

VALENTIN LOUIS GEORGES EUGENE MARCEL PROUST  
IN THE SEARCH OF LOST TIME (THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE THINGS PAST)  
BOOK I  
SWANN'S WAY  
PART I

*Swann in Love*

TO BELONG TO the “little set,” the “little circle,” the “little clan” attached to the Verdurins, one condition was sufficient but necessary: You had to abide tacitly by a Credo one of whose articles was that the young pianist patronized by Mme. Verdurin that year, of whom she would say: “It ought to be against the law to be able to play Wagner like that!,” “was miles above” both Planté<sup>1</sup> and Rubinstein<sup>2</sup> and that Dr. Cottard was a better diagnostician than Potain.<sup>3</sup> Any “new recruit” who could not be persuaded by the Verdurins that the soirées given by people who did not come to the Verdurins’ house were as tiresome as rain was immediately excluded. Because the women were more rebellious in this respect than the men when it came to setting aside their curiosity about society, their desire to find out for themselves how amusing the other salons might be, and because the Verdurins felt that this spirit of investigation and this demon of frivolity could in fact be fatally contagious to the orthodoxy of the little church, they had been led to expel one after another all the “faithful” of the female sex.

Apart from the doctor’s young wife, they were reduced almost exclusively that year (even though Mme. Verdurin herself was virtuous and from a respectable bourgeois family, an extremely rich and entirely obscure one with which she had by degrees and of her own accord ceased to have any contact) to a person almost of the demimonde, Mme. de Crécy, whom Mme. Verdurin called by her first name, Odette, and declared to be “a love,” and to the pianist’s aunt, who must once have been employed as a caretaker; both of them being women ignorant of the world whom, in their naïveté, it had been so easy to delude into believing that the Princesse de Sagan and the Duchesse de Guermantes were obliged to pay certain poor wretches in order to have any guest at their dinners, that if you had offered to get them invitations to the homes of these two great ladies, the former concierge and the cocotte would disdainfully have refused.

The Verdurins did not invite you to dinner: you had, at their house, a “place set for you.” For the soirée there was no program. The young pianist would play, but only if “he fancied,” because they did not force anyone and, as M. Verdurin said: “Anything for our friends. Here’s to friendship!” If the pianist wanted to play the ride from *The Valkyrie* or the prelude from *Tristan*,<sup>4</sup> Mme. Verdurin would protest, not because she did not like that music, but on the contrary because it made too strong an impression on her. “Then you want me to have one of my migraines? You know perfectly well the same thing happens every time he plays that. I can count on it! Tomorrow when I try to get up—that’s it, not possible!” If he did not play, people would chat and one of the friends, most often their favorite painter at the time, would “spin,” as M. Verdurin said, “a damn funny tale that would make ‘em all shriek with laughter,” especially Mme. Verdurin, for such was her habit of taking literally the figurative expressions for the emotions she was feeling that Dr. Cottard (a young novice at the time) would one day have to set her jaw after she dislocated it from laughing too much.

Evening clothes were forbidden because one was “among friends” and also so as not to look like the “bores” whom they avoided like the plague and invited only to the larger soirées, given as rarely as possible and only if it might amuse the painter or help to promote the musician. The rest of the time, they were content to play charades, have supper in fancy dress, but only among themselves, not mixing any strangers in with the little “clan.”

But as the “pals” had assumed more of a place in Mme. Verdurin’s life, the “bores,” the “pariahs” were anything that kept the friends away from her, anything that now and then kept them from being free, whether it was the mother of one, the profession of another, the country house or the bad health of a third. If Dr. Cottard thought he ought to leave just after he got up from the table in order to return to a patient who was dangerously ill, “Who knows,” Mme. Verdurin would say to him, “he might be better off if you don’t go disturbing him again this evening; without you, he’ll have a good night; tomorrow morning early you’ll go there and find him quite recovered.” At the beginning of December, she would be sick at the thought that the faithful would “let them down” on Christmas Day and the first of January. The pianist’s aunt insisted that he come to dinner with the family that day at her mother’s home:

“You seem to think your mother might die,” Mme. Verdurin exclaimed harshly, “if you don’t have dinner with her on New Year’s Day the way they do in the *provinces*!”

Her worries revived during Holy Week:

“Doctor, since you’re such a scholar and freethinker, may I assume you will be coming on Good Friday just as you would on any other day?” she said confidently to Cottard the first year, as if she were sure what the answer would be. But she trembled as she waited for him to utter it, because if he did not come, she might find herself alone.

“I will come on Good Friday . . . to say good-bye to you, because we’re going to be spending the Easter holiday in Auvergne.”

“In Auvergne? You’ll be eaten alive by fleas and vermin! Much good may it do you!”

And after a silence:

“If only you had told us, we would have tried to organize something; we could have made the trip together in comfort.”

Likewise, if one of the "faithful" had a friend or if one of the ladies had a beau who might make them "desert" occasionally, the Verdurins, who were not afraid of a woman having a lover provided she had him at their house, loved him in their midst, and did not prefer his company to theirs, would say: "Well, bring your friend along!" And they would engage him on trial, to see if he was capable of having no secrets from Mme. Verdurin, if he was worthy of being enrolled in the "little clan." If he was not, the "regular" who had introduced him would be taken aside and helped to break with his friend or his mistress. In the opposite case, the "newcomer" would in his turn become one of the faithful. And so when, that year, the demimondaine told M. Verdurin she had made the acquaintance of a charming man, M. Swann, and insinuated that he would be very pleased to be received at their home, M. Verdurin transmitted the request to his wife then and there. (He never formed an opinion until she had formed hers, his particular role being to carry out her wishes, along with those of the faithful, with great and resourceful ingenuity.)

"My dear, Mme. de Cr  cy has something to ask you. She would like to introduce one of her friends to you, a M. Swann. What do you think?"

"Well, now, who could refuse anything to a little angel like that? Quiet, no one asked your opinion. I tell you you're an angel."

"Well, if you say so," answered Odette in a mincing tone, and she added: "You know I'm not *fishng for compliments*." <sup>5</sup>

"All right! Bring your friend, if he's nice."

Of course the "little clan" had no connection to the society in which Swann moved, and true men of fashion would have felt there was little point in enjoying, as he did, an exceptional position only to end up with an introduction to the Verdurins. But Swann was so fond of women that once he had come to know more or less all the women in aristocratic circles and they had nothing more to teach him, he had ceased to regard those naturalization papers, almost a patent of nobility, which the Faubourg Saint-Germain had bestowed upon him, except as a sort of negotiable bond, a letter of credit with no value in itself but which allowed him to improvise a status for himself in some little provincial hole or obscure circle of Paris where the daughter of a squire or clerk had struck him as pretty. For at such times desire or love would revive in him a feeling of vanity from which he was now quite free in his everyday life (although it was doubtless this feeling that had originally pointed him toward the career as man of fashion in which he had wasted his intellectual gifts in frivolous pleasures and allowed his erudition in matters of art to be used to advise society ladies what pictures to buy and how to decorate their houses), and which made him want to shine, in the eyes of any unknown woman with whom he was infatuated, with an elegance which the name Swann in itself did not imply. He wanted this most especially if the unknown woman was in humble circumstances. Just as it is not by another man of intelligence that an intelligent man will be afraid of being thought stupid, so it is not by a great lord but by a country bumpkin that a man of fashion will be afraid of seeing his elegance go unappreciated. Three-quarters of the expenditure of wit and the lies told out of vanity that have been squandered since the world began by people who in doing so merely diminish themselves have been squandered on inferiors. And though Swann was unaffected and casual with a duchess, he trembled at being scorned by a chamber-maid, and poded in front of her.

He was not like so many people who from laziness or a resigned sense of the obligation created by social grandeur to remain moored to a certain shore, abstain from the pleasures real life offers them outside the high-society position in which they live billeted and encamped until their death, contenting themselves in the end with describing as pleasures, for lack of any better, once they have managed to become used to them, the mediocre amusements or bearable tedium it contains. Swann did not try to convince himself that the women with whom he spent his time were pretty, but to spend his time with women he already knew were pretty. And these were often women of a rather vulgar beauty, for the physical qualities that he looked for without realizing it were the direct opposite of those he admired in the women sculpted or painted by his favorite masters. Depth of expression, melancholy, would freeze his senses, which were, however, immediately aroused by flesh that was healthy, plump, and pink.

If when travelling he met a family whom it would have been more stylish not to seek to cultivate, but in which one woman presented herself to his eyes adorned with a charm he had never experienced before, to "stand on his dignity" and cheat the desire she had awoken in him, to substitute a different pleasure for the pleasure he might have experienced with her, by writing to a former mistress to come and join him, would have seemed to him as cowardly an abdication before life, as stupid a renunciation of a new happiness as if instead of touring the countryside, he had shut himself up in his room and looked at pictures of Paris. He did not enclose himself in the edifice of his relationships, but had transformed that edifice, in order to be able to raise it again effortlessly on site wherever he found a woman who pleased him, into one of those collapsible tents of the kind explorers carry with them. As for what was not transportable or exchangeable for a new pleasure, he would have given it away for nothing, however enviable it might appear to others. How often had his credit with a duchess, built up from the desire she had been accumulating over the years to do something kind for him without having found the occasion, been spent all at once by his sending her an indiscreet message asking for a recommendation by telegraph that would put him in touch, immediately, with one of her stewards whose daughter he had noticed in the country, just as a starving man would barter a diamond for a piece of bread! He had even, after the fact, been amused by it, for there existed in him, compensated for by uncommon refinements, a certain boorishness. Then, too, he belonged to that category of intelligent men who have lived idle lives and who seek a consolation and perhaps an excuse in the idea that this idleness offers their intelligence objects just as worthy of interest as art or scholarship could offer, that "Life" contains situations more interesting, more novelistic than any novel. So he declared, at least, and easily convinced even the sharpest of his society friends, in particular the Baron de Charlus, whom he liked to entertain with tales of the racy adventures he had had, such as when he had met a woman on the railway train and afterward taken her back home with him, and then discovered that she was the sister of a monarch who at that time held in his hands all the mingled threads of European politics, thus finding he was kept abreast of them in a most agreeable way, or when, through a complex play of circumstances, the choice about to be made by the conclave<sup>6</sup> was going to determine whether or not he succeeded in sleeping with somebody's cook.

And it was not only the brilliant phalanx of virtuous dowagers, generals, and academicians with whom he was particularly close, whom Swann compelled with such cynicism to serve him as go-betweens. All his friends were used to receiving periodic letters from him in which a word of recommendation or introduction was asked of them with a diplomatic skill that, persisting as it did through his successive love affairs and different pretexts, revealed, more than moments of awkwardness would have done, a permanent trait in his character and an unvarying quest. I often asked to hear, many years later when I began to take an interest

in his character because of the resemblances it offered to my own in completely different respects, how when he wrote to my grandfather (who was not my grandfather yet, for it was about the time of my birth that Swann's great love affair began, and it interrupted these habits for a long time), the latter, recognizing his friend's handwriting on the envelope, would exclaim: "It's Swann, about to ask for something: on guard!" And either from mistrust, or from the unconsciously diabolical spirit that incites us to offer a thing only to the people who do not want it, my grandparents would issue a blunt refusal to the most easily satisfied requests he addressed to them, as for instance to introduce him to a girl who dined at the house every Sunday, and whom they were obliged, each time Swann mentioned it to them again, to pretend they were no longer seeing, whereas all week long they would wonder who in the world they could invite with her, often finding no one in the end, because they would not ask the one who would have been so happy to come.

Sometimes a certain couple, friends of my grandparents who until then had complained of never seeing Swann, would announce to them with satisfaction and perhaps a little desire to arouse their envy that he had become as charming as could be, that he was never out of their house. My grandfather did not want to cloud their pleasure but would look at my grandmother and hum:

What is then this mystery?  
I cannot understand.<sup>7</sup>

or:

Fleeting vision . . .<sup>8</sup>

or:

In these affairs  
'Tis better to be blind.<sup>9</sup>

A few months later, if my grandfather asked Swann's new friend: "And Swann—do you still see as much of him as ever?" the face of the man he was talking to would grow long: "Never mention his name to me again!" "But I thought you were so close . . ." For several months he had, for instance, been intimate friends with cousins of my grandmother, dining almost every day at their house. Suddenly, and without letting them know, he stopped coming. They thought he was ill, and my grandmother's cousin was about to send word asking for news of him, when in the pantry she found a letter from him left inadvertently in the cook's account book. In it he told the woman he was leaving Paris, that he would not be able to continue seeing her. She was his mistress, and when he broke it off with her, she was the only one he thought he needed to tell.

But when his mistress of the moment was a woman of rank or at least one whose background was not too humble or her situation too irregular for him to arrange for her to be received in society, then for her he would return to it, but only to the particular orbit in which she moved or into which he had drawn her. "No use depending on Swann for this evening," they would say. "Don't you remember? It's his American's night at the Opera." He would see to it that she was invited to the particularly exclusive salons where he was a constant guest, where he had his weekly dinners, his poker; every evening, after a slight crimp was added to the brush cut of his red hair, tempering with some gentleness the vivacity of his green eyes, he would choose a flower for his buttonhole and go off to join his mistress at dinner at the home of one or another of the women of his circle; and then, thinking of the admiration and affection which the fashionable people for whom he was the be-all and end-all and whom he was going to see there would lavish on him in the presence of the woman he loved, he would once again find some charm in this worldly life to which he had become indifferent but whose substance, penetrated and warmly colored by a flame that had been insinuated into it and flickered there, seemed to him precious and beautiful as soon as he had incorporated into it a new love.

But, while each of these love affairs, or each of these flirtations, had been the more or less complete fulfillment of a dream inspired by the sight of a face or body that Swann had spontaneously, without making any effort to do so, found charming, on the contrary when he was introduced to Odette de Cr  cy one day at the theater by an old friend of his, who had spoken of her as an entrancing woman with whom he might perhaps have some success, but making her out to be more difficult than she really was in order to appear to have done him a bigger favor by introducing her to him, she had seemed to Swann not without beauty, certainly, but of a type of beauty that left him indifferent, that aroused no desire in him, even caused him a sort of physical repulsion, one of those women such as everyone has his own, different for each, who are the opposite of the kind our senses crave. Her profile was too pronounced for his taste, her skin too delicate, her cheekbones too prominent, her features too pinched. Her eyes were lovely, but so large they bent under their own mass, exhausted the rest of her face, and always gave her a look of being in ill health or ill humor. Sometime after this introduction at the theater she had written to ask if she could see his collections, which interested her so, "she, an ignoramus with a taste for pretty things," saying that it seemed to her she would understand him better when she had seen him in "his home,"<sup>10</sup> where she imagined him to be "so comfortable with his tea and his books," though she had not hidden her surprise that he should live in that part of town, which must be so dreary and "which was so un-smart for a man who was so very smart himself." And after he had allowed her to come, as she left she had told him how sorry she was to have spent such a short time in a house that she had been so glad to enter, speaking of him as though he meant something more to her than the other people she knew, and seeming to establish between their two persons a sort of romantic bond that had made him smile. But at the age, already a little disillusioned, which Swann was approaching, at which one knows how to content oneself with being in love for the pleasure of it without requiring too much reciprocity, this closeness of two hearts, if it is no longer, as it was in one's earliest youth, the goal toward which love necessarily tends, still remains linked to it by an association of ideas so strong that it may become the cause of love, if it occurs first. At an earlier time one dreamed of possessing the heart of the woman with whom one was in love; later, to feel that one possesses a woman's heart may be enough to make one fall in love with her. And so, at an age when it would seem, since what one seeks most of all in love is subjective pleasure, that the enjoyment of a woman's beauty should play the largest part in it, love may come into being—love of the most physical kind—without there having been, underlying it, any previous desire. At this time of life, one has already been wounded

many times by love; it no longer evolves solely in accordance with its own unknown and inevitable laws, before our astonished and passive heart. We come to its aid, we distort it with memory, with suggestion. Recognizing one of its symptoms, we recall and revive the others. Since we know its song, engraved in us in its entirety, we do not need a woman to repeat the beginning of it—filled with the admiration that beauty inspires—in order to find out what comes after. And if she begins in the middle—where the two hearts come together, where it sings of living only for each other—we are accustomed enough to this music to join our partner right away in the passage where she is waiting for us.

Odette de Cr cy came to see Swann again, then visited him more and more often; and certainly each visit renewed the disappointment he felt at finding himself once again in the presence of that face whose details he had somewhat forgotten in the meantime and which he had not recalled as being either so expressive or, despite her youth, so faded; he felt sorry, as she talked to him, that her considerable beauty was not the type he would spontaneously have preferred. Odette's face seemed thinner and sharper, in fact, because her forehead and the upper part of her cheeks, those smoother and flatter surfaces, were covered by the masses of hair which women wore at that time drawn forward in fringes, lifted in "switches," spread in stray locks down along the ears; and as for her body, which was admirably formed, it was difficult to discern its continuity (because of the fashions of the period, and even though she was one of the best-dressed women in Paris), because her blouse, jutting out as though over an imaginary paunch and ending abruptly in a point, below which the balloon of the double skirts swelled out, made a woman look as though she were composed of different parts poorly fitted inside one another; because the flounces, the flutes, the vest followed so independently, according to the whimsy of their design or the consistency of their material, the line that led to the knots, the puffs of lace, the perpendicular fringes of jet, or that directed them along the corset, but were in no way attached to the living person, who, depending on whether the architecture of these frills and furbelows approached too closely or moved too far away from her own, was either encased or lost in them.

But when Odette had left, Swann would smile, thinking of how she had told him the time would drag until he allowed her to come again; he would recall the worried, shy air with which she had begged him once that it should not be too long, and the expression in her eyes at that moment, fastened on him in anxious entreaty, which made her look so touching under the bouquet of artificial pansies fastened to the front of her round white straw hat with its black velvet ribbons. "And you," she had said, "wouldn't you come to my house just once for tea?" He had pleaded unfinished work, a study—in reality abandoned years before—of Vermeer of Delft.<sup>11</sup> "I realize I can't do anything, pitiful little me, compared with all you great scholars," she had answered. "I would be like the frog in front of the Areopagus."<sup>12</sup> And yet I would so love to educate myself, to be informed, to know things. How amusing it must be to bury your nose in old papers!" she had added with the self-satisfaction a stylish woman adopts to assert that she is happiest abandoning herself with no fear of getting dirty to some messy job, like doing a little cooking "with her own hands in the dough." "You're going to make fun of me, but that painter who keeps you from seeing me—" (she meant Vermeer) "I've never heard of him; is he still alive? Can I see any of his things in Paris, so that I could imagine what it is you like, so that I could have some idea what's behind that great forehead that works so hard, inside that mind that I always sense is so busy with its thoughts, so that I could say to myself: There, this is what he's thinking about. What a joy it would be, to share in your work!" He apologized for his fear of new friendships, for what he had called, out of politeness, his fear of being unhappy. "You're afraid of affection? How odd; that's all I ever look for, I would give my life to find it," she had said in a voice so natural, so convinced, that he had been moved. "Some woman must have hurt you. And you think all other women are like her. She must not have understood you; you're such an unusual person. That's what I liked about you right away, I really felt you weren't like anyone else." "And you too," he had said to her, "I know very well what women are like, you must be busy with a great many things, you must not have much time." "Me! I never have anything to do! I'm always free, I will always be free for you. At any hour of the day or night that might be convenient for you to see me, send for me and I'll be only too happy to come immediately. Will you do it? Do you know what would be nice—if you could obtain an introduction to Mme. Verdurin; I go to her house every evening. Just imagine if we met there and I thought it was partly because of me that you were there!"

And as he recalled their conversations this way, as he thought of her this way when he was alone, he was no doubt merely turning over her image among those of many other women in his romantic daydreams; but if, due to some circumstance (or even perhaps not due to it, since a circumstance that presents itself at the moment when a state of mind, latent until then, comes out into the open may possibly not have influenced it in any way) the image of Odette de Cr cy came to absorb all these daydreams, if these daydreams were no longer separable from the memory of her, then the imperfection of her body would no longer have any importance, nor would the fact that it might be, more or less than some other body, to Swann's taste, since, now that it had become the body of the woman he loved, it would be the only one capable of filling him with joy and torment.

As it happened, my grandfather had known—which was more than could be said of any of their current friends—the family of these Verdurins. But he had lost all contact with "young Verdurin," as he called him, whom he regarded, somewhat approximately, as having fallen—even while holding on to his many millions—among bohemians and riffraff. One day, he received a letter from Swann asking him if he could put him in touch with the Verdurins: "On guard! On guard!" my grandfather had exclaimed. "This doesn't surprise me at all; it's just where Swann was bound to end up. A nice group they are! In the first place, I can't do what he asks, because I don't know the gentleman in question anymore. And secondly, there must be a woman in it somewhere, and I never get mixed up in such affairs. Well, well! We shall have a rather amusing time of it if Swann falls in with the young Verdurins."

And after my grandfather returned a negative answer, it was Odette herself who had taken Swann to the Verdurins'.

The Verdurins had had to dinner, on the day Swann made his first appearance there, Dr. and Mme. Cottard, the young pianist and his aunt, and the painter who was in their favor at the time, and these were joined during the evening by several other faithful regulars.

Dr. Cottard was never quite certain of the tone in which he ought to answer someone, whether the person addressing him wanted to make a joke or was serious. And just in case, he would add to each of his facial expressions the offer of a conditional and tentative smile whose expectant shrewdness would exculpate him from the reproach of na vet , if the remark that had been made to him was found to have been facetious. But since, so as to respond to the opposite hypothesis, he did not dare allow that smile to declare itself distinctly on his face, one saw an uncertainty perpetually floating upon it in which could be read the



question he did not dare ask: "Are you saying this in earnest?" He was no more sure how he ought to behave in the street, and even in life generally, than in a drawing room, and he could be seen greeting passersby, carriages, and any minor event that occurred with the same ironic smile that removed all impropriety from his attitude in advance, since he was proving that if the attitude was not a fashionable one he was well aware of it and that if he had adopted it, it was as a joke.

On all points, however, where a direct question seemed to him permissible, the doctor did not fail to endeavor to reduce the field of his doubts and complete his education.

And so, acting on the advice given him by a foresightful mother when he left her province, he never let pass either an expression or a proper name that was unknown to him, without trying to acquire documentation about it.

In the case of expressions, he was insatiable for enlightenment, because, sometimes assuming they had a more precise meaning than they had, he wanted to know exactly what was meant by those he heard used most often: the bloom of youth, blue blood, a fast life, the hour of reckoning, to be a prince of refinement, to give carte blanche, to be nonplussed, etc., and in which specific cases he in his turn could introduce them into his conversation. If there were none, he would substitute puns he had learned. As for new names of people mentioned in his presence, he contented himself merely with repeating them in a questioning tone that he thought sufficient to procure him explanations without his appearing to ask for them.

Since he completely lacked the critical faculty which he thought he exercised on everything, that refinement of politeness which consists in declaring to a person to whom you are doing a favor, without however expecting to be believed, that you are in fact indebted to him, was a waste of effort with the doctor, who took everything literally. Whatever Mme. Verdurin's blindness with respect to him, she had in the end, while continuing to find him very subtle, been annoyed to see that, when she invited him to share a box near the stage for a performance by Sarah Bernhardt, saying to him, to be especially gracious: "It was too kind of you to come, Doctor, especially since I'm sure you've already heard Sarah Bernhardt many times, and we may also be too close to the stage," Dr. Cottard, who had entered the box with a smile that was waiting to become more pronounced or to disappear as soon as some authoritative person informed him as to the quality of the entertainment, answered her: "It's true that we're much too close and one begins to tire of Sarah Bernhardt. But you expressed a desire that I should come. And your desire is my command. I am only too happy to do you this small service. Is there anything one would not do in order to please you, you're so good!" And he added: "Sarah Bernhardt—she is in fact the Golden Voice, isn't she? And they often write that she sets the stage on fire. That's an odd expression, isn't it?" in hope of commentaries which were not forthcoming.

"You know," Mme. Verdurin had said to her husband, "I believe we're steering the wrong course when we belittle our gifts to the doctor out of modesty. He's a man of science, out of touch with the practical side of life, he has no idea of the value of things and relies on what we tell him." "I hadn't dared say anything to you, but I had noticed," answered M. Verdurin. And the following New Year's Day, instead of sending Dr. Cottard a three-thousand-franc ruby, remarking that it was only a trifle, M. Verdurin paid three hundred francs for an artificial stone, implying that it would be hard to find one as beautiful.

When Mme. Verdurin had announced that they would be having M. Swann at the soirée, "Swann?" the doctor had exclaimed in a tone of voice made rough by surprise, for the slightest piece of news always caught him more off guard than anyone else, though this was a man who believed he was perpetually prepared for anything. And seeing that no one answered him, "Swann? Who's this Swann?" he roared, filled with an anxiety that suddenly abated when Mme. Verdurin said: "Why, the friend Odette told us about." "Ah, good, good! That's all right then," answered the doctor, pacified. As for the painter, he was delighted by the introduction of Swann to Mme. Verdurin's, because he assumed Swann was in love with Odette and he liked to encourage love affairs. "There's nothing I enjoy more than arranging a marriage," he confided in Dr. Cottard's ear. "I've already managed a good many, even between women!"

By telling the Verdurins that Swann was very "*smart*," Odette had awoken in them the fear that he would be a "bore." However, he made an excellent impression, of which, without their knowing it, his association with fashionable society was one of the indirect causes. He had, in fact, over men who have never mixed in high society, even intelligent men, one of the superior qualities of those who have had some experience of it, which is that they no longer transfigure it out of the desire or the horror it inspires in their imagination, considering it unimportant. Their friendliness, disassociated from all snobbishness and from a fear of seeming too friendly, thus quite independent, has that ease, that grace characteristic of the motions of people whose supple limbs perform exactly what they want, without any indiscreet or awkward participation of the rest of the body. The simple elementary gymnastics of a man of the world extending his hand with good grace to the unknown young man who is being introduced to him, and bowing with reserve to the ambassador to whom he is being introduced, had in the end passed, without his being aware of it, into Swann's whole social attitude, so that toward people of a social circle inferior to his, like the Verdurins and their friends, he instinctively displayed a marked attention, permitted himself to make advances, from which, according to them, a bore would have refrained. He had a moment of coldness only with Cottard: seeing the doctor wink at him and smile ambiguously before they had spoken to each other (a dumb show that Cottard called "wait-and-see"), Swann thought the doctor probably recognized him from a previous encounter in some house of pleasure, even though he himself went to such places very seldom, having never inhabited the world of dissipation. Finding the allusion in bad taste, especially in the presence of Odette, who might receive a poor impression of him from it, he assumed an icy manner. But when he learned that the lady standing near him was Mme. Cottard, he thought that such a young husband would not have tried to allude to amusements of that sort in front of his wife; and he ceased to give the doctor's knowing look the meaning he had feared. The painter immediately invited Swann to come to his studio with Odette; Swann thought he was nice. "Perhaps he'll favor you more than he has me," said Mme. Verdurin in a tone of mock resentment, "perhaps he'll show you Cottard's portrait" (she had commissioned it from the painter). "Make sure, 'Monsieur' Biche," she reminded the painter, whom it was a sacred joke to address as Monsieur, "to capture that nice look in his eye, that subtle, amusing little way he has of glancing at you. As you know, what I want most of all is his smile; what I asked you for was a portrait of his smile." And since the phrase seemed to her noteworthy, she repeated it very loudly to make sure a number of guests heard it, and even, using some vague pretext, summoned a few of them over to her first. Swann asked to be introduced to everyone, even to an old friend of the Verdurins, Saniette, whose shyness, simplicity, and good nature had lost him all the esteem he had won by his skill as an archivist, his substantial fortune, and the distinguished family he came from. When he talked, there was a sort of mushy sound to his pronunciation that was charming because one sensed that it

betrayed not so much an impediment in his speech as a quality of his soul, a sort of vestige of early childhood innocence that he had never lost. Each consonant he could not pronounce appeared to be another instance of a hardness of which he was incapable. In asking to be introduced to M. Saniette, Swann appeared to Mme. Verdurin to be reversing roles (to the degree that in response, she said, insisting on the difference: "Monsieur Swann, would you have the goodness to allow me to introduce to you our friend Saniette"), but aroused in Saniette a warm feeling of congeniality which the Verdurins, however, never revealed to Swann, for Saniette irritated them a little, and they were not anxious to make friends for him. But, on the other hand, Swann touched them infinitely by believing he ought to ask immediately to be introduced to the pianist's aunt. She was in a black dress, as always, because she thought one always looked nice in black and that it was most distinguished, and her face was extremely red, as it always was after she had just eaten. She bowed to Swann with respect, but straightened with majesty. Because she had no education and was afraid of making mistakes in grammar, she deliberately pronounced things in a garbled way, thinking that if she made a blunder it would be fogged over by such indefiniteness that no one would be able to make it out with any certainty, so that her conversation was reduced to an indistinct hawking, from which emerged now and then the few vocables of which she felt confident. Swann thought he could poke a little fun at her when he was talking to M. Verdurin, but the latter was offended.

"She's such an excellent woman," he answered. "I grant you she's not brilliant; but I assure you she can be most agreeable when you talk to her on your own." "I don't doubt it," Swann hastened to concede. "I meant to say she did not seem to me 'eminent,' " he added, isolating the adjective, "and really that's rather a compliment!" "Well, now," said M. Verdurin, "this will surprise you: she writes charmingly. You've never heard her nephew? He's wonderful, isn't he, Doctor? Would you like me to ask him to play something, Monsieur Swann?" "Why, it would be a joy . . ." Swann was beginning to answer, when the doctor interrupted him with a mocking look. In fact, having acquired the notion that in conversation, to be emphatic, to employ formal expressions was old-fashioned, as soon as he heard a solemn word used seriously, as the word *joy* had just been used, he thought the person who had uttered it had just been guilty of pomposity. And if, in addition, the word happened to occur in what he called an old cliché, however current it might be in other respects, the doctor would assume that the sentence that had been begun was ridiculous and would finish it ironically using the platitude he seemed to be accusing the speaker of having wanted to deploy, although the latter had never thought of it.

"A joy forever!" he cried mischievously, raising his arms for emphasis.

M. Verdurin could not help laughing.

"What are those good people laughing about! You don't seem to be having such a bad time over there in your corner," cried Mme. Verdurin. "I hope you don't think I'm enjoying myself here in disgrace all alone," she added in a tone of childish chagrin.

Mme. Verdurin was sitting on a high Swedish chair of waxed pine, which she had been given by a violinist from that country and which she had kept, though it looked rather like a stool and was at odds with the beautiful old furniture that she had, but she insisted on keeping in evidence the gifts which the faithful regulars were in the habit of giving her from time to time, so that the givers would have the pleasure of spotting them when they came. And so she tried to persuade them to give her nothing but flowers and sweets, which are at least perishable; but she was not successful, and her home contained a collection of foot warmers, cushions, clocks, screens, barometers, and urns, in an accumulation of useless, repetitive, and incongruous offerings.

From this elevated spot she took energetic part in the conversation of the faithful and revelled in their practical jokes, but after the accident involving her jaw, she no longer took pains to explode in true laughter and performed instead a conventionalized pantomime that signified, without fatigue or risk for her, that she was laughing to the point of tears. At the mildest remark fired off by a regular against a bore or against a former regular who had been flung back into the camp of the bores—and to the greatest despair of M. Verdurin, who for a long time had had pretensions of being as affable as his wife, but who, when laughing in earnest, would soon get out of breath and so had been outdistanced and defeated by this ruse of incessant and fictive hilarity—she would utter a little cry, entirely close her birdlike eyes, which were slightly dimmed by leucoma, and abruptly, as if she had only just had time to avoid some indecent spectacle or avert a fatal blow, plunging her face in her hands, which covered it and allowed nothing of it to be seen, would appear to be doing her best to suppress, to annihilate a fit of laughter which, had she given way to it, would have caused her to faint. So, dazed by the gaiety of the faithful, drunk with good-fellowship, scandal-mongering, and approbation, Mme. Verdurin, poised on her perch, like a bird whose seedcake has been soaked in warm wine, sobbed with affability.

Meanwhile, M. Verdurin, after asking Swann's permission to light his pipe ("we don't stand on ceremony here, we're among friends"), begged the young musician to sit down at the piano.

"Now don't bother him, he didn't come here to be tormented," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin, "I won't have him tormented!"

"But why on earth should it bother him?" said M. Verdurin. "Perhaps M. Swann doesn't know the Sonata in F-sharp which we've discovered. He'll play the piano arrangement for us."

"Oh, no, no, not my sonata!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "I don't want to be made to weep till I get a cold in my head and neuralgia in my face, like the last time. Thanks for your offer, but I don't intend to repeat that performance. You're so kind, all of you; it's easy to see you're not the ones who'll be spending the next week in bed!"

This little scene, which was reenacted each time the pianist prepared to play, enchanted her friends as much as if it had been brand-new, because it was proof of the "*Patronne's*"<sup>13</sup> charming originality and sensitivity to music. Those who were near her signaled to those farther away who were smoking or playing cards to come closer, that something was happening, saying to them, as they do in the Reichstag<sup>14</sup> at interesting moments: "Listen, listen." And the next day they would tell those who had not been able to be there how sorry they were, reporting that the scene had been even more entertaining than usual.

"Well, all right then," said M. Verdurin. "He'll just play the andante."

"Just the andante! What are you saying!" exclaimed Mme. Verdurin. "It's precisely the andante that completely paralyzes me. Listen to the *Patron*! He's really marvelous! It's as if he said: In the Ninth we'll just hear the finale, or in *The Meistersingers*<sup>15</sup> we'll just hear the overture."

The doctor, however, urged Mme. Verdurin to let the pianist play, not because he thought the troubling effects the music had on her were feigned—he recognized certain neurasthenic symptoms in them—but from a habit which many doctors have, of immediately relaxing the severity of their prescriptions when something is involved that seems much more important to them, like

some social gathering at which they are present and in which the person they are advising for once to forget his dyspepsia or his grippe is an essential factor.

"You won't become ill this time, you'll see," he told her, trying to hypnotize her with his eyes. "And if you do, we'll look after you."

"Really and truly?" answered Mme. Verdurin, as if the hope of such a favor left her no alternative but to capitulate. Perhaps also, because she said she would be ill, there were times when she did not recall that it was a lie and took on the character of an ill person. For invalids, tired of always having to make the rarity of their attacks dependent on their prudence, like to indulge in the belief that they can with impunity do all of the things that give them pleasure and usually hurt them, as long as they put themselves in the hands of a powerful person who, without their having to take any pains, with a word or a pill will put them back on their feet.

Odette had gone to sit on a tapestry-covered couch near the piano:

"You know I have my own little spot," she said to Mme. Verdurin.

The latter, seeing Swann on a chair, made him get up:

"You're not very comfortable there: now go and sit next to Odette. You'll make room for M. Swann there, won't you, Odette?"

"What a pretty Beauvais," said Swann before he sat down, trying to be pleasant.

"Oh, I'm glad you appreciate my couch," answered Mme. Verdurin. "And let me tell you, if you think you're ever going to see another one as beautiful, you may abandon the idea at once. They never did anything else like it. The little chairs are marvels too. You can look at them in a moment. Each bronze is an emblem that corresponds to the little subject on the chair; you know, you'll have a great deal to entertain you if you want to look at them. I can promise you a good time. Even the little friezes around the edges—look at that, look at the little vine against the red background in the Bear and the Grapes. Isn't it well drawn? What do you say? I think they really knew how to draw! Doesn't that vine make your mouth water? My husband claims I don't like the fruit you get from it, because I don't eat as many as he does. The fact is, actually, I'm more of a glutton than any of you, but I don't need to put them in my mouth because I enjoy them with my eyes. What are you all laughing about, now? Ask the doctor, he'll tell you—for me those grapes are a regular purgative. Other people take the cure at Fontainebleau, I take my little Beauvais cure. But, Monsieur Swann, you won't go away without feeling the little bronzes on the backs! Isn't the patina soft? No, no—with your whole hand: feel them properly."

"Ah, if Madame Verdurin begins fondling the bronzes, we won't hear any music tonight," said the painter.

"You be quiet. You're a rascal. In fact," she said, turning to Swann, "we women are forbidden to do things far less voluptuous than this. But no flesh can compare to it! When M. Verdurin did me the honor of being jealous of me—come now, be polite at least, don't say you never were . . ."

"But I said absolutely nothing. Doctor, be my witness: did I say anything?"

Swann was feeling the bronzes to be polite and did not dare stop right away.

"Come, you can caress them later; now you're the one who's going to be caressed. Your ears are going to be caressed; you'll like that, I think; here's the dear young man who'll be doing it."

Now after the pianist had played, Swann was even friendlier to him than to the others who were present. This is why:

The year before, at a soiree, he had heard a piece of music performed on the piano and violin. At first, he had experienced only the physical quality of the sounds secreted by the instruments. And it had been a keen pleasure when, below the little line of the violin, slender, unyielding, compact, and commanding, he had seen the mass of the piano part all at once struggling to rise in a liquid swell, multiform, undivided, smooth, and colliding like the purple tumult of the waves when the moonlight charms them and lowers their pitch by half a tone. But at a certain moment, without being able to distinguish an outline clearly, or give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly charmed, he had tried to gather up and hold on to the phrase or harmony—he himself did not know which—that was passing by him and that had opened his soul so much wider, the way the smells of certain roses circulating in the damp evening air have the property of dilating our nostrils. Maybe it was because of his ignorance of music that he had been capable of receiving so confused an impression, the kind of impression that is, however, perhaps the only one which is purely musical, immaterial, entirely original, irreducible to any other order of impression. An impression of this kind is, for an instant, so to speak, *sine materia*. No doubt the notes we hear then tend already, depending on their loudness and their quantity, to spread out before our eyes over surfaces of varying dimensions, to trace arabesques, to give us sensations of breadth, tenuousness, stability, whimsy. But the notes vanish before these sensations are sufficiently formed in us not to be submerged by those already excited by the succeeding or even simultaneous notes. And this impression would continue to envelop with its liquidity and its "mellowness" the motifs that at times emerge from it, barely discernible, immediately to dive under and disappear, known only by the particular pleasure they give, impossible to describe, to recall, to name, ineffable—if memory, like a laborer working to put down lasting foundations in the midst of the waves, by fabricating for us facsimiles of these fleeting phrases, did not allow us to compare them to those that follow them and to differentiate them. And so, scarcely had the delicious sensation which Swann had felt died away than his memory at once furnished him with a transcription that was summary and temporary but at which he could glance while the piece continued, so that already, when the same impression suddenly returned, it was no longer impossible to grasp. He could picture to himself its extent, its symmetrical groupings, its notation, its expressive value; he had before him this thing which is no longer pure music, which is drawing, architecture, thought, and which allows us to recall the music. This time he had clearly distinguished one phrase rising for a few moments above the waves of sound. It had immediately proposed to him particular sensual pleasures which he had never imagined before hearing it, which he felt could be introduced to him by nothing else, and he had experienced for it something like an unfamiliar love.

With a slow rhythm it led him first here, then there, then elsewhere, toward a happiness that was noble, unintelligible, and precise. And then suddenly, having reached a point from which he was preparing to follow it, after an instant's pause, abruptly it changed direction, and with a new movement, quicker, sligher, more melancholy, incessant, and sweet, it carried him off with it toward unfamiliar vistas. Then it disappeared. He wished passionately to see it a third time. And it did indeed reappear but without speaking to him more clearly, bringing him, indeed, a sensual pleasure that was less profound. But once he was back at

home he needed it, he was like a man into whose life a woman he has glimpsed for only a moment as she passed by has introduced the image of a new sort of a beauty that increases the value of his own sensibility, without his even knowing if he will ever see this woman again whom he loves already and of whom he knows nothing, not even her name.

It even seemed, for a moment, that this love for a phrase of music would have to open in Swann the possibility of a sort of rejuvenation. He had for so long given up directing his life toward an ideal goal and limited it to the pursuit of everyday satisfactions that he believed, without ever saying so formally to himself, that this would not change as long as he lived; much worse, since his mind no longer entertained any lofty ideas, he had ceased to believe in their reality, though without being able to deny it altogether. Thus he had acquired the habit of taking refuge in unimportant thoughts that allowed him to ignore the fundamental essence of things. Just as he did not ask himself if it would have been better for him not to go into society, but on the other hand knew quite certainly that if he had accepted an invitation he ought to go and that if he did not pay a call afterward he must at least leave cards, so in his conversation he endeavored never to express with any warmth a personal opinion about things, but to furnish material details that had some sort of value in themselves and allowed him not to show his real capacities. He was extremely precise when it came to the recipe for a dish, the date of a painter's birth or death, the nomenclature of his works. Now and then, despite everything, he went so far as to utter a judgment on a work, on someone's interpretation of life, but he would then give his remarks an ironic tone, as if he did not entirely subscribe to what he was saying. Now, like certain confirmed invalids in whom, suddenly, a country they have arrived in, a different diet, sometimes a spontaneous and mysterious organic development seem to bring on such a regression of their ailment that they begin to envisage the un hoped-for possibility of belatedly starting a completely different life, Swann found within himself, in the recollection of the phrase he had heard, in certain sonatas he asked people to play for him, to see if he would not discover it in them, the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe and to which, as if the music had had a sort of sympathetic influence on the moral dryness from which he suffered, he felt in himself once again the desire and almost the strength to devote his life. But, since he had not succeeded in finding out who had composed the work he had heard, he had not been able to acquire it for himself and had ended by forgetting it. True, during the week he had encountered several people who had been with him at that party and he had asked them about it; but many had arrived after the music or left before; some were indeed there while it was performed but had gone into the other drawing room to talk, and others, who had stayed to listen, had heard no more of it than had the first group. As for the master and mistress of the house, they knew it was a recent work which the musicians whom they had hired had asked to play; since the latter had gone off on a tour, Swann could not find out anything more. He had many friends who were musicians, but though he recalled the special and inexpressible pleasure the phrase had given him, and saw before his eyes the shapes it outlined, he was not able to sing it for them. Then he stopped thinking about it.

Now, scarcely a few minutes after the young pianist had begun playing at Mme. Verdurin's, suddenly, after a high note held for a long time through two measures, he saw it approaching, escaping from under that prolonged sonority stretched like a curtain of sound hiding the mystery of its incubation, he recognized it, secret, murmuring, and, divided, the airy and redolent phrase that he loved. And it was so particular, it had a charm so individual, which no other charm could have replaced, that Swann felt as though he had encountered in a friend's drawing room a person whom he had admired in the street and despaired of ever finding again. In the end, diligent, purposeful, it receded through the ramifications of its perfume, leaving on Swann's face the reflection of its smile. But now he could ask the name of his stranger (they told him it was the andante from the Sonata for Piano and Violin by Vinteuil), he possessed it, he could have it in his house as often as he liked, try to learn its language and its secret.

And so when the pianist had finished, Swann went up to him to express a gratitude whose warmth was very pleasing to Mme. Verdurin.

"He's a charmer, isn't he?" she said to Swann. "You might say he knows a thing or two about that sonata, the little devil. You didn't know the piano could achieve such things. It's everything—except a piano! My word! I'm startled by it every time; I think I'm hearing an orchestra. Though it's even more beautiful than an orchestra, more complete."

The young pianist bowed, and with a smile, stressing the words as if he were making a witty remark:

"You're very generous to me," he said.

And while Mme. Verdurin was saying to her husband: "Come, give him some orangeade, he certainly deserves it," Swann was describing to Odette how he had been in love with that little phrase. When Mme. Verdurin, nearby, said: "Well now, it seems to me someone is saying sweet things to you, Odette," she answered: "Yes, very sweet," and Swann found her simplicity delightful. Meanwhile, he was asking for information about Vinteuil, about his work, about the period of his life in which he had composed this sonata, about what the little phrase could have meant to him, this was what he would have liked most of all to know.

But all these people who professed to admire that musician (when Swann had said that his sonata was truly beautiful, Mme. Verdurin had exclaimed: "I should say it's beautiful! But one simply doesn't admit that one does not know Vinteuil's sonata, one is not allowed not to know it," and the painter had added: "Ah, yes! It's a work of genius, isn't it? It may not be what you would call 'obvious' or 'popular,' is it? But it makes a very great impression on us artists"), these people seemed never to have asked themselves these questions, for they were incapable of answering them.

Even in answer to one or two particular remarks that Swann made about his favorite phrase, Mme. Verdurin said:

"Well now, that's funny, I never paid any attention. I'll tell you, I don't very much enjoy nitpicking or discussing fine points; we don't waste our time splitting hairs here, it's not that kind of a house," while Dr. Cottard watched her with blissful admiration and scholarly zeal as she frolicked in this billow of stock expressions. He and Mme. Cottard, however, with a kind of good sense which is also possessed by certain people from humble backgrounds, carefully refrained from offering an opinion or feigning admiration for a sort of music which they confessed to each other, once they were back home, they did not understand any more than the painting of "Monsieur Biche." Since, of the charm, the grace, the forms of nature, the public knows only what it has absorbed from the clichés of an art slowly assimilated, and since an original artist begins by rejecting these clichés, M. and Mme. Cottard, being in this sense typical of the public, found neither in Vinteuil's sonata, nor in the painter's portraits, what for them created the harmony of music and the beauty of painting. It seemed to them when the pianist played the sonata that he was randomly attaching to the piano notes that were not in fact connected to the forms they were used to, and that the painter was

randomly hurling colors onto his canvases. When they were able to recognize a form in these canvases, they found it heavy and vulgarized (that is, lacking the elegance of the school of painting through which they viewed all living creatures, even in the street), and lacking truth, as if Monsieur Biche did not know how a shoulder was constructed or that women do not have lavender hair.

However, when the regulars had dispersed, the doctor felt this was a favorable opportunity, and while Mme. Verdurin was saying a last word about Vinteuil's sonata, like a beginning swimmer who throws himself into the water in order to learn, but chooses a moment when there are not too many people to see him, he exclaimed with sudden determination:

"Now, this is what one calls a musician *di primo cartello*!"<sup>16</sup>

Swann learned only that the recent appearance of Vinteuil's sonata had caused quite a stir among the most advanced school of musicians, but was entirely unknown to the larger public.

"I know someone quite well named Vinteuil," said Swann, thinking of the piano teacher who had taught my grandmother's sisters.

"Perhaps it's him," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh, no!" Swann answered, laughing. "If you had ever spent just a minute or two with him, you wouldn't ask."

"Then, to ask the question is to answer it?" said the doctor.

"But he could be a relative," Swann went on. "That would be rather sad, but the fact is, a man of genius can be cousin to an old fool. If this is so, I confess I would submit to any kind of torture to get the old fool to introduce me to the composer of that sonata: starting with the torture of associating with the old fool, which would be frightful."

The painter knew that Vinteuil was very ill at the moment and that Dr. Potain was afraid he would not be able to save him.

"What!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "Are there people who still go to Potain?"

"Ah, Madame Verdurin!" said Cottard, in a tone of witty repartee. "You forget that you're talking about one of my colleagues, I should say one of my teachers."

The painter had heard that Vinteuil was threatened with mental illness. And he declared that one could perceive it in certain passages of his sonata. Swann did not find this comment absurd, but it bothered him; for since a pure work of music contains none of the logical relationships whose alteration in language reveals madness, madness recognized in a sonata seemed to him something as mysterious as the madness of a bitch, the madness of a horse, though these can indeed be observed.

"Don't upset me with talk about your 'teachers.' You know ten times as much as he does," Mme. Verdurin answered Dr. Cottard, in the tone of a person who has the courage of her convictions and stoutly holds her own against those who are not of the same opinion. "At least you don't kill your patients!"

"But Madame, he belongs to the Academy,"<sup>17</sup> replied the doctor ironically. "If a patient would rather die by the hand of one of the princes of science . . . It's much more stylish to be able to say: 'I'm being treated by Potain.'"

"Ah! It's more stylish?" said Mme. Verdurin. "So there's such a thing as style in illness now? I wasn't aware of that . . . How funny you are!" she exclaimed suddenly, dropping her face in her hands. "And I was such a silly fool, talking about it seriously without seeing that you were pulling my leg."

As for M. Verdurin, finding it rather a strain to force a laugh over such a trifle, he contented himself with drawing on his pipe, musing sadly that he would never be able to rival his wife in a contest of amiability.

"You know, we like your friend very much," said Mme. Verdurin to Odette when the latter was wishing her a good night. "He's so unaffected, he's so charming; if all the friends you think of introducing to us are like him, you may certainly bring them."

M. Verdurin pointed out that Swann had not, however, appreciated the pianist's aunt.

"The man felt a little out of his element," answered Mme. Verdurin. "Now you wouldn't expect him to have caught the tone of the house already, the very first time, like Cottard, who has been one of our little clan for years. The first time doesn't count; it was useful for breaking the ice. Odette, it's agreed that he'll meet us tomorrow at the Châtelet. Will you pick him up?"

"No, he doesn't want me to."

"Ah! Whatever you like, then. As long as he doesn't go and abandon us at the last minute!"

To Mme. Verdurin's great surprise, he never abandoned them. He went to meet them wherever they were, sometimes in restaurants in the outlying districts where no one went much yet, because it was not the season, more often to the theater, which Mme. Verdurin liked very much; and because one day, at her house, she said in his presence that on evenings when there were premieres, or galas, a pass would have been very useful to them, that it had inconvenienced them very much not to have one the day of Gambetta's funeral,<sup>18</sup> Swann, who never talked about his distinguished connections, but only about those which were not very highly esteemed, which he thought it indelicate to conceal, and among which he had, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, fallen into the habit of including his relations with the official world, answered:

"I promise to take care of it, you'll have it in time for the revival of *Les Danicheff*."<sup>19</sup> As it happens, I'm having lunch with the prefect of police tomorrow at the Élysée Palace."

"What? At the Élysée Palace?" shouted Dr. Cottard in a thunderous voice.

"Yes, at M. Grévy's,"<sup>20</sup> answered Swann, a little embarrassed by the effect his remark had produced.

And the painter said to the doctor as a joke:

"Do you have these attacks very often?"

Generally, once an explanation had been given, Cottard would say: "Oh, I see, that's all right then," and not show a trace more of emotion. But this time, Swann's last words, instead of procuring him the usual peace of mind, raised to a fever pitch his astonishment that a man with whom he had dined, who had no official position, no celebrity of any sort, would hobnob with the Head of State.

"What do you mean, M. Grévy? You know M. Grévy?" he said to Swann with the stupid and incredulous look of a policeman on guard at the palace who is asked by a stranger to see the President of the Republic, and who, realizing from these words "what sort of person he is dealing with," as the newspapers say, assures the poor lunatic that he will be received immediately and leads him to the special infirmary of the central police station.



"I know him slightly, we have friends in common." (He did not dare say that one of them was the Prince of Wales.) "Actually, he entertains a good deal, and I assure you these lunches aren't in the least amusing, they're also very simple, there are never more than eight at table," answered Swann, trying to expunge what had seemed to be too dazzling, in the doctor's eyes, about his relations with the President of the Republic.

Immediately Cottard, trusting in the truth of what Swann had said, adopted the opinion, concerning the value of an invitation to M. Grévy's, that it was not a very desirable thing and could be picked up anywhere. From then on, he was no longer surprised that Swann, or anyone else, should visit the Élysée Palace, and he was even a little sorry for him because he had to go to lunches which Swann himself admitted were boring.

"Oh, I see, that's quite all right then," he said in the tone of a customs inspector who, though suspicious a moment before, after hearing your explanations stamps your passport and lets you go through without opening your bags.

"Oh, I believe you, I'm sure those lunches must not be very amusing, and it's good of you to go to them," said Mme. Verdurin, who saw the President of the Republic as a bore to be especially dreaded because he had at his disposal various means of seduction and compulsion which, if employed upon the faithful, would be quite capable of making them desert her. "Apparently he's as deaf as a doorpost and eats with his fingers."

"In that case, certainly it must not be much fun to go there," said the doctor with a touch of commiseration; and, recalling that eight was the number of guests at table: "Are these intimate lunches?" he asked sharply with a linguist's zeal more than a snoop's curiosity.

But the prestige of the President of the Republic in the eyes of the doctor ended by prevailing over both Swann's modesty and Mme. Verdurin's animosity, and at each dinner Cottard would ask with interest: "Will we be seeing M. Swann this evening? He's on personal terms with M. Grévy. Is he in fact what one would call a *gentleman*?"<sup>21</sup> He even went so far as to present him with an invitation card for the dentistry exhibition.

"This will admit you, along with anyone you might like to bring with you, but they won't let dogs in. You understand, I tell you this because some friends of mine didn't know and kicked themselves for it afterward."

As for M. Verdurin, he noticed the bad effect produced on his wife by the discovery that Swann had influential friends whom he had never mentioned.

If they had not arranged a party somewhere, it was at the Verdurins' that Swann would join the little clan, but he came only in the evening, and almost never agreed to have dinner there despite Odette's earnest requests.

"I could even have dinner alone with you, if you would like that better," she would tell him.

"And what about Mme. Verdurin?"

"Oh, that would be easy enough. I would simply tell her my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it."

"You're very sweet."

But Swann said to himself that if he showed Odette (by agreeing only to meet her after dinner) that there were other pleasures he preferred to the pleasure of being with her, a long time would pass before her appetite for him was surfeited. And, too, since he infinitely preferred to Odette's kind of beauty the beauty of a little working girl as fresh and plump as a rose with whom he was smitten, he chose to spend the beginning of the evening with her, being sure of seeing Odette afterward. It was for the same reasons that he never agreed to have Odette pick him up on her way to the Verdurins'. The little working girl would wait for him near his house at a corner known to his coachman Rémi, she would get in beside Swann and stay there in his arms until the moment the carriage drew up in front of the Verdurins'. When he came in, as Mme. Verdurin, pointing to some roses he had sent that morning, said to him: "You deserve a scolding" and showed him a spot next to Odette, the pianist would play for the two of them the little phrase by Vinteuil that was like the anthem of their love. He would begin with the sustained violin tremolos that are heard alone for a few measures, occupying the entire foreground, then all of a sudden they seemed to move away and, as in those paintings by Pieter de Hooch,<sup>22</sup> which assume greater depth because of the narrow frame of a half-open door, away in the distance, in a different color, in the velvet of an interposed light, the little phrase would appear, dancing, pastoral, interpolated, episodic, belonging to another world. It rippled past, simple and immortal, distributing here and there the gifts of its grace, with the same ineffable smile; but Swann thought he could now distinguish within it some disenchantment. It seemed to realize how futile this happiness was to which it showed the way. In its light grace, there was something finished about it, like the detachment that follows regret. But this hardly mattered to him; he considered the phrase less in itself—in what it could express to a musician who was unaware of his existence or of Odette's when he composed it, and to all those who would hear it in the centuries to come—than as a token, a memory of his love which, even for the Verdurins, even for the young pianist, would remind them of Odette and him at the same time, would join them together; so much so that when Odette, capriciously, had begged him to, he had given up the idea of having some pianist play him the entire sonata, of which he knew as yet only this passage. "Why would you need the rest?" she said to him. "This is *our* piece." And in fact, pained by the thought that, at the moment when it passed so close and yet infinitely far away, though it was addressed to them it did not know them, he was almost sorry it had any meaning, any intrinsic and unalterable beauty, alien to them, just as in the jewels given to us, or even the letters written to us by a woman we love, we resent the water of the gem and the words of the language, because they are not created exclusively from the essence of a passing love affair and a particular person.

It often happened that he had lingered so late with the young working girl before going to the Verdurins' that after the little phrase had been played by the pianist, Swann would notice that it would soon be time for Odette to go home. He would drive her back as far as the door of her little house in the rue La Pérouse behind the Arc de Triomphe. And it was perhaps because of this, in order not to demand all her favors, that he sacrificed the less necessary pleasure of seeing her earlier, of arriving at the Verdurins' with her, to the exercise of this right to leave together which she recognized as his and to which he attached a greater value, since, because of it, he had the impression that no one else saw her, no one else came between them, stopped her from being with him still, after he left her.

And so she would go back in Swann's carriage; one night, when she had just stepped down from it and he was saying he would see her tomorrow, she rushed to pick a last chrysanthemum from the little garden in front of the house and gave it to him

before he went off. He held it pressed against his lips on the way home, and when after a few days the flower withered, he locked it with great care in his secretary desk.

But he never went into her house. Only twice, he had gone there in the afternoon to participate in that operation which was of such capital importance for her: "having tea." The isolation and emptiness of the short streets (almost all of them lined with small contiguous private houses, whose monotony would suddenly be interrupted by some sinister street stall, the historic sign and sordid vestige of a time when these districts were still in bad repute), the snow lingering in the garden and on the trees, the slovenliness of the season, the proximity of nature, lent something more mysterious to the warmth, the flowers that he had found when he went in.

Leaving to the left, on the raised ground floor, Odette's bedroom, which looked out on a little parallel street in the back, a straight staircase between walls painted a dark color and hung with Oriental cloths, strings of Turkish beads, and a large Japanese lantern suspended from a slender silk cord (but which, so as not to deprive visitors of the latest comforts of Western civilization, was lit with gas) led up to the drawing room and the morning room. These were preceded by a narrow vestibule whose wall, checkered by a garden trellis, but a gilded one, was lined down its entire length by a rectangular box in which bloomed, as in a greenhouse, a row of those fat chrysanthemums which were still rare at that time, yet nothing like the ones that horticulturalists later succeeded in obtaining. Swann was irritated by the fashion that had favored them since the previous year, but he had taken pleasure, this time, in seeing the half-light of the room striped with pink, orange, and white by the fragrant rays of those ephemeral stars which light up on gray days. Odette had received him in a morning gown of pink silk, her neck and arms bare. She had had him sit next to her in one of the many mysterious alcoves that were contrived in the bays of the drawing room, protected by immense palm trees contained in china cachepots, or by screens festooned with photographs, bows of ribbon, and fans. She had said to him: "You aren't comfortable like that, wait, I'll fix you up," and with the concealed little laugh she would have given at some invention of her own, had settled behind Swann's head, and under his feet, cushions of Japanese silk which she kneaded as if she were lavish with these riches and careless of their value. But when the valet came bringing one after another the many lamps which, nearly all enclosed in large Chinese vases, burned singly or in pairs, all on different pieces of furniture as though on altars, and which had summoned back to the already almost nocturnal twilight of that late afternoon in winter a more lasting sunset, rosier and more human—perhaps making some lover stop and daydream in the street before the mystery of the presence that was at once disclosed and concealed by the glowing panes—she had watched the servant severely from the corner of her eye to see whether he was setting them down properly in their consecrated places. She thought that if even one were put where it should not be, the overall effect of her drawing room would be ruined, and her portrait, placed on a sloping stand draped in plush, would be poorly lit. And so she fervently followed the movements of the ungainly man and reprimanded him sharply when he went too close to two flower stands which she took care to clean herself for fear they would be damaged and which she now went over to examine to see if he had chipped them. She thought all her Chinese knickknacks had "amusing" shapes, as did the orchids, the cattleyas<sup>23</sup> especially, which were, along with the chrysanthemums, her favorite flowers, because they had the great merit of not resembling flowers, but of being made of silk, or satin. "This one looks as though it were cut from the lining of my coat," she said to Swann, showing him an orchid, with a suggestion of respect for this very "chic" flower, for this elegant and unexpected sister which nature had given her, so far removed from her on the scale of living creatures and yet so refined, more deserving than many women of being given a place in her drawing room. As she showed him, first, chimeras with tongues of fire decorating a vase or embroidered on a screen, then the corollas of a bouquet of orchids, then a dromedary of silver inlaid with niello with eyes encrusted with rubies that stood on the mantelpiece next to a jade toad, she affected, first, fear of the wickedness, or laughter at the oddity, of the monsters, then blushes at the indecency of the flowers and then an irresistible desire to go and kiss the dromedary and the toad, which she called "dears." And these affectations contrasted with the sincerity of certain of her devotions, notably to Our Lady of Laghet,<sup>24</sup> who had once, when she lived in Nice, cured her of a fatal illness, and whose gold medal she always wore, attributing to it unlimited powers. Odette made Swann "her" tea, asking him: "Lemon or cream?" and when he answered "Cream," said to him laughing: "A cloud!" And when he found it good: "You see I know what you like." This tea, in fact, seemed as precious a thing to Swann as it did to her, and love has such need to find for itself a justification, a guarantee that it will last, in pleasures which in fact would not be pleasures without it and which end when it ends, that when he left her at seven o'clock to go home and dress, during the whole trip that he made in his coupé, unable to contain the joy which the afternoon had given him, he kept repeating to himself: "How nice it would be to have a little woman like that in whose home one could always find that rare thing, a good cup of tea." An hour later, he received a note from Odette and immediately recognized the large handwriting, in which an affectation of British stiffness imposed an appearance of discipline on ill-formed letters that would perhaps have signified, to less prejudiced eyes, an untidiness of mind, an insufficient education, a lack of frankness and resolution. Swann had forgotten his cigarette case at Odette's. "If you had forgotten your heart here too, I would not have let you have it back."

A second visit he made to her was perhaps more important. Going to her house that day, as always when he was to see her, he pictured her to himself beforehand; and his need, if he was to find her face pretty, to limit what he imagined of her cheeks only to her fresh, pink cheekbones since the rest was so often yellow, languid, sometimes marked with little red specks, distressed him, as it seemed to prove that the ideal is inaccessible and happiness mediocre. He had brought her an engraving that she wanted to see. She was a little unwell; she received him in a mauve crepe de chine dressing gown, pulling the richly embroidered material over her chest like a cloak. Standing next to him, allowing her hair, which she had undone, to flow down her cheeks, bending one leg somewhat in the position of a dancer so that without getting tired she could lean over the engraving, which she looked at, inclining her head, with those large eyes of hers, so tired and sullen when she was not animated, she struck Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, in a fresco in the Sistine Chapel.<sup>25</sup> Swann had always had this peculiar penchant for amusing himself by rediscovering in the paintings of the masters not only the general characteristics of the real world that surrounds us, but what seems on the contrary the least susceptible to generalization, the individual features of the faces we know: for instance, in the material of a bust of the Doge Loredano by Antonio Rizzo,<sup>26</sup> the jut of the cheekbones, the slant of the eyebrows, altogether the very evident resemblance to his coachman Rémi; under the colors of a Ghirlandaio,<sup>27</sup> M. de Palancy's nose; in a portrait by Tintoretto,<sup>28</sup> the invasion of the cheek's fat by the first implanted hairs of the side-whiskers, the

break in the nose, the penetration of the gaze, the congestion of the eyelids of Dr. du Boulbon. Perhaps because he had always continued to feel a touch of remorse that he had limited his life to worldly relationships, to conversation, he believed he could find a sort of indulgent pardon granted him by the great artists, in the fact that they too had contemplated with pleasure, introduced into their work, faces like these which give it a singular certificate of reality and of truth to life, a modern flavor; perhaps, also, he had allowed himself to be so caught up in the frivolity of the society people that he felt the need to look into an old work of art for these anticipated and rejuvenating allusions to current proper names. Perhaps, on the other hand, he still had enough of an artist's nature so that these individual characteristics gave him pleasure by assuming a more general meaning as soon as he saw them extirpated, emancipated, in the resemblance between an older portrait and an original which it did not represent. Whatever the case, and perhaps because the abundance of impressions that he had been receiving for some time, and even though this abundance had come to him more with his love of music, had enriched even his delight in painting, he now found a deeper pleasure—and this was to exert a permanent influence on Swann—in Odette's resemblance to Zipporah as painted by Sandro di Mariano, whom people call more often by his popular nickname of Botticelli, since that name evokes, not the painter's true work, but the idea of it that is vulgarized, banal, and false. He no longer appraised Odette's face according to the finer or poorer quality of her cheeks and the purely flesh-colored softness he supposed he must find when he touched them with his lips if he ever dared to kiss her, but as a skein of subtle and beautiful lines that his eyes reeled off, following their winding curve, joining the cadence of her nape to the effusion of her hair and the flexion of her eyelids, as in a portrait of her in which her type became intelligible and clear.

He looked at her; a fragment of the fresco appeared in her face and in her body, and from then on he would always try to find it in her again, whether he was with Odette or was only thinking of her, and even though he probably valued the Florentine masterpiece only because he found it again in her, nevertheless that resemblance conferred a certain beauty on her too, made her more precious. Swann reproached himself for having misunderstood the value of a creature who would have appeared captivating to the great Sandro, and he felt happy that his pleasure in seeing Odette could be justified by his own aesthetic culture. He told himself that, in associating the thought of Odette with his dreams of happiness, he had not been resigning himself to a second best as imperfect as he had believed until now, since she satisfied his most refined artistic tastes. He forgot that this did not make Odette any more the sort of woman he desired, since in fact his desire had always been oriented in a direction opposite to his aesthetic tastes. The words "Florentine painting" did Swann a great service. They allowed him, like a title, to bring the image of Odette into a world of dreams to which it had not had access until now and where it was steeped in nobility. And, while the simple view he had had of this woman in the flesh, by perpetually renewing his doubts about the quality of her face, her body, her whole beauty, had weakened his love, these doubts were vanquished, that love confirmed when he had instead, for a foundation, the principles of an unquestionable aesthetic; while the kiss and the possession that would seem natural and ordinary if they had been granted him by damaged flesh, coming as they did to crown the adoration of a museum piece appeared to him necessarily supernatural and delicious.

And when he was tempted to regret the fact that for months now he had done nothing but see Odette, he said to himself that it was reasonable to give a good deal of his time to an inestimable masterpiece, cast just this once in a different and particularly savory material, in a most rare exemplar that he contemplated sometimes with the humility, spirituality, and disinterestedness of an artist, and sometimes with the pride, egotism, and sensuality of a collector.

He placed on his worktable, as if it were a photograph of Odette, a reproduction of Jethro's daughter. He admired the large eyes, the delicate face, which allowed one to imagine the imperfect skin, the marvelous curls of the hair along the tired cheeks, and adapting what he had found aesthetically beautiful up to then to the idea of a living woman, he translated it into physical attractions which he rejoiced to find united in a creature whom he could possess. The vague feeling of sympathy that draws us toward a masterpiece as we look at it became, now that he knew the fleshly original of Jethro's daughter, a desire that henceforth compensated for the desire that Odette's body had not at first inspired in him. When he had looked at that Botticelli for a long time, he would think of his own Botticelli, whom he found even more beautiful, and, bringing the photograph of Zipporah close to him, he would believe he was clasping Odette against his heart.

And yet he strained his ingenuity not only to prevent Odette from becoming tired of him, but also, sometimes, to prevent himself from becoming tired of her; feeling that, ever since Odette had had every opportunity to see him, she did not seem to have much to say to him, he was afraid that the rather banal, monotonous, and more or less permanently predetermined manner she now had when they were together would end by killing the romantic hope he had that one day she would declare her passion, a hope which alone had made him fall in love and stay in love. And in order to work a little transformation in Odette's quite invariable attitude of mind, which he was afraid would make him grow tired of her, he would suddenly write her a letter full of feigned disappointment and simulated anger that he would send round to her before dinner. He knew that she would be dismayed, and would answer him, and he hoped that in the contraction of her soul caused by her fear of losing him, words would spring forth that she had never yet said to him—and in fact it was by doing this that he had obtained the most tender letters she had yet written to him, including one, which she had sent round to him at noon from La Maison Dorée<sup>29</sup> (it was the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, held for the flood victims of Murcia)<sup>30</sup> that began with these words: "My dearest, my hand is trembling so badly I can hardly write," and that he had kept in the same drawer as the dry chrysanthemum flower. Or, if she had not had time to write to him, when he arrived at the Verdurins' she would come up to him quickly, saying, "I have to talk to you," and he would gaze curiously at what he saw in her face and her words that she had until then kept hidden from him, of all that was in her heart.

Even as he approached the Verdurins', when he saw the large lamp-lit windows whose shutters were never closed, he was moved as he thought of the charming creature he was going to see in full bloom in their golden light. Now and then the figures of the guests stood out in silhouette, slender and black, screening the lamps, like those little pictures intercalated at intervals around a translucent lampshade whose other panels are plain light. He would try to distinguish Odette's silhouette. Then, as soon as he arrived, without his realizing it, his eyes would shine with such joy that M. Verdurin would say to the painter: "I think it's getting warm." And for Swann, Odette's presence did indeed add something to this house which none of the others in which he was

entertained possessed: a sort of sensory apparatus, a nervous system ramifying through all the rooms and causing constant excitations in his heart.

And so the simple functioning of that social organism, the little “clan,” automatically arranged daily meetings with Odette for Swann and allowed him to feign an indifference to seeing her, or even a desire not to see her, which did not make him run any great risks, since, whatever he wrote to her during the day, he would necessarily see her that evening and take her home.

But once when, having glumly contemplated that inevitable ride home together, he had taken his young working girl all the way to the Bois in order to delay the moment of going to the Verdurins’, he arrived at their house so late that Odette, thinking he would not be coming, had already left. When he saw that she was no longer in the drawing room, Swann felt a pain in his heart; he trembled at being deprived of a pleasure that he was now measuring for the first time, having had until then that certainty of finding it when he wanted it which in the case of all pleasures diminishes for us, or even prevents us from perceiving at all, their greatness.

“Did you notice the look on his face when he saw she wasn’t here?” said M. Verdurin to his wife. “I think one may say he’s smitten!”

“The look on his face?” asked Dr. Cottard violently, since, having gone out briefly to see a patient and returned to pick up his wife, he did not know whom they were discussing.

“What, you didn’t meet the most handsome of all Swanns at the front door . . .”

“No. M. Swann was here?”

“Oh, just for a moment. We had a very agitated, a very nervous Swann. You see, Odette had already left.”

“You mean she and he are thick as thieves? She has given him the key to her city?” asked the doctor, cautiously testing the meaning of the expressions.

“No, no, there’s absolutely nothing going on, and just between us, I think she’s making a great mistake and behaving like a real idiot, which she is, in fact.”

“Tut, tut, tut,” said M. Verdurin. “What do you know about it, how do you know there’s nothing going on? We haven’t gone there to see for ourselves, have we?”

“She would have told me,” retorted Mme. Verdurin proudly. “I tell you she lets me know about all her little affairs! As she hasn’t anyone just now, I told her she ought to sleep with him. She claims she can’t, she says she was certainly rather infatuated with him at first, but that he’s shy with her, which makes her shy with him, and then anyway she doesn’t love him that way, he’s some sort of ideal for her, she’s afraid of taking the bloom off the feeling she has for him, what do I know? Yet it would be just what she needs.”

“Allow me to disagree with you,” said M. Verdurin. “I’m not overly fond of the gentleman’s manner; I think he’s affected.”

Mme. Verdurin froze, assumed an inert expression as if she had turned into a statue, a fiction that allowed it to be assumed that she had not heard that intolerable word *affected*, which seemed to imply that one could “be affected” with them, therefore that one was “better than them.”

“Anyway, if there’s nothing going on, I don’t think it’s because the gentleman thinks she’s *virtuous*,” M. Verdurin said ironically. “And after all, one can’t say anything, since he seems to think she’s intelligent. I don’t know if you heard what he was declaiming to her the other evening about Vinteuil’s sonata; I love Odette with all my heart, but to construct aesthetic theories for her benefit, you’d really have to be quite an imbecile!”

“Now, don’t say bad things about Odette,” said Mme. Verdurin, playing the child. “She’s so charming.”

“But she can still be charming. We aren’t saying bad things about her, we’re saying she’s not a saint, she’s not a genius. In fact,” he said to the painter, “are you really so anxious for her to be virtuous? Who knows—perhaps she would be far less charming.”

On the landing Swann had been approached by the butler, who was not there when he arrived and had been instructed by Odette—but this was already an hour before—to tell him, in case he should still come, that she would probably go and have some chocolate at Prévost’s<sup>31</sup> before returning home. Swann left for Prévost’s, but at every step of the way his carriage was stopped by other carriages or by people crossing the street, loathsome obstacles that he would gladly have knocked down if the policeman and his report would not have delayed him even more than the passage of a pedestrian. He counted the time he was taking, and added a few seconds to all the minutes to be sure of not having made them too short, which would have allowed him to think the chance was greater than it really was that he would arrive early enough and still find Odette. And at one point, like a man in a fever who has just been sleeping and who becomes aware of the absurdity of the dreams he has been contemplating without clearly distinguishing himself from them, Swann suddenly perceived how alien to himself were the thoughts he had been revolving since the moment he had been told at the Verdurins’ that Odette had already left, how new the pain he was suffering in his heart, but noted it only as though he had just woken up. What? All this agitation because he would not see Odette till tomorrow, exactly what he had wanted, an hour ago, when he arrived at Mme. Verdurin’s! He was obliged to acknowledge that in this same carriage which was taking him to Prévost’s he himself was no longer the same, and that he was no longer alone, that a new person was there with him, attached to him, amalgamated to him, one from whom he might not be able to free himself, whom he was going to have to treat with circumspection, like a master or an illness. And yet for a moment now, since he had felt a new person had been added to him in this way, his life had seemed to him more interesting. He hardly said to himself that this possible meeting at Prévost’s, however (the expectation of which so disordered, so denuded the moments preceding it that he could no longer find a single idea, a single memory within which he could rest his mind), would probably, if it took place, be like the others, not much of anything. As on every other evening, once he was with Odette, casting on her changing face a furtive glance which he would immediately turn away for fear that she would see in it his mounting desire and no longer believe in his disinterest, he would cease to be able to think about her, too occupied with finding pretexts that would permit him not to leave her right away and to make certain, without seeming to care about it, that he would see her again the next day at the Verdurins’: that is, to prolong for the moment and to renew for yet one more day the disappointment and torment that came to him from the pointless presence of this woman whom he saw so regularly without daring to take her in his arms.

She was not at Prévost's; he wanted to look in every restaurant along the boulevards. In order to gain time, while he visited some he sent into the others his coachman Rémi (the Doge Loredano by Rizzo), for whom he then waited—having found nothing himself—at a place he had specified to him. The carriage did not return and Swann pictured to himself the approaching moment, as both the moment in which Rémi would say to him: "The lady is here," and the moment in which Rémi would say to him: "The lady was not in any of the cafés." And so he saw the end of the evening before him, one single outcome and yet an alternative as well, preceded either by a meeting with Odette which would put an end to his agony, or by a forced renunciation of finding her this evening, an acceptance of returning home without having seen her.

The coachman came back, but at the moment he stopped in front of Swann, Swann did not say to him: "Did you find the lady?" but: "Remind me, tomorrow, to order more wood; I think our supply must be almost exhausted." Perhaps he had told himself that if Rémi had found Odette in some café where she was waiting for him, the end of the ill-fated evening would already be canceled out by the fulfillment, which was just beginning, of the blissful end of the evening and that he did not need to rush to seize a happiness that was already captured and held in a safe place, that would not be able to break free. But it was also from the force of inertia; there was in his soul that lack of suppleness which can be seen in the bodies of certain people who, at the moment when they need to avoid a collision, to snatch a flame away from their clothing, to perform some other urgent motion, instead take their time, begin by remaining for a second in their original position, as though to find in it their springboard, their source of momentum. And no doubt, if the coachman had interrupted him by saying: "The lady is there," he would have answered: "Oh yes, of course, the errand I sent you on! Well, well! Is that so?" and would have gone on talking to him about supplies of wood in order to hide the emotion he felt and allow himself time to separate from his uneasiness and give himself up to his happiness.

But the coachman came back to tell him he had not found her anywhere, and added his opinion, old servant that he was:

"I think that all Monsieur can do now is go home."

But the indifference that Swann had no trouble feigning as long as Rémi could do nothing further to change the answer he had brought back fell from him, when he saw Rémi attempt to make him give up hope and abandon his search:

"No, not at all," he cried, "we must find the lady; it's terribly important. She would be extremely annoyed—it's a business matter—she would be extremely offended if she didn't see me."

"I don't see how the lady could be offended," answered Rémi, "since she's the one who left without waiting for Monsieur, and since she said she would go to Prévost's and then she wasn't there."

Lights were beginning to go out all around him. Under the trees on the boulevards, in a mysterious darkness, fewer people wandered past, barely recognizable. Now and then the shadow of a woman coming up to him, murmuring a word in his ear, asking him to take her home, would make Swann start. He brushed anxiously against all those dim bodies as if, among the phantoms of the dead, in the kingdom of darkness, he were searching for Eurydice.

Of all the modes by which love is brought into being, of all the agents which disseminate the holy evil, surely one of the most efficacious is this great gust of agitation which now and then sweeps over us. Then our fate is sealed, and the person whose company we enjoy at the time is the one we will love. It is not even necessary for us to have liked him better than anyone else up to then, or even as much. What is necessary is that our predilection for him should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled when—at a moment like this, when we do not have him with us—the quest for the pleasures that his charm gave us is suddenly replaced in us by an anxious need whose object is this person himself, an absurd need which the laws of this world make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to cure—the senseless and painful need to possess him.

Swann asked to be driven to the last remaining restaurants; it was only the hypothesis of happiness he had been able to envisage calmly; now he no longer hid his agitation, the value he placed on this meeting; and he promised a reward to his coachman if they were successful, as though, by inspiring him with a desire to succeed that would be added to his own, he could make Odette appear, even if she had already gone home to bed, in a restaurant on the boulevard. He pushed on as far as La Maison Dorée, went into Tortoni's<sup>32</sup> twice and, still without having seen her, had just come out of the Café Anglais<sup>33</sup> again, walking fast with a wild look on his face back to his carriage, which was waiting for him at the corner of the boulevard des Italiens, when he bumped into a woman coming in the opposite direction: it was Odette; later, she explained that she had not found a seat at Prévost's and so had gone to have supper at La Maison Dorée in an alcove where he had not noticed her, and she was on her way back to her carriage.

She had so little expected to see him that she recoiled in fear. And he himself had run all over Paris not because he thought it was possible to find her, but because it was too hard for him to give up the search. But the joy which his reason had continued to believe was beyond realization that night only seemed even more real now; for since he had not collaborated with it by foreseeing its probabilities, it remained external to him; he did not need to reach into his mind to furnish it with truth, the truth emanated from it, was projected by it toward him, that truth whose radiance dispelled like a dream the isolation he had so dreaded, that truth on which he now based, on which he now rested, without thinking, his happy reverie. In the same way, a traveler arriving at the Mediterranean shore on a day of fine weather, no longer certain that the lands he has just left behind really exist, allows his vision to be dazzled, rather than looking at them himself, by the rays of light emitted in his direction by the luminous, resistant azure of the waters.

He stepped up with her into the carriage that she had waiting there, and told his own to follow.

She was holding a bunch of cattleyas in her hand and Swann saw, under her lace scarf, that she had flowers of the same orchid in her hair, fastened to a plume of swan feathers. She was dressed, under her mantilla, in a flood of black velvet caught up on one side to reveal in a wide triangle the hem of a skirt of white faille and showing a yoke, also of white faille, at the opening of a low-necked bodice tucked with more cattleyas. She had barely recovered from the fright Swann had given her when some obstacle made the horse shy. They were roughly jolted, she cried out and began trembling all over, breathless.

"It's all right," he said, "don't be afraid."

And he put his arm around her shoulder, supporting her against himself; then he said:

"Now don't talk to me, just answer with a sign so you don't get even more out of breath. It won't bother you, will it, if I straighten the flowers in your bodice? They were knocked out of place when the carriage lurched. I'm afraid you may lose them,



I'll push them in a little."

She was not used to seeing a man make such a fuss over her, and said, smiling:

"No, not at all. I don't mind in the least."

But he, intimidated by her answer, and perhaps also so as to appear to have been sincere when he had used that excuse, or even beginning to believe that he had been, exclaimed:

"No, no! Don't talk, you'll get out of breath again, you can answer me perfectly well with a gesture, I'll understand. Tell me sincerely, this doesn't bother you? You see, there's a little . . . I think there's some pollen sprinkled on you; will you let me wipe it off with my hand? I'm not doing it too quickly, I'm not being too rough? Am I tickling you a little, maybe? I don't want to touch the velvet of your dress, I'm afraid I might crush it. But look, it really was necessary to fasten them, they would have fallen; and this way, by pushing them in a little myself . . . Seriously; I'm not annoying you? And what if I just take a little sniff to see if they really have no fragrance? I've never smelled them. May I? Tell the truth."

Smiling, she shrugged her shoulders a little, as though to say "You're quite mad; you can see very well that I like it."

He ran his other hand up along Odette's cheek; she gazed at him steadily, with the grave and languid look of the women by the Florentine master whom he had discovered she resembled; protruding to the edges of her lids, her shining eyes, wide and thin, like theirs, seemed about to well out like two tears. She bent her neck as you see them all do, in the pagan scenes as well as in the religious pictures. And in a position which was no doubt habitual for her, which she knew was appropriate to moments like this and which she took care not to forget to adopt, she seemed to require all her strength to hold her face back, as though an invisible force were drawing it toward Swann. And it was Swann who, before she let her face fall, as though despite herself, onto his lips, held it back for an instant, at a certain distance, between his two hands. He had wanted to give his mind time to catch up, to recognize the dream it had caressed for so long and to be present at its realization, like a relative summoned to witness the success of a child she has loved very much. Perhaps Swann was also fastening upon this face of an Odette he had not yet possessed, an Odette he had not yet even kissed, this face he was seeing for the last time, the gaze with which, on the day of our departure, we hope to carry away with us a landscape we are about to leave forever.

But he was so timid with her that, having ended by possessing her that night, after beginning by arranging her cattleyas, either from dread of offending her, or from fear of appearing in retrospect to have lied, or from a lack of audacity in formulating a greater demand than this one (which he could renew since it had not angered Odette the first time), in the days following he made use of the same pretext. If she had cattleyas tucked in her blouse, he would say: "It's a pity, this evening the cattleyas don't need to be straightened, they haven't been jostled the way they were the other evening; it seems to me, though, that this one isn't quite straight. May I see if these have more fragrance than the others?" Or, if she had none: "Oh! No cattleyas tonight, no way for me to indulge in a little rearranging." So that, for some time, the order he had followed the first night, when he began by touching Odette's throat with his fingers and lips, was not changed, and his caresses still began this way each time; and much later, when the rearrangement (or the ritual simulacrum of rearrangements) of the cattleyas had long since been abandoned, the metaphor "make cattleya," having become a simple phrase they used without thinking about it when they wanted to signify the act of physical possession—in which, in fact, one possesses nothing—lived on in their language, commemorating it, after that forgotten custom. And perhaps this individual way of saying "make love" did not mean exactly the same thing as its synonyms. Even if one is tired of women, even if one believes that the possession of the most various women is always the same and familiar beforehand, this possession becomes a new pleasure if it involves women difficult enough—or believed to be so by us—so that we have to make it happen as a result of some episode in our relationship that is unforeseen, as had been for Swann, the first time, the rearranging of the cattleyas. He tremulously hoped, that night (but Odette, he told himself, if she was fooled by his ruse, would not be able to guess as much), that the possession of this woman was what would emerge from among their broad mauve petals; and the pleasure he felt already and that Odette was perhaps tolerating, he thought, only because she had not recognized it, seemed to him, because of that—as it might seem to the first man who tasted it among the flowers of earthly paradise—a pleasure that had not existed until then, that he was seeking to create, a pleasure—signaled by the special name he gave it—entirely individual and new.

Now, every evening, when he took her home, he had to go in, and often she came back out in a dressing gown and led him to his carriage, kissed him within view of the coachman, saying: "What difference does it make to me, what other people think of me?" On evenings when he did not go to the Verdurins' (which happened sometimes now that he had another way of seeing her), on the increasingly rare evenings when he went into society, she would ask him to come to see her on his way home, whatever the hour. It was spring, a clear and icy spring. Coming out of a party, he would get into his victoria, spread a rug over his legs, tell the friends who were going off at the same time and who had asked him to join them that he could not, that he was not going in the same direction, and the coachman would leave at a fast trot knowing where to go. They would be amazed, and, in fact, Swann was no longer the same. No one ever received a letter from him now asking for an introduction to some woman. He no longer paid any attention to women, avoided going to places where one might meet them. In a restaurant, in the country, his attitude was the opposite of the one by which, just recently, he could be recognized and which had seemed to have been his always. To such an extent does a passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character that replaces our other character and eliminates the signs, invariable until then, by which it was expressed! Now, however, what was invariable was that, wherever Swann might be, he did not fail to go to meet Odette. The path that separated him from her was the one he inevitably traveled as though it were the slope itself, rapid and irresistible, of his life. In truth, when he had stayed out late, he would often have preferred to go directly home without making that long trip, and not see her until the next day; but the very fact of taking the trouble to go to her house at an unusual hour, of guessing that the friends who were leaving him were saying to themselves: "He is tied hand and foot, some woman must be insisting that he go to her whatever the hour," made him feel he was leading the life of men known to be having a love affair and in whom the sacrifice they are making of their sleep and their other interests to a dream of sensuous pleasure produces an inner charm. Then again, without his realizing it, the certainty that she was waiting for him, that she was not somewhere else with other people, that he would not return without seeing her, neutralized the anguish, forgotten but always ready to be reawakened, which he had felt the night when Odette was not at the Verdurins', and of which the present assuagement was so sweet that it could be named happiness. Perhaps it was to this anguish that he owed the

importance which Odette had now assumed for him. Other people usually leave us so indifferent that when we have invested in one of them such possibilities of causing us pain and joy, that person seems to belong to another universe, is surrounded with poetry, turns our life into a sort of expanse of emotion in which that person will be more or less close to us. Swann could not ask himself without anxiety what Odette would mean to him in the years to come. Now and then, as he saw, from his victoria, on those lovely cold nights, the shining moon spreading its brightness between his eyes and the deserted streets, he would think of that other face, bright and tinged with pink like the moon's, which, one day, had appeared in the forefront of his mind and, since then, had cast on the world the mysterious light in which he saw it. If he arrived after the hour when Odette sent her servants to bed, before ringing at the gate of the little garden he would first go into the street onto which looked out, on the ground floor, between the windows, all alike but dark, of the contiguous houses, the only one illuminated, the window of her room. He would rap at the pane, and she, alerted, would answer and go and wait for him on the other side, at the front door. He would find several of her favorite pieces open on the piano: the "Valse des Roses" or "Pauvre Fou" by Tagliafico<sup>34</sup> (which should, according to her wishes, which she had put into writing, be performed at her funeral); he would ask her to play instead the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata, even though Odette played very badly, but the loveliest vision of a work of art that remains with us is often the one that transcended the wrong notes coaxed by unskillful fingers from an out-of-tune piano. For Swann the little phrase continued to be associated with the love he felt for Odette. He was aware that this love was something that did not correspond to anything external, anything verifiable by others besides him; he realized that Odette's qualities did not justify his attaching so much value to the time he spent with her. And often, when Swann's positive intelligence alone prevailed, he wanted to stop sacrificing so many intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. But as soon as he heard it, the little phrase had the power to open up within him the space it needed, the proportions of Swann's soul were changed by it; a margin was reserved in him for a bliss that also did not correspond to any external object, and yet, instead of being purely individual, like the enjoyment of that love, assumed for Swann a reality superior to that of concrete things. The little phrase incited in him this thirst for an unfamiliar delight, but it did not give him anything precise to assuage it. So that those parts of Swann's soul from which the little phrase had erased any concern for material interests, any considerations that were human and valid for all people, it left vacant and blank, and in them he was free to write Odette's name. Moreover, where Odette's affection might seem somewhat limited and disappointing, the little phrase came along to add to it, to amalgamate with it its mysterious essence. From the sight of Swann's face as he listened to the phrase, one would have said he was absorbing an anesthetic that allowed him to breathe more deeply. And the pleasure which the music gave him, and which was soon to create in him a true need, did indeed resemble, at those moments, the pleasure he would have found in testing fragrances, in entering into contact with a world for which we are not made, which seems formless to us because our eyes do not perceive it, meaningless because it evades our understanding, which we can attain only through a single sense. What great repose, what mysterious renewal for Swann—for him whose eyes, though refined lovers of painting, whose mind, though a shrewd observer of manners, bore forever the indelible trace of the aridity of his life—to feel himself transformed into a creature strange to humanity, blind, without logical faculties, almost a fantastic unicorn, a chimerical creature perceiving the world only through his hearing. And since he still searched the little phrase for a meaning to which his intellect could not descend, what strange drunkenness he felt, as he divested his innermost soul of all the help of reason and forced it to pass alone through the sieve, through the dark filter of sound! He began to become aware of all that was painful, perhaps even secretly unappeased in the depths of the sweetness of that phrase, but it could not hurt him. What did it matter if it told him love was fragile, his own love was so strong! He toyed with the sadness it diffused, he felt it pass over him, but in a caress that only deepened and sweetened his sense of his own happiness. He made Odette play it ten times, twenty times, demanding that while she did so she should not stop kissing him. Each kiss summons another. Ah, in those first days of our love, kisses come so naturally! So closely, in their profusion, do they crowd together; and it would be as hard for us to count the kisses we give each other in an hour as the flowers of a field in the month of May. Then she would make as if to stop, saying: "How can you expect me to play if you hold on to me? I can't do everything at once. Now decide what you want—should I play the piano or play with you?," he would become annoyed, she would burst out laughing, and her laughter would change and descend on him in a rain of kisses. Or she would look at him with a sullen expression, once again he would see before him a face worthy of figuring in Botticelli's *Life of Moses*, he would place her in it, he would give her neck the necessary inclination; and when he had well and truly painted her in distemper, in the fifteenth century, on the wall of the Sistine Chapel, the idea that she had nevertheless remained here, by the piano, in the present moment, ready to be kissed and possessed, the idea of her materiality and her life would intoxicate him with such force that, his eyes distracted, his jaw tensed as though to devour her, he would swoop down upon that Botticelli virgin and begin pinching her cheeks. Then, once he had left her, not without going back in to kiss her again because he had forgotten to carry away in his memory some detail of her fragrance or her features, while he was returning home in his victoria, he would bless Odette for allowing him these daily visits, which he felt could not give her very great joy, but which, by saving him from becoming jealous—by relieving him of the occasion for suffering again from the disease that had broken out in him on the evening when he had not found her at the Verdurins'—would help him to arrive, without having any more of those crises of which the first had been so painful and must remain the only one, at the end of this singular period of his life, these hours that were almost enchanted, like those in which he crossed Paris in the light of the moon. And noticing, during his return, that the star had now moved in relation to him and was almost at the edge of the horizon, feeling that his love, too, was obeying immutable and natural laws, he asked himself whether this period he had entered would last much longer, whether, soon, his thoughts would no longer see the dear face except as occupying a distant and diminished place, and nearly ceasing to radiate any charm. For Swann did find charm in things, now that he was in love, just as during the period when, as an adolescent, he had thought he was an artist; but this was no longer the same charm; Odette alone conferred it on them. He felt the inspirations of his youth, which had been dissipated by a frivolous life, reawakening in him, but they all bore the reflection, the mark of a particular being; and, in the long hours which he now found a delicate pleasure in spending at home, alone with his convalescing soul, little by little he became himself again, but possessed by another.

He went to her house only in the evening, and he knew nothing about how she spent her time during the day, any more than about her past, so much so that he lacked even that initial bit of information which, by allowing us to imagine for ourselves what we do not know, makes us want to know it. Thus, he did not ask himself what she might be doing, nor what sort of life she had

had. He merely smiled sometimes at the thought that a few years before, when he did not know her, someone had spoken to him of a woman who, if he remembered rightly, must certainly have been she, as being a courtesan, a kept woman, one of those women to whom he still attributed, since he had spent very little time in their company, the willful, fundamentally perverse character with which they were for so long endowed by the imaginations of certain novelists. He would tell himself that often if one simply believes the opposite of the reputation the world has formed one will judge a person accurately, when he contrasted the character of such a woman with that of Odette, good, naive, enamored of idealism, so nearly incapable of not telling the truth that, after he begged her one day, so that he could have dinner alone with her, to write to the Verdurins telling them that she was unwell, the next day he had seen her, face-to-face with Mme. Verdurin, who was asking her if she felt better, blush, stammer, and reveal on her face despite herself what an affliction, what a torment it was for her to lie, and, while in her answer she multiplied the invented details of her alleged indisposition the day before, appear to be asking forgiveness, by her supplicating looks and her sorrowful voice, for the falseness of her words.

On certain days, however, though they were rare, she came to his home in the afternoon, interrupting his daydreams or the study of Vermeer he had resumed lately. His servant would come to tell him that Mme. de Cr cy was in his morning room. He would go off to find her there, and when he opened the door, as soon as she saw Swann, a smile would come and settle in Odette's rosy face, changing the shape of her mouth, the look in her eyes, the modeling of her cheeks. Once he was alone, he would see that smile again, he would see the one she had given him the day before, another with which she had greeted him on a different occasion, the smile which had been her answer, in the carriage, when he had asked if it annoyed her that he was straightening her cattleyas; and Odette's life during the rest of the time, since he knew nothing about it, appeared to him, with its neutral and colorless background, similar to those sheets of studies by Watteau<sup>35</sup> in which one sees here and there, in every space, from every angle, drawn in three colors on buff paper, innumerable smiles. But sometimes, in a corner of that life which Swann saw as completely empty, even if his mind told him it was not, because he could not imagine it, some friend, who, suspecting they loved each other, had not dared to tell him anything about her except what was insignificant, would describe to him Odette's form, which he had seen, that very morning, going up the rue Abbateucci<sup>36</sup> on foot in a "visiting cloak" trimmed with skunk, under a "Rembrandt-style" hat, and with a bouquet of violets in her bodice. This simple sketch was greatly disturbing to Swann because it suddenly made him see that Odette had a life which did not belong entirely to him; he wanted to know whom she had been trying to please with that outfit, which he did not know she possessed; he would promise himself to ask her where she had been going, at that moment, as if in the whole of his mistress's colorless life—almost inexistent, because it was invisible to him—there had been only one thing apart from all those smiles directed at him: her walking under a Rembrandt-style hat, with a bunch of violets in her bodice.

Except when he asked her for the little phrase by Vinteuil instead of "The Waltz of the Roses," Swann did not try to make her play things he liked or, any more in music than in literature, to correct her bad taste. He fully realized that she was not intelligent. When she told him she would like it so much if he would tell her about the great poets, she had imagined that she would immediately become familiar with heroic and romantic couplets like those by the Vicomte de Borelli,<sup>37</sup> but even more moving. As for Vermeer of Delft, she asked if he had ever suffered because of a woman, if it was a woman who had inspired him, and when Swann admitted to her that no one knew anything about that, she lost interest in the painter. She often said: "I do believe, of course, that poetry—well, that there would be nothing more beautiful if it was true, if poets really believed everything they said. But quite often, those people are the most calculating of all. I know something about it, because a friend of mine was in love with a poet of sorts. In his poetry all he talked about was love, the sky, the stars. Oh, she was fooled all right! He did her out of more than three hundred thousand francs." If Swann then tried to teach her what artistic beauty was, how one should admire poetry or painting, after a moment she would stop listening, saying: "Yes . . . I didn't imagine it was like that." And he would sense that she was feeling such disappointment that he would prefer to lie, telling her that what he had said was nothing, that it was the least important part, that he did not have the time to go into things more deeply, that there was something else. But she would say to him sharply: "Something else? What? . . . Say it, then," but he would not say it, knowing it would seem feeble to her and different from what she was hoping for, less sensational and less touching, and fearing that, disillusioned by art, she would at the same time be disillusioned by love.

And in fact she found Swann intellectually inferior to what she would have imagined. "You're always so reserved. I can't make you out." She would marvel more at his indifference to money, his kindness to everyone, his refinement. And it often happens, in fact, to greater men than Swann, to a scientist or an artist, when he is not misunderstood by those around him, that the feeling on their part which proves that the superiority of his intelligence has compelled their recognition is not their admiration for his ideas, since these are beyond them, but their respect for his goodness. There was also the respect with which Odette was inspired by Swann's position in society, but she did not want him to try to secure invitations for her. Perhaps she felt that he might not be successful, or was even afraid that merely by talking about her he would prompt revelations that she dreaded. In any case, she had made him promise never to utter her name. The reason she did not want to go into society, she had told him, was a quarrel she had once had with a friend who, to avenge herself, had then said bad things about her. Swann objected: "But not everyone knew your friend." "Well, yes, but these things get around. The world is cruel." Swann did not understand this story, but on the other hand he knew that such precepts—"The world is cruel," "A slanderous remark spreads like a drop of oil"—were generally held to be true; there must be cases to which they applied. Was Odette's one of them? He wondered about this, but not for long, because he, too, was subject to the mental torpor that had burdened his father whenever he posed himself a difficult problem. Besides, this world which so frightened Odette did not, perhaps, inspire any great desire in her, because it was too far removed from the one she knew for her to picture it quite clearly. However, while she had remained in certain respects truly simple (for example she had kept as her friend a solitary little seamstress, whose steep, dark, and foul-smelling stair she climbed almost every day), she thirsted after fashion, but did not conceive of it as the fashionable people did. For them, fashion is a thing that emanates from a small number of individuals who project it to a considerable distance—more and more faintly the farther one is from the center of their closest associations—through the circle of their friends or the friends of their friends, whose names form a sort of register. Society people hold this register in their memory, they have an erudition about such matters, from which they have derived a sort of taste, a sort of discernment, so that if Swann, for example, read in a newspaper the names of the

people who were at a dinner, he could immediately, without having to call upon his knowledge of the world, tell the exact degree of stylishness of that dinner, the way a literary person, simply by reading a sentence, can judge exactly the quality of its author. But Odette was one of those people (extremely numerous, whatever the fashionable world may think, and the likes of which exist in every class of society) who do not share these notions, who imagine a stylishness that is quite different, that assumes different guises according to the circle to which they belong, but has the particular characteristic—whether it be the sort of stylishness Odette dreamed of, or the sort Mme. Cottard worshiped—of being directly accessible to everyone. The other, the stylishness of the society people, is accessible too, in truth, but only after a certain delay. Odette would say of someone:

“He only goes to the really smart places.”

And if Swann asked her what she meant by that, she would answer him a little scornfully:

“Why, smart places! My goodness! If at your age you need to be taught what the smart places are, I don’t know what to tell you. For example, the avenue de l’Impératrice<sup>38</sup> on Sunday mornings, the Tour du Lac<sup>39</sup> at five o’clock, the Éden Théâtre<sup>40</sup> on Thursdays, the Hippodrome<sup>41</sup> on Friday, the balls . . .”

“Now, what balls?”

“Why, the balls people give in Paris, the smart people, I mean. Well, Herbinger, you know, the one that has a job with a broker? But you must know him, he’s one of the most successful men in Paris, that tall blond young man who’s such a snob, who always has a flower in his buttonhole, a part at the back, light-colored overcoats; he goes about with that old thing who wears so much paint on her face, he takes her out to all the premieres. Well, he gave a ball the other night, and the smartest people in Paris were there. How I would have loved to go! But you had to show your invitation card at the door and I couldn’t get one. Really, I’m just as glad I didn’t go, I would have got killed in the crush, and I wouldn’t have seen a thing. It’s really just to be able to say you were at Herbinger’s. And you know how I like to boast! Anyway, you can bet that out of a hundred girls who tell you they were there, half of them are lying . . . But actually, you’re such a swell, I’m amazed you weren’t there.”

But Swann in no way tried to make her change this conception of fashionable life; thinking that his own was no more real, was also foolish, unimportant, he saw no point in instructing her about it, so that after some months she had no interest in the people whose homes he went to except as a means of obtaining enclosure passes for the horse races or tickets to the premieres. She wanted him to cultivate useful relationships of that kind, but in other respects she was persuaded they were not very smart, after she saw the Marquise de Villeparisis go past her in the street wearing a black woolen dress and a bonnet with strings.

"Why, she looks like a working-class woman, darling,<sup>42</sup> like an old concierge! That was a marquise! I'm no marquise, but you'd have to pay me handsomely to make me go about rigged out like that!"

She could not understand why Swann lived in the house on the quai d'Orléans which, though she did not dare admit it to him, she found unworthy of him.

Of course she claimed she loved "antiques" and assumed a rapturous and discriminating air when she said she adored spending a whole day "collecting curios," looking for "bric-a-brac," things "from the past." Although she persisted in a sort of point of honor (and as though she were obeying some family precept) in never answering questions or "accounting" for how she spent her days, she talked to Swann once about a friend who had invited her to her house, where everything was "period." But Swann could not manage to make her say what that period was. After some reflection, however, she answered that it was "medieval." By this she meant that there was wood paneling. Sometime later, she talked to him about her friend again and added, in the hesitant tone and with the knowing look with which you mention someone you have had dinner with the night before and whose name you never heard before, but whom your hosts seemed to consider someone so celebrated that you hope the person you are talking to will know who you are talking about: "Her dining room . . . is . . . eighteenth century!" She had thought the room was hideous, bare, as if the house were not finished, the women looked hideous in it too, and the fashion would never catch on. Finally, a third time, she talked about it again and showed Swann the address of the man who had made that dining room and whom she wanted to send for, when she had the money, to see if he could make one for her, not the same one, of course, but another which she was contemplating and which unfortunately the dimensions of her little house would not allow, one with tall sideboards, Renaissance furniture, and fireplaces like the ones in the Château de Blois.<sup>43</sup> That day, she let slip in Swann's presence what she thought of his home on the quai d'Orléans; because he had criticized the fact that Odette's friend preferred, not Louis XVI, for, he said, even though that was not done, it could be charming, but the fake antique: "You wouldn't want her to live the way you do, with your broken furniture and your threadbare carpets," she said to him, her bourgeois deference to public opinion prevailing, again, over her cocotte dilettantism.

People who liked collecting curios, were fond of poetry, despised crass calculations, dreamed of honor and love, she saw as an elite superior to the rest of humanity. One did not really have to have these predilections, provided one proclaimed them; of a man who had confessed to her at dinner that he loved to wander about the city, to get his hands dirty in the old shops, that he would never be appreciated by this commercial century, because he did not look after his own interests, and that because of this he belonged to another age, she returned home saying: "Why, he's a lovely person, so sensitive, I never would have guessed!" and she felt a sudden warm friendship for him. But men who, like Swann, had these tastes, yet did not talk about them, left her cold. No doubt she had to admit that Swann did not value money, but she would add sulkily: "But with him, it's not the same thing"; and in fact, what spoke to her imagination was not the practice of disinterestedness, but its vocabulary.

Feeling that he often failed to satisfy her dreams, he at least tried to see that she enjoyed being with him, not to oppose the vulgar ideas, the bad taste, which she displayed in all things, and which he loved, moreover, like everything else that emanated from her, which even enchanted him, for they were so many particular traits by which the woman's essence appeared to him, became visible. And so, when she looked happy because she was going to *La Reine Topaz*,<sup>44</sup> or when her gaze became serious, worried, and petulant, because she was afraid of missing the flower show or merely of not being in time for tea, with *muffins* and *toasts*,<sup>45</sup> at the "Thé de la rue Royale,"<sup>46</sup> regular attendance at which she believed was indispensable in establishing a woman's reputation for elegance, Swann, enchanted as one is by the naturalness of a child or the truthfulness of a portrait that seems about to speak, sensed so clearly his mistress's soul rising to the surface of her face that he could not resist going over to touch it with his lips. "Ah! She wants to be taken to the flower show, little Odette, she wants to be admired, well then, we'll take her, we must obey." Since Swann's vision was rather poor, he had resigned himself to wearing glasses for working at home, and to adopting, for going out in the world, a monocle, which was less disfiguring. The first time she saw him with one in his eye, she could not contain her joy: "I really do think for a man it's very smart! How it suits you! You look like a real gentleman. All you're missing is a title!" she added, with a touch of regret. He was happy that Odette was like this, just as, if he had been in love with a Breton woman, he would have enjoyed seeing her in a coif and hearing her tell him she believed in ghosts. Until then, as is true of many men whose taste for the arts develops independently from their sensuality, a bizarre disparity had existed between the satisfactions he conceded to one and those he conceded to the other, as he enjoyed, in the company of increasingly crude women, the seductions of increasingly refined works of art, taking a little housemaid to a closed orchestra box for the performance of a decadent play that he wanted to see or to an exhibition of Impressionist painting, and sure, in any case, that a cultivated woman of the world would not have understood any more about it, but would not have been able to keep quiet so nicely. But now that he loved Odette, to feel what she felt, to try to share but a single soul between the two of them, was so sweet to him that he sought to enjoy the things she liked, and his pleasure, not only in imitating her habits, but in adopting her opinions, was all the more profound because, since they had no roots in his own intelligence, they reminded him only of his love, because of which he preferred them. If he went to more than one performance of *Serge Panine*,<sup>47</sup> if he sought out opportunities to go to see Olivier Métra<sup>48</sup> conduct, it was for the sweetness of being initiated into all of Odette's ideas, of feeling he was sharing equally in all her tastes. This charm of bringing him close to her, which was possessed by the works or places that she liked, seemed to him more mysterious than the charm intrinsic to those that were lovelier but did not remind him of her. What was more, because he had allowed the intellectual beliefs of his youth to weaken, and because his skepticism as a man of the world had, unbeknownst to him, penetrated to them, he thought (or at least he had thought this for so long that he still said it) that the objects of one's preferences do not have an absolute value in themselves, but that they all depend on one's period, one's social class, they are all merely fashions, the most vulgar of which are equal to those that pass for the most distinguished. And just as he believed that the importance Odette attached to having tickets for the opening was not in itself a more ridiculous thing than the pleasure he used to take in lunching at the home of the Prince of Wales, likewise he did not think that the admiration she professed for Monte Carlo or for the Righi<sup>49</sup> was more unreasonable than the fondness he himself felt for Holland, which she imagined to be ugly, or for Versailles, which she found dreary. And so he denied himself those places, taking pleasure in telling himself that it was for her sake, that he chose not to feel things, love things, except with her.



Like everything else that was part of Odette's environment and no more, in some sense, than a means by which he could see her, talk to her, he enjoyed the company of the Verdurins. There, because at the center of all the amusements, meals, music, games, costumed suppers, excursions into the country, theater parties, even the rare "grand soirees" given for the "bores," was the presence of Odette, the sight of Odette, conversation with Odette, of which the Verdurins gave to Swann, by inviting him, the inestimable gift, he was happier among the "little clan" than anywhere else, and sought to attribute real merits to it, for by so doing he could imagine that, out of preference, he would associate with it all his life. For, since he did not dare to say to himself, afraid that he would not believe it, that he would always love Odette, at least by supposing that he would always associate with the Verdurins (a proposition that, a priori, raised fewer objections of principle on the part of his intelligence), he could see himself in the future continuing to meet Odette every evening; this did not perhaps quite amount to the same thing as always loving her, but for the moment, while he loved her, to believe that he would not stop seeing her one day was all that he asked. "What a charming place," he would say to himself. "How fundamentally real their life is! How much more intelligent, more artistic, they are there than high-society people! How sincere, despite some rather absurd little exaggerations, is Mme. Verdurin's love of painting, music—what a passion she has for works of art, and how she longs to please artists! The notion she has formed of society people is not accurate; but then again, society's notion of artistic circles is even more false! Perhaps I have no very great intellectual needs to satisfy in conversation, but I'm perfectly happy with Cottard though he does make inept puns. And as for the painter, his pretentiousness may be unpleasant when he's trying to surprise people, but on the other hand he has one of the finest minds I've ever known. And also, most of all, you feel free there, you do what you like without feeling constrained, without standing on ceremony. What a quantity of good humor is expended every day in that drawing room! Decidedly, apart from a few rare exceptions, I will never go anywhere else. More and more, that is where I will find my companionship and live my life."

And since the qualities that he believed to be intrinsic to the Verdurins were merely the reflection of the pleasures he enjoyed in their house because of his love for Odette, those qualities became more serious, more profound, more vital, along with those pleasures. Because Mme. Verdurin sometimes gave Swann the only thing that could constitute happiness for him; because, on a certain evening when he felt anxious because Odette had been talking to one guest more than another, and when, irritated at her, he did not want to take the initiative of asking her if she would return home with him, Mme. Verdurin brought him peace and joy by saying spontaneously: "Odette, you will take M. Swann home, won't you?"; because, when summer was approaching, and he had at first wondered uneasily if Odette would be going away without him, if he could continue to see her every day, Mme. Verdurin invited them both to spend it at her home in the country—Swann, unconsciously allowing gratitude and self-interest to infiltrate into his intelligence and influence his ideas, went so far as to proclaim that Mme. Verdurin was the soul of high-mindedness. Apropos of a few delightful or eminent people whom one of his old classmates from the École du Louvre might mention to him, he would respond: "I prefer the Verdurins a hundred times over." And, with a solemnity that was new to him: "They are magnanimous people, and magnanimity is, fundamentally, the only thing that matters and that gives us distinction here on earth. You know, there are only two classes of people: the magnanimous ones and all the rest; and when you reach my age you have to choose, you have to decide once and for all whom you intend to like and, whom you intend to despise, stick with the ones you like, and, so as to make up for the time you've wasted with the others, not leave them again until you die. Well!" he added with that slight emotion you feel when, even without fully realizing it, you say something not because it is true, but because you enjoy saying it and you listen to it in your own voice as if it came from somewhere other than from yourself, "my fate is settled, I have chosen to like only magnanimous hearts and to live from now on only in magnanimity. You ask me if Mme. Verdurin is truly intelligent. I assure you that she has given me proof of a nobility of heart, of a loftiness of soul which, you know, can't be attained without an equal loftiness of mind. Certainly she has a profound intelligence where the arts are concerned. But perhaps this is not her most admirable quality; and every small, ingeniously, exquisitely good action that she has performed for me, every genial attention, every gesture of sublime familiarity, reveals a more profound understanding of life than any philosophical treatise."

Yet he could have said to himself that there were old friends of his parents just as simple as the Verdurins, friends of his youth as smitten with art, that he knew other greathearted people, and that nevertheless, now that he had opted for simplicity, the arts, and magnanimity, he never saw them anymore. But these people did not know Odette, and, if they had known her, would never have thought of bringing the two of them together.

And so there was probably not, in the whole Verdurin circle, a single faithful partisan who liked them or thought he liked them as much as did Swann. And yet, when M. Verdurin had said he did not much care for Swann, he was not only expressing his own thoughts, but also guessing his wife's. Doubtless Swann's affection for Odette was too private and he had neglected to make Mme. Verdurin his daily confidante concerning it; doubtless the very discretion with which he had made use of the Verdurins' hospitality, often refraining from coming to dinner for a reason that they did not suspect and in place of which they saw a desire not to turn down an invitation to the home of some "bores"; doubtless, too, and despite all the precautions he had taken to hide it from them, their gradual discovery of his brilliant position in society, all fed their irritation with him. But the deeper reason for it was different. It was that they had very quickly sensed in him a reserved, impenetrable space where he continued to profess silently to himself that the Princesse de Sagan was not grotesque and that Cottard's jokes were not funny, in the end, and, even though he never deviated from his affability and never rebelled against their dogmas, they sensed, too, an impossibility of imposing them on him, of wholly converting him to them, the likes of which they had never encountered before in anyone. They would have forgiven him for associating with bores (to whom, for that matter, in his heart of hearts, he preferred the Verdurins and the whole of the little clan a thousand times over), if he had consented, as a good example, to renounce them in the presence of the faithful. But this was an abjuration they understood could not be wrung from him.

How different from a "newcomer" whom Odette had asked them to invite, though she had not met him more than a few times, and in whom they invested many hopes: the Comte de Forcheville! (It turned out that in fact he was Saniette's brother-in-law, which filled the faithful with surprise: the old archivist's manners were so humble that they had always thought he was from a social rank inferior to theirs and did not expect to learn that he belonged to a world that was rich and relatively aristocratic.) True, Forcheville was grossly snobbish, whereas Swann was not; true, he did not even dream of placing the circle of the Verdurins above all others, as Swann did. But he did not have the natural delicacy that stopped Swann from joining in with the too

manifestly false criticisms that Mme. Verdurin leveled against people he knew. As for the vulgar and pretentious tirades the painter launched into on certain days, and as for the traveling-salesman jokes that Cottard ventured, for which Swann, who liked both men, could easily find excuses without having the heart or the hypocrisy to applaud them, Forcheville by contrast was of an intellectual caliber that allowed him to be dumbfounded, awestruck by the first, though he did not understand them, and to delight in the second. And in fact the first dinner at the Verdurins' at which Forcheville was present exposed all these differences, brought out his qualities, and precipitated Swann's fall from grace.

At this dinner there was, besides the regulars, a professor from the Sorbonne, Brichot, who had met M. and Mme. Verdurin at the spa and, if his duties at the university and his scholarly work had not given him very few hours of freedom, would willingly have come to their house often. For he had that curiosity, that excessive interest in life which, when combined with a degree of skepticism concerning the object of their studies, gives certain intelligent men in any profession, doctors who do not believe in medicine, schoolteachers who do not believe in Latin compositions, a reputation for having minds that are broad, brilliant, and even superior. At Mme. Verdurin's, he made a point of seeking his illustrations in whatever was most up-to-date when he spoke of philosophy and history, principally because he thought such subjects were only a preparation for real life and he imagined he would find the little clan putting into practice what he had known before now only from books, and then perhaps also because, having had instilled in him in the past, and having preserved without knowing it, a respect for certain subjects, he believed he was casting off his academic tendencies by taking liberties with them which, on the contrary, appeared such to him only because he had remained an academic.

At the very beginning of the meal, when M. de Forcheville, placed to the right of Mme. Verdurin, who had gone to great trouble over her appearance so as to please the "newcomer," said to her: "Quite original, that white dress," the doctor, who had been steadily observing him, so curious was he to find out what sort of man a "de," as he termed it, would be, and who was looking for a chance of attracting his attention and entering into closer contact with him, seized on the word "*blanche*" and, without lifting his nose from his plate, said: "*Blanche? Blanche de Castille?*"<sup>50</sup> then, without moving his head, cast his eyes furtively to the right and left with an uncertain, smiling look. Whereas Swann, with his painful and useless attempt at a smile, revealed how stupid he thought the pun was, Forcheville had shown both that he relished its subtlety and that he had good manners, by containing within judicious limits a gaiety whose frankness had charmed Mme. Verdurin.

"What do you make of our man of science?" she had asked Forcheville. "It's impossible to have even two minutes of serious conversation with him. Is that the sort of thing you say to them at your hospital?" she had added, turning to the doctor. "It must be rather lively there, if that's the case. I see I'll have to get them to admit me as a patient."

"I think I heard the doctor talking about that old termagant, Blanche de Castille, if I dare express myself that way. Am I correct, madame?" Brichot asked Mme. Verdurin, who, swooning with laughter, her eyes shut, plunged her face into her hands, from which stifled cries escaped. "My God, madame, I wouldn't want to alarm whatever respectful souls there may be at this table, *sub rosa* . . . And I realize that our ineffable republic, Athenian as it is—how very much so!—might pay homage to that obscurantist Capetian lady as the very first truly authoritarian police prefect. Yes indeed, my dear host, yes indeed, yes indeed," he went on in his sonorous voice, detaching each syllable, in response to an objection of M. Verdurin's. "The *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, whose facts are incontestably reliable, leaves no doubt about this. No better choice of patron could have been made by a secularized proletariat than that mother of a saint to whom, incidentally, she gave a pretty rough time, as we are told by Suger and other Saint Bernards;<sup>51</sup> for with her everyone got hauled over the coals."

"Who is this gentleman?" Forcheville asked Mme. Verdurin. "He seems first-rate."

"What? You haven't heard of the famous Brichot? Why, he's celebrated all over Europe."

"Oh! So that's Bréchet!" cried Forcheville, who had not heard the name clearly. "You must tell me all about him," he added, staring wide-eyed at the famous man. "It's always interesting to have dinner with a prominent person. But I must say, you certainly give your guests some choice dinner mates. No one's likely to get bored in your house."

"Oh you know, the most important thing," Mme. Verdurin said modestly, "is that they know they can trust us. They can talk about whatever they like, and the conversation is off and running. For instance, now, take Brichot. This is nothing: I've seen him, you know, when he's been absolutely dazzling here in my house, you feel you ought to go down on your knees before him. Well, now, at other people's houses, he's not the same man, he hasn't a scrap of wit, you have to force the words out of him, he's actually boring."

"How odd!" said Forcheville, surprised.

A wit like Brichot's would have been considered pure stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his youth, even though it might be compatible with real intelligence. And the professor's intelligence, vigorous and well nourished, probably would have been envied by many of the society people whom Swann considered witty. But those people had inculcated him so thoroughly with their own likes and dislikes, at least concerning anything to do with society life, including even that annexed part of it which should, instead, belong to the domain of intelligence—namely, conversation—that Swann could only find Brichot's jokes pedantic, vulgar, and sickeningly coarse. Then, too, being so accustomed to good manners, he was shocked by the rough military tone affected, each time he addressed anyone, by the jingoistic academic. Finally, perhaps he had lost some of his indulgence that evening in particular, seeing the friendliness Mme. Verdurin was displaying toward this man Forcheville whom Odette had had the singular idea of bringing. A little ill at ease with Swann, she had asked him when she arrived:

"What do you think of my guest?"

And he, realizing for the first time that Forcheville, whom he had known for a long time, might be attractive to a woman and was a rather handsome man, had answered: "Disgusting!" Of course, it did not occur to him to be jealous over Odette, but he did not feel as happy as usual, and when Brichot, having begun to tell the story of Blanche de Castille's mother, who "had been with Henry Plantagenet<sup>52</sup> for years before she married him," tried to prompt Swann to ask him what happened next by saying to him: "Isn't that so, Monsieur Swann?" in the martial tone one adopts to make oneself understood by a peasant or instill courage in a soldier, Swann spoiled Brichot's effect, to the fury of their hostess, by answering that they must please excuse him for being so uninterested in Blanche de Castille, but he had something to ask the painter. That afternoon, in fact, the painter had gone to see the

show of a friend of Mme. Verdurin's, an artist who had died recently, and Swann wanted to find out from him (for he respected his taste) if there really was even more in these last works than the virtuosity that was already so astounding in the earlier ones.

"In that respect it was extraordinary, but it didn't seem to me to be an art that was, as they say, all that 'elevated,'" said Swann, smiling.

"Elevated . . . to the height of an institution," interrupted Cottard, lifting his arms with mock gravity.

The whole table burst out laughing.

"Didn't I tell you? He won't allow anyone to be serious," said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville. "Just when you least expect it, he comes out with a pun."

But she noticed that Swann alone had not brightened up. What was more, he was not very pleased that Cottard had made fun of him in front of Forcheville. But the painter, instead of answering Swann in an interesting way, which he probably would have done if he had been alone with him, preferred to win the admiration of the guests by contributing a little set piece on the skill of the deceased master.

"I went up to one of them," he said, "just to see how it was done. I stuck my nose into it. Well! Absolute truth! Impossible to say whether it was done with glue, or rubies, or soap, or sunshine, or leaven, or bronze, or caca!"

"And one makes twelve," cried the doctor, too late, so that no one understood his interruption.

"The thing looked as though it were made with nothing at all," the painter went on; "absolutely no way of discovering the trick, any more than in *The Night Watch* or *The Regents*, and the brushwork is even stronger than Rembrandt or Hals.<sup>53</sup> It's got everything in it—no, I swear."

And just as singers who have reached the highest note they can sing continue in falsetto, softly, he confined himself to murmuring, and smiling, as if in fact the painting had been absurdly beautiful:

"It smells good, it goes to your head, it takes your breath away, it tickles you, and you haven't a hope of knowing what it's made with, it's some kind of sorcery, it's a trick, it's a miracle" (bursting fully into laughter): "it's dishonest!" And stopping, gravely lifting his head, adopting a deep bass note which he tried to make harmonious, he added: "and it's so sincere!"

Except at the moment when he had said "stronger than *The Night Watch*," a blasphemy that had provoked a protest from Mme. Verdurin, who considered *The Night Watch* the greatest masterpiece in the world along with the Ninth and the *Winged Victory*,<sup>54</sup> and at "made with caca," which had caused Forcheville to cast a circular glance at the table to see if the word was acceptable and had then brought to his mouth a prudish and conciliatory smile, all the guests except for Swann had fastened their eyes on the painter with gazes hypnotized by admiration.

"How he amuses me when he gets carried away like that," cried Mme. Verdurin when he was finished, delighted that the table was so interesting on the very day when M. de Forcheville had come for the first time. "And what about you, what's the matter with you, letting your mouth hang open that way like some great dog?" she said to her husband. "You know very well how he can talk; it's as if my husband had never heard you before. If only you could have seen the way he looked while you were talking, he was lapping you up. And tomorrow he'll repeat everything you said without losing a word."

"But it's no joke," said the painter, enchanted with his success, "you seem to think I'm giving you a sales talk, you think it's all a sham; I'll take you there to see for yourself, then you'll decide whether I'm exaggerating. I'll bet your boots you'll come back even more enthusiastic than I was!"

"But we don't think you're exaggerating, we just want you to eat your dinner, and we want my husband to eat too; give Monsieur some more sole normande, you can see that his is cold. We're not in such a hurry as all that, you're serving as if the house were on fire, now wait a little before you bring in the salad."

Mme. Cottard, who was modest and did not talk much, did not lack self-assurance when a happy inspiration caused her to hit upon a suitable remark. She felt that it would have some success, this gave her confidence, and what she did with it was not so much in order to shine as to be useful to her husband's career. And so she did not allow the word *salad* to escape after it was spoken by Mme. Verdurin.

"That wouldn't be Japanese salad, would it?" she said softly, turning to Odette.

And delighted and abashed by the appropriateness and boldness of making this allusion, so discreet, yet so clear, to the new and astonishing play by Dumas,<sup>55</sup> she burst into charming, ingenuous laughter, not very noisy, but so irresistible that for a few moments she could not control it. "Who is that lady? She's a lively one," said Forcheville.

"No, it's not, but we'll have some for you if you'll all come to dine with us on Friday."

"I'm going to seem very provincial to you, monsieur," said Mme. Cottard to Swann, "but I haven't yet seen the famous *Francillon* everyone's talking about. The doctor has already gone (I even recall that he told me he had the very great pleasure of spending the evening with you) and I confess that I didn't find it reasonable that he should pay for seats to go again with me. Obviously, at the Théâtre-Français, one never regrets one's evening, it's always well acted, but as we have very nice friends" (Mme. Cottard rarely uttered a proper name and simply referred to "some friends of ours" or "one of my friends," because it was more "distinguished," speaking in an artificial tone and with the air of importance of a person who names only those she chooses to) "who often have a box and are kind enough to take us to all the new productions that are worth going to, I'm certain to see *Francillon* sooner or later, and then I can form an opinion for myself. Yet I must confess I find I'm a bit embarrassed, for in every drawing room I visit, naturally the only thing they're talking about is that wretched Japanese salad. One even begins to be a little tired of it," she added, seeing that Swann did not seem as interested as she would have thought in so burning a topic. "I must admit, though, that it sometimes provides an excuse for some rather amusing notions. For instance, I have a friend who's most original, though she's a very pretty woman, very popular, very sought after, who claims she got her cook to make that Japanese salad at her house, putting in everything that Alexandre Dumas  *fils*  mentions in the play. She invited some friends to come and eat it. Unfortunately I wasn't one of the elect. But she told us about it at her next 'at-home'; apparently it was quite horrible, she made us laugh till we cried. But you know, it's all in the way you tell it," she said, seeing that Swann still looked grave.

And imagining that it was perhaps because he did not like *Francillon*: "Anyway, I think I'll be disappointed. I don't think it's as good as *Serge Panine*, which Mme. de Crécý worships so. In that one, at least, there are deep things that make you think; but to give a recipe for salad on the stage of the Théâtre-Français! Whereas *Serge Panine*! But then, it's like everything that comes

from Georges Ohnet's pen, it's always so well written. I don't know if you know *Le Maître de Forges*, which I like even better than *Serge Panine*."

"Forgive me," Swann said to her with irony, "but I confess that my lack of admiration is almost equally divided between the two masterpieces."

"Really, what have you got against them? Are you sure you aren't prejudiced? Do you think perhaps they're a little dreary? Anyway, as I always say, one should never argue about novels or plays. Everyone has his own way of looking at things and what you find detestable may be the very thing I like best."

She was interrupted by Forcheville addressing Swann. In fact, while Mme. Cottard was talking about *Francillon*, Forcheville had told Mme. Verdurin how much he admired what he called the painter's little "*speech*."<sup>56</sup>

"The gentleman has a facility for speaking, a memory," he had said to Mme. Verdurin when the painter was finished, "such as I have rarely encountered! By my bootlaces! I'd love to have such a gift. He would make an excellent preacher. One may say that with him and M. Bréchet, you have two real characters, one as good as the other, though for gift of the gab I'm not even sure this one would not in fact ace the professor. It comes out more naturally, it's less studied. Although now and then he does use words that are a bit on the vulgar side, but that's the thing to do nowadays. It's not often that I've seen anyone hold the floor so cleverly — 'hold the spittoon,' as we used to say in the regiment, and come to think of it, it was in the regiment that I had a friend the gentleman rather reminded me of. Apropos of anything, I don't know what, this glass, for instance, he could rattle on for hours; no, not about this glass, that's a silly thing to say; but about the Battle of Waterloo, anything you like, and he would throw in things you never would have thought of. Why, Swann was in the same regiment; he must have known him."

"Do you see M. Swann often?" asked Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh no," answered M. de Forcheville, and since in order to approach Odette more easily he wanted to be pleasant to Swann, he attempted to seize this opportunity of flattering him by talking about his distinguished friends, but talking about them as a man of the world, in the tone of an affectionate critic and not as though he were congratulating him as on an un hoped-for success: "Isn't it so, Swann? I never see you. Anyway, how could I ever see him? The man is always hanging about with the La Trémoilles<sup>57</sup> with the Laumes, people like that! . . ." An imputation especially false, since, for a year now, Swann had hardly gone anywhere but to the Verdurins'. But the mere name of a person they did not know was greeted by a reproving silence on their part. M. Verdurin, afraid of the painful impression that these names of "bores," especially when tactlessly hurled thus in the faces of all the faithful, must have produced on his wife, secretly cast at her a glance full of worried solicitude. He saw then that in her resolution not to take action, not to have been affected by the news that had just been announced to her, not merely to remain dumb but to have been deaf as well, the way we pretend to be deaf when a friend who has offended us tries to slip into the conversation an excuse which we would seem to accept if we listened to it without protesting, or when someone utters in our presence the forbidden name of an ingrate, Mme. Verdurin, so that her silence would not seem to be a form of consent, but rather the ignorant silence of an inanimate object, had suddenly divested her face of all life, all mobility; her prominent forehead was now merely a lovely study in the round, which the name of those La Trémoilles at whose house Swann was always hanging about had not been able to penetrate; her slightly wrinkled nose revealed an indentation that seemed copied from life. Her half-open mouth seemed about to speak. She was now merely a lost wax,<sup>58</sup> a plaster mask, a model for a monument, a bust for the Palais de l'Industrie<sup>59</sup> in front of which the public would certainly stop to admire how the sculptor, by expressing the indefeasible dignity of the Verdurins as opposed to that of the La Trémoilles and the Laumes, whose equals they naturally were, as they were the equals of all the bores on earth, had managed to give an almost papal majesty to the whiteness and rigidity of the stone. But at last the marble came to life and insinuated that one could not be squeamish if one wanted to go to the homes of these people, because the wife was always drunk and the husband so ignorant that he said "collidor" instead of "corridor."

"You'd have to pay me handsomely before I'd let that sort enter my house," concluded Mme. Verdurin, looking at Swann with an imperious air.

She probably did not hope that he would be submissive enough to imitate the saintly simplicity of the pianist's aunt, who had just exclaimed: "You see that? What astonishes me is that there's still people who'll speak to them! I think I would be too afraid: once struck, out of luck! How can there still be folks low enough to go running after them?" But he might at least have answered like Forcheville: "Lord, she's a duchess; some people are still impressed by that," which had at least allowed Mme. Verdurin to reply: "Much good may it do them!" Instead of that, Swann merely laughed with an air that signified that he could not even take such extravagant nonsense seriously. M. Verdurin, continuing to cast furtive glances at his wife, saw with sadness and understood all too well that she was feeling the rage of a grand inquisitor who cannot manage to extirpate the heresy, and in order to try to lead Swann to a recantation, since the courage of one's convictions always seem to be a calculation and an act of cowardice in the eyes of those who do not share them, M. Verdurin challenged him:

"Now tell us frankly what you think of them, we won't repeat it to them."

To which Swann answered:

"Why, it's not in the least out of fear of the duchess (if you're talking about the La Trémoilles). I assure you everyone likes to visit her. I'm not saying she's 'profound'" (he pronounced *profound* as if it were a ridiculous word, because his language still bore the trace of habits of mind which his recent rejuvenation, marked by a love of music, had temporarily made him lose, so that at times he now expressed his opinions warmly) "but I'm quite sincere when I say that she's intelligent and her husband is truly well read. They're charming people."

Whereupon Mme. Verdurin, feeling that because of this one infidel she would be prevented from creating a complete moral unanimity among the little clan, was unable to stop herself, in her rage against this stubborn man who did not see how much his words pained her, from crying out to him from the bottom of her heart:

"Believe it if you like, but at least don't say it to us."

"It all depends on what you call intelligence," said Forcheville, who felt it was his turn to shine. "Now, Swann, what do you mean by intelligence?"

"There you are!" exclaimed Odette. "That's the sort of big subject I'm always asking him to talk to me about, but he never will."

"But I do . . ." protested Swann.

"What tripe!" said Odette.

"Tripe with onions?" asked the doctor.

"As you see it," Forcheville went on, "does intelligence mean a gift of the gab, does it have to do with how people manage to worm their way in?"

"Finish up so they can take your plate," said Mme. Verdurin sourly, turning to Saniette, who, absorbed in thought, had stopped eating. And perhaps a little ashamed of the tone she had taken: "Never mind, take your time, I only said it for the sake of the others, because it holds up the next course."

"There is," said Brichot, rapping out the syllables, "a very curious definition of intelligence in that gentle anarchist, Fénelon . . ."<sup>60</sup>

"Listen!" said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville and the doctor. "He's going to give us Fénelon's definition of intelligence. Now that's interesting. It's not often you have a chance of hearing that."

But Brichot was waiting for Swann to give his own definition. Swann did not answer, and by evading them spoiled the brilliant contest that Mme. Verdurin was so delighted to be able to offer Forcheville.

"Of course. He's just like that with me all the time," said Odette sulkily. "I'm glad to see I'm not the only one he doesn't think is up to his level."

"Those de la Trémouailles,<sup>61</sup> who are so little to be recommended, as Mme. Verdurin has shown us," asked Brichot with powerfully clear articulation, "are they descended from the folk whom Mme. de Sévigné, that good snob, admitted she was pleased to know because it was good for her peasants? Of course, the Marquise had another reason, and one that had to be more important to her, for as a woman of letters through and through, she put copy before all else. Now in the journal she used to send regularly to her daughter, it was Mme. de la Trémouaille, kept well informed by her great connections, who supplied the foreign politics."

"Why, no, I don't think it's the same family," ventured Mme. Verdurin.

Saniette, who, after hurriedly giving the butler his plate, which was still full, had plunged back into a meditative silence, emerged from it at last to tell them with a smile the story of a dinner he had attended with the Duc de La Trémoille at which it turned out that the Duc did not know George Sand was the pseudonym of a woman. Swann, who was fond of Saniette, thought he ought to supply him with a few particulars about the Duc's culture proving that such ignorance on the latter's part was materially impossible; but suddenly he stopped, realizing that Saniette did not need these proofs and knew the story was untrue for the simple reason that he had just invented it a moment ago. That excellent man suffered from being thought such a bore by the Verdurins; and, aware that he had been even duller than usual at this dinner, he had not wanted to let it end before he succeeded in amusing them. He capitulated so quickly, looked so unhappy at seeing that the effect on which he had counted had failed, and answered Swann in such a pitiful tone so that Swann would not persist in a refutation that was henceforth pointless, "All right, all right; and if I'm mistaken it's not a crime, I hope," that Swann would have liked to be able to say the story was true and delightful. The doctor, who had been listening to them, thought this was the moment to say: *Se non è vero*,<sup>62</sup> but he was not quite sure of the words and was afraid of getting muddled.

After dinner, Forcheville went up to the doctor.

"She must not have been too bad at one time, Mme. Verdurin, and she's a woman you can talk to; for me that's everything. Of course she's beginning to get a bit long in the tooth. But Mme. de Crécy—now there's a little woman who seems intelligent—oh yes, by God; you can see at a glance that she keeps her eyes peeled! We're talking about Mme. de Crécy," he said to M. Verdurin, who was approaching, his pipe in his mouth. "I would imagine that as a specimen of the female figure . . ."

"I'd rather have it in my bed than a slap with a wet fish," Cottard rushed to say, having waited in vain for some moments for Forcheville to pause for breath so that he could insert that old joke, which he feared would not be appropriate again if the conversation changed course, and which he delivered with that excess of spontaneity and assurance which attempts to mask the coldness and anxiety inseparable from a recitation. Forcheville was familiar with the joke, he understood it and was amused by it. As for M. Verdurin, he was unsparing with his mirth, because he had recently discovered a signal for expressing it different from the one used by his wife but equally simple and clear. Scarcely had he begun moving his head and shoulders in the manner of a person shaking with laughter than he would immediately begin coughing as if, in laughing too hard, he had swallowed smoke from his pipe. And still keeping the pipe in one corner of his mouth, he would prolong indefinitely this pantomime of suffocation and hilarity. Thus he and Mme. Verdurin, who, across the room from him, listening to the painter tell her a story, was closing her eyes before dropping her face into her hands, looked like two theater masks each representing merriment in its own way.

M. Verdurin had in fact been wise not to withdraw his pipe from his mouth, for Cottard, who needed to leave the room for a moment, made a joke under his breath that he had learned recently and that he repeated each time he had to go to the same place: "I must absent myself for a moment in aid of the Duc d'Aumale,"<sup>63</sup> so that M. Verdurin's fit began again.

"Take your pipe out of your mouth. Can't you see you're going to choke to death trying not to laugh?" Mme. Verdurin said to him as she came around offering the liqueurs.

"How charming your husband is, he has wit enough for four," declared Forcheville to Mme. Cottard. "Thank you, madame. An old soldier like me never refuses a drop."

"M. de Forcheville thinks Odette is charming," said M. Verdurin to his wife.

"Why, actually she would like to come to lunch with you some time. We're going to contrive to make it happen, but Swann mustn't hear of it. You know, he puts rather a damper on things. That doesn't mean you shouldn't join us for dinner, of course, we hope to have you often. With summer coming, we'll be dining outdoors quite frequently. That won't bore you, will it—little dinners in the Bois? Good, good, it'll be very nice. You! Aren't you going to go do your job now?" she cried out to the little pianist, in order to display, in front of a newcomer as important as Forcheville, both her wit and her tyrannical power over the faithful.

"M. de Forcheville was saying bad things to me about you," said Mme. Cottard to her husband when he returned to the drawing room.



And he, pursuing the idea of Forcheville's noble lineage, which had preoccupied him from the beginning of dinner, said to him:

"I'm treating a baroness just now, Baronne Putbus;<sup>64</sup> the Putbuses took part in the Crusades, didn't they? They have a lake in Pomerania that's so big it must be ten times the size of the place de la Concorde. I'm treating her for rheumatoid arthritis; she's a charming woman. In fact she knows Mme. Verdurin, I believe."

Which allowed Forcheville, finding himself, a moment later, alone with Mme. Cottard, to complete the favorable judgment that he had passed on her husband:

"And he's so interesting, you can tell he's acquainted with more than a few people. Lord, they know such a lot, these doctors!"

"I'm going to play the phrase from the sonata for M. Swann," said the pianist.

"My God! I trust we don't have the 'sonata-snake'<sup>65</sup> in our midst?" asked M. de Forcheville to create an effect.

But Dr. Cottard, who had never heard that pun, did not understand it and thought M. de Forcheville was making a mistake. He went up to them briskly to correct it:

"No, no, one doesn't say *serpent à sonates*, it's *serpent à sonnettes*, 'rattlesnake,' " he said in a tone that was zealous, impatient, and triumphant.

Forcheville explained the pun to him. The doctor blushed.

"Admit that it's funny, Doctor!"

"Oh, I've known it for too long," answered Cottard.

But they fell silent; under the agitation of the violin tremolos which protected it with their quivering extended two octaves above—and as in a mountainous countryside, behind the apparent and vertiginous immobility of a waterfall one sees, two hundred feet down, the minuscule form of a woman walking—the little phrase had just appeared, distant, graceful, protected by the long unfurling of its transparent, ceaseless curtain of sound. And Swann, in his heart, appealed to it as to a confidant of his love, as to a friend of Odette's who certainly should tell her to pay no attention to that Forcheville.

"Ah, you're late!" said Mme. Verdurin to a regular whom she had invited only "for coffee." "Brichot was incomparable—so eloquent! But he's gone. Isn't that right, Monsieur Swann? I believe it was the first time you and he had met," she said in order to point out to him that she was the one to whom he owed the introduction. "Wasn't our Brichot delicious?"

Swann bowed politely.

"No? He didn't interest you?" Mme. Verdurin asked him curtly.

"Why, of course, madame, very much, I was delighted. He is perhaps a little peremptory and a little jovial for my taste. I would like to see some hesitation, some gentleness now and then, but one senses that he knows so many things and he seems like an all-around decent man."

Everyone went home very late. Cottard's first words to his wife were:

"I've rarely seen Mme. Verdurin as spirited as she was this evening."

"What exactly is this Mme. Verdurin of yours, rather a mixed bag of goods?" said Forcheville to the painter, whom he had invited to ride with him.

Odette watched with regret as he went off; she did not dare decline to ride with Swann, but was in a bad mood in the carriage, and when he asked her if he ought to come in, she said, "Of course," shrugging her shoulders impatiently. When all the guests had gone, Mme. Verdurin said to her husband:

"Did you notice how Swann laughed foolishly when we were talking about Mme. La Trémoïlle?"

She had noticed that several times, when saying this name, Swann and Forcheville had omitted the particle. Having no doubt that they did this to show they were not intimidated by titles, she wanted to imitate their pride, but had not fully understood by which grammatical form it was expressed. And so her incorrect way of speaking won out over her republican intransigence, and she still said "the de la Trémoilles" or rather, using an abbreviation current in the words of the café songs and caricature captions, which swallowed the *de*, "the d'La Trémoilles," but she made up for it by saying: "Madame La Trémoïlle," "The *Duchesse*, as Swann calls her," she added ironically with a smile which proved she was only quoting and did not accept responsibility for so naive and ridiculous a denomination.

"I must tell you I found him extremely stupid."

And M. Verdurin answered her:

"He's not direct, he's cunning, always betwixt and between. He's a fellow who's always wanting to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. How different from Forcheville! There's a man who at least tells you fair and square what he's thinking. You either agree with him or you don't. He's not like the other, neither fish nor fowl. Anyway, Odette really seems to prefer Forcheville, and I think she's right. And then, also, since Swann wants to play the society man with us, defender of duchesses, at least the other has his own title; he's still the Comte de Forcheville," he added delicately, as if, well informed about the history of that dignity, he was scrupulously weighing its particular value.

"I must tell you," said Mme. Verdurin, "that he felt called upon to direct some venomous and quite ridiculous insinuations against Brichot. Naturally, since he saw that Brichot was well liked in this house, it was a way of attacking us, of disparaging our dinner party. What I suspect is he's the sort of good friend who says nasty things about you on his way out."

"But that's what I told you," answered M. Verdurin. "He's a typical failure, the little fellow envious of anything that's at all big."

In reality there was not one of the faithful who was not more malicious than Swann; but they all took care to season their slander with familiar jokes, with little hints of anxiety and cordiality; whereas the slightest reserve that Swann allowed himself, omitting such conventional formulas as, "Now I don't mean to say anything bad," to which he did not deign to stoop, seemed perfidious. There are authors of true originality in whom the least boldness offends because they have not first flattered the tastes of the public and have not served it the commonplaces which it is used to; it was in the same way that Swann roused M. Verdurin's indignation. In Swann's case as in theirs, it was the novelty of his language that convinced one of the darkness of his intentions.

Swann was still unaware of the disgrace that threatened him at the Verdurins' and continued to regard all their absurdities in a favorable light, with the eyes of his love.

Most of the time, at least, he met Odette only in the evening; but during the day, though he was afraid of causing her to become tired of him by going to her house, he wanted at least not to cease to occupy her thoughts and was always looking for an opportunity of involving himself in them, but in a way that would be pleasant for her. If, in the window of a florist or a jeweler, the sight of a shrub or a jewel charmed him, instantly he would think of sending it to Odette, imagining that the pleasure it had given him would be felt by her too, increasing her affection for him, and he would immediately have it delivered to the rue La Pérouse so as not to delay the moment when, because she was receiving something from him, he would feel he was in some way close to her. He especially wanted her to receive it before she went out so that the gratitude she felt would win him a more tender welcome when she saw him at the Verdurins', or even—who knows?—if the shopkeeper was prompt enough, perhaps a letter which she would send him before dinner, or her arrival in person at his house, in a supplementary visit to thank him. Just as he had once tested Odette's nature for reactions of resentment, so now he sought by reactions of gratitude to extract from her intimate particles of feeling that she had not yet revealed to him.

Often, she had money troubles and, hard-pressed by a debt, would ask him for help. He was happy about that, as about everything that could give Odette a strong impression of the love he had for her, or simply a strong impression of his influence, of how useful he could be to her. No doubt if someone had said to him in the beginning: "It's your position that attracts her," and now: "It's because of your wealth that she loves you," he would not have believed it, and would also not have minded very much that people imagined she was attached to him—that people felt they were joined together—by something as powerful as snobbishness or money. But, even if he had thought it was true, perhaps he would not have been hurt by discovering within Odette's love for him that mainstay more durable than his charm or the good qualities she might find in him: namely, self-interest, a self-interest that would prevent the day ever coming when she would be tempted to stop seeing him. For the moment, by overwhelming her with presents, by doing her favors, he could rely upon advantages extrinsic to his person, his intelligence, to take over from him the exhausting responsibility of pleasing her by himself. And as for the pleasure of being in love, of living by love alone, the reality of which he doubted at times, it was increased in value for him, as dilettante of immaterial sensations, by the price he was paying her for it—as we observe that people who are uncertain whether the sight of the sea and the sound of its waves are delightful convince themselves of it and also of the exceptional quality and disinterest of their own taste, by paying a hundred francs a day for a hotel room that allows them to experience that sight and that sound.

One day when reflections of this kind were leading him back once again to the memory of the time when people had described Odette to him as a kept woman, and when he was amusing himself yet again by contrasting that strange personification, the kept woman—an iridescent amalgam of unfamiliar and diabolical elements, set, like some apparition by Gustave Moreau,<sup>66</sup> among venomous flowers interwoven with precious jewels—with the Odette on whose face he had seen the same feelings of pity for a sufferer, revolt against an injustice, gratitude for a favor, that he had seen in earlier days on his own mother's face and on the faces of his friends, the Odette whose conversation had so often turned on the things he knew best himself, on his collections, his room, his old servant, the banker who looked after his securities, it happened that this last image of the banker reminded him that he would have to call on him soon to draw some money. In fact, if this month he was less liberal when helping Odette out of her material difficulties than he had been the month before when he had given her five thousand francs, and if he did not present her with a diamond rivière that she wanted, he would not reawaken her admiration for his generosity, her gratitude, which made him so happy, and he would even risk making her think that his love for her, as she saw its manifestations become less abundant, had diminished. Then, suddenly, he wondered if this was not precisely what was meant by "keeping" her (as if, in fact, this notion of keeping could be derived from elements not at all mysterious or perverse but belonging to the intimate substance of his daily life, like that thousand-franc bill, domestic and familiar, torn and reglued, which his valet, after having paid the month's accounts and the quarter's rent for him, had locked in the drawer of the old desk from which Swann had taken it out again to send it with four others to Odette) and if one could not apply to Odette, starting from when he had come to know her (because he did not for a moment suspect that she could ever have received money from anyone before him), those words which he had believed so irreconcilable with her—"kept woman." He could not study this idea in greater depth, because an attack of that mental laziness which in him was congenital, intermittent, and providential, happened at that moment to extinguish all light in his intelligence, as abruptly as, later, when electric lighting had been installed everywhere, one could cut off the electricity in a house. His mind groped for a moment in the darkness, he took off his glasses, wiped the lenses, passed his hand over his eyes, and saw the light again only when he found himself in the presence of an entirely different idea, namely that he ought to try to send six or seven thousand francs to Odette next month instead of five, because of the surprise and pleasure it would give her.

In the evening, when he did not stay at home waiting for the hour when he would meet Odette at the Verdurins' or rather in one of the summer restaurants they favored in the Bois and especially at Saint-Cloud, he would go and dine in one of those elegant houses where he had once been a habitual guest at table. He did not want to lose touch with people who—one never could tell—might perhaps be useful to Odette one day and through whom, in the meantime, he often succeeded in pleasing her. Also, his long habit of society, of luxury, had given him, at the same time as a disdain for them, a need for them, so that by the time he had come to regard the most modest houses as exactly on a par with the most princely, his senses were so accustomed to the latter that he experienced some indisposition at finding himself in the former. He had the same esteem—identical to a degree they could not have believed—for a petit bourgeois family which asked him up to a dance on the fifth floor, Stairway D, left at the landing, as for the Princess of Parma, who gave the finest parties in Paris; but he did not have the feeling of being actually at a ball while standing with the fathers in the bedroom of the mistress of the house and the sight of the washstands covered with towels, of the beds, transformed into cloakrooms, their coverlets piled with overcoats and hats, gave him the same stifling sensation that people today who are used to twenty years of electricity may experience at the smell of a lamp blackening or a night-light smoking. On the days when he dined in town, he would have the horses harnessed for seven-thirty; he would dress while thinking about Odette and so would not be alone, because the constant thought of Odette would give to the moments in which he was away from her the same particular charm as to those in which she was there. He would get into his carriage, but he would feel that this thought had leaped into it at the same time and settled on his knees like a beloved pet which one takes

everywhere and which he would keep with him at the table, unbeknownst to the other guests. He would stroke it, warm himself at it, and, experiencing a sort of languor, yield to a light quivering that tensed his neck and his nose, and was new to him, all the while fastening the bunch of columbines in his buttonhole. Having felt unwell and sad for some time, especially from the time that Odette had introduced Forcheville to the Verdurins, Swann would have liked to go and rest a little in the country. But he would not have had the courage to leave Paris for a single day while Odette was there. The air was warm; these were the finest days of spring. And though he might cross a city of stone to immure himself in some town house, what was constantly before his eyes was a park that he owned near Combray, where, from four o'clock on, before reaching the asparagus patch, because of the wind that comes from the fields of Méséglise, one could savor as much coolness under an arbor as at the edge of the pond encircled by forget-me-nots and gladioli, and where, when he dined, it was at a table around which ran red currants and roses intertwined by his gardener.

After dinner, if the appointed meeting time at the Bois or Saint-Cloud was early, he would leave so soon after getting up from the table—especially if rain was threatening to fall and make the “faithful” go home earlier—that once the Princesse des Laumes (at whose home they had dined late and whom Swann had left before coffee was served in order to join the Verdurins on the island in the Bois) had said:

“Really, if Swann were thirty years older and had bladder trouble, one would excuse him for running off like that. But the fact is he doesn’t care what people think.”

He told himself that the charm of springtime which he could not go down to enjoy at Combray he could at least find on the Île des Cygnes<sup>67</sup> or at Saint-Cloud. But since he could think only about Odette, he did not even know if he had detected the smell of the leaves, if there had been any light from the moon. He was greeted by the little phrase from the sonata played in the garden on the restaurant piano. If there was no piano there, the Verdurins would take great pains to have one brought down from a bedroom or dining room: it was not that Swann had come back into favor with them, on the contrary. But the idea of organizing an ingenious pleasure for someone, even for someone they did not like, fostered in them, during the time required for these preparations, exceptional and ephemeral feelings of warmth and cordiality. Now and then he would say to himself that another spring evening was passing, he would force himself to pay attention to the trees, the sky. But the agitation with which Odette’s presence filled him, and also a slight feverish indisposition that had hardly left him for some time now, denied him that sense of calm and well-being which is the indispensable background to the impressions we derive from nature.

One evening when Swann had agreed to dine with the Verdurins, and had just mentioned during dinner that the next day he was going to attend a banquet for old comrades, Odette answered him across the table, in front of Forcheville, who was now one of the faithful, in front of the painter, in front of Cottard:

“Yes, I know you have your banquet, so I won’t see you till I get home, but don’t be too late.”

Even though Swann had never become very seriously offended by Odette’s friendliness toward one or another of the faithful, he felt an exquisite pleasure on hearing her thus confess in front of everyone, with such a calm lack of modesty, to their regular meetings every night, his privileged position in her house, and the preference for him which it implied. Of course Swann had often reflected that Odette was in no way a remarkable woman, and the ascendancy he exerted over a creature so inferior to him was not something that ought to appear to him so flattering to see proclaimed to all the “faithful,” but from the time he had first noticed that many men found Odette an enchanting and desirable woman, the attraction her body had for them had awoken in him a painful need to master her entirely even in the smallest parts of her heart. And he had begun to set an inestimable price on those times spent in her house at night, when he would sit her on his knees, make her say what she thought of one thing, of another, when he would count up the only goods whose possession he now valued on earth. And so, after this dinner, taking her aside, he did not fail to thank her effusively, endeavoring to teach her according to the degrees of gratitude he displayed to her, the scale of pleasures that she could give him, the highest of which was to guarantee him, during the time that his love should last and make him vulnerable to them, protection from the assaults of jealousy.

When he came away from the banquet the next day, it was pouring rain, all he had was his victoria; a friend offered to drive him home in his coupé, and because Odette, since she had asked him to come, had given him the assurance that she was not waiting for anyone else, it was with a tranquil mind and a happy heart that, rather than set off in the rain like this, he would have gone back home to bed. But perhaps, if she saw that he did not seem anxious to spend the last part of every evening without exception in her company, she might neglect to reserve it for him, precisely the one time when he particularly desired it.

He reached her house after eleven o'clock, and, as he was apologizing for not being able to come earlier, she complained that it was indeed very late, the storm had made her unwell, she had a headache and warned him that she would not keep him more than half an hour, that at midnight she would send him away; and, soon afterward, she felt tired and wanted to go to sleep.

“So, no cattleyas tonight,” he said to her, “after I was so hoping for a nice little cattleya.”

And, a little sulky and irritable, she answered:

“No, no, darling, no cattleyas tonight, you can see I’m unwell!”

“It might have done you good, but I won’t insist.”

She asked him to put out the light before he went, he himself closed the curtains of the bed and left. But when he was back at home, the idea came to him abruptly that perhaps Odette had been waiting for someone else that night, had only pretended to be tired, and had asked him to put out the light only so that he would believe she was going to go to sleep, that as soon as he left, she had put the light on again, and let in the man who was going to spend the night with her. He looked at the time. It was about an hour and a half since he had left her, he went back out, took a hackney carriage, and stopped it very close to where she lived, in a little street at right angles to the one which lay behind her house and into which he sometimes went to knock at her bedroom window so that she would come and open the door for him; he got out of the carriage, the neighborhood was dark and deserted, he had only to walk a few steps, and he came out almost opposite her house. Amid the blackness of all the windows in the street in which the lights had long since been put out, he saw just one from which there spilled out—between shutters which pressed its mysterious golden pulp—the light which filled the bedroom and which, on so many other evenings, as soon as he saw it when he came into the street, lifted his spirits and announced to him: “She’s there waiting for you” and which now tortured him by saying: “She’s there with the man she was waiting for.” He wanted to know who it was; he slipped along the wall as far as the window,

but between the oblique slats of the shutters he could see nothing; all he heard in the silence of the night was the murmur of conversation. Certainly it hurt him to see that light and know that in its golden atmosphere, behind the sash, the unseen and detested pair were moving about, to hear the murmur revealing the presence of the man who had come after he left, Odette's duplicity, the happiness she was enjoying with him.

And yet he was glad he had come: the torment that had forced him to leave his house had become less acute as it became less vague, now that Odette's other life, of which he had had, back then, a sudden helpless suspicion, was now in his grasp, fully illuminated by the lamp, an unwitting prisoner in that room into which, when he chose, he could go to surprise it and capture it; or rather he would knock on the shutters as he often did when he came very late; this way at least, Odette would learn that he knew, that he had seen the light and heard the talking, and that, after having just a moment ago pictured her laughing with the other man at his illusions, he would now be the one to see them, confident in their error, actually outwitted by him whom they believed to be so very far away and who, in fact, already knew he was going to knock at the shutters. And perhaps, what he was feeling at this moment, which was almost pleasant, was also something different from the assuaging of a doubt and a distress: it was a pleasure in knowledge. If, ever since he had fallen in love, things had regained for him a little of the delightful interest they had once had for him, but only insofar as they were illuminated by the memory of Odette, now it was another of the faculties of his studious youth that his jealousy revived, a passion for truth, but for a truth that was likewise interposed between him and his mistress, taking its light only from her, a completely individual truth whose sole object, of an infinite value and almost disinterested in its beauty, was Odette's actions, her relationships, her plans, her past. At all other periods of his life, the little everyday words and deeds of a person had always seemed worthless to Swann if someone conveyed them to him as the subject of a bit of gossip, he found such gossip meaningless, and, while he listened to it, only the most vulgar part of his attention was interested; these were the times when he felt himself to be most mediocre. But in this strange phase of love, an individual person assumes something so profound that the curiosity he now felt awakening in him concerning the smallest occupations of this woman, was the same curiosity he had once had about History. And all these things that would have shamed him up to now, such as spying, tonight, outside a window, tomorrow perhaps, for all he knew, cleverly inducing neutral people to speak, bribing servants, listening at doors, now seemed to him to be, fully as much as were the deciphering of texts, the weighing of evidence, and the interpretation of old monuments, merely methods of scientific investigation with a real intellectual value and appropriate to a search for the truth.

On the point of knocking on the shutters, he felt a pang of shame thinking that Odette was going to know he had been suspicious, that he had come back, that he had posted himself in the street. She had often told him what a horror she had of jealous men, of lovers who spied. What he was about to do was very uncouth, and from now on she would detest him, whereas now, for the moment, so long as he had not knocked, perhaps, even while deceiving him, she loved him. How often we sacrifice the fulfillment of a possible happiness to our impatience for an immediate pleasure! But the desire to know the truth was stronger and seemed to him nobler. He knew that the reality of certain circumstances which he would have given his life to reconstruct accurately could be read behind that window striated with light, as under the gold-illuminated cover of one of those precious manuscripts to whose artistic richness itself the scholar who consults them cannot remain indifferent. He felt a delicious pleasure in learning the truth that so impassioned him from this unique, ephemeral, and precious transcript, made of a translucent substance so warm and so beautiful. Then, too, the advantage he felt he had—that he so needed to feel he had—over them lay perhaps less in knowing than in being able to show them he knew. He raised himself on his tiptoes. He knocked. They had not heard, he knocked again more loudly, the conversation stopped. A man's voice which he tried to distinguish from among the voices of those of Odette's friends whom he knew asked:

"Who's there?"

He was not sure he recognized it. He knocked again. The window was opened, then the shutters. Now there was no way to retreat, and since she was going to know everything, so as not to seem too wretched, too jealous and curious, he merely called out carelessly and gaily:

"Please don't go to any trouble. I was just passing by and I saw the light. I wanted to know if you were feeling better."

He looked. Before him, two old gentlemen were standing at the window, one holding a lamp, and then he saw the bedroom, a bedroom unknown to him. Because he was in the habit, when he came to Odette's house very late, of recognizing her window by the fact that it was the only one lit among windows that were all alike, he had made a mistake and knocked at the window after hers, which belonged to the adjoining house. He went away apologizing and returned home, happy that the satisfaction of his curiosity had left their love intact and that after having simulated a sort of indifference toward Odette for so long, he had not given her, by his jealousy, that proof of loving her too much which, between two lovers, exempts forever after, from loving enough, the one who receives it. He did not talk to her about this misadventure, he himself did not think about it further. But now and then his thoughts as they moved about would come upon the memory of it which they had not noticed, bump up against it, drive it further in, and Swann would feel a sudden, deep pain. As if it were a physical pain, Swann's mind could not lessen it; but at least with physical pain, because it is independent of thought, thought can dwell on it, note that it has diminished, that it has momentarily ceased. But with this pain the mind, merely by recalling it, re-created it. To wish not to think about it was still to think about it, still to suffer from it. And when, chatting with friends, he forgot his hurt, all of a sudden a word someone said to him would make him change expression, like a man with an injury whom some clumsy person has just carelessly touched on his sore arm or leg. When he left Odette, he was happy, he felt calm, he recalled her smiles, derisive when speaking of this or that other person, and affectionate toward him, the heaviness of her head which she had shifted from its axis to incline it, let it fall, almost despite herself, onto his lips, as she had done the first time in the carriage, the languishing looks she had cast at him while she was in his arms, as with a shiver she pulled her inclined head in against her shoulder.

But instantly his jealousy, as if it were the shadow of his love, would furnish itself with a duplicate of the new smile she had given him that very evening—and which, inverse now, mocked Swann and was filled with love for another man; with that inclination of her head but reversed toward other lips; with all the marks of affection, now given to another man, that she had given him. And all the sensuous memories he carried away from her house were like so many sketches, "plans" like those a decorator submits to you, that allowed Swann to form an idea of the ardent or swooning attitudes she might adopt with other

men. So that he came to regret every pleasure he enjoyed with her, every invented caress whose sweetness he had been so imprudent as to point out to her, every grace he discovered in her, for he knew that a moment later, they would supply new instruments for torturing him.

This torture became still crueler when Swann remembered a brief expression he had surprised, a few days before, and for the first time, in Odette's eyes. It was after dinner, at the Verdurins'. Either because Forcheville, feeling that Saniette, his brother-in-law, was not in favor in their house, wanted to use him as a whipping boy and shine in front of them at his expense, or because he had been irritated by a clumsy remark which Saniette had just made to him and which, in fact, had gone unnoticed by those present, who were not aware of the unpleasant allusion it might contain quite contrary to the intentions of the one who had uttered it without any malice, or finally because for some time now he had been looking for an opportunity to induce them to banish from the house someone who was too well acquainted with him and whom he knew to be so refined that he felt embarrassed at certain moments merely by his presence, Forcheville answered this clumsy remark of Saniette's with such coarseness, hurling insults at him, and emboldened, as he shouted, by Saniette's pain, his dismay, his entreaties, that the wretched man, after asking Mme. Verdurin if he ought to stay, and receiving no answer, had left the house stammering, tears in his eyes. Odette had watched this scene impassively, but when the door closed on Saniette, lowering as it were by several notches her face's habitual expression, so as to be able to find herself, in her baseness, on an equal footing with Forcheville, she had put a sparkle in her eyes with a sly smile of congratulations for the audacity he had shown, of mockery for the man who had been its victim; she had cast him a glance of complicity in evil which was so clearly intended to say: "That finished him off, or I'm very much mistaken. Did you see how pathetic he looked? He was actually crying," that Forcheville, when his eyes met that glance, sobering in a moment from the anger or simulation of anger which still warmed him, smiled and answered:

"He needed only to be friendly, and he would still be here. A good rebuke does a man no harm at any age."

One day when Swann had gone out in the middle of the afternoon to pay a call, not having found the person he wanted to see, it occurred to him to go to Odette's house at an hour when he never went there, but when he knew she was always at home having her nap or writing letters before teatime, and when he would enjoy seeing her for a little while without bothering her. The concierge told him he thought she was there; he rang, thought he heard a noise, heard footsteps, but no one opened the door. Anxious, irritated, he went into the little street on which the other side of the house looked out, stood in front of the window of Odette's bedroom; the curtains prevented him from seeing anything, he knocked hard on the windowpanes, called out; no one opened the window. He saw that some neighbors were watching him. He went away, thinking that after all, perhaps he had been mistaken in believing he heard footsteps; but he remained so preoccupied by it that he could not think about anything else. An hour later, he came back. He found her there; she told him she had been at home earlier when he rang, but was sleeping; the bell had woken her, she had guessed it was Swann, she had run after him, but he had already left. She had certainly heard the sound of knocking at the windowpanes. Swann immediately recognized this statement as one of those fragments of true fact with which liars, when caught unprepared, console themselves by introducing into the composition of the falsehood they are inventing, believing they can accommodate it there and steal its resemblance to the Truth. Of course when Odette had just done something she did not want to reveal, she would hide it deep inside herself. But as soon as she found herself face-to-face with the man to whom she wanted to lie, she was overcome with uneasiness, all her ideas collapsed, her faculties of invention and reasoning were paralyzed, she found nothing in her head but emptiness, yet it was necessary to say something, and all she would find within reach was the very thing she had wanted to conceal and which, being true, was all that had remained there. She would detach a little piece from it, unimportant in itself, telling herself that after all this was better since the detail was authentic and did not present the same dangers as a false detail. "At least this is true," she would say to herself, "so much is gained, anyway. He may make inquiries and he'll see that it's true, so at least it won't be this that gives me away." She was wrong, it was this that gave her away, she did not realize that the true detail had angles that could fit only into the contiguous details of the true fact from which she had arbitrarily detached it, angles which, whatever the invented details among which she might place it, would always reveal, by the excess material and unfilled empty areas, that it was not from among these that it had come. "She admits that she heard me ring, then knock, and that she thought it was me, that she wanted to see me," Swann said to himself. "But this does not conform with the fact that no one opened the door."

But he did not point out this contradiction to her, because he thought that, left to herself, Odette would perhaps produce some lie that would be a faint indication of the truth; she would talk; he would not interrupt her, he would collect with an avid and painful piety the words she said to him, feeling (precisely because she was hiding it behind them as she talked to him) that, like the sacred veil, they retained the vague imprint, sketched the uncertain features, of that reality so infinitely precious and, alas! undiscoverable—what she had been doing that afternoon at three o'clock, when he came—of which he would never possess more than these lies, illegible and divine vestiges, and which now existed only in the memory of this woman, who would conceal it like stolen goods and contemplate it without being able to appreciate it, but would not hand it over to him. Of course, he fully suspected at times that in themselves Odette's daily actions were not passionately interesting, and that the relationships she might have with other men did not naturally, universally, and for every intelligent creature exhale a morbid sadness capable of infecting one with a feverish desire to commit suicide. He would then realize that this interest, this sadness existed only in him like a disease, and that, once this disease was cured, Odette's actions, the kisses she might have given would become once again as harmless as those of so many other women. But the fact that the painful curiosity which Swann brought to them now had its origin only in himself was not enough to make him think it was unreasonable to consider this curiosity important and to use every possible means to satisfy it. For Swann was reaching an age the philosophy of which—encouraged, in his case, by the current philosophy of the day, and also by that of the circle in which he had spent so much of his life, that of the social set attached to the Princess des Laumes, where one's intelligence was understood to be in direct ratio to one's skepticism and nothing was real and incontestable except the individual tastes of each person—is no longer that of youth, but the positive, almost medical philosophy of men who, instead of externalizing the objects of their aspirations, try to derive from the years they have already lived a stable residue of habits and passions which they can regard as characteristic and permanent and to which, deliberately, they will take care before anything else that the kind of life they adopt may provide satisfaction. Swann thought it prudent to make allowance in his life for the pain he felt at not knowing what Odette had been doing, just as he made allowance

for the fresh outbreak which a damp climate might cause in his eczema; to provide in his budget for a sizable sum of available funds for obtaining information about how Odette spent her days, without which he would feel unhappy, just as he reserved the same for other partialities from which he knew he could expect to derive pleasure, at least before he had fallen in love, like his partiality for collections and for good food.

When he tried to say good-bye to Odette in order to leave for home, she asked him to stay longer and even held him back suddenly, by taking his arm, when he was about to open the door to go out. But he took no notice of this, because among the multitude of gestures, remarks, minor incidents that fill a conversation, it is inevitable that we should come close, without detecting anything in them to attract our attention, to those that hide a truth our suspicions are blindly seeking, and that we should stop, on the other hand, at those behind which there is nothing. She kept saying to him: "How unfortunate—you never come in the afternoon, and the one time you do come, I don't see you." He knew very well that she was not sufficiently in love with him to be so keenly distressed at having missed his visit, but, because she was good, desirous of pleasing him, and often sad when she had vexed him, he found it quite natural that she should be sad this time at having deprived him of the pleasure of spending an hour together, a very great pleasure, not for her, but for him. Yet it was a thing unimportant enough so that the pained air she continued to have ended by surprising him. She reminded him even more than usual, when she looked this way, of the faces of the women portrayed by the painter of the Primavera.<sup>68</sup> She had at this moment their downcast and heartbroken expression which seems to be succumbing beneath the weight of a grief too heavy for them, when they are merely letting the child Jesus play with a pomegranate or watching Moses pour water into a trough.<sup>69</sup> He had once before seen the same sadness on her face, but he no longer knew when. And suddenly he remembered: it was when Odette had lied in talking to Mme. Verdurin the day after that dinner to which she had not come on the pretext that she was ill and in reality so that she could stay with Swann. Of course, even if she had been the most scrupulous of women, she might not have felt remorse over a lie as innocent. But the lies Odette generally told were less innocent and served to prevent discoveries that might have created for her, with one person or another, terrible difficulties. And so when she lied, struck by fear, aware that she was feebly armed to defend herself, uncertain of success, she wanted to cry, from exhaustion, like certain children who have not slept. And she also knew that her lie was usually doing serious harm to the man to whom she was telling it, and into whose power she was perhaps going to fall if she lied badly. And so she felt at once humble and guilty in his presence. And when she had to tell an insignificant social lie, the association of sensations and memories would leave her with the faintness that follows overexertion and the regret that follows an act of malevolence.

What depressing lie was she telling Swann that gave her this pained look, this plaintive voice which seemed to falter under the effort she demanded of herself and to ask for forgiveness? He had an idea that it was not merely the truth about the incident in the afternoon that she was endeavoring to hide from him, but something more immediate, that had perhaps not yet transpired and was quite imminent, something that might enlighten him about this truth. At that moment, he heard the bell ring. Odette did not stop talking, but her words were now no more than a long lament: her regret at not having seen Swann in the afternoon, at not having opened the door to him, had turned into true despair.

He could hear the front door closing again and the sound of a carriage, as if someone was going away again—probably the one Swann was not supposed to meet—after being told that Odette was out. Then, when he reflected that merely by coming at an hour when he was not in the habit of coming he had managed to disturb so many arrangements she did not want him to discover, he was overcome with a feeling of discouragement, almost despondency. But because he loved Odette, because he was in the habit of turning all his thoughts toward her, the pity he might have inspired in himself he felt for her instead, and he murmured: "Poor darling!" As he was leaving her, she picked up several letters that she had on her table and asked him if he would put them in the post. He took them away with him and, once he was home, saw that he had kept the letters on him. He returned as far as the post office, drew them from his pocket, and before tossing them into the box looked at the addresses. They were all for tradesmen except one which was for Forcheville. He held it in his hand. He said to himself: "If I saw what was inside it, I would know what she calls him, how she talks to him, if there's anything between them. It may even be that by not looking, I'm behaving with a lack of delicacy toward Odette, because this is the only way to free myself of a suspicion which is perhaps calumnious for her, which is in any case bound to hurt her, and which nothing would be able to destroy, once the letter was gone."

He returned home after leaving the post office, but he had kept that last letter with him. He lit a candle and held up close to it the envelope he had not dared to open. At first he could not read anything, but the envelope was thin and, by making it adhere to the stiff card that was enclosed in it, he could read, through its transparency, the last words. It was a very cold, formal ending. If he had not been the one looking at a letter addressed to Forcheville, but instead Forcheville reading a letter addressed to Swann, Forcheville would have seen words that were far more affectionate! He took firm hold of the card that danced in the envelope, which was larger than it was, then, sliding it with his thumb, brought its different lines one after another under the part of the envelope where the paper was not doubled, the only part through which one could read.

Despite this he could not distinguish anything very well. But it did not matter, because he had seen enough to realize that its subject was a minor, unimportant event that had nothing to do with a love affair; it was something relating to an uncle of Odette's. Swann had read clearly at the beginning of the line: "I was right," but had not understood what Odette had been right in doing, when suddenly, a word he had not at first been able to decipher appeared and illuminated the meaning of the entire sentence: "I was right to open the door, it was my uncle." Open the door! So Forcheville had been there that afternoon when Swann rang the bell, and she had made him leave, which was the source of the noise Swann had heard.

Then he read the whole letter; at the end she apologized for having acted so unceremoniously toward him and said he had forgotten his cigarettes at her house, the same sentence she had written to Swann one of the first times he had come. But in Swann's case she had added: "If you had left your heart here, I would not have let you take it away again." For Forcheville nothing like that: no allusion that might suggest that they were having an affair. And in fact, Forcheville was more deceived in all this than he, since Odette was writing to him to assure him that the visitor had been her uncle. In the end he, Swann, was the one she considered important, the one for whom she had dismissed the other. And yet, if there was nothing between Odette and Forcheville, why had she not opened the door right away, why had she said, "I did the right thing to open the door, it was my



uncle"? if she was doing nothing wrong at that moment, how would Forcheville even be able to explain to himself the fact that she had not opened the door? Swann remained there, disconsolate, embarrassed and yet happy, with this envelope which Odette had handed over to him quite fearlessly, so absolute was her confidence in his discretion, but through the transparent glazing of which was revealed to him, along with the secret of an incident which he would never have believed it possible to discover, a little of Odette's life, as in a narrow illuminated section cut directly out of the unknown. Then his jealousy rejoiced over it, as if that jealousy had an independent, selfish vitality, voracious for anything that would feed it, even at Swann's own expense. Now it had something to feed on and Swann was going to be able to begin worrying each day over the visitors Odette might have received at about five o'clock, and begin trying to learn where Forcheville had been at that hour. For Swann's affection continued to preserve the same character imprinted on it from the very beginning by his ignorance as to how Odette spent her days and by the mental laziness that stopped him from compensating for his ignorance with his imagination. He had not been jealous at first of Odette's whole life, but only of the times when some circumstances, perhaps wrongly interpreted, led him to suppose that Odette might have deceived him. His jealousy, like an octopus that casts a first, then a second, then a third mooring, attached itself solidly first to that time, five o'clock in the afternoon, then to another, then to yet another. But Swann was not capable of inventing his sufferings. They were merely the memory, the perpetuation of a suffering that had come to him from outside himself.

From outside, however, everything brought him more suffering. He wanted to separate Odette from Forcheville, take her away to spend a few days in the south. But he believed all the men who happened to be in the hotel desired her and that she desired them. And so he who in former days, when traveling, had sought out new people, large groups, now appeared unsociable, appeared to be fleeing the company of men as if it had cruelly wounded him. And how could he not be misanthropic, when he saw every man as a possible lover of Odette's? And so his jealousy, even more than the sensuous and lighthearted feeling he had at first had for Odette, altered Swann's character and changed entirely, in the eyes of other people, the very appearance of the external signs by which that character was manifested.

A month after the day on which he had read the letter addressed by Odette to Forcheville, Swann went to a dinner which the Verdurins were giving in the Bois. As they were preparing to leave, he noticed some confabulations between Mme. Verdurin and several of the guests and thought he heard them reminding the pianist to come to a party at Chatou<sup>70</sup> the next day; yet, he, Swann, had not been invited.

The Verdurins had spoken in low voices and in vague terms, but the painter, probably inattentive, exclaimed:

"There must be no lights on and he must play the 'Moonlight Sonata' in the dark so we can watch how things become illuminated."

Mme. Verdurin, seeing that Swann was two steps away, now wore that expression in which the desire to make the person who is talking be quiet and the desire to maintain a look of innocence in the eyes of the person who is hearing neutralize each other in an intense nullity of gaze, in which the motionless sign of intelligence and complicity is concealed beneath an innocent smile, and which in the end, being common to all those who find themselves making a social blunder, reveals it instantly, if not to those making it, at least to the one who is its victim. Odette suddenly had the desperate look of one who has given up fighting the crushing difficulties of life, and Swann anxiously counted the minutes that separated him from the time when, after leaving the restaurant, during the drive home with her, he would be able to ask her for an explanation, persuade her not to go to Chatou the next day or to see that he was invited, and to soothe in her arms the anguish he was feeling. At last the carriages were sent for. Mme. Verdurin said to Swann:

"Well now, good-bye, we'll see you soon, I trust?" attempting by the amiableness of her gaze and the constraint of her smile to keep him from realizing that she was not saying to him, as she had always done until now: "Tomorrow, then, at Chatou, the day after at my house."

M. and Mme. Verdurin made Forcheville get in with them, Swann's carriage had pulled up behind theirs, and he was waiting for theirs to leave so that he could help Odette into his.

"Odette, we're taking you home," said Mme. Verdurin, "we have a little spot for you here next to M. de Forcheville."

"Yes, madame," answered Odette.

"What? I thought I was driving you home," cried Swann, saying what had to be said without dissembling, because the carriage door was open, the seconds were numbered, and he could not go home without her in his present state.

"But Mme. Verdurin asked me . . ."

"Now, you can certainly go home alone, we've let you have her to yourself often enough," said Mme. Verdurin.

"But I had something important to say to Madame."

"Well, you can write it to her in a letter . . ."

"Good-bye," Odette said, holding out her hand.

He tried to smile but looked utterly crushed.

"Did you see the way Swann permits himself to behave with us now?" said Mme. Verdurin to her husband when they were back at home. "I thought he was going to eat me alive because we were taking Odette with us. It's quite unseemly, really! Let him just say right out that we're running a house of assignation! I don't understand how Odette can tolerate such behavior. He absolutely seems to be saying: You belong to me. I'm going to tell Odette what I think, I hope she'll understand."

And she also added, a moment later, angrily:

"No, really, the vile creature!" using, without realizing it, and perhaps responding to the same obscure need to justify herself—like Françoise at Combray when the chicken did not want to die—the same words which the last twitches of an inoffensive animal in its death throes wring from the countryman who is killing it.

And when Mme. Verdurin's carriage had left and Swann's came forward, his coachman looked at him and asked if he was not ill or if there had not been an accident.

Swann sent him away, he wanted to walk, and he returned home on foot through the Bois. He talked to himself out loud, in the same slightly artificial tone he had always used when he enumerated the charms of the little clan and extolled the magnanimity of the Verdurins. But just as Odette's conversation, smiles, kisses became as odious to him as he had once found them sweet, if

they were addressed to another man, in the same way the Verdurins' salon, which only recently had still seemed to him amusing, inspired with a real enthusiasm for art and even a sort of moral nobility, now that a man other than himself was the one Odette was going there to meet, to love without restraint, exhibited to him its absurdities, its foolishness, its ignominy.

He pictured to himself with disgust the next day's soiree at Chatou. "The idea of going to Chatou anyway! Like drapers after shutting up shop! These people really are sublimely bourgeois, they can't really exist, they must have come out of a Labiche comedy!"<sup>71</sup>

The Cottards would be there, maybe Brichot. "It's quite grotesque, the lives of these nonentities, always in each other's pockets like this. They would feel utterly lost, I swear, if they didn't all meet up again tomorrow *at Chatou!*" Alas! the painter would be there too, the painter who enjoyed "matchmaking," who would invite Forcheville to come to his studio with Odette. He could see Odette in clothes far too formal for this country outing, "because she's so vulgar and worst of all, poor little thing, such a fool!!!"

He could hear the jokes that Mme. Verdurin would make after dinner, jokes which, whoever the bore might be at whom they were aimed, had always amused him because he saw Odette laughing, laughing with him, almost inside him. Now he felt that perhaps they would be making Odette laugh at him. "What fetid humor!" he said, twisting his mouth into an expression of disgust so powerful that he felt the muscular sensation of his grimace even in his neck, flung back against the collar of his shirt. "And how can a creature whose face is made in the image of God find anything to laugh about in those nauseating jokes? Any nose of any delicacy at all would turn away with horror so as not to allow itself to be offended by such musty odors. It's really incredible to think that a human being could fail to understand that, by permitting herself to smile at the expense of a fellow human being who has loyally reached out his hand to her, she is sinking down into a mire from which it will be impossible, even with the best will in the world, to rescue her. I live too many miles above the swamp in which these vermin are gabbling and wallowing to be splattered by the jokes of a Verdurin," he cried, lifting his head, proudly throwing back his shoulders. "As God is my witness, I have honestly tried to pull Odette up out of there, and lift her into a nobler and purer atmosphere. But no human being has more than just so much patience, and mine is exhausted," he said to himself, as if this mission to tear Odette away from an atmosphere of sarcasm dated from further back than the last few minutes and as if he had not taken it upon himself only when he thought perhaps these sarcasms were aimed at him and were attempting to separate Odette from him.

He could see the pianist preparing to play the "Moonlight Sonata" and the faces Mme. Verdurin would make as she grew dismayed at the harm that Beethoven's music was going to do to her nerves: "Idiot, liar!" he exclaimed. "And the woman pretends to love *Art!*" She would tell Odette, after having adroitly insinuated a few words of praise for Forcheville, as she had so often done for him: "Make a little room next to you for M. de Forcheville." "In the dark! The pimp, the procuress!" *Procuress* was also the name he applied to the music that would invite them to be quiet, to dream together, to look at each other, to take each other by the hand. He found there was some good to be said for the severity toward the arts displayed by Plato, by Bossuet,<sup>72</sup> and by the old school of French education.

In fact, the life one led at the Verdurins' and which he had so often called "real life" seemed to him the worst of all, and their little clan the lowest of social circles. "It really is," he said, "the lowest thing on the social ladder, Dante's last circle."<sup>73</sup> No doubt about it, the venerable text refers to the Verdurins! Really, the fashionable folk, whom one may vilify, but who all the same are different from these gangs of riffraff, show a most profound sagacity in refusing to know them, or even to dirty the tips of their fingers with them! What sound intuition there is in the Faubourg Saint-Germain's *Noli me tangere!*<sup>74</sup> He had long since left the avenues of the Bois, he had nearly reached his house, and still, not yet sobered from his pain and from the insincere exuberance with which the deceitful intonations, the artificial sonority of his own voice, pouring into him more abundantly every minute, had intoxicated him, he continued to perorate out loud in the silence of the night: "Society people have their faults, as no one knows better than I do, but all the same really these are people for whom certain things are out of the question. For instance, one fashionable woman I knew was far from perfect, but all the same really she had a basic decency, a sense of honor in her dealings that would have made her incapable, whatever the circumstances, of any sort of treachery and which is quite sufficient to put a vast gulf between her and a vixen like Verdurin. Verdurin! What a name! Oh, one may truly say they are the ultimate, perfect specimens of their kind! Thank God—it was high time I stopped condescending to mix in utter promiscuousness with such infamy, such excrement."

But, just as the virtues he had attributed that same afternoon to the Verdurins would not have been enough, had they even really possessed them but had not encouraged and protected his love, to provoke in Swann that intoxication in which he was moved by their magnanimity and which, even if it was propagated through other people, could only come to him from Odette—in the same way, the immorality that he now saw in the Verdurins, had it been real, would have been powerless, had they not invited Odette with Forcheville and without him, to unleash his indignation and cause him to vilify "their infamy." And no doubt Swann's voice was more perceptive than he was himself, when it refused to pronounce these words filled with disgust for the Verdurin social circle and joy at being done with it, otherwise than in an artificial tone and as if they were chosen to appease his anger rather than to express his thoughts. The latter, in fact, while he was indulging in these invectives, were probably, without his noticing it, occupied with a completely different object, for, once he reached home, scarcely had he closed the carriage gate behind him than suddenly he struck himself on the forehead, and, opening the gate again, went out exclaiming in a natural voice this time: "I think I know a way of getting invited to the dinner at Chatou tomorrow!" But the way must have been a poor one, for Swann was not invited: Dr. Cottard, who, summoned to the country on a serious case, had not seen the Verdurins for several days and had not been able to go to Chatou, said, the day after that dinner, as he sat down at the table at their house:

"Why, won't we be seeing M. Swann this evening? He is certainly what you would call a personal friend of . . ."

"Why, I should hope not!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "May the Lord preserve us from him, he is deadly dull, stupid, and ill-mannered."

At these words Cottard showed surprise and submission at the same time, as though confronted with a truth contrary to everything he had believed up to then, but irresistibly obvious; and, lowering his nose nervously and timidly into his plate, confined himself to answering: "Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!", traversing along a descending scale, in his forced but orderly retreat into the depths of himself, the entire register of his voice. And at the Verdurins', Swann was never mentioned again.

So the salon which had brought Swann and Odette together became an obstacle to their meetings. She no longer said to him as she had in the early days of their love: "We'll see each other tomorrow night anyway, there's a supper at the Verdurins'," but: "We won't be able to see each other tomorrow night, there's a supper at the Verdurins'." Or else the Verdurins were to take her to the Opéra-Comique to see *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*<sup>75</sup> and Swann would read in Odette's eyes a fear that he would ask her not to go, which once upon a time he would not have been able to keep himself from kissing as it passed over his mistress's face, and which now exasperated him. "It's not anger, however," he said to himself, "that I feel when I see that she wants to go and scratch about in that excremental music. It's sorrow, not for myself certainly, but for her; sorrow at seeing that after more than six months of living in daily contact with me, she has not managed to change enough to eliminate Victor Massé spontaneously! Especially for not having come to understand that there are evenings when a person of any subtlety must know how to give up a pleasure, when one asks it of her. She ought to know how to say 'I won't go,' if only by using her intelligence, since it is on the basis of her answer that one will rate once and for all the quality of her soul." And having persuaded himself that it really was only in order to be able to pass a more favorable judgment on Odette's spiritual value that he wanted her to stay with him that evening instead of going to the Opéra-Comique, he presented her with the same reasoning, with the same degree of insincerity as he had presented it to himself, and even with one degree more, for now he was also responding to a desire to capture her through her self-love.

"I swear," he said to her a few moments before she left for the theater, "that in asking you not to go out, my every wish, if I were selfish, would be for you to refuse me, because I have a thousand things to do this evening and I will find myself trapped and thus quite annoyed if against all expectations you answer me that you won't go. But my own occupations, my own pleasures, aren't everything, I have to think of you. There may come a day when, seeing me gone from you forever, you will be justified in reproaching me for not having warned you in the crucial moments when I sensed that I was going to bring down upon you one of those severe judgments against which love cannot resist for long. You see, *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* (what a title!) doesn't really matter. What we must find out is whether you are really that creature which ranks lowest in mentality, and even in charm, the contemptible creature who is incapable of giving up a pleasant thing. Now, if this is what you are, how could anyone love you, for you're not even a person, a clearly defined entity, imperfect, but at least perfectible? You're only a formless stream of water running down whatever slope one offers it, a fish without memory or reflection which, as long as it lives in its aquarium, continuing to mistake the glass for water, will bump against it a hundred times a day. Do you understand that your answer will have the effect—I won't say of making me stop loving you immediately, of course, but of making you less attractive in my eyes when I realize that you're not a person, that you're lower than all other things, that I can't place you above any of them? Obviously I would have preferred to ask you as a thing of no importance to give up *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* (since you oblige me to soil my lips with that despicable name) in hopes that you would go anyway. But since I've decided to tally such an account, to derive such consequences from your answer, I thought it would be more honest to let you know."

For some time, Odette had shown signs of agitation and uncertainty. Although she failed to grasp the meaning of this speech, she did understand that it might belong to the category of "scoldings" and scenes of reproach or supplication, and her familiarity with men enabled her, without paying attention to the details of what they said, to conclude that they would not make such scenes if they were not in love, that since they were in love it was pointless to obey them, that they would be only more in love afterward. And so she would have listened to Swann with the utmost calm if she had not seen that time was passing and that if he talked much longer, she would, as she told him with a smile that was tender, obstinate, and abashed, "end by missing the overture!"

On other occasions he told her that the one thing that was more likely than anything else to make him stop loving her was that she would not give up lying. "Even from the point of view of your desire to be attractive," he told her, "don't you understand how much of your charm you lose when you stoop to lying? With one confession, think how many faults you could redeem! Really you are much less intelligent than I thought!" But it was in vain that Swann expounded for her thus all the reasons she had for not lying; they might have undermined some general and systematic approach to lying; but Odette had none; she merely contented herself, whenever she wanted Swann not to know about something she had done, with not telling him about it. And so lying was for her an expedient of a particular order; and the only thing that could decide whether she ought to make use of it or confess the truth was a reason of a particular order too, the greater or lesser likelihood that Swann might discover she had not told the truth.

Physically, she was going through a bad phase: she was growing stout; and the expressive and doleful charm, the surprised and dreamy glances she had once had seemed to have disappeared with her first youth. So that she had become so dear to Swann at the moment, as it were, when he found her in fact much less pretty. He would look at her for a long time trying to recover the charm he had once seen in her, and he would not find it. But knowing that under the new chrysalis, what lived on was still Odette, still the same will, evanescent, elusive, and guileful, was enough to make Swann continue to put the same passion into trying to capture her. Then he would look at a photograph from two years before, he would remember how exquisite she had been. And that would console him a little for taking such pains over her.

When the Verdurins carried her off to Saint-Germain, Chatou, Meulan, often, if it was the warm season, they would propose, on the spot, staying there to sleep and not coming back until the next day. Mme. Verdurin would try to quiet the scruples of the pianist, whose aunt had remained in Paris.

"She'll be delighted to be rid of you for a day. And how could she worry, she knows you're with us; anyway, she can put the blame on me."

But if she was not successful, M. Verdurin would spring into action, find a telegraph office or a messenger, and inquire as to which of the faithful had someone they needed to inform. But Odette would thank him and say that she did not need to send anyone a telegram, because she had told Swann once and for all that by sending him one in front of everybody, she would be compromising herself. Sometimes she would be gone for several days, the Verdurins would take her to see the tombs at Dreux,

or, on the advice of the painter, to Compiègne to admire sunsets as viewed from inside a forest, and then they would push on as far as the Château de Pierrefonds.<sup>26</sup>

"To think that she could visit real historic buildings with me. I've studied architecture for ten years and I'm forever being implored to take people of the highest standing to Beauvais or Saint-Loup-de-Naud<sup>27</sup> and would do it only for her, and instead she goes with the lowest of simpletons to wax ecstatic first over the dejecta of Louis-Philippe and then over those of Viollet-le-Duc! It seems to me you don't need to be an artist for that and even without a particularly delicate nose, you don't choose to go holiday making in latrines in order to be closer to the smell of excrement."

But when she had left for Dreux or Pierrefonds—without, alas, allowing him to go too, as though by chance, on his own account, because "that would make a deplorable impression," she said—he would plunge into that most intoxicating of romances, the railway timetable, which would present him with all the ways he might join her, in the afternoon, in the evening, that same morning! Not only the ways, but even more, almost: the authorization. Because after all, the timetable and the trains themselves were not meant for dogs. If one informed the public, via printed matter, that at eight o'clock in the morning a train left which arrived in Pierrefonds at ten o'clock, it was because going to Pierrefonds was a lawful act, for which permission from Odette was superfluous; and it was also an act that could have a motive completely different from the desire to meet Odette, since people who did not know her performed it each day, in large enough numbers for it to be worth the trouble of stoking the locomotives.

So she really couldn't stop him from going to Pierrefonds if he wanted to! Now, in fact, he felt that he did want to, and that, if he had not known Odette, he certainly would have gone. For a long time now he had wanted to form a clearer idea for himself of Viollet-le-Duc's restoration work. And in this weather, he was moved by an imperious desire for a walk in the forest of Compiègne.

It was truly hard luck that she was forbidding him the only spot that tempted him today. Today! If he went despite her prohibition, he might see her *today*! But whereas, if at Pierrefonds she had met someone who did not matter, she would have said joyfully: "Imagine finding you here!" and would have asked him to come see her at the hotel where she was staying with the Verdurins, if she met him, Swann, there, she would be offended, she would say to herself that she was being followed, she would love him less, perhaps she would turn away angrily when she saw him. "So, I no longer have the right to travel!" she would say to him when they returned, whereas really he was the one who no longer had the right to travel!

For a while he had had the idea, so as to be able to go to Compiègne and Pierrefonds without appearing to be doing it in order to meet Odette, of contriving to be taken there by one of his friends, the Marquis de Forestelle, who had a château in the vicinity. The Marquis, to whom he had communicated his plan without letting him know the reason for it, was beside himself with joy and marveled that Swann, for the first time in fifteen years, was at last consenting to come see his estate and, since he did not want to stay there, as he had told him, at least promised to take walks and go on excursions with him for a few days. Swann pictured himself already down there with M. de Forestelle. Even before seeing Odette there, even if he did not manage to see her, what happiness it would give him to step on that earth where, not knowing the exact location, at any given moment, of her presence, he would feel palpitating everywhere the possibility of her sudden appearance: in the courtyard of the château, now beautiful to him because it was for her sake that he had gone to see it; in every street of the town, which seemed to him romantic; on every road in the forest, rosy in the deep and tender sunset—numberless alternative asylums, where, in the uncertain ubiquity of his hopes, his multiplied heart simultaneously came to take refuge, happy and vagabond. "Whatever we do," he would say to M. de Forestelle, "let's take care we don't stumble on Odette and the Verdurins; I've just learned they're in Pierrefonds today, in fact. There's time enough for us to see one another in Paris, it wouldn't be worth the trouble of leaving Paris if they couldn't take a step without me or I without them." And his friend would not understand why, once he was there, Swann would change a plan twenty times, inspect the dining rooms of all the hotels in Compiègne without making up his mind to sit down in any of them even though no trace of the Verdurins had been seen, looking as though he were searching for the very thing he had said he wanted to avoid and then avoiding it as soon as he found it, because if he had encountered the little group, he would pointedly have gone off, glad he had seen Odette and that she had seen him, especially that she had seen him not bothering about her. But no, she would certainly guess that it was for her sake he was there. And when M. de Forestelle came to pick him up so that they could set off, he said to him: "Alas, no, I can't go to Pierrefonds today, Odette is there, as it turns out." And Swann was happy despite everything to feel that, if alone of all mortals that day he was not allowed to go to Pierrefonds, it was because for Odette he was someone different from the others, her lover, and that this restriction which was applied in his case alone to the universal right to freedom of movement was merely one of the forms of that slavery, of that love which was so dear to him. Decidedly it was better not to risk quarreling with her, to be patient, to wait for her to come back. He spent his days bent over a map of the Compiègne forest as if it were the Map of Love,<sup>28</sup> and surrounded himself with photographs of the château at Pierrefonds. As soon as the day arrived on which it was possible that she would be coming back, he opened the timetable again, calculated which train she must have taken and, if she had been delayed, those that were still available to her. He did not go out for fear of missing a telegram, did not go to bed in case, having returned on the last train, she wanted to surprise him by coming to see him in the middle of the night. In fact he heard the bell at the carriage gate, it seemed to him they were slow opening it, he wanted to wake up the concierge, went to the window to call out to Odette if it was she, for despite the instructions he had gone downstairs to give the servants himself more than ten times, they were still capable of telling her he was not there. It was a servant coming home. He noticed the incessant stream of passing carriages, to which he had never paid attention in the past. He listened to each one come from far off, draw near, pass his gate without stopping, and go on into the distance bearing a message that was not for him. He waited all night, quite uselessly, because the Verdurins had decided to return early, and Odette had been in Paris since noon; it had not occurred to her to tell him; not knowing what to do, she had gone and spent her evening alone at the theater and long ago, by now, had returned home to bed and gone to sleep.

The fact was that she had not even thought of him. And occasions such as this when she forgot Swann's very existence were more useful to Odette, did more to attach Swann to her, than all her coquetry. Because in this way Swann was kept in that state of painful agitation which had already been powerful enough to make his love blossom on the night when he had not found Odette at the Verdurins' and had searched for her all evening. And he did not have, as I had at Combray in my childhood, happy days during which to forget the sufferings that will return at night. Swann spent his days without Odette; and now and then he said to

himself that to allow such a pretty woman to go out alone in Paris like that was as imprudent as to put a case full of jewels in the middle of the street. Then he would become indignant at all the people passing by as at so many thieves. But their faces, formless, collective, escaped the grasp of his imagination and did not feed his jealousy. Swann's mind would become exhausted, until, passing his hand over his eyes, he would exclaim: "We must trust in God," like those who, after having persisted in embracing the problem of the reality of the external world or the immortality of the soul, grant their tired brains the relief of an act of faith. But always the thought of the absent woman was indissolubly mingled with the simplest actions of Swann's life—having lunch, receiving his mail, leaving the house, going to bed—by the very sadness he felt over performing them without her, like the initials of Philibert le Beau, which, in the church at Brou,<sup>79</sup> because of the longing she felt for him, Margaret of Austria intertwined everywhere with her own. On certain days, instead of staying at home, he would go and have his lunch in a restaurant not far from his house whose good cooking he had appreciated once upon a time and to which he now went only for one of those reasons, at once mystical and preposterous, that we call romantic; in fact this restaurant (which still exists) bore the same name as the street in which Odette lived: *Lapérouse*.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes, when she had gone away briefly, it was only after several days that she thought of letting him know she had returned to Paris. And she would say to him quite simply, no longer taking the precaution as she once had of covering herself, just in case, with a little fragment borrowed from the truth, that she had just returned that moment by the morning train. These words were mendacious; at least for Odette they were mendacious, insubstantial, not having, as they would have had if they had been true, a basis in her memory of arriving at the station; in fact, she was even prevented from picturing them herself at the moment she uttered them, by the contradictory image of what she had been doing that was quite different at the moment she was claiming she had stepped off the train. But in Swann's mind it was just the opposite, these words, encountering no obstacle, encrusted themselves and assumed the immobility of a truth so indubitable that if a friend told him he had come by that train and had not seen Odette, Swann would be convinced it was the friend who was mistaken about the day or the hour, since his account did not agree with Odette's. Her words would have seemed to him false only if he had suspected beforehand that they were. For him to believe she was lying, a previous suspicion was a necessary condition. In fact it was also a sufficient condition. Then everything Odette said to him would appear suspect. If he heard her mention a name, it was certainly the name of one of her lovers; the supposition once forged, he would spend weeks grieving; he even contacted a private investigation agency once in order to find out the address and the daily routine of the stranger who would not let him breathe easy except when he went off on a trip, and who, he learned in the end, was an uncle of Odette's dead for the past twenty years.



Even though in general she did not permit him to meet her in public places, saying that people would talk, sometimes at an evening party to which he and she both had been invited—at Forcheville's, at the painter's, or at a charity ball in one of the ministries—he would find himself there at the same time as she. He would see her but did not dare stay for fear of irritating her by appearing to spy on the pleasures she was enjoying with other people, pleasures which—as he drove home alone, went to bed as anxious as I myself was to be some years later on the evenings when he would come to dine at the house, at Combray—seemed unlimited to him because he had not seen them come to an end. And once or twice on such evenings he experienced the sort of happiness which, had it not been so violently affected by the recoil from the abrupt cessation of anxiety, one would be tempted to call a tranquil happiness, because it consisted of a return to a peaceful state of mind: he had dropped in on a party at the painter's home and was preparing to go off again; behind him he was leaving Odette transformed into a brilliant stranger, surrounded by men to whom her glances and her gaiety, which were not for him, seemed to speak of some sensuous pleasure that would be enjoyed there or elsewhere (maybe at the “Bal des Incohérents,”<sup>81</sup> where he trembled at the idea that she would go afterward) and that caused Swann more jealousy than the carnal act itself because he had more difficulty imagining it; he was already on the point of passing through the studio door, when he heard himself being called back with these words (which, by cutting off from the party that end which had terrified him so, made the party seem in retrospect innocent, made Odette's return a thing no longer inconceivable and terrible, but sweet and familiar and abiding next to him, like a bit of his everyday life, in his carriage, and divested Odette herself of her too brilliant and too gay appearance, showed that it was only a disguise which she had put on for a moment, for its own sake, not with a view to mysterious pleasures, and that she was already tired of it), with these words that Odette tossed at him, as he was already on the threshold: “Wouldn't you wait five minutes for me? I'm leaving, we'll go back together, you can take me home.”

True, one day Forcheville had asked to be taken back at the same time but, when they had arrived at Odette's door and he had asked permission to come in too, Odette had answered him, pointing to Swann: “Ah! That depends on this gentleman here, ask him. Well, all right, come in for a moment if you want, but not for long because I warn you he likes to talk quietly with me, and he doesn't much like having visitors when he comes. Oh, if you knew this fellow as well as I know him! Isn't that so, *my love*,”<sup>82</sup> I'm the only one who really knows you?”

And Swann was perhaps even more touched to see her addressing him thus, in front of Forcheville, not only these tender words of predilection, but also certain criticisms such as: “I'm sure you haven't answered your friends yet about that dinner on Sunday. Don't go if you don't want to, but at least be polite,” or: “Now, have you left your essay on Vermeer here so that you can do a little more on it tomorrow? How lazy you are! I'll make you work—you'll see!,” which proved that Odette kept up with his social engagements and his literary work, that the two of them really had a life together. And as she said this she gave him a smile in whose depths he felt she was entirely his.

And so at these moments, while she was making orangeade for them, suddenly, as when a poorly adjusted reflector at first casts on the wall around an object large fantastic shadows which then fold and disappear into it, all the terrible shifting ideas he had formed for himself about Odette would vanish, would rejoin the charming body that stood there in front of him. He would have the sudden suspicion that this hour spent at Odette's house, in the lamplight, was perhaps not an artificial hour, invented for his own use (intended to mask that dismaying and delightful thing which he thought about endlessly without being able really to picture it, an hour in Odette's real life, in Odette's life when he himself was not there), with stage-set accessories and cardboard fruit, but was perhaps a real hour in Odette's life, that if he had not been there, she would have set out the same armchair for Forcheville and poured him not some unfamiliar drink, but that very same orangeade, that the world inhabited by Odette was not that other frightful and supernatural world where he spent his time locating her and which perhaps existed only in his imagination, but rather the real world, radiating no special sadness, comprising that table where he was going to be able to write and that drink which he would be permitted to taste, all those objects which he contemplated with as much curiosity and admiration as gratitude, for if by absorbing his dreams they had delivered him from them, they in return had been enriched by them, they showed him the palpable realization of his dreams, and they interested his mind, they assumed substance and shape before his eyes at the same time that they soothed his heart. Ah! If fate had permitted him to have but a single home with Odette so that in her house he would be in his own, if when he asked the servant what was planned for lunch, it was Odette's menu that he had learned in answer, if when Odette wanted to go out in the morning to walk down the avenue du Bois de Boulogne, his duty as a good husband had obliged him, even if he did not want to go out, to accompany her, carrying her coat when she was too warm, and at night after dinner if she wanted to stay at home informally dressed, if he had been forced to stay there with her, to do what she wanted; then how completely all those trifles in Swann's life which seemed to him so sad, would, on the contrary, because they were at the same time part of Odette's life, have taken on, even the most familiar of them—like that lamp, that orangeade, that armchair which contained so much of his dreams, which materialized so much desire—a sort of superabundant sweetness and mysterious density.

Yet he actually suspected that what he thus longed for was a calm, a peace that would not have been a favorable atmosphere for his love. When Odette ceased to be for him a creature always absent, longed for, imaginary, when the feeling he had for her was no longer the same mysterious disturbance caused in him by the phrase from the sonata, but affection, gratitude, when normal relations were established between them that would put an end to his madness and his gloom, then no doubt the actions of Odette's daily life would appear to him of little interest in themselves—as he had several times already suspected they were, for example on the day he had read through its envelope the letter addressed to Forcheville. Considering his disease with as much discernment as if he had inoculated himself with it in order to study it, he told himself that when he had recovered his health what Odette might be doing would leave him indifferent. But, from within his morbid state, in truth he feared death itself no more than such a recovery, which would in fact have been the death of all that he was at present.

After these peaceful evenings, Swann's suspicions would be calmed; he would bless Odette and the next day, first thing in the morning, he would send around to her house the most beautiful jewels, because those kind attentions the night before had excited either his gratitude, or the desire to see them repeated, or a paroxysm of love that needed to expend itself.

But at other times his pain would seize him again, he would imagine that Odette was Forcheville's mistress and that when the two of them had seen him, from the depths of the Verdurins' landau, at the Bois, the day before the Chatou party to which he had

not been invited, entreat her vainly, with that look of despair which even his coachman had noticed, to go back with him, then return home on his own, alone and defeated, she must have had, as she pointed him out to Forcheville and said to him: "Look! How furious he is!" the same expression in her eyes, glittering, malicious, haughty, and sly, as on the day when Forcheville had driven Saniette from the Verdurins'.

Then Swann detested her. "But also, I'm too stupid," he would tell himself, "I'm paying with my own money for other people's pleasures. All the same, she ought to take care and not pull too hard on her bowstring, because I might very well not give anything more at all. In any case, let's forgo the supplementary favors for the time being! To think that only yesterday, when she said she wanted to attend the season at Bayreuth,<sup>83</sup> I was stupid enough to propose renting for the two of us one of the King of Bavaria's pretty castles in the vicinity. And anyway she did not seem all that delighted, she hasn't yet said either yes or no; let's hope she will decide against it. Good Lord! To spend two weeks listening to Wagner with her when she cares as much for it as a fish for an apple—what fun that would be!" And because his hatred, like his love, needed to manifest itself and to act, he took pleasure in pursuing his evil fantasies further and further, since, because of the perfidies he imputed to Odette, he detested her still more and could, if—something he tried to picture to himself—they were found to be true, have an occasion for punishing her and for satiating on her his increasing rage. Thus he went so far as to suppose that he was going to receive a letter from her in which she would ask him for money to rent that castle near Bayreuth, but warning him that he could not go there himself, because she had promised Forcheville and the Verdurins that she would invite them. Ah! How he would have liked her to be so bold! What joy he would feel as he refused, as he drafted the vengeful answer, the terms of which he took satisfaction in choosing, in uttering out loud, as if he had actually received the letter!

Yet this was in fact what happened the very next day. She wrote that the Verdurins and their friends had expressed a desire to attend these performances of Wagner and that, if he would be so good as to send her the money, she would at last, after having so often been entertained at their home, have the pleasure of inviting them in her turn. About him, she said not a word, it was implied that their presence would exclude his own.

And so that terrible answer, whose every word he had determined the day before without daring to hope that it would ever be used, he could now have the joy of sending off to her. Alas! He was quite aware that, all the same, with the money she had, or that she might easily find, she could rent something at Bayreuth since she wanted to, she who was incapable of telling the difference between Bach and Clapisson.<sup>84</sup> But still, she would live there more frugally. There would be no way, as there would have been had he sent her a few thousand-franc bills this time, of organizing every evening, in a castle, those exquisite suppers after which she would perhaps have indulged the whim—which it was possible she had never yet had—of falling into Forcheville's arms. And then at least he, Swann, was not the one who would be paying for this detested journey! Oh, if only he could have prevented it! If only she could have sprained her ankle before she left, if the coachman of the carriage that would take her to the station had agreed, whatever the price, to drive her to a place where for some time she would remain sequestered—this perfidious woman, her eyes glittering with a smile of complicity addressed to Forcheville, which Odette had become for Swann in the past forty-eight hours!

But she was never that for very long; after a few days the gleaming hypocritical gaze would lose some of its luster and duplicity, the image of a despised Odette saying to Forcheville: "How furious he is!" would begin to grow pale, fade away. Then, gradually the face of the other Odette would reappear and rise up, shining softly, the Odette who also offered a smile to Forcheville, but a smile in which there was nothing but affection for Swann, when she said: "Don't stay long, because this gentleman does not much like me to have visitors when he wants to be with me. Oh, if you knew this fellow as well as I know him!", the same smile she wore when thanking Swann for some instance of his courtesy, which she prized so highly, for some advice she had asked of him in one of those serious circumstances in which she had confidence only in him.

Then, thinking of this Odette, he would ask himself how he could have written her that outrageous letter of which no doubt until now she had not thought him capable, and which must have brought him down from the high, the unique rank which by his goodness, his honesty, he had won in her esteem. He would now become less dear to her, because it was for those particular qualities, which she did not find in either Forcheville or any other man, that she loved him. It was because of them that Odette so often showed a graciousness toward him that he counted for nothing when he was jealous, because it was not a sign of desire, and even gave proof of affection rather than love, but whose importance he began to feel again in proportion as the spontaneous relaxation of his suspicions, a relaxation often increased by the distraction he found in reading about art or talking to a friend, caused his passion to become less demanding of reciprocities.

Now that, after this oscillation, Odette had naturally returned to the place from which Swann's jealousy had for a time removed her, to the angle from which he found her charming, he pictured her as full of tenderness, with a look of consent, and so pretty thus that he could not help offering her his lips as if she had been there and he had been able to kiss her; and he felt as strong a gratitude toward her for this enchanting, kindly glance as if she had really given it to him, as if it were not merely his imagination that had just portrayed it in order to satisfy his desire.

How he must have hurt her! Of course he could find valid reasons for his resentment against her, but they would not have been enough to make him feel that resentment if he had not loved her so much. Had he not had grievances of equal gravity against other women, for whom he would nevertheless readily have done favors now, feeling no anger toward them because he no longer loved them? If someday he was ever to find himself in the same state of indifference toward Odette, he would understand that it was his jealousy alone that had made him find something atrocious, unpardonable, in this desire of hers, fundamentally so natural, arising from a touch of childishness and also a certain delicacy in her nature, to be able in her turn, since an occasion presented itself, to repay the civilities of the Verdurins, to play the mistress of the house.

He returned to this point of view—which was opposed to that of his love and his jealousy, and in which he placed himself sometimes through a sort of intellectual equity so as to allow for the various probabilities—from which he tried to judge Odette as if he had never loved her, as if to him she were a woman like any other, as if Odette's life had not been, as soon as he was no longer there, different, contrived in hiding from him, plotted against him.

Why should he believe that there, she would enjoy with Forcheville or with other men intoxicating pleasures which she had never experienced with him and which his jealousy alone had fabricated out of nothing? In Bayreuth as in Paris, if Forcheville

happened to think of him at all, it might be merely as of someone who mattered a great deal in Odette's life, to whom he was obliged to yield his place, when they met at her house. If Forcheville and she gloated over being there despite him, it was he who would be to blame by trying in vain to keep her from going, whereas if he had approved of her plan, which was in fact defensible, she would have appeared to be there on his recommendation, she would feel she had been sent there, housed there by him, and for the pleasure she felt in entertaining those people who had entertained her so often, it was to Swann that she would have been grateful.

And—instead of letting her go off on bad terms with him, without having seen him again—if he sent her this money, if he encouraged her to take this trip and went out of his way to make it pleasant for her, she would come running to him, happy, grateful, and he would have the joy of seeing her, a joy which he had not experienced for almost a week and which nothing could replace. Because as soon as Swann could picture her without horror, as soon as he once again saw kindness in her smile, and as soon as the desire to take her out of reach of all other men was not added by jealousy to his love, that love again became above all a predilection for the sensations that Odette's person gave him, for the pleasure he took in admiring like a spectacle or questioning like a phenomenon the dawn of one of her glances, the evolution of one of her smiles, the emission of an intonation of her voice. And this pleasure, different from all the others, had ended by creating in him a need for her that she alone could satisfy by her presence or her letters, a need almost as disinterested, almost as artistic, as perverse, as another need that characterized this new period in Swann's life, in which the dryness, the depression of earlier years had been succeeded by a sort of spiritual superabundance, without his knowing to what he owed this un hoped-for enrichment of his inner life any more than a person in delicate health who from a certain moment grows stronger, stouter, and seems for a time to be on the road to a complete recovery: that other need which was also developing apart from the real world was the need to hear, and to understand, music.

And so, with the very chemistry of his disease, after he had created jealousy with his love, he began once more to manufacture affection, and pity, for Odette. She had turned back into the Odette who was charming and good. He felt remorse at having been severe toward her. He wanted her to come to him, and, before that, he wanted to procure for her some sort of pleasure, so as to see gratitude mold her face and shape her smile.

And Odette, sure of seeing him come back after a few days, as tender and submissive as before, to ask her for a reconciliation, acquired the habit of no longer being afraid to displease or even to provoke him, and she refused him, when it was convenient for her, the favors he valued most.

Perhaps she did not realize how sincere he had been with her during the quarrel, when he had told her he would not send her any money and would try to hurt her. Perhaps she also did not realize how sincere he was, if not with her, at least with himself, on other occasions when for the sake of the future of their relationship, so as to show Odette he was capable of doing without her, that a break was always possible, he decided to let some time pass without going to see her.

Sometimes this was after several days during which she had not given him any new reason to worry; and since, from the next few visits he would make to her, he knew he would not derive any very great joy but more probably some vexation that would put an end to his present state of calm, he would write to her that since he was very busy he would not be able to see her on any of the days on which he had said he would. Then a letter from her, crossing his, would ask him to change one of those very meetings. He would wonder why; his suspicions, his anguish would take hold of him again. He would no longer be able to abide, in the new state of agitation in which he found himself, by the commitment he had made in his earlier state of relative calm, he would hurry to her house and demand to see her on all the following days. And even if she had not written to him first, if she merely answered, with an acquiescence, his request for a brief separation, this would be enough to make him unable to go on without seeing her. For, contrary to Swann's calculations, Odette's consent had entirely changed his attitude. Like all those who enjoy the possession of a thing, in order to know what would happen if he ceased for a moment to possess it he had removed that thing from his mind, leaving everything else in the same state as when it was there. But the absence of a thing is not merely that, it is not simply a partial lack, it is a disruption of everything else, it is a new state which one cannot foresee in the old.

But there were other occasions—Odette was about to go off on a trip—when, after some little dispute for which he had chosen the pretext, he would resolve not to write to her and not to see her again before she returned, thus giving the appearance, and expecting the reward, of a more serious quarrel, which she would perhaps believe was final, to a separation the greater part of which was unavoidable because of the trip and which he was merely allowing to begin a little earlier. Already he imagined Odette uneasy, distressed at having received neither visit nor letter, and this image, by calming his jealousy, made it easy for him to break himself of the habit of seeing her. No doubt, at times, at the far end of his mind where his resolution had thrust her because of the entire interposed length of the three weeks of separation he had accepted, it was with pleasure that he contemplated the idea of seeing Odette again when she returned; but it was also with so little impatience that he began to ask himself if he would not readily double the duration of an abstinence that was so easy. It had lasted as yet only three days, a period of time much shorter than he had often spent without seeing Odette and without having as now planned it in advance. And yet at this point a slight irritation or physical discomfort—by making him consider the present moment an exceptional one, outside the rules, one in which even common wisdom would agree that he could accept the appeasement afforded by a pleasure and allow his will, until it might be useful to resume the effort, to rest—would suspend the action of the latter, which would cease to exert its pressure; or, less than that, the memory of something he had forgotten to ask Odette, whether she had decided which color she wanted to have her carriage repainted, or, with regard to a certain investment, whether it was common or preferred shares that she wanted to buy (it was all very well to show her that he could live without seeing her, but if, after that, the painting had to be done all over again or the shares paid no dividends, a lot of good it would have done him), and like a stretched piece of elastic that is let go or the air in a pneumatic machine that is opened, the idea of seeing her again, from the far distance where it had been kept, would come back in a single leap into the field of the present and of immediate possibilities.

It came back without encountering any further resistance, in fact so irresistible that Swann had had much less difficulty feeling the approach one by one of the fifteen days he was going to be separated from Odette than he had waiting the ten minutes which his coachman took to harness the carriage that was going to take him to her house and which he spent in transports of impatience and joy as he recaptured a thousand times in order to lavish his tenderness on it that idea of meeting her again which, by so abrupt a return, at a moment when he thought it was so far away, was once again with him in his most intimate consciousness.

For this thought no longer encountered the obstacle of Swann's desire to attempt forthwith to resist it, a desire which had ceased to have any place in Swann's mind since, having proved to himself—at least this was what he believed—that he was so easily capable of it, he no longer saw any disadvantage in deferring an attempt at separation that he was now certain he could put into execution whenever he wished. And, too, this idea of seeing her again returned to him adorned with a novelty, a seductiveness, endowed with a virulence which habit had dulled, but which had been retempered in that privation not of three days but of fifteen (for a period of renunciation must be calculated, by anticipation, as having lasted already until the final date assigned to it), and had converted what had been until then an expected pleasure which could easily be sacrificed into an undreamed-of happiness which he was powerless to resist. Finally, the idea returned to Swann embellished by his ignorance of what Odette might have thought, perhaps done, seeing that he had given her no sign of life, so that what he was now going to find was the impassioning revelation of an Odette almost unknown to him.

But she, just as she had believed that his refusal to send her money was only a sham, saw nothing but a pretext in the information that Swann came to ask of her about the carriage to be repainted or the shares to be purchased. For she could not reconstruct the various phases of these crises through which he was passing and, in the idea she formed of them, she failed to understand the mechanism by which they worked, believing only in what she knew beforehand, in their necessary, infallible, and always identical outcome. An idea that was incomplete—all the more profound, perhaps—if one judged it from the point of view of Swann, who would no doubt have thought he was misunderstood by Odette, just as a morphine addict or a consumptive, persuaded that they have been prevented, one by an outside event just when he was about to free himself of his inveterate habit, the other by an accidental indisposition just when he was about to be restored to health at last, feel misunderstood by the doctor who does not attach the same importance they do to these alleged contingencies, mere disguises according to him, assumed, so as to make themselves perceptible again to his patients, by the vice and the morbid condition which, in reality, have not ceased to burden them incurably while they were feeding their dreams of reformation or recovery. And in fact, Swann's love had reached the stage where the doctor and, in certain affections, even the boldest surgeon, ask themselves if ridding a patient of his vice or relieving him of his disease is still reasonable or even possible.

Certainly, of the extent of this love Swann had no direct awareness. When he tried to measure it, it sometimes seemed to him diminished, reduced to almost nothing; for example, the lack of pleasure, the displeasure, almost, inspired in him, before he loved Odette, by her expressive features, her faded complexion, came back to him on certain days. "Really, I'm making some progress," he would say to himself the next day. "When I think about it carefully, I hardly enjoyed myself at all yesterday when I was in bed with her: it's odd, I actually found her ugly." And of course, he was sincere, but his love extended well beyond the realms of physical desire. Odette's body itself no longer had a large place in it. When his eyes fell upon Odette's photograph on the table, or when she came to see him, he had trouble identifying the figure of flesh or cardboard with the painful and constant disturbance that inhabited him. He would say to himself almost with surprise: "It's she!" as if suddenly someone were to show us in a separate, external form one of our own diseases and we found that it did not resemble what we were suffering. "She"—he tried to ask himself what that was; for one thing love and death have in common, more than those vague resemblances people are always talking about, is that they make us question more deeply, for fear that its reality will slip away from us, the mystery of personality. And this disease which was Swann's love had so proliferated, was so closely entangled with all his habits, with all his actions, with his thoughts, his health, his sleep, his life, even with what he wanted after his death, it was now so much a part of him, that it could not have been torn from him without destroying him almost entirely: as they say in surgery, his love was no longer operable.

By this love Swann had been so far detached from all other interests that, when by chance he reappeared in society telling himself that his connections, like an elegant setting that she would not in fact have been able to appreciate with much accuracy, could restore a little of his value in Odette's eyes (and this would perhaps indeed have been true had these connections not been lowered in value by that love itself, which for Odette depreciated all the things it touched by seeming to proclaim them less precious), what he experienced there, along with the distress of being in places and among people whom she did not know, was the disinterested pleasure he would have taken in a novel or a painting which depicted the amusements of a leisured class, just as, in his own house, he enjoyed contemplating the functioning of his domestic life, the elegance of his wardrobe and livery, the proper placement of his stocks, in the same way that he enjoyed reading in Saint-Simon, who was one of his favorite authors, about the "mechanics" of the daily life, the menus of the dinners of Mme. de Maintenon,<sup>85</sup> or the well-advised avarice and grand style of Lully.<sup>86</sup> And to the small extent that this detachment was not absolute, the reason for this new pleasure that Swann was enjoying was that he could emigrate for a while into the rare parts of himself that had remained almost foreign to his love and to his pain. In this respect the personality which my great-aunt attributed to him, of "young Swann," distinct from his more individual personality of Charles Swann, was the one in which he was now happiest. One day when, for the birthday of the Princess of Parma (and because she could often please Odette indirectly by making it possible for her to have seats at galas, jubilees, and other occasions), he had wanted to send her some fruit and was not sure how to order it, he had entrusted the task to a cousin of his mother's, a lady who, delighted to do an errand for him, had written to him, when sending him the account, that she had not got all the fruit at the same place, but the grapes at Crapote's, whose specialty they were, the strawberries at Jauret's, the pears at Chevet's, where they were the loveliest, etc., "each piece of fruit inspected and examined individually by me." And indeed, from the Princess's thanks, he had been able to judge the flavor of the strawberries and the mellowness of the pears. But more important, that "each piece of fruit inspected and examined individually by me" had soothed his pain, by taking his consciousness away into a region where he rarely went, even though it was his by right as the heir to a rich and solid bourgeois family in which there had been preserved by heredity, quite ready to be put at his service whenever he wished, a knowledge of the "best addresses" and the art of placing a proper order.

Certainly, he had forgotten for too long that he was "young Swann" not to feel, when he became that person again briefly, a keener pleasure than those he could have felt the rest of the time and to which he had grown indifferent; and if the friendliness of the bourgeoisie, for whom he had remained that person more than anything else, was less animated than that of the aristocracy (but in fact more flattering, for with them at least it is always inseparable from respect), a letter from a royal personage, whatever princely entertainment it offered, could never be as pleasant to him as a letter asking him to be a witness, or merely to be present,

at a wedding in the family of old friends of his parents, some of whom had continued to see him—like my grandfather, who, the year before, had invited him to my mother's wedding—while certain others barely knew him personally but believed they were obligated to be polite to the son, to the worthy successor, of the late M. Swann.

But, because of the long-standing close ties he had among them, the nobility, to a certain extent, were also part of his house, his household, and his family. He felt he possessed, when contemplating his distinguished friendships, the same support from outside, the same comfort, as when looking at the fine lands, the fine silverware, the fine table linen, that had come to him from his own people. And the thought that if he were to collapse at home from the effects of a sudden illness it would quite naturally be the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Reuss, the Duc de Luxembourg, and the Baron de Charlus whom his valet would run off to find, brought him the same consolation as to our old Françoise the knowledge that she would be wrapped in a shroud of her own fine sheets, marked, not mended (or so finely that it gave only a loftier idea of the care of the seamstress), a shroud from the frequent image of which in her mind's eye she derived a certain satisfying sense, if not of material well-being, at least of self-respect. But most important, since in every one of his actions and thoughts that referred to Odette, Swann was constantly governed and directed by the unavowed feeling that he was, perhaps not less dear, but less welcome to her than anyone else, than the most boring faithful of the Verdurins—when he returned to a world in which he was the highest example of excellence, whom one would do anything to attract, whom one was sorry not to see, he began to believe again in the existence of a happier life, almost to feel an appetite for it, as an invalid may feel who has been bedridden for months, on a strict diet, and who sees in a newspaper the menu for an official luncheon or an advertisement for a cruise to Sicily.

If he was obliged to give his excuses to the society people for not visiting them, it was precisely for his visits to her that he sought to excuse himself to Odette. He even paid for them (asking himself at the end of the month, supposing he had abused her patience somewhat and gone to see her many times, if it was enough to send her four thousand francs), and for each one found a pretext, a present to bring her, a piece of information she needed, M. de Charlus whom he had met going to her house and who had demanded that he accompany him. And, lacking one, he would ask M. de Charlus if he would please run over to her house, remark to her as though spontaneously, in the course of the conversation, that he remembered he had something to say to Swann, would she kindly send for him to come to her house right away; but most often Swann would wait in vain and M. de Charlus would tell him in the evening that his plan had not succeeded. So that if she was often away from Paris now, even when she stayed there she saw very little of him, and she who, when she was in love with him, used to say: "I'm always free" and "What do I care what others think?" would now, each time he wanted to see her, invoke social conventions or plead other engagements. When he mentioned that he might be going to some charity ball, opening, premiere where she would be, she would tell him that he was trying to flaunt their affair, that he was treating her like a prostitute. It reached such a point that, in order to try not to be debarred from meeting her anywhere, Swann, knowing that she was acquainted with and had considerable affection for my great-uncle Adolphe and having once been a friend of his himself, went to see him one day in his little apartment in the rue de Bellechasse to ask him to use his influence with Odette. Since she always adopted poetical airs when speaking to Swann of my uncle, saying: "Ah, yes, he's not like you, his friendship with me is a lovely thing, so grand, so handsome! He would never think so little of me as to want to show himself with me in every public place," Swann was perplexed and did not know quite how lofty his tone ought to be in talking about her to my uncle. He first posited Odette's a priori excellence, her axiomatic and seraphic superhumanity, the revealed truth of her virtues, which could be neither demonstrated nor derived from experience. "I must talk to you. You know that Odette is a woman superior to all other women, an adorable creature, an angel. But you know what life in Paris is like. Not everyone sees Odette in the same light as you and I. And so there are people who think the role I'm playing is rather ridiculous: she can't even allow me to meet her outside, at the theater. She has such confidence in you—couldn't you say a few words to her for me, assure her that she's exaggerating the harm I would do her by greeting her in public?"

My uncle advised Swann to let a little time go by without seeing Odette, who would only love him all the more for it, and Odette to allow Swann to meet her wherever he liked. A few days later, Odette told Swann she had just had the disappointment of discovering that my uncle was the same as every other man: he had just tried to take her by force. She quieted Swann when at first he wanted to go off and challenge my uncle, but he refused to shake his hand the next time he met him. He especially regretted this quarrel with my uncle Adolphe since he had hoped, had he seen him again from time to time and been able to chat with him in complete confidence, to try to shed some light on certain rumors relating to the life Odette had once led in Nice. For my uncle Adolphe spent his winters there. And Swann thought that perhaps it was even there that he had met Odette. The little that had been let slip by someone in his presence, relating to a man who was said to have been Odette's lover, had greatly disturbed Swann. But the things he would have regarded, before knowing them, as the most frightful to learn and the most impossible to believe, once he knew them were incorporated forever after into his sadness, he accepted them, he would no longer have been able to understand that they did not exist. Only each one indelibly revised the idea he was forming of his mistress. He was even given to understand, at one point, that this laxness in Odette's morals, which he would not have suspected, was fairly well known, and that in Baden and in Nice, when she used to spend a few months there, she had had a degree of amorous notoriety. He sought out certain philanderers in order to question them; but they were aware that he knew Odette; and besides, he was afraid of reminding them of her, of putting them on her track. But he to whom before then nothing could have appeared as tedious as anything relating to the cosmopolitan life of Baden or Nice, learning that Odette had perhaps led a rather riotous life in those pleasure towns, though he could never manage to find out if it had been only to satisfy a need for money which thanks to him she no longer had, or from some capricious desire which might return, now leaned with an impotent, blind, and dizzying anguish over the bottomless abyss that had swallowed up those early years of the Septennate<sup>87</sup> during which one spent winters on the Promenade des Anglais, summers under the lime trees of Baden, and in them he saw a painful but magnificent profundity such as a poet might have lent them; and he would have devoted to the reconstruction of the petty events of the chronicle of the Côte d'Azur of that time, if that chronicle could have helped him understand something of Odette's smile or the look in her eyes—honest and simple though they were—more passion than an aesthete examining the extant documents of fifteenth-century Florence in order to try to penetrate further into the soul of Botticelli's Primavera, bella Vanna, or Venus.<sup>88</sup> Often, without saying anything to her, he would gaze at her, he would daydream; she would say to him: "How sad you look!" It was not as yet very long since he had moved on from the idea that she was a good person, comparable to the best he had ever known, to the idea that



she was a kept woman; inversely he had sometimes since then returned from Odette de Crécy, perhaps too well known among the fast crowd, among ladies' men, to this face whose expression was at times so gentle, to this nature so human. He would say to himself: "What does it matter that at Nice everyone knows Odette de Crécy? Reputations of this sort, even if true, are created out of other people's ideas"; he would reflect that this legend—even if it was authentic—lay outside Odette, was not inside her like an irreducible and baneful personality; that the creature who might have been led to do wrong was a woman with kind eyes, a heart full of pity for suffering, a submissive body which he had held, which he had clasped in his arms and handled, a woman whom one day he might come to possess entirely, if he succeeded in making himself indispensable to her. She was there, often tired, her face emptied for a moment of that feverish, joyful preoccupation with the unknown things that made Swann suffer; she would push back her hair with her hands; her forehead, her face would appear broader; then, suddenly, some ordinary human thought, some good feeling such as may be found in all individuals when in a moment of rest or reclusion they are left to themselves, would spring from her eyes like a beam of yellow sunlight. And immediately her whole face would brighten like a gray countryside covered with clouds which suddenly part, transfiguring it, at the moment the sun goes down. The life that was in Odette at that moment, even the future she seemed so dreamily to be watching, Swann could have shared with her; no evil disturbance seemed to have left its residue there. Rare though they became, these moments were not entirely useless. In memory Swann joined these fragments together, eliminated the intervals, cast, as though in gold, an Odette formed of goodness and calm for whom (as will be seen in the second part of this story) he later made sacrifices which the other Odette would never have won from him. But these moments were so rare, and he saw her so little now! Even in regard to their evening meeting, she would tell him only at the last minute if she could grant it to him, for, since she could count on his always being free, she first wanted to be certain that no one else would suggest coming around. She would maintain that she had to wait for an answer of the greatest importance, and if after she had sent for Swann friends asked her, when the evening had already begun, to meet them at the theater or at supper, she would give a joyful leap into the air and dress quickly. As she progressed in her preparations, each movement she made would bring Swann closer to the moment when he would have to leave her, when she would fly off with an irresistible force; and when ready at last, plunging into her mirror a final glance strained and brightened by attention, she put a little more red on her lips, settled a lock of hair on her forehead, and asked for her sky-blue evening cloak with gold tassels, Swann looked so sad that she could not suppress a gesture of impatience and said: "So that's how you thank me for letting you stay here till the last minute. And I thought I was being nice. I'll know better next time!" Now and then, at the risk of angering her, he would promise himself to try to find out where she had gone, he would dream of an alliance with Forcheville, who would perhaps have been able to enlighten him. In any case, when he knew who it was she had spent the evening with, it was very seldom that he could not discover among all his own acquaintance someone who knew, if only indirectly, the man with whom she had gone out and could easily obtain this or that piece of information about him. And while he was writing to one of his friends to ask him to try to clear up some point or other, he would feel how restless it was to stop asking himself his unanswerable questions and to transfer to someone else the fatigue of interrogation. True, Swann was scarcely better off when he had certain information. Knowing a thing does not always allow us to prevent it, but at least the things we know, we hold, if not in our hands, at any rate in our minds, where we can arrange them as we like, which gives us the illusion of a sort of power over them. He was happy each time M. de Charlus was with Odette. Between M. de Charlus and her, Swann knew that nothing could happen, that when M. de Charlus went out with her it was for the sake of his friendship with Swann and he would have no reluctance about telling him what she had done. Sometimes she had declared so categorically to Swann that it was impossible for her to see him on a certain evening, she seemed so keen on going out, that Swann attached real importance to M. de Charlus's being free to go with her. The next day, though he did not dare ask many questions of M. de Charlus, he would compel him, by appearing not quite to understand his first answers, to give him further answers, after each of which he would feel more relieved, because he very soon learned that Odette had occupied her evening with the most innocent of pleasures. "But what do you mean, my dear Mémé? I don't quite understand . . . You didn't go straight from her house to the Musée Grévin? You had gone somewhere else first. No? Oh! How funny! You don't know how much you amuse me, my dear Mémé. But what a funny idea of hers to go on to the Chat Noir afterward, that's certainly her sort of idea . . . No? It was you? How strange. But in fact it's not such a bad idea; she must have known a good many people there? No? She spoke to no one? That's extraordinary. So you stayed there like that just the two of you all by yourselves? I can just picture it. You are kind, my dear Mémé, I'm very fond of you." Swann felt relieved. For him, to whom it had occasionally happened, when chatting casually with people to whom he was barely listening, that he sometimes heard certain remarks (as, for example: "I saw Mme. de Crécy yesterday; she was with a gentleman I don't know"), remarks which, as soon as they entered Swann's heart, solidified, hardened like an encrustation, cut into him, never moved from there again, how sweet by contrast were these words: "She knew no one, she spoke to no one," how they circulated comfortably in him, how fluid they were, easy, breathable! And yet after a moment he would say to himself that Odette must find him quite tiresome if these were the pleasures she preferred to his company. And their insignificance, though it reassured him, nevertheless pained him like a betrayal.

Even when he could not find out where she had gone, it would have been enough to soothe the anguish which he felt at these times, and for which Odette's presence, the sweetness of being close to her was the only specific (a specific that in the long run aggravated the disease, like many remedies, but at least momentarily soothed his pain), it would have been enough for him, if only Odette had permitted it, to remain in her house while she was out, to wait for her there until the hour of her return, into whose stillness and appeasement would have flowed and melted the hours which some magical illusion, some evil spell had made him believe were different from the rest. But she did not want this; he returned home; he forced himself, on the way, to make various plans, he stopped thinking about Odette; he even succeeded, while he was undressing, in turning over some fairly cheerful thoughts in his mind; and it was with a light heart, full of the hope of going to see some great painting the next day, that he got into bed and put out his light; but, no sooner, as he prepared to go to sleep, did he cease to exert upon himself a constraint of which he was not even aware because it was by now so habitual, than at that very instant an icy shiver would run through him and he would begin to sob. He did not even want to know why, dried his eyes, said to himself with a smile: "Delightful—I'm turning into a real neurotic." Then he could not think without a feeling of great weariness that the next day he would again have to begin trying to find out what Odette had been doing, use all his influence to attempt to see her. This compulsion to an activity

without respite, without variety, without results was so cruel to him that one day, seeing a lump on his abdomen, he felt real joy at the thought that he might have a fatal tumor, that he was no longer going to have to take charge of anything, that it was the disease that would manage him, make him its plaything, until the impending end. And indeed if, during this period, he often desired death though without admitting it to himself, it was to escape not so much the acuteness of his sufferings as the monotony of his struggle.

And yet he would have liked to live on until the time came when he no longer loved her, when she would have no reason to lie to him and he could at last learn from her if, on the day when he had gone to see her in the afternoon, she was or was not in bed with Forcheville. Often for several days, the suspicion that she loved someone else would distract him from that question about Forcheville, would make it a matter almost of indifference to him, like those new developments in a continuing state of ill health which seem momentarily to have delivered us from the preceding ones. There were even days when he was not tormented by any suspicion. He thought he was cured. But the next morning, when he woke up, he felt in the same place the same pain, the sensation of which, in the course of the preceding day, he had diluted in a flood of different impressions. But it had not moved from its place. And in fact, it was the sharpness of this pain that had woken Swann.

Since Odette never gave him any information about these very important things which occupied her so fully each day (although he had lived long enough to know that these things are never anything else but pleasures), he could not try to imagine them for very long at a time, his brain was working with nothing in it; then he would pass his finger over his tired eyelids as he would have wiped the glass of his lorgnon, and stop thinking altogether. Yet floating up from that great unknown were certain occupations which reappeared from time to time, vaguely connected by her with some obligation toward distant relatives or friends from an earlier time, who, because they were the only ones she regularly mentioned to him as preventing her from seeing him, seemed to Swann to form the stable, necessary framework of Odette's life. Because of the tone in which she referred from time to time to "the day I go to the Hippodrome with my friend," if, having felt ill and thought: "Perhaps Odette would be kind enough to come round to the house," he recalled abruptly that this was in fact that very day, he would say to himself: "Oh no! It's not worth the trouble of asking her to come, I should have thought of it earlier, this is the day she goes to the Hippodrome with her friend. We must confine ourselves to what's possible; it's pointless wearing oneself out proposing things that are unacceptable and have already been refused in advance." And the duty incumbent upon Odette of going to the Hippodrome, to which Swann thus yielded, did not appear to him merely unavoidable; but the mark of necessity with which it was stamped seemed to make plausible and legitimate everything that was closely or distantly related to it. If, after a man passing in the street had greeted Odette and aroused Swann's jealousy, she answered his questions by associating the stranger with one of the two or three paramount duties of which she had spoken to him, if, for example, she said: "That was a gentleman who was in the box of the friend with whom I go to the Hippodrome," this explanation would calm Swann's suspicions, since he did indeed find it inevitable that the friend would have other guests besides Odette in her box at the Hippodrome, but had never tried or managed to picture them. Ah! how he would have liked to know her, the friend who went to the Hippodrome, and how he would have liked her to take him there with Odette! How gladly he would have given up all his connections in exchange for any person Odette was in the habit of seeing, even a manicurist or a shop assistant! He would have gone to more trouble for that person than for a queen. Wouldn't she have given him, with what she contained of Odette's life, the only effective calumet for his pain? How happily he would have hurried to spend the days at the home of one of those humble people with whom Odette kept up friendly relations out of either self-interest or true simplicity! How willingly he would have taken up residence forever on the fifth floor of a certain sordid and coveted house to which Odette did not take him and in which, if he had lived there with the little retired dressmaker whose lover he would willingly have pretended to be, he would have had a visit from her almost every day! In these almost working-class neighborhoods, what a modest life, abject, but sweet, nourished with calm and happiness, he would have agreed to live indefinitely!

It also sometimes happened that when, after meeting Swann, she saw some man approaching her whom he did not know, he could observe on Odette's face the sadness she had shown the day he had come to see her while Forcheville was there. But this was rare; for on the days when, despite everything she had to do and her fear of what other people would think, she managed to see Swann, what now predominated in her attitude was self-assurance: a great contrast, perhaps an unconscious revenge or a natural reaction to the timorous emotion which, in the early days when she had known him, she had felt with him, and even far away from him, when she would begin a letter with these words: "My dear, my hand is shaking so hard I can scarcely write" (at least so she claimed, and a little of that emotion must have been sincere for her to want to feign more of it). She liked Swann then. We do not tremble except for ourselves, except for those we love. When our happiness is no longer in their hands, what calm, what ease, what boldness we enjoy in their company! When speaking to him, when writing to him, she no longer used any of those words with which she had sought to give herself the illusion that he belonged to her, creating occasions for saying "my," "mine," when she referred to him—"You are my property, this is the fragrance of our friendship, I'm keeping it"—and for talking to him about the future, about death even, as a single thing that would be shared by the two of them. In those days, to everything he said, she would answer admiringly: "You—you will never be like anyone else"; she would look at his long face, his slightly bald head, about which the people who knew of Swann's successes with women would think: "He's not conventionally handsome, granted, but he is smart: that quiff of hair, that monocle, that smile!" and, perhaps with more curiosity to know what he was than desire to become his mistress, she would say: "If only I could know what is in that head!"

Now, to all of Swann's remarks she would reply in a tone that was at times irritated, at times indulgent: "Oh, you really never will be like anyone else!" She would look at that head, which was only a little more aged by worry (but about which now everyone thought, with that same aptitude which enables you to discover the intentions of a symphonic piece when you have read the program, and the resemblances of a child when you know its parents: "He's not positively ugly, granted, but he is absurd; that monocle, that quiff of hair, that smile!" creating in their suggestible imaginations the immaterial demarcation that separates by several months' distance the head of an adored lover from that of a cuckold), she would say: "Oh, if only I could change what's in that head, if only I could make it reasonable."

Always prepared to believe what he hoped for, if Odette's behavior toward him left any room at all for doubt, he would fling himself avidly on her words:

"You can if you want to," he would say to her.

And he would try to show her that to soothe him, direct him, make him work, would be a noble task to which many other women might ask nothing better than to devote themselves, though it would only be fair to add that in their hands the noble task would have appeared to him merely an indiscreet and intolerable usurpation of his freedom. "If she did not love me a little," he would say to himself, "she would not want to transform me. In order to transform me, she will have to see more of me." Thus he regarded this reproach of hers as a sort of proof of interest, of love perhaps; and indeed, she now gave him so few that he was obliged to regard as such the various prohibitions she imposed on him. One day, she declared that she did not like his coachman, that he was perhaps turning Swann against her, that in any case he did not show the punctuality and the deference to Swann that she wanted. She felt that Swann wanted to hear her say: "Don't use him anymore when you come to see me," as he would have wanted a kiss. Since she was in a good mood, she said it; he was touched. That evening, chatting with M. de Charlus, with whom he had the comfort of being able to talk about her openly (for the least bit of conversation he had, even with people who did not know her, always somehow related to her), he said to him: "Yet I believe she loves me; she is so kind to me, what I do is certainly not a matter of indifference to her." And if, when he was setting off for her house, getting into his carriage with a friend whom he was to drop along the way, the friend said: "Why, that's not Lorédan on the box," with what melancholy joy Swann would answer him: "Oh Lord no! I tell you I can't use Lorédan when I go to the rue La Pérouse. Odette doesn't like me to use Lorédan, she doesn't think he suits me. Well, what do you expect! Women, you know, women! I tell you she wouldn't like it at all. Oh, Lord, yes; if I'd used Rémi, there'd be no end of trouble!"

This new manner, indifferent, distracted, irritable, which was now Odette's manner with him, certainly caused Swann to suffer; but he was not aware of his suffering; since it was only gradually, day by day, that Odette had cooled toward him, it was only by comparing what she was now to what she had been in the beginning that he would have been able to fathom the depth of the change that had taken place. Yet that change was his deep, his secret wound which hurt him day and night, and as soon as he felt that his thoughts were straying a little too close to it, he would quickly guide them in another direction for fear of suffering too much. He would certainly say to himself in an abstract way: "There was a time when Odette loved me more," but he would never look back at that time. Just as there was a bureau in his office which he took pains not to look at, which he made a detour to avoid as he came and went, because in one of its drawers he had locked away the chrysanthemum she had given him that first evening on which he had driven her home, and the letters in which she had said: "If you had forgotten your heart here too, I would not have let you take it back," and "At whatever hour of the day or night you need me, send word and my life will be yours to command," so too there was a place inside him which he never let his thoughts approach, forcing them if necessary to make the detour of a lengthy argument so that they would not have to pass in front of it: this was the place where his memory of the happy days resided.

But his meticulous prudence was foiled one evening when he had gone out into society, to a party.

It was at the home of the Marquise de Saint-Euverte, on the last, for that year, of the evenings on which she invited people to hear the musicians whom she would afterward use for her charity concerts. Swann, who had wanted to go to each of the preceding evenings in turn and had not been able to resolve to do so, had received, while he was dressing for this one, a visit from the Baron de Charlus, who was coming with an offer to return with him to the home of the Marquise, if his company would help him to be a little less bored there, a little less sad. But Swann had answered:

"You can't doubt how much pleasure I would take in being with you. But the greatest pleasure you could give me would be to go to see Odette instead. You know what an excellent influence you have on her. I believe she's not going out this evening before she goes to see her old dressmaker, and I'm sure she'd be delighted to have you accompany her there. In any case you'll find her at home before that. Try to amuse her and also to talk some sense to her. If you could arrange something for tomorrow that she enjoys and that we could all three do together . . . Also, try to begin planning for this summer, see if there's something she might want to do, a cruise we might all three take, I don't know. I'm not counting on seeing her tonight myself; still, if she wanted to see me or if you were to find a way, you would only need to send me word at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's up to midnight, and afterward at home. Thank you for all that you do for me—you know how fond I am of you."

The Baron promised to go and pay the visit that Swann wanted after he had driven him to the door of the Saint-Euverte house, where Swann arrived soothed by the thought that M. de Charlus would be spending the evening in the rue La Pérouse, but in a state of melancholy indifference to everything that did not concern Odette, and in particular to the accoutrements of fashionable life, which gave them the charm that is to be found in anything which, being no longer an object of our desire, appears to us in its own guise. As soon as he descended from the carriage, in the foreground of that fictitious summary of their domestic life which hostesses like to offer their guests on ceremonial occasions and in which they seek to respect accuracy of costume and setting, Swann enjoyed the sight of those descendants of Balzac's "tigers,"<sup>89</sup> the grooms, who normally followed along on the daily outing, now hatted and booted and posted outside in front of the house on the soil of the avenue, or in front of the stables, like gardeners lined up at the entrances to their flower beds. The particular tendency he had always had to look for analogies between living people and portraits in museums was still active but in a more constant and general way; it was society as a whole, now that he was detached from it, which presented itself to him as a series of pictures. In the hall which in the old days, when he went out regularly into society, he would walk into wrapped in his overcoat and leave in his tails, but without knowing what had happened there, his mind having been, during the few moments he had stayed there, either still at the party he had just left, or already at the party he was about to be shown into, for the first time he noticed, woken by the unexpected arrival of the late guest, the scattered pack of magnificent, tall, idle footmen sleeping here and there on benches and chests who, raising their sharp, noble, greyhound profiles, stood up and gathered in a circle around him.

One of them, of a particularly ferocious aspect and rather like the executioner in certain Renaissance paintings which depicts scenes of torture, advanced upon him with an implacable air to take his things. But the hardness of his steely gaze was compensated by the softness of his cotton gloves, so that as he approached Swann he seemed to be showing contempt for his person and consideration for his hat. He took it with a care to which the exactness of his balance gave something meticulous, and with a delicacy rendered almost touching by the evidence of his strength. He then passed it to one of his assistants, new and

timid, who expressed the terror he felt by casting wild glances in all directions and displayed the agitation of a captive animal in the first hours of its domestication.

A few steps away, a sturdy fellow in livery mused motionless, statuesque, useless, like the purely decorative warrior one sees in the most tumultuous paintings by Mantegna,<sup>90</sup> lost in thought, leaning on his shield, while others beside him rush forward and slaughter one another; detached from his group of companions as they pressed around Swann, he seemed as resolved to take no part in this scene, which he followed vaguely with his cruel sea-green eyes, as if it were the Massacre of the Innocents or the Martyrdom of Saint John. He seemed in fact to belong to that race which has vanished—or which perhaps never existed except in the altarpiece of San Zeno and the frescoes of the Eremítani, where Swann had encountered it and where it dreams on still—and which issued from the impregnation of an ancient statue by one of the Master's Paduan models or some Albrecht Dürer Saxon.<sup>91</sup> And the locks of his red hair, crimped by nature but glued by brilliantine, were treated broadly as they are in the Greek sculpture which the painter from Mantua studied so constantly and which, if out of all creation it depicts only man, is at least able to derive from his simple forms richnesses so varied, as though borrowed from all of living nature, that a head of hair, in the smooth rolls and sharp beaks of its curls, or in the superimposition of the threefold flowering diadem of its tresses, looks at once like a bundle of seaweed, a nestful of doves, a band of hyacinths, and a coil of snakes.

Still others, also colossal, stood on the steps of a monumental staircase to which their decorative presence and marmoreal immobility might have induced one to give the same name as the one in the Ducal Palace—"Staircase of the Giants"—and which Swann began to climb with the sad thought that Odette had never ascended it. Oh, with what joy by contrast would he have gone up the dark, evil-smelling, and rickety flights to the little retired dressmaker's, in whose "fifth floor" he would have been so happy to pay more than the price of a weekly stage box at the Opéra for the right to spend the evening when Odette came there, and even on the other days, so as to be able to talk about her, to live among the people she was in the habit of seeing when he was not there and who because of that seemed to him to harbor something, of his mistress's life, that was more real, more inaccessible, and more mysterious. Whereas in the old dressmaker's pestilential and longed-for staircase, since there was no second, service stair, one saw in the evening in front of each door an empty, dirty milk can set out in readiness on the mat, on the magnificent and disdained staircase which Swann was mounting at that moment, on either side, at different levels, in front of each anfractuosity formed in the wall by the window of the lodge or the entrance to a set of rooms, representing the domestic service which they directed and paying homage to the guests on their behalf, a concierge, a majordomo, a steward (good people who lived the rest of the week somewhat independent in their domains, dined there at home like small shopkeepers, and by tomorrow would perhaps be in the bourgeois service of a doctor or manufacturer), heedful not to fail to carry out the instructions they had been given before being allowed to put on the dazzling livery which they wore only at rare intervals and in which they did not feel very much at ease, stood under the arcature of their portals with a stately glitter tempered by common good nature, like saints in their niches, and an enormous usher, dressed as though he were in church, struck the flagstones with his staff as each new arrival passed. Having reached the top of the staircase up the length of which he had been followed by a wan-faced servant with a little bunch of hair tied in a cadogan<sup>92</sup> at the back of his head, like a Goya<sup>93</sup> sexton or a scrivener in an old play, Swann passed in front of a desk where valets, seated like notaries in front of great registers, stood up and inscribed his name. He then crossed a little vestibule which—like certain rooms arranged by their owners to serve as the setting for a single work of art, from which they take their name and, deliberately bare, contain nothing else—displayed at its entrance, like some precious effigy by Benvenuto Cellini<sup>94</sup> representing a watchman, a young footman, his body bent slightly forward, lifting from his red gorget a face even redder from which burst forth torrents of fire, timidity, and zeal, and who, piercing with his impetuous, vigilant, distracted gaze the Aubusson tapestries hung before the drawing room where people were listening to music, appeared, with a military impassivity or a supernatural faith—an allegory of alarm, an incarnation of alertness, a commemoration of the call to arms—to be watching, angel or sentinel, from the tower of a castle or cathedral, for the appearance of the enemy or the hour of Judgment. Now Swann had only to enter the concert room, whose doors an usher loaded with chains was opening for him with a bow, as he would have handed over to him the keys to a city. But he thought of the house in which he might have been at this very moment, if Odette had permitted it, and the memory he glimpsed of an empty milk can on a doormat wrung his heart.

Swann rapidly recovered his sense of how ugly men could be, when, beyond the tapestry hangings, the spectacle of the servants was followed by that of the guests. But even the ugliness of these faces, though he knew it so well, seemed new to him since their features—instead of being signs usable in a practical way for the identification of a certain person who had until then represented a cluster of pleasures to pursue, worries to avoid, or courtesies to pay—now remained coordinated only by aesthetic relations, within the autonomy of their lines. And of these men in whose midst Swann found himself hemmed in, even the monocles which many wore (and which, formerly, would at the very most have allowed Swann to say that they wore a monocle), having now been released from signifying a habit, the same for everyone, appeared to him each with a sort of individuality. Maybe because he did not regard Général de Froberville and the Marquis de Bréauté, who were talking to each other just inside the door, as more than two figures in a painting, whereas for a long time they had been useful friends who had introduced him to the Jockey Club and supported him in duels, the general's monocle, stuck between his eyelids like a shell splinter in his vulgar, scarred, overbearing face, in the middle of a forehead which it blinded like the Cyclops' single eye, appeared to Swann like a monstrous wound that might have been glorious to receive, but was indecent to show off; whereas the one that M. de Bréauté added, as a badge of festivity, to the pearl-gray gloves, the opera hat, and the white tie, and substituted for the familiar lorgnette (as Swann himself did) for going out in society, bore, glued to its other side, like a natural history specimen under a microscope, an infinitesimal gaze teeming with friendliness that smiled constantly at the loftiness of the ceilings, the beauty of the preparations, the interest of the programs, and the excellence of the refreshments.

"Well now, here you are! Why, it's been an eternity since we last saw you," said the general to Swann and, noticing his drawn features and concluding from this that it was perhaps a grave illness that had kept him away from society, he added: "You look quite well, you know!" while M. de Bréauté asked: "My dear, what in the world are you doing here?" of a society novelist who had just positioned in the corner of his eye a monocle which was his only organ of psychological investigation and pitiless analysis and who answered with an air of mystery and self-importance, rolling the *r*:

"I am observing!"

The Marquis de Forestelle's monocle was minuscule, had no border, and, requiring a constant painful clenching of the eye, where it was encrusted like a superfluous cartilage whose presence was inexplicable and whose material was exquisite, gave the Marquis's face a melancholy delicacy, and made women think he was capable of great sorrows in love. But that of M. de Saint-Candé, surrounded by a gigantic ring, like Saturn, was the center of gravity of a face which regulated itself at each moment in relation to it, a face whose quivering red nose and thick-lipped sarcastic mouth attempted by their grimaces to equal the unceasing salvos of wit sparkling from the disk of glass, and saw itself preferred to the handsomest eyes in the world by snobbish and depraved young women in whom it inspired dreams of artificial charms and a refinement of voluptuousness; and meanwhile, behind his own, M. de Palancy, who, with his big, round-eyed carp's head, moved about slowly in the midst of the festivities unclenching his mandibles from moment to moment as though seeking to orient himself, merely seemed to be transporting with him an accidental and perhaps purely symbolic fragment of the glass of his aquarium, a part intended to represent the whole, reminding Swann, a great admirer of Giotto's *Vices* and *Virtues* at Padua, of Injustice, next to whom a leafy bough evokes the forests in which his lair is hidden.

Swann had walked on into the room, at the insistence of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, and, in order to hear a melody from *Orphée*<sup>95</sup> that was being performed by a flautist, had placed himself in a corner where unfortunately his only view was of two mature ladies seated next to each other, the Marquise de Cambremer and the Vicomtesse de Franquetot, who, because they were cousins, spent their time when attending a party, clutching their bags and followed by their daughters, looking for each other as though in a railway station, and did not rest easy until they had reserved, with a fan or a handkerchief, two seats side by side: Mme. de Cambremer, since she had very few acquaintances, being all the happier to have a companion, Mme. de Franquetot, who was in contrast extremely well connected, believing there was something elegant, something original, about showing all her fine friends that she preferred, to their company, an obscure lady with whom she shared memories of her youth. Full of a melancholy irony, Swann watched them listen to the piano intermezzo (*Saint Francis Speaking to the Birds* by Liszt)<sup>96</sup> which had come after the flute melody, and follow the vertiginous playing of the virtuoso, Mme. de Franquetot anxiously, her eyes wild as if the keys over which he ran with such agility were a series of trapezes from which he might fall from a height of eighty yards, and at the same time casting at her neighbor looks of astonishment, of denial which signified: "This is not to be believed, I would never have thought a man could do this," while Mme. de Cambremer, being a woman who had received a strong musical education, marked time with her head transformed into the arm of a metronome whose amplitude and rapidity of oscillations from one shoulder to the other had become such (with that sort of frenzy and abandon in the eyes characteristic of a kind of suffering which is no longer aware of itself nor tries to control itself and says "I can't help it!") that she kept snagging her solitaires in the straps of her bodice and was obliged to straighten the black grapes she had in her hair, though without ceasing to accelerate her motion. On the other side of Mme. de Franquetot, but a little in front, was the Marquise de Gallardon, occupied with her favorite thought, her alliance with the Guermantes, which in the eyes of the world and in her own was the source of a good deal of glory along with some shame, the most brilliant of them keeping her a bit at a distance, perhaps because she was tiresome, or because she was spiteful, or because she was from an inferior branch, or perhaps for no reason. When she found herself next to someone she did not know, as at this moment Mme. de Franquetot, it would pain her that her own awareness of her kinship with the Guermantes could not be manifested outwardly in visible characters like those which, in the mosaics of the Byzantine churches, placed one below another, inscribe in a vertical column, next to a holy personage, the words he is supposed to be uttering. At this moment she was pondering the fact that she had never received an invitation or a visit from her young cousin the Princesse des Laumes, in the six years the Princesse had been married. This thought filled her with anger, but also with pride; for, by dint of saying to people who were surprised not to see her at the home of Mme. des Laumes, that it was because she would have risked meeting Princesse Mathilde<sup>97</sup> there—for which her ultra-Legitimist<sup>98</sup> family would never have forgiven her—she had ended by believing this actually was the reason she did not go to her young cousin's house. Yet she recalled having asked Mme. des Laumes several times how she might contrive to meet her, but recalled it only confusedly and also more than neutralized this slightly humiliating memory by murmuring: "After all it's not up to me to make the first move, I'm twenty years older than she." Fortified by the efficacy of these unspoken words, she proudly threw back her shoulders, which seemed detached from her bust and on which her head was positioned almost horizontally so that one was reminded of the "restored" head of a haughty pheasant brought to the table in all its feathers. It was not so much that she was not stocky, mannish, and plump by nature; but the insults she had received had straightened her up like those trees which, born in a bad position at the brink of a precipice, are forced to grow backward to keep their balance. Obligated as she was, in order to console herself for not being altogether the equal of the other Guermantes, to keep telling herself that it was because of the intransigence of her principles and her pride that she did not see them very often, this thought had ended by shaping her body and by giving her an imposing sort of presence that passed in the eyes of bourgeois women for a sign of breeding and sometimes disturbed with a fleeting desire the clubmen's weary glances. If Mme. de Gallardon's conversation had been subjected to those analyses which, by recording the greater or lesser frequency of each word, permit one to discover the key to a language in code, one would have realized that no expression, even the most ordinary, recurred in it as often as "at the home of my cousins the Guermantes," "at the home of my aunt de Guermantes," "the health of Elzéar de Guermantes," "my cousin de Guermantes's baignoire."<sup>99</sup> When anyone spoke to her about a famous personage, she would answer that without knowing him personally she had met him a thousand times at the home of her aunt de Guermantes, but she would answer this in a tone so icy and in a voice so low that it was clear that, if she did not know him personally, it was by virtue of all the ineradicable and stubborn principles which her shoulders touched behind her, like those ladders on which gymnastics instructors make you stretch out in order to develop your chest.

Now as it happened, the Princesse des Laumes, whom one would not have expected to see at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, had just arrived. In order to show that she was not trying to advertise, in a drawing room to which she had come only out of condescension, the superiority of her rank, she had entered with her shoulders turned sideways even where there was no crowd to cleave through and no person attempting to get past her, staying deliberately at the back, with the air of being in her proper place, like a king who stands in line at the door of a theater so long as the management has not been informed that he is there; and, merely confining her gaze—so as not to seem to be signaling her presence and demanding attention—to a consideration of the design in the carpet or in her own skirt, she stood in the spot that had seemed to her the most modest (and from which she



was well aware she would be drawn by a delighted exclamation from Mme. de Saint-Euverte as soon as the latter noticed her), next to Mme. de Cambremer, whom she did not know. She observed the pantomime of her music-loving neighbor, but did not imitate it. It was not that, the one time she came to spend five minutes at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, the Princesse des Laumes would not have wished, so that the courtesy she was showing her might count double, to prove as friendly as possible. But by nature, she had a horror of what she called "exaggerations" and was anxious to show that she "did not have to" indulge in displays of emotion which were not in keeping with the "style" of the circle she moved in, but which still, on the other hand, could not help but impress her, by virtue of that spirit of imitation akin to timidity which is developed in the most confident persons by the atmosphere of a new environment, even if it is an inferior one. She began to wonder if this gesticulation was not perhaps a necessary response to the piece being played, which did not come quite within the scope of the music she had heard up to now, if to refrain was not to give proof of incomprehension with respect to the work and impropriety toward the lady of the house: so that, in order to express both of her contradictory inclinations by a compromise, she first merely straightened up her shoulder straps or put a hand to her blond hair to secure the little balls of diamond-flecked coral or pink enamel which formed her simple and charming coiffure, while at the same time examining her ardent neighbor with cold curiosity, then with her fan she beat time for a moment, but, so as not to forfeit her independence, on the offbeat. When the pianist ended the piece by Liszt and began a prelude by Chopin, Mme. de Cambremer gave Mme. de Franquetot a tender smile full of knowledgeable satisfaction and allusion to the past. When she was young she had learned to caress the phrases of Chopin with their sinuous and excessively long necks, so free, so flexible, so tactile, which begin by seeking out and exploring a place for themselves far outside and away from the direction in which they started, far beyond the point which one might have expected them to reach, and which frolic in this fantasy distance only to come back more deliberately—with a more premeditated return, with more precision, as though upon a crystal glass that resonates until you cry out—to strike you in the heart.

Living in a provincial family that had few friends, scarcely ever going out to a ball, she had intoxicated herself in the solitude of her manor house, with all those imaginary dancing couples, now slowing them, now speeding them, now scattering them like flowers, now leaving the ball for a moment to hear the wind blow in the pine trees, at the edge of the lake, and suddenly seeing, as he came toward her there, more unlike anything anyone had ever dreamed of than an earthly lover could be, a slender young man in white gloves whose voice had a strange, false lilt to it. But nowadays the old-fashioned beauty of that music seemed stale. Having fallen in the esteem of the discriminating public over the past several years, it had lost its position of distinction and its charm, and even those whose taste is bad no longer took more than an unacknowledged and moderate pleasure in it. Mme. de Cambremer cast a furtive glance behind her. She was aware that her young daughter-in-law (full of respect for her new family, except regarding the things of the mind about which, since she knew a little harmony and even some Greek, she was especially enlightened) despised Chopin and suffered when she heard it played. But far away from the surveillance of that Wagnerian who was off in the distance with a group of people her own age, Mme. de Cambremer abandoned herself to her delightful impressions. The Princesse des Laumes was enjoying them too. Though without a natural gift for music, she had had lessons fifteen years earlier from a piano teacher of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a woman of genius who at the end of her life had been reduced to poverty and had returned, at the age of seventy, to giving piano lessons, to the daughters and granddaughters of her old pupils. She was dead now. But her method, her lovely sound, came back to life sometimes under the fingers of her pupils, even those who had become in other respects ordinary people, had abandoned music, and almost never opened a piano anymore. And so Mme. des Laumes could shake her head, with expert knowledge, with a just appreciation of the way the pianist was playing this prelude, which she knew by heart. The end of the phrase he had begun already sang on her lips. And she murmured, "It's always *charming*," with a double *ch* at the start of the word which was a mark of refinement and which, she felt, pursed her lips so romantically, like a beautiful flower, that she instinctively brought her eyes into harmony with them by giving them an expression just then of sentimentality and vague yearning. Meanwhile, Mme. de Gallardon was saying to herself how annoying it was that she only very rarely had the opportunity to meet the Princesse des Laumes, for she wanted to teach her a lesson by not responding to her greeting. She did not know her cousin was there. A movement of Mme. de Franquetot's head revealed the Princesse to her. Immediately she hurried toward her, disturbing everyone; but though she wanted to preserve a haughty and glacial manner which would remind everyone that she did not wish to be on friendly terms with a person in whose house one might find oneself coming face-to-face with Princesse Mathilde, and to whom it was not for her to make advances since she was not "of her generation," still she wanted to offset this air of haughtiness and reserve by some remark that would justify her overture and force the Princesse to engage in conversation; and so when she came near her cousin, Mme. de Gallardon, with a hard expression and a hand outthrust like a "forced" card, said to her: "How is your husband?" in the concerned tone she would have used if the Prince had been gravely ill. The Princesse, bursting into a laugh which was peculiar to her and which was intended at once to show others that she was making fun of someone and also to make herself look prettier by concentrating her features around her animated lips and sparkling eyes, answered:

"Why, he's never been better!"

And she laughed again. Whereupon Mme. de Gallardon, drawing herself up and contriving an even chillier expression, yet still concerned about the Prince's condition, said to her cousin:

"Oriane" (here Mme. des Laumes looked with an air of surprise and merriment at an invisible third party in whose presence she seemed anxious to attest that she had never authorized Mme. de Gallardon to call her by her first name), "I would be so pleased if you could stop in at my house for a moment tomorrow evening to hear a clarinet quintet by Mozart. I would like to have your opinion."

She seemed not to be offering an invitation, but to be asking a favor, and to need the Princesse's assessment of the Mozart quintet as if it were a dish composed by a new cook about whose talents it was valuable to her to obtain the opinion of a gourmet.

"But I know that quintet. I can tell you right now . . . I like it!"

"You know, my husband isn't well; it's his liver . . . It would give him great pleasure to see you," resumed Mme. de Gallardon, now placing the Princesse under a charitable obligation to appear at her soiree.

The Princesse never liked to tell people she did not want to go to their homes. Every day she would write notes expressing her regrets at having been prevented—by an unexpected visit from her mother-in-law, an invitation from her brother-in-law, the

opera, an expedition to the country—from attending a soiree to which she would never have dreamed of going. In this way she gave many people the joy of believing that she was one of their friends, that she would readily have gone to visit them, that she had been kept from doing so only by princely inconveniences which they were flattered to see enter into competition with their soiree. Then, too, since she was part of that witty circle of the Guermantes in which something survived of the alert mentality unburdened by platitudes and conventional feelings which was handed down from Mérimée<sup>100</sup> and had found its latest expression in the theater of Meilhac and Halévy,<sup>101</sup> she adapted it even to social relations, transposed it even into her politeness, which endeavored to be positive and precise, and to approximate the plain truth. She would never develop at any length to a hostess the expression of her desire to be present at her party; she thought it friendlier to put to her a few little facts on which it would depend whether or not it was possible for her to come.

"The thing is," she said to Mme. de Gallardon, "tomorrow evening I have to go see a friend who has been asking me to make a date with her for ages. If she takes us to the theater, even with the best will in the world there won't be any chance of my coming to you; but if we stay in the house, since I know we'll be alone, I'll be able to leave her."

"Oh, by the way, did you see your friend M. Swann?"

"Why no! My beloved Charles, I didn't know he was here, I must try to attract his attention."

"It's funny that he should go to old Saint-Euverte's," said Mme. de Gallardon. "Oh, I know he's intelligent," she added, meaning he was a schemer, "but still and all, a Jew in the home of the sister and sister-in-law of two archbishops!"

"I confess to my shame that I'm not shocked," said the Princess des Laumes.

"I know he's a convert, and even his parents and grandparents before him. But they do say converts remain more attached to their religion than anyone else, that it's all just a pretense. Is that true?"

"I don't know a thing about that."

The pianist, who was to play two pieces by Chopin, after finishing the prelude had immediately attacked a polonaise. But now that Mme. de Gallardon had told her cousin that Swann was there, Chopin himself might have risen from the dead and played all his pieces in succession without Mme. des Laumes paying the slightest attention. She belonged to that half of the human race in whom the curiosity the other half feels about the people it does not know is replaced by an interest in the people it does. As with many women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the presence in a place where she happened to be of someone from her set, though she had nothing in particular to say to him, monopolized her attention at the expense of everything else. From that moment on, in the hopes that Swann would notice her, the Princesse, like a tame white mouse when a bit of sugar is offered to it and then taken away, kept turning her face, which was filled with a thousand signs of complicity unrelated to the feeling in Chopin's polonaise, in Swann's direction, and if he moved, she would shift in a corresponding direction her magnetic smile.

"Oriane, don't be angry," resumed Mme. de Gallardon, who could never stop herself from sacrificing her greatest social ambitions and highest hopes of someday dazzling the world to the immediate, obscure, and private pleasure of saying something disagreeable, "but people do claim that M. Swann is someone whom one can't have in one's house, is that true?"

"Why . . . you ought to know," answered the Princesse des Laumes, "since you've invited him fifty times and he hasn't come once."

And leaving her mortified cousin, she burst into laughter again, scandalizing the people who were listening to the music, but attracting the attention of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, who had stayed near the piano out of politeness and only now noticed the Princesse. Mme. de Saint-Euverte was especially delighted to see Mme. des Laumes because she had thought she was still at Guermantes looking after her sick father-in-law.

"Why, Princesse, I didn't know you were here!"

"Yes, I tucked myself away in a little corner, and I've been hearing such lovely things."

"What! Have you been here for a long time?"

"Why yes, a very long time which seemed very short to me—it was long only because I couldn't see you."

Mme. de Saint-Euverte tried to give her chair to the Princesse, who answered:

"Oh, please, no! Why should you? I'm comfortable wherever I sit!"

And, intentionally selecting, the better to display her simplicity, great lady though she was, a low seat without a back:

"Here, this hassock is all I need. It'll make me sit up straight. Oh, my Lord, I'm making too much noise again, if I'm not careful they'll turn on me and throw me out."

Meanwhile, the pianist having redoubled his speed, the musical emotion was at its height, a servant was passing refreshments on a tray and making the spoons clink, and, as happened every week, Mme. de Saint-Euverte signaled to him without his seeing her, to go away. A newlywed, who had been taught that a young woman must not appear bored, smiled with pleasure, and tried to catch the hostess's eye in order to send her a look of gratitude for having "thought of her" for such a treat. However, although she remained calmer than Mme. de Franquetot, it was not without some uneasiness that she followed the music; but the object of her uneasiness was, not the pianist, but the piano, on which a candle jumping with each fortissimo risked, if not setting its shade on fire, at least spotting the Brazilian rosewood. In the end she could not bear it any longer and, scaling the two steps of the dais on which the piano was placed, swooped down to remove the sconce. But her hands were just about to touch it when, with a final chord, the piece ended and the pianist stood up. Nevertheless the young woman's bold initiative, the resulting brief promiscuity between her and the instrumentalist, produced a generally favorable impression.

"Did you see what that young woman did, Princesse?" said Général de Froberville to the Princesse des Laumes, whom he had come up to greet and whom Mme. de Saint-Euverte had left for a moment. "Odd, wasn't it? Is she a performer?"

"No, she's just some young Mme. de Cambremer," answered the Princesse without thinking and then added hurriedly: "I'm only repeating what I heard, I haven't the slightest idea who she is; someone behind me was saying they were country neighbors of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, but I don't think anyone knows them, really. They must be 'country folk'! Anyway, I don't know if you're intimate with the brilliant society here, but I can't put a name to any of these astonishing people. What do you think they spend their time doing when they're not at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's evenings? She must have ordered 373 them along with the musicians, the chairs, and the refreshments. You must admit these 'guests from Belloir's'<sup>102</sup> are magnificent. Does she really have the heart to rent the same 'extras' every week? It isn't possible!"

"Ah! But Cambremer is quite a good name, and an old one too," said the general.

"I see no harm in the fact that it's old," answered the Princesse dryly, "but still, it's not *euphonious*," she added, isolating the word *euphonious* as though between quotation marks, a little affectation in delivery that was peculiar to the Guermantes set.

"You think so? She's pretty enough to eat, though," said the general, who had not let Mme. de Cambremer out of his sight. "Don't you agree, Princesse?"

"She thrusts herself forward too much, I think; in so young a woman, that's not nice—because I don't believe she's of my generation," answered Mme. des Laumes (this expression being common to both the Gallardons and the Guermantes).

But then the Princesse, seeing that M. de Froberville was continuing to gaze at Mme. de Cambremer, added half out of spite against her, half out of friendliness toward the general: "Not nice . . . for her husband! I'm sorry I don't know her, since you've set your heart on her; I would have introduced you," she continued, although she probably would have done nothing of the kind had she known the young woman. "I will have to say goodnight to you, because it's the birthday of a friend of mine and I must go and pay my respects," she said in a tone of modesty and sincerity, reducing the fashionable party to which she was going to the simplicity of a ceremony which was tiresome but which it was obligatory and also rather touching to attend. "Besides, I'm supposed to meet Basin there; while I've been here, he has been seeing friends of his—people you know, I believe. They have the same name as a bridge: the Lénas."

"Before that it was the name of a victory, Princesse," said the general. "What do you expect—an old soldier like me," he went on, removing his monocle and wiping it, as he would have changed a bandage, while the Princesse instinctively looked away. "The nobility of the Empire, it's different of course, but really, for what it is, it's very fine of its kind. Those were men who fought, really, like heroes."

"But I have the deepest respect for heroes," said the Princesse, in a slightly ironic tone: "if I don't go with Basin to see this woman, the Princesse d'Éna, it's not because of that, not at all, it's quite simply because I don't know them. Basin knows them, he loves them dearly. Oh no, it's not what you may think, they're not having an affair, I have no reason to object! Anyway, what use is it when I do try to object?" she added in a melancholy voice, because everyone knew that the very day after the Prince des Laumes married his ravishing cousin, he had deceived her, and he had not stopped deceiving her since. "But this is not the same, these are people he used to know, he's happy as a pig in clover, I think it's very nice. But I can tell you that even what he has told me about their house . . . Can you imagine, all their furniture is 'Empire'!"<sup>103</sup>

"Well, naturally, Princesse; it was their grandparents' furniture."

"Well, I'm not saying it wasn't, but it's no less ugly for all that. I understand perfectly well that one can't always have pretty things, but at least one's things should not be ridiculous. What do you expect? I can't think of anything more conventional, more bourgeois, than that horrible style—cabinets with swans' heads, like bathtubs."

"Actually I do believe they have some beautiful things, they must have that famous mosaic table that was used for the signing of the Treaty of . . ."

"Oh, I'm not saying they don't have things that are interesting from a historical point of view. But things like that can't ever be beautiful . . . because they're simply horrible! I've got things like that myself which Basin inherited from the Montesquiou. Only they're in the attics of Guermantes where no one can see them. Anyway, really, that's not the point, I would rush around to their house with Basin, I would see them even in the midst of their sphinxes and their brass if I knew them, but . . . I don't know them! I was always told when I was little that it wasn't polite to go to the homes of people one didn't know," she said, assuming a childish tone. "So I'm just doing what I was taught. Can't you see those good people if someone they didn't know were to come bursting into the house? They might make me feel quite unwelcome!" said the Princesse.

And she coquettishly enhanced the smile which this supposition had brought to her lips by giving her blue eyes, which were fixed on the general, a dreamy, gentle expression.

"Ah, Princesse, you know very well they wouldn't be able to contain themselves for joy . . ."

"Not at all. Why?" she asked him with the utmost vivacity, either so as not to seem to know that it was because she was one of the foremost ladies in France, or so as to have the pleasure of hearing the general say it. "Why? What do you know about it? It might be the most disagreeable thing in the world for them. I don't know, but judging by myself, it already bores me so much to see people I know, I believe that if I had to see people I didn't know, even if they had 'fought like heroes,' I would go mad. Besides, you see, except when it's an old friend like you whom one knows quite apart from that, I don't know if heroism would take one very far in society. I often find it quite boring enough as it is to give a dinner party, but if I had to offer my arm to Spartacus going in to the table . . . No, really, Vercingétorix would never be the one I would send for, to make a fourteenth. I think I would save him for the large parties. And since I never give any . . ."

"Ah, Princesse, you're not a Guermantes for nothing. You have your share of it all right, the wit of the Guermantes family!"

"They always say 'the wit of the Guermantes family.' I've never been able to understand why. Do you know *other* Guermantes who have it?" she added in a bubbly, joyful burst of laughter, her features concentrated, interconnected in a web of animation, her eyes sparkling, blazing with a radiant sunshine of gaiety that could be kindled only by remarks, even if made by the Princesse herself, in praise of her wit or her beauty. "Wait, there's Swann. He seems to be speaking to your young Cambremer. There . . . he's next to old mother Saint-Euverte, don't you see him? Ask him to introduce you. But hurry up, he's trying to walk away!"

"How frightfully ill he's looking—did you notice?" said the general.

"My dear Charles! Ah! At last he's coming, I was beginning to think he didn't want to see me!"

Swann liked the Princesse des Laumes very much, and the sight of her also reminded him of Guermantes, the estate next to Combray, the whole countryside which he loved so much and had ceased to visit so as not to be away from Odette. Using the half-artistic, half-courtly formulae which he knew were pleasing to the Princesse and which he resumed quite naturally whenever he reimmersed himself for a moment in his old social milieu—and wanting anyway for his own sake to express the yearning he felt for the country:

"Ah," he said to some vague general audience, in order to be heard both by Mme. de Saint-Euverte, to whom he was speaking, and by Mme. des Laumes, for whom he was speaking, "here's the charming Princesse! See, she has come up from

Guermantes expressly to hear Liszt's *Saint Francis of Assisi* and has only just had time, like a pretty titmouse, to go and pluck a little fruit from the wild plums and hawthorns and put them on her head; there is even a bit of dew on them still, a bit of the hoarfrost that must be making the duchess groan so. It's very pretty indeed, my dear Princesse."

"What, the Princesse has come up expressly from Guermantes? But that's too much! I didn't know, I'm embarrassed," exclaimed Mme. de Saint-Euverte naively, not being used to Swann's wit. Then, looking more closely at the Princesse's headgear: "Why you're quite right, it's meant to look like . . . what shall I say, not chestnuts, no—oh, what a ravishing idea! But how could the Princesse have known what was going to be on my program! The musicians didn't even tell me."

Swann, who was accustomed, when he was in the company of a woman whom he had kept up the habit of addressing in gallant language, to say things so delicately nuanced that many society people could not understand them, did not condescend to explain to Mme. de Saint-Euverte that he had merely been speaking metaphorically. As for the Princesse, she began laughing heartily, because Swann's wit was highly appreciated in her set and also because she could not hear a compliment addressed to her without finding it most exquisitely subtle and irresistibly droll.

"Well! I'm delighted, Charles, if you like my little hawthorn fruits. Why did you speak to that Cambremer woman? Are you her neighbor in the country too?"

Mme. de Saint-Euverte, seeing that the Princesse appeared happy to chat with Swann, had moved off.

"But you are too, Princesse."

"I! But then those people have country places everywhere! How I would like to be in their place!"

"It's not the Cambremers, it's her own family; she's a Legrandin daughter and used to come to Combray. I don't know if you know you're the Comtesse de Combray and the chapter owes you a due?"

"I don't know what the chapter owes me, but I know that I'm dunned a hundred francs every year by the curé, which I could do without. Really those Cambremers have a most astonishing name.<sup>104</sup> It ends just in time, but it ends badly!" she said, laughing.

"It doesn't begin any better," Swann answered.

"Really, the two abbreviations together! . . ."

"Someone very angry and very proper didn't dare finish the first word."

"But since he couldn't stop himself from beginning the second, he should have finished the first—then he'd be done with it once and for all. Our jokes are in charming taste, my little Charles, but how tiresome it is not to see you anymore," she added in a caressing tone, "I so much like talking to you. Just think, I wouldn't even have been able to make that idiot Froberville understand that the name Cambremer is astonishing. Admit that life is a dreadful thing. It's only when I see you that I stop feeling bored."

This was probably not true. But Swann and the Princesse had the same way of looking at the small things of life, the effect of which—unless it was the cause—was a great similarity in their ways of expressing themselves and even in their pronunciation. No one noticed the resemblance because their two voices were so utterly unlike. But if in one's imagination one managed to divest Swann's remarks of the sonority in which they were enveloped, of the mustache from under which they issued, one realized that these were the same sentences, the same inflections, that these turns of phrase belonged to the Guermantes set. When it came to the important things, Swann and the Princesse did not have the same ideas about anything. But now that Swann had become so sad, always in the sort of tremulous condition that precedes the moment one is going to cry, he felt as compelled to talk about grief as a murderer is to talk about his crime. When he heard the Princesse say that life was a dreadful thing, he felt as comforted as if she had been talking about Odette.

"Oh, yes! Life is a dreadful thing. We must see each other soon, my dear friend. What's so nice about being with you is that you're not cheerful. We could spend an evening together."

"What a good idea! Why don't you come down to Guermantes? My mother-in-law would be wild with joy. It's supposed to be so ugly thereabouts, but I must say I don't dislike that countryside at all; I loathe 'picturesque' spots."

"I agree, it's wonderful," answered Swann, "it's almost too beautiful, too alive for me just now; it's a place to be happy in. Perhaps it's because I've lived there, but the things there speak to me so! As soon as a breath of wind comes up, when the wheat begins to move, it seems to me that someone is about to arrive, I'm going to hear some news; and those little houses by the edge of the water . . . I would be quite miserable!"

"Oh, my dear Charles, watch out, there's that dreadful Rampillon woman. She's seen me; please hide me. Remind me what it was that happened to her; I'm getting it all mixed up; she's just married off her daughter, or her lover, I can't remember which; maybe both of them . . . and to each other! . . . Oh no! I remember now, she's been dropped by her prince . . . Pretend to be talking to me, so that Bérénice woman won't come over and invite me to dinner. Anyway, I must fly. Listen, my dear Charles, now that I've seen you for once, won't you let me steal you away and take you to the Princess's? She'd be so pleased to see you, and Basin, too—he's meeting me there. If we didn't get news of you from Mémé . . . Just think, I never see you at all now!"

Swann declined; having told M. de Charlus that when he left Mme. de Saint-Euverte's he would go directly back home, he did not want to run the risk, by going on to the Princess of Parma's, of missing a note that he had been hoping all evening would be handed to him by a servant during the party, and that perhaps he would find in his concierge's keeping. "Poor Swann," said Mme. des Laumes that night to her husband, "he's always kind, but he appears quite unhappy. You'll see, because he has promised to come to dinner one of these days. I do find it absurd that a man of his intelligence should suffer over a person of that sort, who isn't even interesting—because they say she's an idiot," she added with the wisdom of people not in love who believe a man of sense should be unhappy only over a person who is worth it; which is rather like being surprised that anyone should condescend to suffer from cholera because of so small a creature as the comma bacillus.

Swann wanted to leave, but just when he was at last about to escape, Général de Froberville asked him for an introduction to Mme. de Cambremer and he was obliged to go back into the drawing room with him to look for her.

"Now, Swann, I'd rather be the husband of that woman than slaughtered by savages, what do you say?"

The words *slaughtered by savages* pierced Swann's heart painfully; and at once he felt the need to continue the conversation:

"Well, you know," he said to him, "some really fine men have lost their lives that way . . . For instance, if you remember . . . That navigator whose ashes were brought back by Dumont d'Urville, La Pérouse . . ." (And Swann was immediately happy, as if he had spoken Odette's name.) "He was a fine character, La Pérouse was, and one who interests me very much," he added with a melancholy air.

"Ah! Indeed yes. La Pérouse," said the general. "The name is well known. It's got its own street."

"You know someone in the rue La Pérouse?" asked Swann in some agitation.

"I know only Mme. de Chanlivault, the sister of that good fellow Chaussepierre. She gave us a nice theater party the other day. Her salon will be very elegant one of these days, you'll see!"

"Ah, so she lives in the rue La Pérouse. It's an appealing street, very pretty, and so melancholy."

"Why, not at all, in fact you haven't been there in some time; it's not melancholy these days, they're beginning to build there, they've got buildings going up in the whole neighborhood."

When at last Swann introduced M. de Froberville to young Mme. de Cambremer, since it was the first time she had heard the general's name she ventured the smile of joy and surprise she would have given him if no other name but that one had ever been uttered in her presence, for as she did not know the friends of her new family, each time a person was presented to her, she believed he was one of them, and thinking it would be tactful of her to look as though she had heard such a lot about him since she was married, she would put out her hand with a hesitant air meant as proof of the inculcated reserve she had to conquer and the spontaneous congeniality that succeeded in overcoming it. And so her parents-in-law, whom she still believed to be the most brilliant people in France, declared that she was an angel; especially since they preferred to appear, in marrying their son to her, to have responded to the attraction of her fine qualities rather than of her great wealth.

"One can see that you have the soul of a musician, madame," the general said to her, unconsciously alluding to the incident of the scone.

But the concert was beginning again and Swann realized he would not be able to leave before the end of this new number. He was suffering at having to remain shut up among these people whose stupidity and absurd habits struck him all the more painfully since, being unaware of his love, incapable, had they known about it, of taking any interest in it or doing more than smile at it as at some childish nonsense or deplore it as utter madness, they made it appear to him as a subjective state which existed only for him, whose reality was confirmed for him by nothing outside himself; he suffered most of all, to the point where even the sound of the instruments made him want to cry out, from prolonging his exile in this place to which Odette would never come, where no one, where nothing knew her, from which she was entirely absent.

But suddenly it was as though she had appeared in the room, and this apparition caused him such harrowing pain that he had to put his hand on his heart. What had happened was that the violin had risen to a series of high notes on which it lingered as though waiting for something, holding on to them in a prolonged expectancy, in the exaltation of already seeing the object of its expectation approaching, and with a desperate effort to try to endure until it arrived, to welcome it before expiring, to keep the way open for it another moment with a last bit of strength so that it could come through, as one holds up a trapdoor that would otherwise fall back. And before Swann had time to understand, and say to himself: "It's the little phrase from the sonata by Vinteuil; don't listen!" all his memories of the time when Odette was in love with him, which he had managed until now to keep out of sight in the deepest part of himself, deceived by this sudden beam of light from the time of love which they believed had returned, had awoken and flown swiftly back up to sing madly to him, with no pity for his present misfortune, the forgotten refrains of happiness.

In place of the abstract expressions *the time when I was happy*, *the time when I was loved*, which he had often used before now without suffering too much, for his mind had enclosed within them only spurious extracts of the past that preserved nothing of it, he now recovered everything which had fixed forever the specific, volatile essence of that lost happiness; he saw everything again, the snowy curled petals of the chrysanthemum that she had tossed to him in his carriage, that he had held against his lips—the embossed address of the "Maison Dorée" on the letter in which he had read: "My hand is shaking so badly as I write to you"—the way her eyebrows had come together when she said to him with a supplicating look: "It won't be too long before you send word to me?"; he smelled the fragrance of the hairdresser's iron by which he would have his "brush cut" straightened while Lorédan went to fetch the young working girl, the stormy rains that fell so often that spring, the icy drive home in his victoria, by moonlight, all the meshes formed from habits of thinking, impressions of the seasons, reactions on the surface of his skin, which had laid over a succession of weeks a uniform net in which his body was now recaptured. At that time, he was satisfying a sensual curiosity by experiencing the pleasures of people who live for love. He had believed he could stop there, that he would not be obliged to learn their sorrows; how small a thing Odette's charm was for him now compared with the astounding terror that extended out from it like a murky halo, the immense anguish of not knowing at every moment what she had been doing, of not possessing her everywhere and always! Alas, he recalled the accents in which she had exclaimed: "But I will always be able to see you, I am always free!"—she who was never free now!—the interest, the curiosity she had shown in his own life, the passionate desire that he should do her the favor—which he in fact dreaded in those days as a cause of tiresome inconveniences—of allowing her to enter it; how she had been obliged to beg him to let her take him to the Verdurins'; and when he had allowed her to come to him once a month, how she had had to tell him over and over again, before he would let himself give in to her, how delightful it would be to have the habit of seeing each other every day, a habit which she dreamed of whereas to him it seemed only a tedious bother, which she had then grown tired of and broken once and for all, while for him it had become such an irresistible and painful need. He did not know how truthfully he was speaking when, the third time he saw her, as she said to him yet again: "But why don't you let me come more often?" he had said to her with a laugh, gallantly: "for fear of being hurt." Now, alas, she still wrote to him occasionally from a restaurant or hotel on paper that bore its printed name; but now the letters of that name burned him like letters of fire. "It's written from the Hôtel Vouillemont?"<sup>105</sup> What can she have gone there to do? And with whom? What has been going on there?" He remembered the gas jets being extinguished along the boulevard des Italiens when he had met her against all hope among the wandering shades on that night which had seemed to him almost supernatural and which indeed—since it belonged to a time when he did not even have to ask himself if he would vex her by looking for her, by finding her, so sure was he that her greatest joy was to see him and go home with him—was truly part of a mysterious world



to which one can never return once its doors have closed. And Swann saw, motionless before that relived happiness, a miserable figure who filled him with pity because he did not recognize him right away, and he had to lower his eyes so that no one would see that they were full of tears. It was himself.

When he realized this, his pity vanished, but he was jealous of the other self she had loved, he was jealous of those of whom he had often said to himself without suffering too much “maybe she loves them,” now that he had exchanged the vague idea of loving, in which there is no love, for the petals of the chrysanthemum and the letterhead of the Maison d’Or, which were full of it. Then his pain became too sharp, he passed his hand over his forehead, let his monocle drop, wiped its glass. And no doubt, if he had seen himself at that moment, he would have added to the collection of those which he had singled out for distinction the monocle he was removing like an importunate thought and from whose clouded face, with a handkerchief, he was trying to wipe off his worries.

There are tones in a violin—if we cannot see the instrument and therefore cannot relate what we hear to our image of it, which changes the sound of it—so similar to those of certain contralto voices that we have the illusion a singer has been added to the concert. We lift our eyes, we see only the bodies of the instruments, as precious as Chinese boxes, but at times we are still fooled by the deceptive call of the siren; at times too we think we hear a captive genie struggling deep inside the intelligent, bewitched, and tremulous box, like a devil in a holy-water basin; sometimes, again it is like a pure and supernatural being that passes through the air uncoiling its invisible message.

As if the instrumentalists were not so much playing the little phrase as performing the rituals it required in order to make its appearance, and proceeding to the incantations necessary for obtaining and prolonging a few moments the wonder of its evocation, Swann, who could no more see it than if it had belonged to an ultraviolet world, and who was experiencing something like the refreshing sense of a metamorphosis in the momentary blindness with which he was struck as he approached it, felt it to be present, like a protective goddess, a confidante of his love, who in order to be able to come to him in the midst of the crowd and take him aside to talk to him, had assumed the disguise of this body of sound. And while it passed, light, soothing, murmured like a perfume, telling him what it had to tell him, as he scrutinized every word, sorry to see them fly off so quickly, he involuntarily made the motion with his lips of kissing the harmonious fleeting body as it passed. He no longer felt exiled and alone since the little phrase was addressing him, was talking to him in a low voice about Odette. For he no longer felt, as he once had, that the little phrase did not know him and Odette. It had so often witnessed their moments of happiness! True, it had just as often warned him how fragile they were. And in fact, whereas in those days he read suffering in its smile, in its limpid and disenchanted intonation, he now found in it instead the grace of a resignation that was almost gay. Of those sorrows of which it used to speak to him and which, without being affected by them, he had seen it carry along with it, smiling, in its rapid and sinuous course, of those sorrows which had now become his own, without his having any hope of ever being free of them, it seemed to say to him as it had once said of his happiness: “What does it matter? It means nothing.” And for the first time Swann’s thoughts turned with a stab of pity and tenderness to Vinteuil, to that unknown, sublime brother who must also have suffered so; what must his life have been like? From the depths of what sorrows had he drawn that godlike strength, that unlimited power to create? When it was the little phrase that spoke to him about the vanity of his sufferings, Swann found solace in that very wisdom which, just recently, had seemed to him intolerable when he thought he could read it on the faces of the indifferent people who considered his love an insignificant aberration. For the little phrase, unlike them, whatever its opinion of the brief duration of the conditions of the soul, did not see in them, as these people did, something less serious than the events of everyday life, but on the contrary, something so superior that it alone was worth expressing. These charms of an intimate sadness—these were what it sought to imitate, to re-create, and their very essence, even though it is to be incommunicable and to seem frivolous to everyone but the one who is experiencing them, had been captured by the little phrase and made visible. So much so that it caused their value to be acknowledged, and their divine sweetness savored, by all those same people sitting in the audience—if they were at all musical—who would afterward fail to recognize these charms in real life, in every individual love that came into being before their eyes. Doubtless the form in which it had codified them could not be resolved into reasoned arguments. But ever since, more than a year ago now, the love of music had, for a time at least, been born in him, revealing to him many of the riches of his own soul, Swann had regarded musical motifs as actual ideas, of another world, of another order, ideas veiled in shadows, unknown, impenetrable to the intelligence, but not for all that less perfectly distinct from one another, unequal among themselves in value and significance. When, after the Verdurin evening, he had had the little phrase played over for him, and had sought to disentangle how it was that, like a perfume, like a caress, it encircled him, enveloped him, he had realized that it was to the closeness of the intervals between the five notes that composed it, and to the constant repetition of two of them, that was due this impression of a frigid and withdrawn sweetness; but in reality he knew that he was reasoning this way not about the phrase itself but about simple values substituted, for the convenience of his intelligence, for the mysterious entity he had perceived, before knowing the Verdurins, at that party where he had first heard the sonata played. He knew that even the memory of the piano falsified still further the perspective in which he saw the elements of the music, that the field open to the musician is not a miserable scale of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard still almost entirely unknown on which, here and there only, separated by shadows thick and unexplored, a few of the millions of keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity which compose it, each as different from the others as one universe from another universe, have been found by a few great artists who do us the service, by awakening in us something corresponding to the theme they have discovered, of showing us what richness, what variety, is hidden unbeknownst to us within that great unpenetrated and disheartening darkness of our soul which we take for emptiness and nothingness. Vinteuil had been one of those musicians. In his little phrase, although it might present an obscure surface to one’s intelligence, one sensed a content so solid, so explicit, to which it gave a force so new, so original, that those who had heard it preserved it within themselves on the same plane as the ideas of the intelligence. Swann referred back to it as to a conception of love and happiness whose distinctive character he recognized at once, as he would that of *La Princesse de Clèves* or of *René*,<sup>106</sup> when their titles returned to his memory. Even when he was not thinking of the little phrase, it existed latent in his mind in the same way as certain other notions without equivalents, like the notion of light, of sound, of perspective, of physical pleasure, which are the rich possessions that diversify and ornament the realms of our inner life. Perhaps we will lose them, perhaps they will fade away, if we return to nothingness. But as long as we are alive, we can no more eliminate our

experience of them than we can our experience of some real object, than we can for example doubt the light of the lamp illuminating the metamorphosed objects in our room whence even the memory of darkness has vanished. In this way Vinteuil's phrase had, like some theme from *Tristan*, for example, which also represents to us a certain emotional acquisition, espoused our mortal condition, taken on a human quality that was rather touching. Its destiny was linked to the future, to the reality of our soul, of which it was one of the most distinctive, the best differentiated ornaments. Maybe it is the nothingness that is real and our entire dream is nonexistent, but in that case we feel that these phrases of music, and these notions that exist in relation to our dream, must also be nothing. We will perish, but we have for hostages these divine captives who will follow us and share our fate. And death in their company is less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps less probable.

Swann was therefore not wrong to believe that the phrase of the sonata really existed. Of course, although human from this point of view, it belonged to an order of supernatural creatures whom we have never seen, but whom despite this we recognize with delight when some explorer of the invisible manages to capture one, to bring it, from that divine world to which he has access, to shine for a few moments above ours. This was what Vinteuil had done for the little phrase. Swann sensed that the composer had merely unveiled it, made it visible, with his musical instruments, following and respecting its sketched form with a hand so tender, so prudent, so delicate, and so sure that the sound altered at every moment, fading away to indicate a shadow, revived when it had to follow a bolder contour. And one proof that Swann was not mistaken when he believed in the real existence of that phrase was that any lover of music with the least discernment would at once have noticed the imposture if Vinteuil, having had less capacity to see and to render its forms, had sought to conceal, by adding lines of his own invention here and there, the lacunae in his vision or the failures of his hand.

It had disappeared. Swann knew that it would reappear at the end of the last movement, after a whole long passage that Mme. Verdurin's pianist always skipped. There were marvelous ideas in it which Swann had not distinguished at his first hearing and that he perceived now, as if they had divested themselves, in the cloakroom of his memory, of the uniform disguise of novelty. Swann listened to all the scattered themes which would enter into the composition of the phrase, like premises in the necessary conclusion; he was attending its birth. "O audacity as inspired, perhaps," he said to himself, "as that of a Lavoisier, of an Ampère<sup>107</sup>—the audacity of a Vinteuil experimenting, discovering the secret laws that govern an unknown force, guiding and urging on, across a region unexplored, toward the only possible goal, the invisible team in which he has placed his trust and which he may never discern!" The beautiful dialogue which Swann heard between the piano and the violin at the beginning of the last passage! The suppression of human speech, far from letting fantasy reign there, as one might have believed, had eliminated it; never had spoken language been such an inflexible necessity, never had it known such pertinent questions, such irrefutable answers. First the solitary piano lamented, like a bird abandoned by its mate; the violin heard it, answered it as from a neighboring tree. It was as at the beginning of the world, as if there were only the two of them still on the earth, or rather in this world closed to all the rest, constructed by the logic of a creator, this world in which there would never be more than the two of them: this sonata. Was it a bird, was it the soul of the little phrase, not yet fully formed, was it a fairy—this creature invisibly lamenting, whose plaint the piano afterward tenderly repeated? Its cries were so sudden that the violinist had to leap to his bow to collect them. Marvelous bird! The violinist seemed to want to charm it, tame it, capture it. Already it had passed into his soul, already the violinist's body, truly possessed, was shaking like a medium's with the summoned presence of the little phrase. Swann knew it was going to speak one more time. And he had so completely divided himself in two that the wait for the imminent moment when he would find himself confronting it again made him shudder with the kind of sob which a beautiful line of verse or a sad piece of news wrings from us, not when we are alone, but if we repeat it to friends in whom we can see ourselves as another person whose probable emotion moves them. It reappeared, but this time to hang in the air and play for a moment only, as though motionless, and afterward expire. And so Swann lost nothing of this very brief extension of its life. It was still there like an iridescent bubble floating by itself. Like a rainbow, whose brilliance weakens, fades, then rises again, and before dying away altogether, flares up a moment more brilliant than ever: to the two colors it had so far allowed to appear, it added others, variegated chords of every hue in the prism, and made them sing. Swann did not dare move and would have made all the other people be still too, as if the slightest motion might compromise the fragile, exquisite, and supernatural magic that was so close to vanishing. No one, in fact, dreamed of speaking. The ineffable word of one man who was absent, perhaps dead (Swann did not know if Vinteuil was still alive), breathing out above the rites of these officiants, was enough to hold the attention of three hundred people, and made of this dais, where a soul had thus been summoned, one of the noblest altars on which a supernatural ceremony could be performed. So that, when the phrase came unraveled at last, floating in shreds in the motifs which followed and had already taken its place, if at first Swann was irritated to see the Comtesse de Monteriender, famous for her naive remarks, lean toward him to confide her impressions even before the sonata had ended, he could not help smiling, and perhaps also found a deeper meaning that she did not see in the words she used. Awestruck by the virtuosity of the performers, the Comtesse exclaimed to Swann: "It's amazing, I've never seen anything so powerful . . ." But a scruple for accuracy causing her to correct her first assertion, she added this reservation: "anything so powerful . . . since the table turning!"

From that evening on, Swann understood that the feeling Odette had had for him would never revive, that his hopes of happiness would not be realized now. And on the days when she happened to be kind and affectionate toward him again, if she showed him some thoughtful attention, he would note these apparent and deceptive signs of a slight movement back toward him, with the loving, skeptical solicitude, the desperate joy of those who, caring for a friend in the last days of an incurable illness, relate as precious facts: "Yesterday, he did his accounts himself, and he was the one who spotted a mistake in addition that we had made; he ate an egg and enjoyed it—if he digests it easily we'll try a cutlet tomorrow," although they know these facts are meaningless on the eve of an unavoidable death. No doubt Swann was sure that if he had now been living far away from Odette, she would in the end have become unimportant to him, so that he would have been glad if she had left Paris forever; he would have had the courage to stay there; but he did not have the courage to leave.

He had often thought of it. Now that he had resumed his study of Vermeer, he needed to return at least for a few days to The Hague, Dresden, Brunswick. He was convinced that a *Diana with Her Companions* which had been bought by the Mauritshuis at the Goldschmidt sale as a Nicolas Maes, was in reality a Vermeer.<sup>108</sup> And he wished he could study the painting on the spot, in order to support his conviction. But to leave Paris while Odette was there, or even when she was absent—for in new places

where our sensations are not dulled by habit, we retemper, we revive an old pain—was for him so cruel a plan that he was able to think about it constantly only because he knew he was resolved never to execute it. But sometimes, while he was asleep, the intention of taking the trip would revive in him—without his remembering that it was impossible—and in his sleep he would take the trip. One day he dreamed he was leaving for a year; leaning out the door of the railway car toward a young man on the platform who was saying good-bye to him, weeping, Swann tried to convince him to leave with him. The train began to move, his anxiety woke him, he remembered that he was not leaving, that he would see Odette that evening, the next day, and almost every day after. Then, still shaken by his dream, he blessed the particular circumstances that had made him independent, because of which he could remain near Odette, and also succeed in getting her to allow him to see her now and then; and, recapitulating all these advantages—his position; his fortune, from which she was too often in need of assistance not to shrink from contemplating a definite break with him (having even, people said, an ulterior plan of getting him to marry her); his friendship with M. de Charlus, which in truth had never helped him obtain much from Odette, but gave him the comfort of feeling that she heard flattering things about him from this mutual friend for whom she had such great esteem; and lastly even his intelligence, which he employed entirely in contriving a new intrigue every day that would make his presence, if not agreeable, at least necessary to Odette—he thought about what would have become of him if he had not had all this, he thought that if, like so many other men, he had been poor, humble, wretched, obliged to accept any sort of work, or tied to relatives, to a wife, he might have been forced to leave Odette, that that dream, the terror of which was still so close to him, might have been true, and he said to himself: “You don’t know it when you’re happy. You’re never as unhappy as you think.”<sup>109</sup> But he calculated that this existence had already lasted for several years, that all he could hope for now was that it would last forever, that he would sacrifice his work, his pleasures, his friends, finally his whole life to the daily expectation of a meeting that could bring him no happiness, and he wondered if he was not deceiving himself, if the circumstances that had favored his love affair and kept it from ending had not been bad for the course of his life, if the desirable outcome would not in fact have been the one which, to his delight, had taken place only in a dream: for him to have gone away; he told himself that you don’t know it when you’re unhappy, that you are never as happy as you think.

Sometimes he hoped she would die in an accident without suffering, she who was outside, in the streets, on the roads, from morning to night. And when she returned safe and sound, he marveled that the human body was so supple and so strong, that it continued to ward off, to outwit all the perils which surrounded it (and which Swann found innumerable now that his secret desire had computed them) and so allowed people to abandon themselves daily and almost with impunity to their work of mendacity, their pursuit of pleasure. And Swann felt very close in his heart to Mohammed II, whose portrait by Bellini he liked so much, who, realizing that he had fallen madly in love with one of his wives, stabbed her in order, as his Venetian biographer ingenuously says, to recover his independence of mind. Then he would be filled with indignation that he should be thinking thus only of himself, and the sufferings he had endured would seem to him to deserve no pity since he himself had placed so low a value on Odette’s life.

Since he was unable to separate from her irrevocably, if he had at least been able to see her without any separations, his pain would in the end have abated and perhaps his love would have died. And if she did not want to leave Paris forever, he would have liked her never to leave Paris. At least since he knew that her only long absence was the yearly one in August and September, he had ample opportunity several months in advance to dissolve the bitter idea of it in all the Time to come which he carried within him in anticipation and which, composed of days identical with those of the present, flowed through his mind transparent and cold, sustaining his sadness, but without causing him too sharp a pain. But that interior future, that colorless free-flowing river, was suddenly assaulted by a single remark of Odette’s which entered Swann and, like a piece of ice, immobilized it, hardened its fluidity, made it freeze entirely; and Swann suddenly felt he was filled with an enormous infrangible mass that pressed on the inner walls of his being till it nearly burst: what Odette had said, observing him with a sly smiling glance, was: “Forcheville is going to be taking a lovely trip, at Pentecost. He’s going to Egypt,” and Swann had immediately understood that this meant: “I’m going to Egypt at Pentecost with Forcheville.” And in fact, if several days after, Swann said to her: “Look, about this trip you told me you would be taking with Forcheville,” she would answer thoughtlessly: “Yes, my dear boy, we’re leaving the nineteenth, we’ll send you a view of the Pyramids.” Then he would want to know if she was Forcheville’s mistress, would want to ask her directly. He knew that, superstitious as she was, there were certain perjuries she would not commit, and, too, the dread, which had restrained him up to this point, of irritating Odette by questioning her, of causing her to hate him, had vanished now that he had lost all hope of ever being loved by her.

One day he received an anonymous letter telling him that Odette had been the mistress of countless men (several of whom it mentioned, among them Forcheville, M. de Bréauté, and the painter), and of women too, and that she frequented houses of ill repute. He was tormented by the thought that among his friends there was an individual capable of sending him this letter (because certain details revealed that the person who had written it had an intimate knowledge of Swann’s life). He wondered who it could be. But he had never had any feelings of suspicion about the unknown actions of other people, those which had no visible connection with what they said. And when he tried to find out whether it was beneath the apparent character of M. de Charlus, or M. des Laumes, or M. d’Orsan, that he ought to situate the unknown region in which this ignoble act must have been conceived, since none of these men had ever spoken in praise of anonymous letters in his presence and since everything they had said to him implied that they condemned them, he saw no reason for connecting this infamy with the character of one rather than another. That of M. de Charlus was a little deranged but basically good and affectionate; that of M. des Laumes, a little hard, but sound and straightforward. As for M. d’Orsan, Swann had never met anyone who in even the most dismal circumstances would approach him with a more heartfelt remark, a more discreet or appropriate gesture. So much so that he could not understand the rather indelicate role people ascribed to M. d’Orsan in the love affair he was having with a rich woman, and that each time Swann thought of him, he was obliged to thrust to one side that bad reputation which was so irreconcilable with the many clear proofs of his discretion. For a moment Swann felt his mind was darkening and he thought about something else in order to recover a little light. Then he had the courage to return to these reflections. But now, after being unable to suspect anyone, he had to suspect everyone. True, M. de Charlus was fond of him, had a good heart. But he was a neurotic, tomorrow he might weep at the news that Swann was ill, and today, out of jealousy, out of anger, acting under the influence of some sudden idea, he had wanted to

hurt him. Really, that kind of man was the worst of all. Of course, the Prince des Laumes was not nearly as fond of Swann as M. de Charlus. But for that very reason he did not have the same susceptibilities with regard to him; and then although his was undoubtedly a cold nature, he was as incapable of base actions as of great ones. Swann regretted that in his life he had not formed attachments exclusively to such people. Then he mused that what prevents men from doing harm to their fellowmen is goodness of heart, that really he could answer only for men whose natures were analogous to his own, as was, so far as the heart was concerned, that of M. de Charlus. The mere thought of causing such pain to Swann would have revolted him. But with an insensitive man, of another order of humanity, as was the Prince des Laumes, how could one foresee the actions to which he might be led by motives that were so different in essence? To have a kind heart is everything, and M. de Charlus had one. M. d'Orsan was not lacking in heart either and his cordial but not very close relationship with Swann, arising from the pleasure which, since they thought the same way about everything, they found in talking together, was more secure than the excitable affection of M. de Charlus, capable of committing acts of passion, good or bad. If there was anyone by whom Swann had always felt himself understood and liked in a discriminating way, it was by M. d'Orsan. Yes, but what about this dishonorable life he was leading? Swann regretted never having taken it into account properly, having often confessed as a joke that he had never experienced such keen feelings of sympathy and respect as in the company of a scoundrel. It is not for nothing, he said to himself now, that when men judge another man, it is by his actions. They alone mean something, and not what we say, or what we think. Charlus and des Laumes may have their faults, but they are still honest men. Orsan perhaps has none, but he is not an honest man. He may have acted badly yet again. Then Swann suspected Rémi, who, it was true, could merely have inspired the letter, but for a moment he felt he was on the right track. In the first place Lorédan had reasons for resenting Odette. And then how can we help but imagine that our servants, living in a situation inferior to ours, adding to our fortunes and our faults imaginary wealth and vices for which they envy and despise us, will find themselves inevitably led to act in a way different from people of our own class? He also suspected my grandfather. Each time Swann had asked a favor of him, had he not always refused? And then with his bourgeois ideas he might have thought he was acting for Swann's own good. Swann also suspected Bergotte, the painter, the Verdurins, admired once more in passing the wisdom of society people in not wanting to mix in those artistic circles in which such things are possible, perhaps even openly admitted as good pranks; but he recalled certain honest traits in those bohemians, and contrasted them with the life of expediency, almost of fraudulence, into which the lack of money, the craving for luxury, the corrupting influence of their pleasures so often drive members of the aristocracy. In short, this anonymous letter proved that he knew an individual capable of villainy, but he could see no more reason why that villainy should be hidden in the bedrock—unexplored by any other person—of the character of an affectionate man rather than a cold one, an artist rather than a bourgeois, a great lord rather than a valet. What criterion should one adopt for judging men? Really there was not a single person among those he knew who might not be capable of infamy. Was it necessary to stop seeing all of them? His mind clouded over; he passed his hands across his forehead two or three times, wiped the lenses of his lorgnon with his handkerchief, and thinking that after all men as good as himself associated with M. de Charlus, the Prince des Laumes, and the others, he said to himself that this meant, if not that they were incapable of infamy, at least that it is a necessity of life to which each of us submits, to associate with people who are perhaps not incapable of it. And he continued to shake hands with all of those friends whom he had suspected, with the one purely formal reservation that they had perhaps tried to drive him to despair. As for the actual substance of the letter, he did not worry about it, because not one of the accusations formulated against Odette had a shadow of likelihood. Swann, like many people, had a lazy mind and lacked the faculty of invention. He knew very well as a general truth that people's lives are full of contrasts, but for each person in particular he imagined the whole part of his life that he did not know as being identical to the part that he knew. He imagined what he was not told with the help of what he was told. During the times when Odette was with him, if they were talking about some indelicate act committed or some indelicate feeling experienced by someone else, she would stigmatize them by virtue of the same principles that Swann had always heard professed by his parents and to which he had remained faithful; and then she would arrange her flowers, she would drink a cup of tea, she would worry about Swann's work. And so Swann extended these habits to the rest of Odette's life, he repeated these gestures when he wanted to picture to himself the times when she was away from him. If anyone had portrayed her to him as she was, or rather as she had been with him for so long, but in the company of another man, he would have suffered, because that image would have appeared to him quite likely. But to think that she went to procuresses, took part in orgies with other women, that she led the dissolute life of the most abject of creatures—what an insane aberration, for the realization of which, God be thanked, the imagined chrysanthemums, the successive teas, the virtuous indignation left no room! Only from time to time, he would insinuate to Odette that, out of spite, someone had been reporting to him about everything she did; and, making use, in connection with this, of an insignificant but true detail, which he had learned by chance, as if it were the sole fragment among many others that he had allowed to slip out despite himself, of a complete reconstruction of Odette's life which he kept hidden inside himself, he would lead her to suppose that he was well informed about things that in reality he did not know or even suspect, for if quite often he adjured Odette not to alter the truth, it was only, whether he realized it or not, so that she would tell him everything she did. Undoubtedly, as he said to Odette, he loved sincerity, but he loved it as a procuress who could keep him in touch with his mistress's life. And so his love of sincerity, not being disinterested, had not made him a better person. The truth he cherished was the truth Odette would tell him; but he himself, in order to obtain that truth, was not afraid to resort to falsehood, that very same falsehood which he constantly portrayed to Odette as leading every human creature down to utter degradation. And so he lied as much as Odette because, while unhappier than she, he was no less selfish. And she, hearing Swann tell her the things she had done, would gaze at him with a look of mistrust, and, just to be on the safe side, of vexation, so as not to seem to be humiliating herself and blushing at her actions.

One day, during the longest period of calm he had yet been able to go through without suffering renewed attacks of jealousy, he had agreed to go to the theater that evening with the Princesse des Laumes. Having opened the newspaper, in order to find out what was being played, the sight of the title, *Les Filles de Marbre* by Théodore Barrière,<sup>110</sup> struck him such a painful blow that he recoiled and turned his head away. Illuminated as though by footlights, in the new spot where it had appeared, the word *marble*, which he had lost the ability to distinguish because he was so used to seeing it before his eyes, had suddenly become visible again and had immediately reminded him of the story Odette had told him once long ago, about a visit she had made to the



Salon du Palais de l'Industrie with Mme. Verdurin, where the latter had said to her: "Watch yourself, now! I know how to make you melt. You're not made of marble, you know." Odette had sworn to him it was only a joke, and he had attached no importance to it. But he had had more confidence in her at that time than he did now. And in fact the anonymous letter mentioned love affairs of that kind. Without daring to lift his eyes to the newspaper again, he unfolded it, turned a page in order not to see the words *Les Filles de Marbre*, and mechanically began reading news from the provinces. There had been a storm on the Channel, damage was reported at Dieppe, Cabourg, Beuzeval. Immediately he recoiled again.

The name Beuzeval had reminded him of the name of another place in the same area, Beuzeville, whose name is joined by a hyphen to another, Bréauté, which he had often seen on maps, but without ever noticing before that it was the same as that of his friend M. de Bréauté, whom the anonymous letter mentioned as having been Odette's lover. In fact, in the case of M. de Bréauté, the accusation was not unlikely; but so far as Mme. Verdurin was concerned, it was a sheer impossibility. From the fact that Odette sometimes lied, one could not conclude that she never told the truth, and in the remarks she had exchanged with Mme. Verdurin and which she herself had described to Swann, he had recognized those pointless and dangerous jokes made, from inexperience of life and ignorance of vice, by women whose innocence they merely reveal and who—like Odette for example—are least prone to feel passionate love for another woman. Whereas on the contrary, the indignation with which she had denied the suspicions she had involuntarily aroused in him for a moment by her story squared with all he knew about his mistress's tastes and temperament. But at this moment, through one of those inspirations common to jealous men, analogous to that which reveals to a poet or scientist who has still only one rhyme or one observation the idea or law that will give them all their power, Swann recalled for the first time a remark Odette had made to him fully two years before: "Oh, Mme. Verdurin! All she can think about these days is me. I'm her little pet. She kisses me, and she wants me to go shopping with her, and she wants me to call her *tu*."<sup>111</sup> Far from seeing, at the time, any sort of connection between this comment and the absurd remarks meant to simulate some sort of depravity which Odette had reported to him, he had welcomed it as proof of a warm friendship. Now the memory of Mme. Verdurin's affection had suddenly come to join the memory of her unseemly conversation. He could no longer separate them in his mind and saw them mingled in reality too, the affection lending something serious and important to the jokes which in return caused the affection to lose some of its innocence. He went to Odette's house. He sat down at a distance from her. He did not dare kiss her, not knowing whether it would be affection or anger that a kiss would provoke, either in her, or in himself. He said nothing, he watched their love die. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Odette," he said to her, "my dear, I know I'm being hateful, but there are a few things I must ask you. Do you remember the idea I had about you and Mme. Verdurin? Tell me, was it true, with her or with anyone else?"

She shook her head while pursing her lips, a sign people often use to answer that they will not go, that it bores them, if someone asks: "Would you like to come watch the cavalcade go past, will you be at the review?" But a shake of the head thus usually assigned to an event in the future, for this reason colors with some uncertainty the denial of an event that is past. What is more, it suggests only reasons of personal propriety rather than reprobation, a moral impossibility. When he saw Odette make this sign to him that it was untrue, Swann understood that it was perhaps true.

"I've already told you. You know perfectly well," she added, looking irritated and unhappy.

"Yes, I know, but are you sure? Don't say, 'You know perfectly well'; say, 'I have never done anything of that sort with any woman.'"

She repeated, as though it were a lesson, ironically, and as if she wanted to get rid of him:

"I have never done anything of that sort with any woman."

"Can you swear it on your medal of Our Lady of Laghet?"

Swann knew Odette would never swear a false oath on that medal.

"Oh, you make me so unhappy!" she exclaimed, abruptly dodging the grasp of his question. "Aren't you done? What's the matter with you today? Are you determined to make me hate you, to make me detest you? You see? I wanted to have a nice time with you again, the way we used to, and this is how you thank me!"

However, not letting her go, like a surgeon waiting for a spasm to subside that has interrupted his operation but will not make him abandon it:

"You're quite wrong to imagine I would hold it against you in the least, Odette," he said to her with a persuasive and deceptive gentleness. "I only talk to you about what I know, and I always know much more about it than I say. But you are the only one who can mitigate by your confession what makes me hate you as long as it has been reported to me only by other people. My anger toward you does not come from your actions, I forgive you everything because I love you, but from your duplicity, the absurd duplicity which makes you persist in denying things I know already. How can you expect me to go on loving you when I see you insisting upon something, swearing to something I know is untrue? Odette, don't prolong this moment, which is agony for both of us. If you want to, you can end it in a second, you'll be free of it forever. Tell me on your medal, yes or no, if you have ever done these things."

"But I have no idea," she exclaimed angrily, "maybe a very long time ago, without realizing what I was doing, maybe two or three times."

Swann had envisaged all the possibilities. Reality is therefore something that has no relation to possibilities, any more than the stab of a knife in our body has any relation to the gradual motions of the clouds overhead, since those words *two or three times* carved a kind of cross in the tissue of his heart. Strange that the words *two or three times*, no more than words, words spoken into the air, at a distance, can lacerate the heart this way as if they had really touched it, can make you as sick as if you had swallowed poison. Involuntarily Swann thought of the remark he had heard at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's: "That's the most powerful thing I've seen since the table turning." The pain he was now experiencing resembled nothing he had imagined. Not only because in the hours when he most entirely distrusted her he had rarely imagined such an extremity of evil, but because, even when he did imagine this thing, it remained vague, uncertain, not clothed in the particular horror that had issued from the words *maybe two or three times*, not armed with that specific cruelty as different from everything he had known as a disease with which one is stricken for the first time. And yet Odette, from whom all this harm came to him, was no less dear to him, quite the contrary, more precious, as if at the same rate that his suffering increased, the value of the sedative increased, of the antidote



which only this woman possessed. He wanted to devote more care to her, as to a disease which one suddenly discovers is more serious. He wanted the frightful thing she had told him she had done "two or three times" not to be repeated. For this, he had to watch over Odette. People often say that when we inform a friend of his mistress's wrongdoings, we succeed only in attaching him to her more closely because he places no faith in them, but how much more so if he does place faith in them! But, said Swann to himself, how could he manage to protect her? He could perhaps keep her safe from a particular woman, but there were hundreds of others, and he realized what madness had come over him when he had begun, on the evening when he had not found Odette at the Verdurins', to want something that was always impossible—to possess another person. Happily for Swann, beneath the new sufferings that had just entered his soul like hordes of invaders, there lay a natural substratum, older, gentler, and silently industrious, like the cells of an injured organ that immediately set about preparing to restore the damaged tissues, like the muscles of a paralyzed limb that try to resume their former movements. These older, more autochthonous inhabitants of his soul employed, for a moment, all of Swann's strength in this dim recuperative work that gives the illusion of repose to a convalescent, to a surgical patient. This time it was not so much, as it usually was, in Swann's brain that this relaxation induced by exhaustion took effect, it was rather in his heart. But all the things in life that have once existed tend to recur, and like a dying animal shaken one last time by the throes of a convulsion which seemed to have ended, upon Swann's heart, spared for a moment, the same suffering returned of its own volition to carve the same cross again. He remembered those moonlit evenings when, lying back in the victoria that was taking him to the rue La Pérouse, he would voluptuously cultivate within himself the emotions of a man in love, without knowing the poisoned fruit they would necessarily bear. But all these thoughts did not last more than the space of a second, the time he took to bring his hand to his heart, catch his breath, and manage a smile to hide his agony. Already he was beginning to ask his questions again. For his jealousy, which had taken pains an enemy would not have taken to strike this blow, to introduce him to the most intense suffering he had yet known, did not believe he had suffered enough and sought to expose him to a wound that was deeper still. Thus, like a wicked deity, his jealousy inspired Swann and pushed him to his ruin. It was not his fault but only Odette's if at first his torment did not grow worse.

"My dear," he said to her, "it's in the past now. Was it with anyone I know?"

"No, of course not, I swear it wasn't. And anyway, I think I exaggerated, I don't think I went that far."

He smiled and went on:

"As you like. It doesn't really matter, but it's too bad you can't tell me the name. If I could picture the person it would keep me from ever thinking about her again. I say this for your own sake, because then I wouldn't be bothering you about it anymore. It's such a relief to be able to picture a thing! The truly horrifying things are the ones you can't imagine. But you've already been so kind, I don't want to tire you. I do thank you with all my heart for all the good you've done me. I'm quite finished now. Only this last question: How long ago was it?"

"Oh, Charles! Don't you see you're killing me? It's all so long ago. I never gave it another thought. And now it's as if you're positively trying to put those ideas in my head again. A lot of good it'll do you," she said, with unthinking foolishness and deliberate spite.

"Oh, I only wanted to know if it had happened since I've known you! It would be natural enough. Did it happen here? Could you tell me which particular evening, so that I could picture what I was doing at the time? I'm sure you realize it isn't possible that you don't remember who it was with, Odette, my love."

"Oh, I don't know, really I don't, I think it was in the Bois one evening when you came to meet us on the island. You had been to the Princesse des Laumes's for dinner," she said, happy to give him a specific detail that would attest to her truthfulness. "There was a woman at the next table; I hadn't seen her for ages. She said to me: 'Come around behind that little rock there and see the moonlight on the water.' At first I just yawned and said: 'No, I'm tired and I'm quite comfortable where I am.' She swore there had never been such moonlight. I said: 'What a joke!' I knew quite well what she was after."

Odette told this almost with a smile, either because it seemed to her quite natural, or because she thought she would thereby make it seem less important, or so as not to appear humiliated. At the sight of Swann's face, she changed her tone:

"You're a scoundrel, you like tormenting me, making me invent lies which I only tell you so you'll leave me in peace."

This second blow which Swann suffered was even more agonizing than the first. Never had he supposed the thing had been so recent, hidden from his eyes, which had not been able to discover it, not in a past which he had not known, but among evenings which he recalled so clearly, which he had experienced with Odette, which he had believed he knew so well, and which now assumed in retrospect an appearance that was false and atrocious; among them suddenly there opened up this wide gap, this moment on the island in the Bois. Odette, without being intelligent, had the charm of naturalness. She had described, she had mimed this scene with such simplicity that Swann, breathless, saw everything: Odette's yawn, the little rock. He heard her respond—gaily, alas: "What a joke!" He felt she would say nothing more this evening, there was no new revelation to expect just now; he said to her: "My poor dear, forgive me, I feel I'm hurting you, it's over and done with, I'm not thinking about it anymore."

But she saw that his eyes were still dwelling on the things he did not know and on that past era of their love, monotonous and sweet in his memory because it was vague, which was now being torn open like a wound by that minute on the island in the Bois, in the moonlight, after the dinner with the Princesse des Laumes. But he was so much in the habit by now of finding life interesting—of admiring the curious discoveries one can make—that even while suffering to the point of believing he could not endure such pain for long, he said to himself: "Life is really astonishing; it really has great surprises in store for us; immorality is actually more common than one would think. Here's a woman I trusted, who seemed so simple, so honest in any case, even if she was rather flighty, who seemed quite normal and healthy in her tastes; after an unlikely denunciation I question her, and the little she admits reveals much more than what one would have suspected." But he could not confine himself to these disinterested remarks. He tried to estimate the exact value of what she had told him, in order to know if he ought to conclude that she had done these things often, that they would happen again. He repeated to himself the words she had said: "I knew quite well what she was after," "Two or three times," "What a joke!" but they did not reappear in Swann's memory disarmed, each of them held a knife and with it struck him another blow. For a very long time, just as an invalid cannot stop himself from trying over and over again to make the motion that is painful to him, he repeated these words to himself: "I'm quite comfortable here," "What a joke!" but

the pain was so intense he had to stop. He marveled that acts which he had always judged so lightly, so cheerfully, had now become as serious as a disease from which one may die. He certainly knew some women he could have asked to keep an eye on Odette. But how could he hope they would adopt the same point of view he now had and not hold on to the point of view he had had for so long, that had always guided him in love affairs, would not say to him, laughing: "You nasty jealous man—trying to rob others of a little pleasure?" By what trapdoor, suddenly opened, had he (who in the past had derived only refined pleasures from his love for Odette) been roughly dropped into this new circle of hell from which he could not see how he would ever get out? Poor Odette! He did not hold it against her. She was only half guilty. Didn't people say it was her own mother who had handed her over to a rich Englishman in Nice when she was hardly more than a child? But what painful truth was now contained for him in those lines from *Journal d'un Poète* by Alfred de Vigny<sup>112</sup> which he had read with indifference in the past: "When you feel you are falling in love with a woman, you ought to say to yourself: Who are her friends? What sort of life has she had? All one's future happiness depends upon it." Swann was surprised that simple statements spelled out by his mind, like "What a joke!", "I could see very well what she was after," could hurt him so. But he realized that what he believed to be simple statements were merely the pieces of the framework that still contained, and could give back to him, the pain he had felt during Odette's story. For it was indeed the same pain which he was feeling again. Though he now knew, though he had even, as time passed, forgotten a little, forgiven, the moment he said these words to himself again the old suffering made him once again what he had been before Odette spoke: ignorant, trustful; his cruel jealousy placed him once again, so that he might be wounded by Odette's confession, in the position of a man who does not yet know, and after several months this old story still upset him like a revelation. He admired the terrible re-creative power of his memory. It was only by the weakening of that generator, whose fecundity diminishes with age, that he could hope for an easing of his torment. But as soon as the power of any one of Odette's remarks to make him suffer seemed nearly exhausted, then one of those on which Swann's mind had dwelt less until then, a remark that was almost new, would come to relieve the others and strike at him with undiminished vigor. The memory of the evening he had dined with the Princesse des Laumes was painful to him, but it was only the center of his disease. The latter irradiated confusedly on all sides through the days before and after it. And whatever point in it he tried to touch in his memories, it was the whole of that season, during which the Verdurins had dined so often on the island in the Bois, that hurt him. Hurt him so badly that gradually the curiosity which his jealousy kept provoking in him was neutralized by his fear of the new torments he would inflict on himself by satisfying it. He realized that the entire period of Odette's life that had elapsed before she met him, a period he had never tried to picture, was not the abstract expanse which he could vaguely see, but had consisted of specific years, each filled with concrete incidents. But if he came to know them, he was afraid that that past of hers, colorless, fluid, and tolerable, might assume a body that was tangible and loathsome, a face that was individual and diabolical. And he continued to refrain from trying to imagine it, no longer from laziness of mind, but from fear of suffering. He hoped that one day he might at last be able to hear the name of the island in the Bois, of the Princesse des Laumes, without feeling the old tearing at his heart, and thought it would be imprudent to provoke Odette into supplying him with new remarks, names of places, different circumstances which, when his illness was still scarcely abated, would reawaken it again in another form.

But often the things he did not know, that he now was afraid of knowing, were revealed spontaneously by Odette herself, and without her realizing it; in fact the distance that depravity put between Odette's real life and the relatively innocent life which Swann had believed, and quite often still believed, his mistress led, was a distance whose extent Odette did not realize: a depraved person, still affecting the same virtue in front of the people by whom he does not want his vices to be suspected, has no gauge by which to recognize how far the latter, whose continuous growth is imperceptible to himself, are drawing him little by little away from normal ways of living. As they cohabited, deep in Odette's mind, with the memory of the acts she was hiding from Swann, other actions were gradually colored by them, infected by them, without her being able to see anything strange about them, without their seeming out of place in the particular surroundings where she kept them inside her; but if she described them to Swann, he was horrified by the revelation of the environment they betrayed. One day he was trying, without hurting Odette, to ask her if she had ever had any dealings with a procuress. Actually he was convinced she had not; reading the anonymous letter had introduced the conjecture into his mind, but in a mechanical way; it had met with no credence there, but had in fact remained there, and Swann, in order to be rid of the purely material but nonetheless awkward presence of the suspicion, wanted Odette to remove it. "Oh, no! Not that they don't pester me," she added, revealing by her smile a self-satisfied vanity which she no longer noticed could not seem justified to Swann. "There was one here yesterday who stayed more than two hours waiting for me, offered me any amount I liked. It seems some ambassador had said to her: 'I'll kill myself if you don't get her for me.' They told her I'd gone out. In the end I went and talked to her myself so she would leave. I wish you could have seen the way I spoke to her; my maid heard me from the next room and told me I was shouting at the top of my voice. I said, 'Haven't I told you I don't want to? It's a poor idea, I don't like it. Really, I should hope I'm still free to do what I want! If I needed the money, I could understand . . .' The concierge has orders not to let her in again. He'll tell her I'm in the country. Oh, I wish you had been hiding somewhere. I think you would have been pleased, my dear. You see, your little Odette has some good in her, all the same, even though some people find her so detestable."

Moreover her very admissions, when she made them, of faults that she supposed he had discovered, served Swann as points of departure toward new doubts rather than put an end to the old. For her admissions were never of exactly the same proportions as his doubts. Though Odette might subtract from her confession all the essential part, there remained in the accessory part something Swann had never imagined, that crushed him with its newness, and would permit him to change the terms of the problem of his jealousy. And these admissions he could no longer forget. His soul bore them along, cast them aside, cradled them, like dead bodies. And it was poisoned by them.

One time she told him about a visit Forcheville had paid her on the day of the Paris-Murcia fete. "What? You already knew him back then? Yes, of course, that's right," he said, catching himself so as not to show that he had not known. And suddenly he began to tremble at the thought that on the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, on which he had received from her the letter he had kept so carefully, she had perhaps been having lunch with Forcheville at the Maison d'Or. She swore she had not. "Yet the Maison d'Or does remind me of something or other that I knew at the time wasn't true," he said in order to frighten her. "Yes, that I hadn't actually been there at all that evening when I told you I had just come from there and you had been looking for me at

Prévost's," she answered (thinking from his expression that he knew this), with a decisiveness in which there was, not cynicism, but rather timidity, a fear of vexing Swann, which out of self-respect she wanted to hide, and also a desire to show him that she could be frank. Thus she struck with an executioner's neatness and energy though quite without cruelty, for Odette was not conscious of the harm she was doing Swann; and she even began to laugh, perhaps, it is true, chiefly so as not to seem humiliated, embarrassed. "It's quite true that I hadn't been to the Maison Dorée; I was coming away from Forcheville's house. I actually had been to Prévost's, I didn't make that up, and he ran into me there and asked me to come and look at his engravings. But someone else came to see him. I told you I was coming from the Maison d'Or because I was afraid you would be annoyed. See? That was rather kind of me, wasn't it? Even if I was wrong, at least I'm telling you all about it now quite frankly. What would I gain by not telling you I had lunch with him the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, if it was true? Especially since at the time we didn't know each other very well yet, you and I, dear." He smiled at her with sudden cowardice, changed by these crushing words into a creature without strength. So, even during the months which he had never dared to think about again because they had been too happy, during those months when she had loved him, she was already lying to him! Besides that time (the first evening they had "made cattleya") when she had told him she was coming from the Maison Dorée, how many others there must have been, each of them also harboring a lie which Swann had not suspected. He remembered that one day she had said to him: "I would simply tell Mme. Verdurin my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it." From him too, probably, many times when she had murmured the sorts of words which explain a delay, justify a change in the hour of a meeting, they must have concealed, without his suspecting it then, something she was going to do with some other man, with some other man to whom she had said: "I'll simply tell Swann my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it." And under all of Swann's sweetest memories, under the simplest words Odette had said to him in the old days, which he had believed like the words of the gospel, under the daily actions she had recounted to him, under the most ordinary places, her dressmaker's house, the avenue du Bois, the Hippodrome, he sensed, concealed within the surplus time which even in the most thoroughly itemized days still leaves some play, some room, and can serve as hiding places for certain actions, he sensed insinuating itself the possible subterranean presence of lies which made something ignoble out of all that had remained most dear to him (his best evenings, the rue La Pérouse itself, which Odette must always have left at other hours than those she had reported to him), propagating everywhere a little of the dark horror he had felt when he heard her admission about the Maison Dorée, and, like the loathsome beasts in the Desolation of Nineveh,<sup>13</sup> toppling stone by stone his entire past. If he now turned away each time his memory spoke the bitter name of the Maison Dorée, it was no longer, as still quite recently at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, because it recalled to him a happiness he had long since lost, but because it recalled to him an unhappiness he had only just discovered. Then the same thing happened to the name of the Maison Dorée as to that of the island in the Bois, it gradually ceased to hurt Swann. For what we believe to be our love, or our jealousy, is not one single passion, continuous and indivisible. They are composed of an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, which are ephemeral but by their uninterrupted multitude give the impression of continuity, the illusion of unity. The life of Swann's love, the faithfulness of his jealousy, were formed of the death, the faithlessness, of numberless desires, numberless doubts, all of which had Odette as their object. If he had remained for a long time without seeing her, those that died would not have been replaced by others. But the presence of Odette continued to sow Swann's heart with affection and suspicion by turns.

On certain evenings she would suddenly be full of kindness toward him again, and she would warn him severely that he ought to take advantage of it right away, under penalty of not seeing it repeated for years to come; they had to go back to her house immediately to "make cattleya," and this desire which she claimed to feel for him was so sudden, so inexplicable, so imperious, the caresses she lavished on him at these times so demonstrative and so unusual that this rough and improbable affection made Swann as unhappy as a lie or an unkindness. One evening when he had gone home with her thus after she commanded it, and she was kissing him and murmuring to him with a passion quite unlike her usual coldness, he suddenly thought he heard a noise; he stood up, looked everywhere, found no one, but did not have the courage to go back to his place next to her, whereupon she, in a paroxysm of rage, broke a vase and said to Swann: "One can never do anything right with you!" And he remained uncertain whether she had not hidden someone there with the desire of provoking the man's jealousy or inflaming his senses.

Sometimes he visited brothels hoping to learn something about her, though without daring to say her name. "I have a nice little one I know you'll like," the madam would say. And he would stay there for an hour chatting gloomily to some poor girl who was astonished that he did nothing more. One who was very young and beautiful said to him one day: "What I'd like would be to find a man who would be a real friend to me: then he could be quite certain I'd never go with another man again." "Really, do you believe it's possible for a woman to be touched that a man loves her, and never be unfaithful to him?" Swann asked her anxiously. "Well, of course! But it would depend on her character, wouldn't it now?" Swann could not help saying to these girls the same sorts of things that would have pleased the Princesse des Laumes. To the one who was looking for a friend, he said, smiling: "How nice—you've put on blue eyes to match the color of your belt." "And you too; you've got blue cuffs on." "What a lovely conversation we're having, for this sort of a place! I'm not boring you, am I? Perhaps you've got something else you have to do?" "No, I have plenty of time. If you were boring me, I would have told you. Actually, I like listening to you talk." "I'm very flattered. Aren't we having a nice chat?" he said to the madam, who had just come in. "Why yes, that's just what I was saying to myself. How well they're behaving! There! Now they come to my house to talk. The Prince said it himself, the other day, it's much nicer here than at his wife's house. It seems that in high society these days all the women put on such airs, it's a real scandal! But I'll leave you alone, I know when to be discreet." And she left Swann with the blue-eyed girl. But soon he stood up and said good-bye, she did not matter to him, she did not know Odette.

Because the painter had been ill, Dr. Cottard had advised him to go to sea for a while; several of the regulars talked about going along with him; the Verdurins could not reconcile themselves to being left alone, rented a yacht, then purchased it and so Odette went on frequent cruises. Each time she had been gone for a little while, Swann felt he was beginning to separate from her, but as if this mental distance were proportional to the physical distance, as soon as he knew Odette was back, he could not rest without seeing her. Once, having gone off for only a month, as they thought, either because they were tempted along the way, or because M. Verdurin had cunningly arranged things beforehand to please his wife and had informed the regulars only as

they proceeded, from Algiers they went to Tunis, then to Italy, then to Greece, to Constantinople, to Asia Minor. The voyage had lasted close to a year. Swann felt absolutely calm, almost happy. Even though Mme. Verdurin had tried to persuade the pianist and Dr. Cottard that the aunt of the one and the patients of the other did not need them at all and that in any case it was imprudent to let Mme. Cottard return to Paris, which M. Verdurin assured them was in the midst of a revolution, she was obliged to give them back their freedom at Constantinople. And the painter left with them. One day, shortly after the three travelers<sup>114</sup> returned, Swann, seeing an omnibus go by headed for the Luxembourg, where he had business, had jumped inside and found himself sitting across from Mme. Cottard, who was making the rounds of the people whose “day” it was in full dress uniform, ostrich feather in hat, silk dress, muff, combination umbrella-sunshade, calling-card case, and freshly cleaned white gloves. Clothed in these insignia, when it was dry out she would go on foot from one house to the next in the same neighborhood, but for proceeding into a different neighborhood would use the omnibus with connection service. During the first few minutes, before the woman’s native kindness perforated the starch of the petty bourgeoisie, and also not very sure if she ought to talk about the Verdurins to Swann, she produced quite naturally, in her awkward, slow, soft voice which at times the omnibus drowned out completely with its rattling, remarks chosen from among those she heard and repeated in the twenty-five houses whose stories she climbed during one day:

“I don’t need to ask you, monsieur, if a man in the swim such as yourself has gone to the Mirlitons,<sup>115</sup> to see the portrait by Machard<sup>116</sup> which the whole of Paris is rushing to see? Well, and what do you think of it? Whose camp are you in, those who approve or those who don’t? It’s the same in every house now, all they talk about is the portrait by Machard; you aren’t fashionable, you aren’t really cultured, you aren’t up-to-date, unless you can give your opinion of Machard’s portrait.”

Swann answered that he had not seen the portrait, and Mme. Cottard was afraid she had offended him by obliging him to confess it.

“Well, good, at least you admit it frankly, you don’t think you’re disgraced because you haven’t seen Machard’s portrait. I think that’s admirable. Well now, I have seen it. Opinion is divided, you know, some people think there’s too much polish in it, too much whipped cream, but I think it’s just right. Of course she’s not like the blue-and-yellow women by our friend Biche. But I must confess to you frankly, though you will not find me very fin-de-siècle, but I do say what I think—I don’t understand his work. Good Lord, I can see the good points in his portrait of my husband, it’s not as strange as what he usually does, but even so he had to go and put a blue mustache on him. Whereas Machard! Imagine, the husband of the friend I’m on my way to see at this moment (giving me the great pleasure of riding with you) has promised her that, if he’s elected to the Academy (he’s one of the doctor’s colleagues), he’ll have her portrait done by Machard. Obviously they’re dreaming! I have another friend who claims she likes Leloir<sup>117</sup> better. I’m just a poor layman and perhaps Leloir is even superior technically. But I think the most important quality in a portrait, especially when it’s going to cost ten thousand francs, is that it should be a good likeness, and pleasant to look at.”

Having made these remarks, which were inspired by the loftiness of her plume, the monogram on her card case, the little number inked inside her gloves by the dry cleaner, and the difficulty of talking to Swann about the Verdurins, Mme. Cottard, seeing that they were still far away from the corner of the rue Bonaparte where the driver was to let her off, listened to her heart, which counseled other words.

“Your ears must have been burning, monsieur,” she said, “during the voyage we made with Mme. Verdurin. We talked of nothing else but you.”

Swann was very surprised; he had assumed that his name was never mentioned in the presence of the Verdurins.

“Anyway,” added Mme. Cottard, “Mme. de Crècy was there, and that says it all. Wherever Odette is, she can never go for very long without mentioning you. And as you may expect she does not speak ill of you. What! You doubt it?” she said, seeing Swann make a gesture of skepticism.

And carried away by the sincerity of her conviction, and imputing no unfavorable meaning to the word, which she used only in the sense in which one employs it to speak of the affection between friends:

“Why, she adores you! Oh, I’m sure one couldn’t say anything against you in front of her! One would be soundly scolded! Apropos of anything at all, if we saw a painting, for instance, she would say: ‘Now, if he were here, he’d be able to tell us whether it was genuine or not. There’s nobody like him for that.’ And she was constantly asking: ‘What can he be doing right now? If only he would do a little work! It’s dreadful that a fellow with such gifts should be so lazy.’ (You’ll forgive me, won’t you?) ‘I can see him right now, he’s thinking about us, he’s wondering where we are.’ She even made a remark that I found quite charming: M. Verdurin said to her: ‘How in the world can you see what he’s doing right now, since you’re eight hundred leagues away?’ And Odette answered: ‘Nothing is impossible for the eye of a friend.’ No, I swear, I’m not saying it just to flatter you, you have a true friend in her such as you don’t often find. I can tell you besides, that if you don’t know it, you’re the only one who doesn’t. Mme. Verdurin told me as much herself on our very last day (you know, when you’re about to leave you always have the best talks): ‘I’m not saying Odette doesn’t care a great deal for us, but whatever we might say to her wouldn’t have much weight compared to what M. Swann might say.’ Oh, my Lord! The driver’s stopping for me—here I’ve been chatting away with you and I nearly went right past the rue Bonaparte . . . Would you be so kind as to tell me if my plume is straight?”

And Mme. Cottard withdrew from her muff and held out to Swann a hand gloved in white from which escaped, along with a transfer ticket, a vision of upper-class life that filled the omnibus, mingling with the smell of the dry cleaner. And Swann felt himself overflowing with affection for her, as much as for Mme. Verdurin (and almost as much as for Odette, since the feeling he now had for the latter, being no longer mingled with pain, was hardly love anymore), while from the platform of the omnibus he followed her with his newly affectionate eyes as she courageously made her way up the rue Bonaparte, her plume high, lifting her skirt with one hand, holding in the other her sunshade and her card case with its monogram displayed, while her muff danced in front of her.

To compete with the morbid feelings that Swann had for Odette, Mme. Cottard, a better healer than her husband would have been, had grafted alongside them other feelings, normal ones, of gratitude, friendship, feelings which in Swann’s mind would make Odette more human (more like other women, because other women too could inspire these feelings in him), would hasten her final transformation into the Odette who was loved with a peaceful affection, who had brought him back one evening after a

party at the painter's home to drink a glass of orangeade with Forcheville and with whom Swann had glimpsed the possibility of living in happiness.

In the past having often thought with terror that one day he would cease to be in love with Odette, he had promised himself to be vigilant and, as soon as he felt his love was beginning to leave him, to cling to it, to hold it back. But now to the weakening of his love there corresponded a simultaneous weakening of his desire to remain in love. For one cannot change, that is to say become another person, while continuing to acquiesce to the feelings of the person one has ceased to be. Now and then the name, glimpsed in a newspaper, of one of the men he thought could have been Odette's lovers, restored his jealousy to him. But it was very mild and as it proved to him that he had not yet completely emerged from the time when he had suffered so much—but also when he had experienced such voluptuous feelings—and that the hazards of the road ahead might still permit him to catch a furtive, distant glimpse of its beauties, this jealousy actually gave him a pleasant thrill just as to the sad Parisian leaving Venice to return to France a last mosquito proves that Italy and the summer are not yet too remote. But most often, when he made the effort, if not to remain in this quite distinctive period of his life from which he was emerging, at least to have a clear view of it while he still could, he would notice that already he no longer could; he would have liked to observe, as though it were a landscape about to disappear, that love which he had just left behind; but it is so difficult to duplicate oneself and give oneself a truthful display of a feeling one no longer has that soon, darkness gathering in his brain, he could no longer see anything, gave up looking, took off his lorgnon, wiped its lenses; and he said to himself that it would be better to rest a little, that there would still be time later on, and would settle back with the incuriosity, the torpor of the drowsy traveler who pulls his hat down over his eyes in order to sleep in the railway carriage which he feels carrying him faster and faster away from the country where he has lived for so long and which he had promised himself not to let slip past without giving it a last farewell. Indeed, like the same traveler if he does not wake until he is back in France, when Swann happened upon proof close at hand that Forcheville had been Odette's lover, he observed that he felt no pain, that his love was far away by now, and he was sorry not to have been warned of the moment when he was about to leave it behind forever. And just as before kissing Odette for the first time he had tried to imprint on his memory the face which had been familiar to him for so long and which was about to be transformed by the memory of that kiss, so he would have wanted, in his thoughts at least, to have been able to make his farewells, while she still existed, to the Odette who had inspired him with love, jealousy, to the Odette who had made him suffer and whom he would now never see again. He was mistaken. He did see her again, one more time, a few weeks later. It was while he was asleep, in the twilight of a dream. He was walking with Mme. Verdurin, Dr. Cottard, a young man in a fez whom he could not identify, the painter, Odette, Napoleon III, and my grandfather, along a path that followed the sea and overhung it steeply sometimes very high up, sometimes by a few yards only, so that one climbed and descended again constantly; those who were descending again were already no longer visible to those who were still climbing, what little daylight remained was failing, and it seemed then as though a profound darkness was going to spread over them at any moment. Now and again the waves leaped right up to the edge and Swann felt sprays of icy water on his cheek. Odette told him to wipe them off, he could not and was embarrassed by this in front of her, as he was embarrassed to be in his nightshirt. He hoped that in the darkness no one would realize, but Mme. Verdurin stared at him with a look of surprise for a long moment during which he saw her face change shape, her nose lengthen, and that she had a large mustache. He turned away to look at Odette, her cheeks were pale, with little red spots, her features drawn, ringed with shadows, but she was looking at him with eyes full of tenderness that were about to separate from her like teardrops and fall on him, and he felt he loved her so much that he wanted to take her away at once. Suddenly Odette turned her wrist, looked at a little watch, and said: "I have to go," she said good-bye to everyone, in the same manner, without taking Swann aside, without telling him where she would see him again that evening or another day. He did not dare ask her, he would have liked to follow her and was obliged, without turning back toward her, to answer with a smile some question of Mme. Verdurin's, but his heart was pounding horribly, he felt he hated Odette, he would have liked to cut out those eyes of hers that he had loved so much just a moment ago, crush those pallid cheeks. He continued to climb with Mme. Verdurin, which meant that with each step he moved farther away from Odette, who was descending in the opposite direction. After one second, it was many hours ago that she had left them. The painter remarked to Swann that Napoleon III had vanished an instant after she had. "They certainly must have arranged it together," he added. "They must have met at the bottom of the hill, but they didn't want to say good-bye at the same time for the sake of appearances. She's obviously his mistress." The unknown young man began to cry. Swann tried to comfort him. "Really, she's doing the right thing," he told him, drying his eyes and taking off his fez so that he would be more comfortable. "I told her a dozen times she should do it. Why be sad about it? He above all would understand her." Thus did Swann talk to himself, for the young man he had not been able to identify at first was also himself; like certain novelists, he had divided his personality between two characters, the one having the dream, and another he saw before him wearing a fez.

As for Napoleon III, it was to Forcheville that some vague association of ideas, then a certain modification in the Baron's usual physiognomy, lastly the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honor on his chest, had induced him to give this name; but in reality, and in everything which the character in the dream represented to him and recalled to him, it was indeed Forcheville. For, from incomplete and changing images the sleeping Swann drew false deductions, having for the moment as well such creative power that he reproduced himself by simple division like certain lower organisms; with the warmth that he felt in his own palm he modeled the hollow of a strange hand which he thought he was clasping, and from feelings and impressions of which he was not yet conscious, devised peripeteias of a sort which, through their logical linking, would produce at just the right moment in Swann's sleep the person required to receive his love or prompt his awakening. Utter darkness descended on him in an instant, an alarm sounded, inhabitants of the place ran past, escaping from houses in flames; Swann heard the sound of the waves leaping and his heart, with the same violence, pounding with anxiety in his chest. Suddenly the palpitations of his heart redoubled in speed, he felt an inexplicable pain and nausea; a countryman covered with burns flung at him as he passed: "Come ask Charlus where Odette ended up this evening with her friend, he used to go about with her in the old days and she tells him everything. It's them that started the fire." It was his valet who had come to wake him and who said:

"Monsieur, it's eight o'clock and the hairdresser is here, I've told him to come by again in an hour."

But these words, penetrating the swells of sleep in which Swann was plunged, had reached his consciousness only by suffering that deflection which causes a ray of light in the depths of water to appear to be a sun, just as a moment earlier the



sound of the doorbell, assuming in the depths of those abysses the sonority of an alarm, had begotten the episode of the fire. Meanwhile the scene before his eyes turned to dust, he opened his eyes, heard one last time the sound of a wave of the sea as it receded. He touched his cheek. It was dry. And yet he could recall the sensation of the cold water and the taste of the salt. He got up, dressed. He had asked the hairdresser to come early because he had written to my grandfather the night before that he would be going to Combray in the afternoon, having learned that Mme. de Cambremer—Mlle. Legrandin—was spending a few days there. Associating in his memory the charm of that young face with the charm of a countryside he had not visited in such a long time, he found that together they offered him an attraction that had made him decide to leave Paris for a few days at last. Because the different chance events which bring us into contact with certain people do not coincide with the time during which we are in love with them, but, extending beyond it, may occur before it begins and repeat themselves after it has ended, the earliest appearances in our lives of a person destined later to captivate us assume retrospectively in our eyes the significance of a warning, a presage. This was how Swann had often looked back at the image of Odette when he met her at the theater, that first evening when he did not dream he would ever see her again—and how he now recalled the party at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's where he had introduced Général de Froberville to Mme. de Cambremer. We have such numerous interests in our lives that it is not uncommon, on a single occasion, for the foundations of a happiness that does not yet exist to be laid down alongside the intensification of a grief from which we are still suffering. And undoubtedly this could have happened to Swann elsewhere than at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's. Who knows, even, had he found himself elsewhere, that evening, if other happinesses, other griefs would not have come to him, which afterward should have appeared to him to have been inevitable? But what did seem to him to have been inevitable was what had taken place, and he was not far short of seeing something providential in the fact that he had decided to go to Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, because his mind, wanting to admire life's richness of invention and incapable of posing itself a difficult question for very long, such as to determine what would have been most desirable, believed that in the sufferings he had experienced that evening and in the pleasures still unsuspected that were already germinating—between which the balance was too difficult to establish—there was a sort of necessary connection.

But while, an hour after he had woken, he was giving instructions to the hairdresser so that his brush cut would not become disordered on the train, he thought about his dream again, and saw once again, as he had felt them close beside him, Odette's pale complexion, her too thin cheeks, her drawn features, her tired eyes, everything which—in the course of the successive expression of tenderness which had made of his abiding love for Odette a long oblivion of the first image he had formed of her—he had ceased to notice since the earliest days of their acquaintance, days to which no doubt, while he slept, his memory had returned to search for their exact sensation. And with the intermittent coarseness that reappeared in him as soon as he was no longer unhappy and the level of his morality dropped accordingly, he exclaimed to himself: "To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I felt my deepest love, for a woman who did not appeal to me, who was not my type!"

## PART II

### COMBRAY

COMBRAY, FROM A DISTANCE, for ten leagues<sup>1</sup> around, seen from the railway when we arrived there the last week before Easter, was no more than a church summing up the town, representing it, speaking of it and for it into the distance, and, when one approached, holding close around its high dark cloak, in the middle of a field, against the wind, like a shepherdess her sheep, the woolly gray backs of the gathered houses, which a vestige of medieval ramparts girdled here and there with a line as perfectly circular as a small town in a primitive painting. To live in, Combray was a little dreary, like its streets, whose houses, built of the blackish stones of the countryside, fronted by outside steps, capped with gables that cast shadows down before them, were so dark that once the daylight began to fade one had to draw back the curtains in the “formal rooms”; streets with the solemn names of saints (of whom many were connected to the history of the earliest seigneurs of Combray): the rue Saint-Hilaire, the rue Saint-Jacques, in which my aunt’s house stood, the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, along which her railings ran, and the rue du Saint-Esprit, onto which opened the little side gate of her garden; and these streets of Combray exist in a part of my memory so withdrawn, painted in colors so different from those that now coat the world for me, that in truth all of them, and also the church that rose above them on the square, appear to me even more unreal than the projections of the magic lantern; and that at certain moments, it seems to me that to be able to cross the rue Saint-Hilaire again, to be able to take a room in the rue de l’Oiseau—at the old Hôtellerie de l’Oiseau Flesché, from whose basement windows rose a smell of cooking that now and then still rises in me as intermittently and as warmly—would be to enter into contact with the Beyond in a manner more marvelously supernatural than making the acquaintance of Golo or chatting with Geneviève de Brabant.

My grandfather’s cousin—my great-aunt—in whose house we lived, was the mother of that Aunt Léonie who, after the death of her husband, my uncle Octave, no longer wished to leave, first Combray, then within Combray her house, then her bedroom, then her bed and no longer “came down,” always lying in an uncertain state of grief, physical debility, illness, obsession, and piety. Her own rooms looked out on the rue Saint-Jacques, which ended much farther away in the Grand-Pré (as opposed to the Petit-Pré, a green in the middle of the town where three streets met), and which, smooth and gray, with the three high steps of sandstone before almost every door, seemed like a narrow passage hewn by a cutter of Gothic images from the same stone out of which he would have sculpted a crèche or a calvary. My aunt effectively confined her life to two adjoining rooms, staying in one of them in the afternoon while the other was aired. These were the sorts of provincial rooms which—just as in certain countries entire tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or perfumed by myriad protozoa that we cannot see—enchant us with the thousand smells given off by the virtues, by wisdom, by habits, a whole secret life, invisible, superabundant, and moral, which the atmosphere holds in suspension; smells still natural, certainly, and colored by the weather like those of the neighboring countryside, but already homey, human and enclosed, an exquisite, ingenious, and limpid jelly of all the fruits of the year that have left the orchard for the cupboard; seasonal, but movable and domestic, correcting the piquancy of the hoarfrost with the sweetness of warm bread, as lazy and punctual as a village clock, roving and orderly, heedless and foresightful, linen smells, morning smells, pious smells, happy with a peace that brings only an increase of anxiety and with a prosiness that serves as a great reservoir of poetry for one who passes through it without having lived in it. The air was saturated with the finest flower of a silence so nourishing, so succulent, that I could move through it only with a sort of greed, especially on those first still cold mornings of Easter week when I tasted it more keenly because I had only just arrived in Combray: before I went in to say good morning to my aunt, they made me wait for a moment, in the first room where the sun, still wintry, had come to warm itself before the fire, already lit between the two bricks and coating the whole room with an odor of soot, having the same effect as one of those great rustic open hearths, or one of those mantels in country houses, beneath which one sits hoping that outdoors there will be an onset of rain, snow, even some diluvian catastrophe so as to add to the comfort of reclusion the poetry of hibernation; I would take a few steps from the prayer stool to the armchairs of stamped velvet always covered with a crocheted antimacassar; and as the fire baked like a dough the appetizing smells with which the air of the room was all curdled and which had already been kneaded and made to “rise” by the damp and sunny coolness of the morning, it flaked them, gilded them, puckered them, puffed them, transforming them into an invisible, palpable country pastry, an immense “turnover” in which, having barely tasted the crisper, more delicate, more highly regarded but also drier aromas of the cupboard, the chest of drawers, the floral wallpaper, I would always come back with an unavowed covetousness to ensnare myself in the central, sticky, stale, indigestible, and fruity smell of the flowered coverlet.

In the next room, I would hear my aunt talking all alone in an undertone. She always talked rather softly because she thought there was something broken and floating in her head that she would have displaced by speaking too loudly, but she never remained for long, even alone, without saying something, because she believed it was beneficial to her throat and that if she prevented the blood from stopping there, she would reduce the frequency of the fits of breathlessness and the spasms from which she suffered; besides, in the absolute inertia in which she lived, she attributed to the least of her sensations an extraordinary importance; she endowed them with a mobility that made it difficult for her to keep them to herself, and lacking a confidant to whom she could communicate them, she announced them to herself, in a perpetual monologue that was her only form of activity. Unfortunately, having acquired the habit of thinking out loud, she did not always take care to see that there was no one in the next room, and I often heard her saying to herself: “I must be sure to remember that I did not sleep” (for never sleeping was her great claim, and the language we all used deferred to it and was marked by it: in the morning Françoise did not come to “wake” her, but “entered” her room; when my aunt wanted to take a nap during the day, we said she wanted to “reflect” or “rest”; and when she happened to forget herself, while chatting, so far as to say: “what woke me up” or “I dreamed that,” she would blush and correct herself instantly).

After a moment I would go in and kiss her; Françoise would be steeping her tea; or, if my aunt was feeling agitated, she would ask instead for her infusion and I would be the one entrusted with pouring from the pharmacy bag onto a plate the quantity

of lime blossom which then had to be put into the boiling water. The drying of the stems had curved them into a whimsical trelliswork in whose interlacings the pale flowers opened, as if a painter had arranged them, posing them in the most ornamental way. The leaves, having lost or changed their aspect, looked like the most disparate things, a fly's transparent wing, the white back of a label, a rose petal, but these things had been heaped up, crushed, or woven as in the construction of a nest. A thousand small useless details—the charming prodigality of the pharmacist—that would have been eliminated in an artificial preparation gave me, like a book in which one is amazed to encounter the name of a person one knows, the pleasure of realizing that these were actually stems of real lime blossoms, like those I saw in the avenue de la Gare, altered precisely because they were not duplicates but themselves, and because they had aged. And since here, each new characteristic was only the metamorphosis of an old characteristic, in some little gray balls I recognized the green buds that had not come to their term; but especially the pink luster, lunar and soft, that made the flowers stand out amid the fragile forest of stems where they were suspended like little gold roses—a sign, like the glow on a wall that still reveals the location of a fresco that has worn away, of the difference between the parts of the tree that had been “in color” and those that had not—showed me that these petals were in fact the same ones that, before filling the pharmacy bag with flowers, had embalmed the spring evenings. That candle-pink flame was their color still, but half doused and drowsing in the diminished life that was theirs now, and that is a sort of twilight of flowers. Soon my aunt would be able to dip into the boiling infusion, of which she savored the taste of dead leaf or faded flower, a small madeleine, a piece of which she would hold out to me when it had sufficiently softened.

On one side of her bed was a large yellow chest of drawers of lemon wood and a table that was akin to both a dispensary and a high altar, on which, below a small statue of the Virgin and a bottle of Vichy-Célestins, could be found her missals and her medical prescriptions, everything needed for following from her bed both the services and her regimen, for not missing the hour either of her pepsin or of Vespers. On the other side, her bed lay by the window, she had the street there before her eyes and on it from morning to night, to divert her melancholy, like the Persian princes, would read the daily but immemorial chronicle of Combray, which she would afterward comment upon with Françoise.

I would not have been with my aunt five minutes before she would send me away for fear that I would tire her. She would hold out to my lips her sad, pale, dull forehead, on which, at this morning hour, she had not yet arranged her false hair, and where the bones showed through like the points of a crown of thorns or the beads of a rosary, and she would say to me: “Now, my poor child, off you go, get ready for Mass; and if you see Françoise downstairs, tell her not to stay too long amusing herself with all of you, she should come up soon to see if I need anything.”

Françoise, who had been in her service for years and did not suspect at that time that one day she would enter exclusively into ours, did in fact neglect my aunt a little during the months when we were there. There had been a time, in my childhood, before we went to Combray, when my aunt Léonie still spent the winters in Paris with her mother, when Françoise was such a stranger to me that on the first of January, before entering my great-aunt's, my mother would put a five-franc coin in my hand and say to me: “Take great care not to give it to the wrong person. Wait until you hear me say, ‘Good morning, Françoise’; at the same time, I'll touch you lightly on the arm.” Hardly had we arrived in my aunt's dim hall than we would see in the shadows, under the flutes of a dazzling bonnet as stiff and fragile as if it were made of spun sugar, the concentric ripples of an anticipatory smile of gratitude. It was Françoise, standing motionless in the frame of the little door of the corridor like the statue of a saint in its niche. When we were a little used to this chapel darkness, we could distinguish on her face the disinterested love of humanity, the fond respect for the upper classes excited in the best regions of her heart by the hope of a New Year's gift. Mama would pinch my arm violently and say in a loud voice: “Good morning, Françoise.” At this signal, my fingers would open and I would release the coin, which found a bashful but outstretched hand to receive it. But ever since we had begun going to Combray I knew no one better than Françoise, we were her favorites, she had for us, at least during the first years, not only as much regard as for my aunt, but also a keener liking, because we added, to the prestige of being part of the family (she had, for the invisible bonds formed between the members of a family by the circulation of the same blood, as much respect as a Greek tragedian), the charm of not being her usual masters. And so with what joy would she welcome us, commiserate with us that we did not yet have finer weather, the day of our arrival, just before Easter, when there was often an icy wind, while Mama would ask her for news of her daughter and her nephews, whether her grandson was a pretty child, what they were planning to make of him, whether he was going to be like his grandmother.

And when there was no one else there, Mama, knowing that Françoise still mourned her parents, who had died years ago, would talk to her about them gently, ask her for a thousand details about what sort of life they had led.

She had guessed that Françoise did not like her son-in-law and that he spoiled the pleasure she took in being with her daughter, with whom she could not chat as freely when he was there. And so, when Françoise went to see them, a few leagues from Combray, Mama would say to her, smiling: “Isn't it so, Françoise, if Julien is obliged to be away and you have Marguerite all to yourself all day long, you'll be sorry, but you'll make the best of it?” And Françoise would say, laughing: “Madame knows everything; Madame is worse than those X rays” (she said X with an affected difficulty and a smile to poke fun at herself, an ignorant woman, for using that erudite term) “that they brought in for Mme. Octave and that see what you have in your heart,” and disappeared, embarrassed that someone was paying attention to her, perhaps so that we would not see her cry; Mama was the first person who gave her that sweet sensation, the feeling that her life as a countrywoman, her joys, her sorrows could be of some interest, could be a reason for pleasure or sadness in someone other than herself. My aunt was resigned to managing with less help from her during our stay, knowing how much my mother appreciated the service of this maid who was so intelligent and active, who was as handsome at five o'clock in the morning in her kitchen, under a bonnet whose dazzling rigid flutes appeared to be made of porcelain, as she was when going to High Mass; who did everything well, working like a horse, whether she was in good health or not, but without a fuss, as though it were nothing, the only one of my aunt's maids who, when Mama asked for hot water or black coffee, brought them really boiling; she was one of those servants who, in a household, are at the same time those most immediately displeasing to a stranger, perhaps because they do not bother to win him over and are not attentive to him, knowing very well they have no need of him, that one would stop seeing him rather than dismiss them; and who are, on the other hand, those most valued by masters who have tested their real capacities, and do not care about the superficial charm, the servile chatter that makes a favorable impression on a visitor, but that often cloaks an ineducable incompetence.

When Françoise, having seen that my parents had everything they needed, went back for the first time to give my aunt her pepsin and ask what she would like to have for lunch, it was quite rare that she was not already required to offer an opinion or provide explanations about some event of importance:

"Françoise, imagine, Mme. Goupil went past more than a quarter of an hour late going to fetch her sister; if she lingers along the way it wouldn't surprise me at all if she were to arrive after the Elevation."

"Well, there wouldn't be anything astonishing in that," answered Françoise.

"Françoise, if you had come five minutes earlier you would have seen Mme. Imbert go past carrying some asparagus twice as fat as Mère Callot's; now try to find out from her maid where she got them. You have been serving us asparagus in every sauce this year; you of all people might have found some like those for our travelers."

"It wouldn't be surprising if they came from M. le Curé's," said Françoise.

"Ah! Do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise?" answered my aunt, shrugging her shoulders. "From M. le Curé's! You know very well he grows only wretched, spindly little asparagus. I tell you these were as fat as a woman's arm. Not your arm, of course, but one like mine, poor thing, which has got so much thinner again this year."

"Françoise, didn't you hear those chimes that nearly split my head open?"

"No, Madame Octave."

"Ah, my poor girl, you must have a hard head, you can thank the Good Lord for that. It was Maguelone coming to get Dr. Piperaud. He came back out with her right away and they turned down the rue de l'Oiseau. Some child must be ill."

"Oh my, dear God," sighed Françoise, who could not hear of a misfortune occurring to a stranger, even in a distant part of the world, without beginning to lament.

"Françoise, now who were they ringing the passing bell for? Oh, dear God, it must have been for Mme. Rousseau. I'm blessed if I hadn't forgotten that she passed away the other night. Oh, it's time for the Good Lord to call me home, I don't know what I've done with my head since my poor Octave died. But I'm wasting your time, my girl."

"Not at all, Madame Octave, my time is not so precious; He who made it did not sell it to us. I'm only just going to see that my fire isn't out."

In this way Françoise and my aunt together appraised, during that morning session, the first events of the day. But sometimes those events assumed a character so mysterious and so grave that my aunt felt she could not wait for the moment when Françoise would come up, and four astounding peals of the bell would echo through the house.

"But Madame Octave, it isn't time for your pepsin yet," Françoise would say. "Were you feeling faint?"

"Not at all, Françoise," my aunt would say; "what I mean is yes, you know very well there is seldom a time, now, when I don't feel faint; one day I'll pass away like Mme. Rousseau without even time to collect myself; but that's not why I rang. Would you believe that I just saw Mme. Goupil as clearly as I see you now with a little girl whom I don't know at all? Now go fetch two sous' worth of salt at Camus's. It's not often that Théodore can't tell you who someone is."

"But that'll be M. Pupin's daughter," Françoise would say, preferring to be satisfied with an immediate explanation since she had already been to Camus's twice that morning.

"M. Pupin's daughter! Oh, do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise? And you think I wouldn't have recognized her?"

"But I don't mean the big one, Madame Octave, I mean the little one that's away at school in Jouy. I think I saw her once already this morning."

"Ah! That must be it," said my aunt. "She must have come for the holidays. That's it! There's no need to ask, she will have come for the holidays. But then anytime now we might very likely see Mme. Sazerat come and ring at her sister's for lunch. That's what it is! I saw Galopin's boy going past with a tart! You'll see, the tart was on its way to Mme. Goupil's."

"Once Mme. Goupil has a visitor, Madame Octave, it won't be long before you'll see all her folk coming back for lunch, because it's not so early as it was," said Françoise, who, in a hurry to go back down and see to lunch, was not sorry to leave my aunt the prospect of this distraction.

"Oh, not before noon!" answered my aunt in a tone of resignation, casting an uneasy glance at the clock, yet furtively so as not to let it be seen that she, who had renounced everything, nevertheless took such a lively pleasure in learning whom Mme. Goupil was having to lunch, a pleasure that would unfortunately have to wait a little more than an hour longer. "And on top of that, it will happen during my lunch!" she added half aloud to herself. Her lunch was enough of a distraction for her so that she did not wish for another one at the same time. "Now you won't forget to give me my eggs with cream in a flat plate?" These were the only plates with pictures on them, and my aunt amused herself at each meal by reading the inscription on the one she was served that day. She would put on her glasses and spell out: Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin or the Magic Lamp, and smile, saying: "Very good, very good."

"I would certainly have gone to Camus's . . ." Françoise would say, seeing that now my aunt would not send her there.

"No, no, it's not worth the trouble anymore, it's certainly Mlle. Pupin. My poor Françoise, I'm sorry to have made you come up for nothing."

But my aunt knew perfectly well it was not for nothing that she had rung for Françoise, since, in Combray, a person "whom one did not know at all" was a creature as scarcely believable as a mythological god, and in fact one could not remember when, anytime one of these stupefying apparitions had occurred, in the rue du Saint-Esprit or on the square, well-conducted research had not ended by reducing the fabulous character to the proportions of a "person one knew," either personally or abstractly, in his or her civil status, as having such and such a degree of kinship with some people of Combray. It was Mme. Sauton's son returning from military service, Abbé Perdreau's niece leaving the convent, the curé's brother, a tax collector at Châteaudun, who had just retired or had come to spend the holidays. One had had, upon seeing them, the shock of believing that there were in Combray people whom one did not know at all, simply because one had not recognized them right away. And yet, long in advance, Mme. Sauton and the curé had let everyone know they were awaiting their "travelers." When in the evening I went upstairs, after returning home, to describe our walk to my aunt, if I was so imprudent as to tell her that we had met, near Pont-Vieux, a man my grandfather did not know, "A man Grandfather did not know at all!" she would cry. "Ah! I don't believe it!"

Nonetheless somewhat disturbed by this news, she would want to clear the matter up, my grandfather would be summoned. "Now who did you meet near Pont-Vieux, Uncle? A man you didn't know?" "But I did know him," my grandfather would answer, "it was Prosper, the brother of Mme. Bouilleboeuf's gardener." "Ah! All right," my aunt would say, calmed and a little flushed; shrugging her shoulders with an ironic smile, she would add: "Now, he told me you had met a man you didn't know!" And they would advise me to be more circumspect the next time and not to go on agitating my aunt with thoughtless remarks. One knew everybody so well, in Combray, both animals and people, that if my aunt had chanced to see a dog pass by "whom she did not know at all," she would not stop thinking about it and devoting to this incomprehensible fact all her talents for induction and her hours of leisure.

"That must be Mme. Sazerat's dog," Françoise would say, without great conviction but in order to pacify my aunt, and so that she would not "split her head."

"As if I didn't know Mme. Sazerat's dog!" my aunt would answer, her critical mind not accepting a fact so easily.

"Ah! Then it will be the new dog M. Galopin brought back from Lisieux."

"Ah! That must be it."

"It seems it's quite an affable creature," added Françoise, who had got the information from Théodore, "as clever as a person, always in a good humor, always friendly, always as agreeable as you might wish. It's uncommon for an animal of that age to be so well behaved already. Madame Octave, I will have to leave you, I haven't time to enjoy myself, here it's almost ten o'clock, and my stove not lit yet, even, and I still have my asparagus to scrape."

"What, Françoise, more asparagus! Why, you've got a regular mania for asparagus this year. You'll make our Parisians grow tired of it!"

"Why, no, Madame Octave, they're very fond of it. You'll see, they'll come home from church with a good appetite and they won't push it about with the backs of their spoons."

"Church! Why, they must be there already. You'd do well not to waste any time. Go and look after your lunch."

While my aunt was conferring thus with Françoise, I was going to Mass with my parents. How I loved it, how clearly I can see it again; our church! The old porch by which we entered, black, pocked like a skimming ladle, was uneven and deeply hollowed at the edges (like the font to which it led us), as if the gentle brushing of the countrywomen's cloaks as they entered the church and of their timid fingers taking holy water could, repeated over centuries, acquire a destructive force, bend the stone and carve it with furrows like those traced by the wheel of a cart in a boundary stone which it knocks against every day. Its tombstones, under which the noble dust of the abbots of Combray, who were buried there, formed for the choir a sort of spiritual pavement, were themselves no longer inert and hard matter, for time had softened them and made them flow like honey beyond the bounds of their own square shapes, which, in one place, they had overrun in a flaxen billow, carrying off on their drift a flowery Gothic capital letter, drowning the white violets of the marble; and into which, elsewhere, they had reabsorbed themselves, further contracting the elliptical Latin inscription, introducing a further caprice in the arrangement of those abridged characters, bringing close together two letters of a word of which the others had been disproportionately distended. Its windows never sparkled as much as on the days when the sun hardly appeared, so that, if it was gray outside, we were sure it would be beautiful inside the church; one was filled to its very top by a single figure like a king in a game of cards, who lived up there, under an architectural canopy, between heaven and earth (and in whose slanting blue light, on weekdays sometimes, at noon, when there is no service—at one of those rare times when the church, airy, vacant, more human, luxurious, with some sun on its rich furniture, looked almost habitable, like the hall of a medieval-style mansion, of sculpted stone and stained glass—one would see Mme. Sazerat kneel for a moment, setting down on the next prayer stool a packet of petits fours tied with string that she had just picked up from the pastry shop across the street and was going to take back home for lunch); in another, a mountain of pink snow, at whose foot a battle was being fought, seemed to have frosted onto the glass itself, blistering it with its cloudy sleet like a windowpane on which a few snowflakes remained, but snowflakes lit by some aurora (the same, no doubt, that flushed the reredos of the altar with tints so fresh they seemed set there for a moment by a gleam from outside about to vanish, rather than by colors attached forever to the stone); and all were so old that here and there one saw their silvery age sparkle with the dust of the centuries and show, shimmering and worn down to the thread, the weft of their soft tapestry of glass. One of them, a tall compartment, was divided into a hundred or so small rectangular panes in which blue predominated, like a great deck of cards resembling those meant to entertain King Charles VI;<sup>2</sup> but either because a beam of sunlight was shining, or because my gaze, as it moved, carried across the glass, snuffed and lit again by turns, a precious moving conflagration, the next moment it had assumed the changing luster of a peacock's train, then trembled and undulated in a flaming chimerical rain that dripped from the top of the dark rocky vault, along the damp walls, as if this were the nave of some grotto iridescent with sinuous stalactites into which I was following my parents, who were carrying their prayer books; a moment later the little lozenge-shaped panes had assumed the deep transparency, the infrangible hardness of sapphires which had been juxtaposed on some immense breastplate, but behind which one felt, more beloved than all these riches, a momentary smile of sunlight; it was as recognizable in the soft blue billow with which it bathed the precious stones as on the pavement of the square or the straw of the marketplace; and even on our first Sundays when we had arrived before Easter, it consoled me for the earth being still bare and black, by bringing into bloom, as in a historical springtime dating from the age of Saint Louis's successors, this dazzling gilded carpet of glass forget-me-nots.

Two high-warp tapestries represented the coronation of Esther (tradition had it that Ahasuerus had been given the features of a king of France and Esther those of a lady of Guermantes with whom he was in love), to which their colors, by melting, had added expression, relief, light: a little pink floated over Esther's lips outside the tracing of their outline; the yellow of her dress spread so unctuously, so thickly, that it acquired a kind of solidity and stood out boldly from the receding atmosphere; and the green of the trees, remaining vivid in the lower parts of the panel of silk and wool, but "gone" at the top, brought out in a paler tone, above the dark trunks, the lofty yellowing branches, gilded and half obliterated by the abrupt, slanting illumination of an invisible sun. All this, and still more the precious objects that had come into the church from figures who were for me almost legendary (the gold cross worked, they said, by Saint Eloi<sup>3</sup> and given by Dagobert, the tomb of the sons of Louis the Germanic,<sup>4</sup> of porphyry and enameled copper), because of which I moved through the church, when we went to our seats, as though through



a valley visited by the fairies, in which a country person is amazed to see in a rock, a tree, a pool, the palpable trace of their supernatural passage, all this made it, for me, something entirely different from the rest of the town: an edifice occupying a space with, so to speak, four dimensions—the fourth being Time—extending over the centuries its nave which, from bay to bay, from chapel to chapel, seemed to vanquish and penetrate not only a few yards but epoch after epoch from which it emerged victorious; hiding the rough, savage eleventh century in the thickness of the walls, from which it appeared with its heavy arches plugged and blinded by crude blocks of ashlar only in the deep gash incised near the porch by the tower staircase, and even there concealed by the graceful Gothic arcades that crowded coquettishly in front of it like older sisters who, to hide him from strangers, place themselves smiling in front of a younger brother who is boorish, sulky, and badly dressed; lifting into the heavens above the square its tower which had contemplated Saint Louis and seemed to see him still; and plunging down with its crypt into a Merovingian night, in which, groping their way as they guided us under the dark vault as powerfully ribbed as the wing of an immense stone bat, Théodore and his sister would light for us with a candle the tomb of Sigebert's<sup>5</sup> little daughter, on which a deep scallop—like the mark of a fossil—had been dug, it was said, “by a crystal lamp which, on the night the Frankish princess was murdered, had separated of its own accord from the golden chains by which it hung on the site of the present apse and without the crystal breaking, without the flame going out, had sunk deep into the stone which gave way softly under it.”

The apse of the Combray church; what can one say about it? It was so crude, so lacking in artistic beauty and even religious spirit. From outside, because the crossroads which it commanded was on a lower level, its crude wall rose up from a subbasement of quite unpolished ashlar, bristling with flints, and having nothing particularly ecclesiastical about it, the windows seemed to have been pierced at an excessive height, and the whole looked more like the wall of a prison than the wall of a church. And certainly, later, when I recalled all the glorious apses I had seen, it would never have occurred to me to compare them with the apse of Combray. But, one day, at the bend of a little street in a country town, I noticed, opposite the crossing of three lanes, a rough and unusually high wall with windows pierced far above and the same asymmetrical appearance as the apse of Combray. Then I did not ask myself as at Chartres or Rheims how powerfully it expressed religious feeling, but involuntarily exclaimed: “The church!”

The church! Familiar; flanked, in the rue Saint-Hilaire, where its north door was situated, by its two neighbors, M. Rapin's pharmacy and Mme. Loiseau's house, which it touched without any separation; a simple citizen of Combray that could have had its number in the street if the streets of Combray had had numbers, and where it seems that the postman should have had to stop in the morning when he was making his rounds, before going into Mme. Loiseau's and upon coming out of M. Rapin's, there existed, however, between it and everything that was not it a demarcation that my mind was never able to cross. Even though Mme. Loiseau might have at her window fuchsias which developed the bad habit of forever allowing their branches to run all over with heads lowered, and whose flowers had no business more pressing, when they were large enough, than to go and cool their flushed, violet cheeks against the dark front of the church, for me the fuchsias did not for this reason become holy; between the flowers and the blackened stone against which they leaned, if my eyes perceived no interval, my mind reserved an abyss.

One could recognize the steeple of Saint-Hilaire from quite far off inscribing its unforgettable form on the horizon where Combray had not yet appeared; when from the train which, in Easter week, was bringing us from Paris, my father caught sight of it slipping by turns over all the furrows of the sky and sending its little iron weathercock running in all directions, he would say to us: “Come, gather up the rugs, we're here.” And on one of the longest walks we took from Combray, there was a spot where the narrow road emerged suddenly on an immense plateau closed at the horizon by jagged forests above which rose only the delicate tip of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, but so thin, so pink, that it seemed merely scratched on the sky by a fingernail which wanted to give this landscape, this exclusively natural picture, that little mark of art, that indication of human presence. When one drew near and could see the remains of the half-destroyed square tower which, not as high, still stood next to it, one was struck most of all by the dark, reddish shade of the stones; and on a misty morning in autumn one might have thought it, rising above the stormy violet of the vineyards, a ruin of purple nearly the color of a wild vine.

Often in the square, when we were coming home, my grandmother would make me stop to look at it. From the windows of its tower, placed two by two one above the other, with the exact and original proportion in their spacing that gives beauty and dignity not just to human faces, it loosed, dropped at regular intervals, volleys of crows which, for a moment, circled about shrieking, as if the old stones that allowed them to hop and flutter about without appearing to see them had suddenly become uninhabitable and emitted some principle of infinite agitation, struck them and driven them out. Then, after striping in every direction the violet velvet of the evening air, they would return suddenly calm to be reabsorbed into the tower, which was no longer baneful but once again benign, a few of them sitting here and there, apparently motionless, but perhaps snapping up some insect, on the tip of a turret, like a seagull as still as a fisherman on the crest of a wave. Without really knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, of pretension, of meanness, which made her love and believe rich in beneficent influence not only nature, when the hand of man had not, as had my great-aunt's gardener, shrunk and reduced it, but also works of genius. And certainly, every part of the church that one could see distinguished it from all other buildings by a sort of thoughtfulness that was infused into it, but it was in the steeple that it seemed to become aware of itself, affirm an individual and responsible existence. It was the steeple that spoke for it. I believe above all that, confusedly, my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what for her had the highest value in the world, an air of naturalness and an air of distinction. Knowing nothing about architecture, she would say: “My children, make fun of me if you like, perhaps it isn't beautiful according to the rules, but I like its strange old face. I'm sure that if it could play the piano it would not play *dryly*.” And looking at it, following with her eyes the gentle tension, the fervent inclination of its slopes of stone, which approached each other as they rose like hands meeting in prayer, she would join so fully in the effusion of the spire that her gaze seemed to soar with it; and at the same time she would smile in a friendly way at the worn old stones, of which the setting sun now illuminated only the topmost part and which, the moment they entered that sunny region, softened by the light, appeared suddenly to have risen much higher, to be quite far away, like a song taken up again in “a head voice” an octave above.

It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that gave all the occupations, all the hours, all the viewpoints of the town their shape, their crown, their consecration. From my bedroom, I could see only its base, which had been covered with slates; but when, on Sunday, I saw them, on a warm summer morning, blazing like a black sun, I would say to myself: “Good Heavens! Nine

o'clock! I'd better get ready for Mass if I want to have time to go and give Aunt Léonie a kiss first," and I knew exactly the color of the sun on the square, the heat and dust of the market, the shadow made by the awning of the store which Mama would perhaps enter before Mass in an odor of unbleached linen, to buy some handkerchief which would be displayed to her under the direction of the shopkeeper, his chest outthrust, who, as he prepared to close, had just gone into the back of the shop to put on his Sunday jacket and soap his hands, which it was his habit, every five minutes, even in the most melancholy of circumstances, to rub together with an air of enterprise, celebration, and success.

When after Mass we went in to ask Théodore to bring us a brioche larger than usual because our cousins had taken advantage of the fine weather to come from Thiberzy to have lunch with us, we would have the steeple there in front of us, itself golden and baked like a greater blessed brioche, with flakes and gummy drippings of sun, pricking its sharp point into the blue sky. And in the evening, when I was coming home from a walk and thinking about the moment when I would soon have to say goodnight to my mother and not see her anymore, it was on the contrary so soft, at the close of day, that it looked as if it had been set down and crushed like a cushion of brown velvet against the pale sky which had yielded under its pressure, hollowing slightly to give it room and flowing back over its edges; and the cries of the birds that wheeled around it seemed to increase its silence, lift its spire to a greater height, and endow it with something ineffable.

Even on the errands we had to do behind the church, where we could not see it, everything seemed to be arranged in relation to the steeple, which would rise up here or there between the houses, perhaps even more affecting when it appeared that way, without the church. And certainly, there are many others that are more beautiful when seen this way, and I have in my memory vignettes of steeples rising above roofs which have a different artistic character from those composed by the sad streets of Combray. I will never forget, in a curious town in Normandy near Balbec, two charming eighteenth-century houses that are in many respects dear to me and venerable and between which, when you look at it from the lovely garden that descends from the front steps to the river, the Gothic spire of a church hidden behind them soars up, appearing to complete, to surmount their facades, but in a material so different, so precious, so annulated, so pink, so polished, that you see clearly it no more belongs to them than does the crimson crenellated spire of some seashell, tapering to a turret and glazed with enamel, to the two handsome, smooth pebbles between which it is caught on the beach. Even in Paris, in one of the ugliest parts of the city, I know a window from which you can see, beyond a foreground, middle ground, and even third ground composed of the piled-up roofs of several streets, a violet bell, sometimes ruddy, sometimes also, in the noblest "proofs" of it printed by the atmosphere, a decanted cindery black, which is in fact the dome of Saint-Augustin and which gives this view of Paris the character of certain views of Rome by Piranesi. But since into none of these little engravings, with whatever taste my memory may have executed them, was it able to put what I had lost a long time ago, the feeling that makes us not consider a thing a spectacle, but believe in it as in a creature without equivalent, none of them holds in subjection an entire profound part of my life, as does the memory of those views of the Combray steeple from the streets behind the church. Whether we saw it at five o'clock, when we went to get the letters at the post office, a few houses away from us to the left, abruptly lifting with an isolated peak the ridgeline of the roofs; or whether, on the other hand, if we wanted to go in to ask for news of Mme. Sazerat, our eyes followed that line, low again after the descent of its other slope, knowing we would have to turn at the second street after the steeple; or whether, again, going on farther, if we went to the station, we saw it obliquely, showing in profile new edges and surfaces like a solid caught at an unfamiliar moment of its revolution; or whether, from the banks of the Vivonne, the apse, muscularly gathered and raised to a greater height by the perspective, seemed to spring with the effort the steeple was making to hurl its spire into the heart of the sky: it was always to the steeple that we had to return, always the steeple that dominated everything, summing up the houses with an unexpected pinnacle, raised before me like the finger of God, whose body might be hidden in the crowd of humans, though I would not confuse it with them because of that. And even today, if in a large provincial town or a part of Paris I do not know well, a passing stranger who has "put me on the right path" shows me in the distance, as a reference point, some hospital belfry, some convent steeple lifting the peak of its ecclesiastical cap at the corner of a street I am supposed to take, if only my memory can obscurely find in it some small feature resembling the dear departed form, the stranger, if he turns around to make sure I am not going astray, may, to his astonishment, see me, forgetting the walk I had begun or the necessary errand, remain there in front of the steeple for hours, motionless, trying to remember, feeling deep in myself lands recovered from oblivion draining and rebuilding themselves; and then no doubt, and more anxiously than a short time before when I asked him to direct me, I am still seeking my path, I am turning a corner . . . but . . . I am doing so in my heart . . .

As we returned home from Mass, we would often meet M. Legrandin, who was detained in Paris by his profession of engineer and, except during the summer vacation, could come to his property in Combray only from Saturday evening until Monday morning. He was one of those men who, quite apart from a career in science in which they have in fact been brilliantly successful, possess an entirely different culture, one that is literary, artistic, which their professional specialization does not make use of and which enriches their conversation. Better read than many men of letters (we did not know at that time that M. Legrandin had a certain reputation as a writer and we were very surprised to see that a famous musician had composed a melody to some verses of his), gifted with more "facility" than many painters, they imagine that the life they are leading is not the one that really suits them and they bring to their actual occupations either an indifference mingled with whimsy, or an application that is sustained and haughty, scornful, bitter, and conscientious. Tall, with a handsome figure, a fine, thoughtful face with a long, blond mustache and disenchanted blue eyes, exquisitely courteous, a conversationalist such as we had never heard before, he was in the eyes of my family, who always cited him as an example, the epitome of the superior man, approaching life in the noblest and most delicate way. My grandmother reproached him only for speaking a little too well, a little too much like a book, for not having the same naturalness in his language as in his loosely knotted lavalier bow ties, in his short, straight, almost schoolboyish coat. She was also surprised by the fiery tirades he often launched against the aristocracy, against fashionable life, against snobbery, "certainly the sin which Saint Paul has in mind when he speaks of the sin for which there is no forgiveness."

Worldly ambition was a sentiment that my grandmother was so incapable of feeling or even, almost, of understanding, that it seemed to her quite pointless to bring so much ardor to stigmatizing it. What was more, she did not think it in very good taste that M. Legrandin, whose sister near Balbec was married to a titled gentleman of Lower Normandy, should indulge himself in such violent attacks against the nobility, going so far as to reproach the Revolution for not having had them all guillotined.

"Greetings, my friends!" he would say, coming up to us. "How fortunate you are to live here for such extended periods of time; tomorrow I must return to Paris, to my little nook.

"Oh!" he would add, with his own particular smile, gently ironical, disappointed and slightly distracted, "of course my house contains every useless thing in the world. It lacks only the one essential, a large piece of sky like this one. Always try to keep a piece of sky over your life, little boy," he would add, turning to me. "You have a lovely soul, of a rare quality, an artist's nature, don't ever let it go without what it needs."

When we returned home and my aunt sent to ask us if Mme. Goupil had been late coming to Mass, we could not give her any information. Instead, we increased her disturbance by telling her there was a painter at work in the church copying the window of Gilbert the Bad. Françoise, sent immediately to the grocery, came back empty-handed owing to the absence of Théodore, whose two professions, that of chorister with a part in the maintenance of the church and of grocer's boy, gave him connections in all worlds and therefore knowledge that was universal.

"Ah!" sighed my aunt, "I wish it were time for Eulalie. She's really the only one who will be able to tell me."

Eulalie was an active old maid, lame and hard-of-hearing, who had "retired" after the death of Mme. de la Bretonnerie, with whom she had been in service since her childhood, and had then taken a room next to the church, descending from it constantly either for the services or, when there was no service, to say a little prayer or give Théodore a hand; the rest of the time she visited invalids like my aunt Léonie, to whom she would describe what had happened at Mass or at Vespers. She was not above adding some revenue to the small pension paid her by the family of her former employers by going from time to time to look after the curé's linen or that of some other prominent personality in Combray's clerical world. Above a cloak of black cloth she wore a small white hood almost like a nun's, and a skin disease gave parts of her cheeks and her hooked nose the bright pink tones of an impatiens. Her visits were the great diversion of my aunt Léonie, who hardly received anyone else now, apart from M. le Curé. My aunt had gradually eliminated all the other visitors because all of them made the mistake, in her eyes, of belonging to one of two categories of people whom she detested. One group, the worst, whom she had got rid of first, were the ones who advised her not to "listen to herself" so, and subscribed, if only negatively, manifesting it only by certain disapproving silences or by certain dubious smiles, to the subversive doctrine that a little walk in the sun and a good rare beefsteak (even though two wretched sips of Vichy water would lie on her stomach for fourteen hours!) would do her more good than her bed and her medicines. The other category was made up of the people who seemed to believe she was more seriously ill than she thought, that she was as seriously ill as she said she was. And so, those she had allowed to come up after some hesitation and upon Françoise's kindly meant entreaties and who, in the course of their visit, had shown how very unworthy they were of the favor being done them by timidly risking a "Don't you think that if you were to move about a little when the weather's fine," or who, on the contrary, when she said to them: "I'm very low, very low, this is the end, my poor friends," answered her: "Ah! when our health fails us! Still, you may last awhile longer yet as you are"—these, the former as well as the latter, were certain never to be received again. And if Françoise was amused by my aunt's horrified look when from her bed she saw one of these people in the rue du Saint-Esprit apparently coming toward her house or when she heard the doorbell ring, she would laugh more heartily still, and as though at a good trick, at my aunt's ever-victorious ruses for managing to have them turned away, and at their discomfited expressions as they went off without having seen her, and at heart admired her mistress, whom she felt to be superior to all these people since she did not want to receive them. In short, my aunt required that her visitors at the same time commend her on her regimen, commiserate with her for her sufferings, and encourage her as to her future.

This was where Eulalie excelled. My aunt might say to her twenty times in a minute: "This is the end, my poor Eulalie," twenty times Eulalie would answer: "Knowing your illness as you know it, Madame Octave, you will live to be a hundred, as Mme. Sazerin was saying to me just yesterday." (One of Eulalie's firmest beliefs, which the impressive number of denials contributed by experience had not been enough to shake, was that Mme. Sazerat's name was Mme. Sazerin.)

"I am not asking to live to a hundred," answered my aunt, who preferred not to see her days assigned a precise term.

And since along with this Eulalie knew better than anyone else how to distract my aunt without tiring her, her visits, which took place regularly every Sunday, barring an unforeseen obstacle, were for my aunt a pleasure, the prospect of which kept her on those days in a state that was at first pleasant, but quite soon painful like an excessive hunger, if Eulalie was even a little late. Overly prolonged, this ecstasy of waiting for Eulalie became a torment, my aunt looked constantly at the time, yawned, felt faint. The sound of Eulalie's chime, if it came at the very end of the day, when she was no longer expecting it, would almost make her ill. The fact was that on Sunday, she thought only of this visit, and as soon as lunch was finished, Françoise would be in a hurry for us to leave the dining room so that she could go up and "occupy" my aunt. But (especially once the fine weather settled in at Combray) a good long time would go by after the haughty hour of noon, descending from the Saint-Hilaire steeple, which it had emblazoned with the twelve momentary rosettes of its sonorous crown, had echoed around our table close to the consecrated bread which had also come in, familiarly, after church, while we remained sitting in front of the *Thousand and One Nights* plates, oppressed by the heat and especially by the meal. For, upon a permanent foundation of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, jams, biscuits which she no longer even announced to us, Françoise would add—depending on the labors in the fields and orchards, the fruit of the tide, the luck of the marketplace, the kindness of neighbors, and her own genius, and with the result that our menu, like the quatrefoils carved on the portals of cathedrals in the thirteenth century, reflected somewhat the rhythm of the seasons and the incidents of daily life—a brill because the monger had guaranteed her that it was fresh, a turkey hen because she had seen a large one at the Roussainville-le-Pin market, cardoons with marrow because she had not made them for us that way before, a roast leg of mutton because fresh air whets the appetite and it would have plenty of time to "descend" in the next seven hours, spinach for a change, apricots because they were still uncommon, gooseberries because in two weeks there would not be any more, raspberries that M. Swann had brought especially, cherries, the first that had come from the cherry tree in the garden after two years in which it had not given any, cream cheese, which I liked very much at one time, an almond cake because she had ordered it the day before, a brioche because it was our turn to present it. When all of that was finished, there came a work of art composed expressly for us, but more particularly dedicated to my father who was so fond of it, a chocolate custard, the product of Françoise's personal inspiration and attention, ephemeral and light as an occasional piece into which she had put all her talent. If anyone had refused to taste it, saying: "I'm finished, I'm not hungry anymore," that person would immediately have been

relegated to the rank of those barbarians who, even in a gift an artist makes them of one of his works, scrutinize its weight and its material when the only things of value in it are its intention and its signature. To leave even a single drop of it on the plate would have been to display the same impoliteness as to stand up before the end of a piece under the very nose of the composer.

At last my mother would say to me: "Now, don't stay here all day, go up to your room if you're too hot outdoors, but get a little fresh air first so that you don't start reading right after leaving the table." I would go and sit down beside the pump and its trough, often ornamented, like a Gothic font, with a salamander which sculpted on the rough stone the mobile relief of its allegorical tapering body, on the backless bench shaded by a lilac, in the little corner of the garden that opened through a service gate onto the rue du Saint-Esprit and from whose untended earth the scullery rose by two steps, projecting from the house like an independent structure. One could see its red paving stones gleaming like porphyry. It looked not so much like Françoise's lair as a little temple of Venus. It overflowed with the offerings of the dairyman, the fruit man, the vegetable monger, who had come sometimes from quite remote hamlets to dedicate to it the first fruits of their fields. And its roof was forever crowned with the cooing of a dove.

In earlier years I did not linger in the sacred grove surrounding it, since, before going upstairs to read, I would enter the little sitting room that my uncle Adolphe, a brother of my grandfather and a veteran who had retired with the rank of major, occupied on the ground floor, and which, even when its open windows let in the heat, if not the rays of the sun, which seldom reached that far, gave off inexhaustibly that dark cool smell of both forest and ancien régime, that makes your nostrils linger in a daydream when you venture into certain abandoned hunting lodges. But for a number of years now I had not gone into my uncle Adolphe's room, since he no longer came to Combray because of a quarrel that had occurred between him and my family, through my fault, in the following circumstances.

Once or twice a month, in Paris, I used to be sent to pay him a visit as he was finishing lunch wearing a plain loose-fitting jacket and waited on by his servant who was dressed in a work jacket of striped duck, violet and white. He would grumble complaining that I had not come for a long time, grumble that we were abandoning him; he would offer me a marzipan cake or a tangerine, we would pass through a drawing room in which no one ever stopped, where no one ever made a fire, whose walls were ornamented with gilded moldings, its ceilings painted with a blue that was meant to imitate the sky and its furniture upholstered in satin as at my grandparents', but yellow; then we would go on into what he called his "study," whose walls were hung with some of those engravings depicting, against a dark background, a fleshy pink goddess driving a chariot, standing on a globe, or wearing a star on her forehead, which were admired during the Second Empire<sup>6</sup> because they were felt to have a Pompeiian look about them, were then hated, and are beginning to be admired again for one reason and one reason only, despite the others that are given, and that is that they have such a Second Empire look about them. And I would stay with my uncle until his valet came to him from the coachman to ask what time the latter should harness up. My uncle would then sink into a deep meditation while his admiring valet, afraid of disturbing him by the slightest movement, waited curiously for the result, which was always identical. At last, after the greatest hesitation, my uncle would unfailingly utter these words: "At quarter past two," which the valet would repeat with surprise, but without disputing them: "At quarter past two? Very good . . . I'll go and tell him . . ."

In those days I loved the theater, with a platonic passion since my parents had not yet allowed me to enter a theater, and I pictured to myself so inaccurately the pleasures one might experience there that I almost believed that each spectator looked as though into a stereoscope at a scene that was for him alone, though similar to the thousand others being looked at, each one for himself, by the rest of the audience.

Every morning I would run to the Morris column<sup>7</sup> to see what shows were being announced. Nothing was more disinterested or happier than the daydreams inspired in my imagination by each play that was announced, daydreams conditioned both by the images inseparable from the words that made up its title and also by the color of the posters, still damp and blistered with paste, against which that title stood out. Except for those strange works like *Le Testament de César Girodot* or *Oedipe-Roi*, which were inscribed, not on the green poster of the Opéra-Comique, but on the wine-red poster of the Comédie-Française, nothing seemed to me more different from the sparkling white plume of *Les Diamants de la Couronne* than the smooth, mysterious satin of *Le Domino Noir*,<sup>8</sup> and, since my parents had told me that when I went to the theater for the first time I would have to choose between these two plays, as I tried to study exhaustively and in turn the title of one and then the title of the other, since this was all I knew of them, so as to attempt to discern the pleasure each one promised me and compare it to the pleasure that lay concealed within the other, I managed to picture to myself so forcefully, on the one hand a play that was dazzling and proud, on the other a play that was soft and velvety, that I was as incapable of deciding which I would prefer as if, for dessert, I had been given the choice between rice à l'Impératrice and chocolate custard.

All my conversations with my friends concerned these actors whose art, though unknown to me, was the first form, of all those it assumes, in which Art allowed me a presentiment of what it was. Between the manner in which one actor and another delivered, nuanced a declamatory speech, the tiniest differences seemed to me to have an incalculable importance. And I would rank them in order of talent, according to what I had been told about them, in lists that I recited to myself all day long, and that in the end hardened in my brain and obstructed it with their immovability.

Later, when I was in school, each time I wrote to a new friend during class as soon as the teacher's head was turned, my first question was always whether he had been to the theater yet and whether he thought the greatest actor really was Got, the second best Delaunay, etc. And if, in his opinion, Febvre came only after Thiron, or Delaunay only after Coquelin, the sudden mobility that Coquelin, losing his stony rigidity, would develop in my mind in order to pass to second place, and the miraculous agility, the fecund animation with which Delaunay would be endowed in order to withdraw to fourth, would restore the sensation of flowering and life to my newly supple and fertilized brain.

But if the actors preoccupied me so, if the sight of Maubaut coming out of the Théâtre-Français one afternoon had filled me with the ecstasy and suffering of love, how much more did the name of a star, blazing on the door of a theater, how much more did the sight, at the window of a brougham passing in the street, its horses blossoming with roses in their headbands, of a woman I thought might be an actress, leave me in a state of prolonged disturbance, as I tried impotently and painfully to imagine her life! I would rank the most illustrious in order of talent, Sarah Bernhardt, La Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne

Samary, but all of them interested me. Now my uncle knew many of them and also some courtesans whom I did not distinguish clearly from the actresses. He would entertain them at home. And if we went to see him only on certain days, this was because on the other days women came whom his family could not have met, or so at least they thought, since my uncle himself, on the contrary, was only too ready to pay pretty widows who had perhaps never been married, and countesses with high-sounding names which were doubtless only noms de guerre, the courtesy of introducing them to my grandmother or even of presenting them with some of the family jewels, tendencies which had already embroiled him more than once with my grandfather. Often, when an actress's name came into the conversation, I would hear my father say to my mother, smiling: "A friend of your uncle's"; and I would think that the novitiate pointlessly endured for perhaps years on end by eminent men at the door of some woman who would not answer their letters and would ask her doorman to turn them away could have been spared a boy like me by my uncle, who could introduce him in his own home to the actress who, unapproachable by so many others, was for him an intimate friend.

And so—using the excuse that a lesson which had been moved now came at such an awkward hour that it had prevented me several times and would continue to prevent me from seeing my uncle—one day, different from the day set apart for the visits we made to him, taking advantage of the fact that my parents had had lunch early, I went out and, instead of going to look at the column of posters, for which I was allowed to go out alone, I ran to him. I noticed in front of his door a carriage with two horses, each of which had a red carnation at its blinkers, as did the coachman in his buttonhole. From the staircase I heard a laugh and a woman's voice, and, as soon as I rang, a silence, then the sound of doors being shut. The valet came to open the door, and when he saw me seemed embarrassed, told me my uncle was very busy, probably would not be able to see me, and when he went to let him know anyway, the same voice I had heard before said: "Oh, yes! do let him come in; just for a minute, I would enjoy it so much. In the photograph you have on your desk, he looks so much like his mother, your niece; that's her photograph next to his, isn't it? I would so like to see the boy, just for a moment."

I heard my uncle grumble, become cross, finally the valet showed me in.

On the table, there was the same plate of marzipan as always; my uncle had on his usual jacket, but across from him, in a pink silk dress with a long string of pearls around her neck, sat a young woman who was eating the last of a tangerine. My uncertainty as to whether I should call her Madame or Mademoiselle made me blush and, not daring to turn my eyes too much in her direction for fear of having to talk to her, I went to kiss my uncle. She looked at me, smiling, my uncle said to her, "My nephew," without telling her my name, or telling me hers, probably because, ever since the difficulties he had had with my grandfather, he had been trying as far as possible to avoid any association of his family with this sort of acquaintance.

"How much like his mother he is," she said.

"But you've never seen my niece except in a photograph," said my uncle brusquely.

"I beg your pardon, my dear friend, I passed her on the stairs last year when you were so ill. It's true that I saw her for only a split second and your stairs are quite dark, but that was enough for me to admire her. This young man has her beautiful eyes and also *that*," she said, drawing a line with her finger along the lower part of her forehead. "Does Madame, your niece, have the same name as you, my dear?" she asked my uncle.

"He looks like his father more than anyone," muttered my uncle, who was no more anxious to introduce them at a distance by saying Mama's name than to do so at close quarters. "He is exactly like his father and also my poor mother."

"I don't know his father," said the lady in pink with a slight inclination of her head, "and I never knew your poor mother, my dear. You remember, it was shortly after your bereavement that we met."

I was feeling a little disappointed, because this young lady was no different from the other pretty women I had sometimes seen in my family, in particular the daughter of a cousin of ours to whose house I went every year on the first of January. Better dressed, only, my uncle's friend had the same quick and kind glance, she seemed as open and affectionate. In her I found no trace of the theatrical appearance that I admired in photographs of actresses, nor of the diabolical expression that would have suited the life she must lead. I had trouble believing she was a courtesan and I especially would not have believed she was a stylish courtesan, if I had not seen the carriage and pair, the pink dress, the pearl necklace, if I had not known that my uncle was acquainted only with those of the highest sort. But I wondered how the millionaire who had given her her carriage and her house and her jewels could enjoy squandering his fortune on a person whose appearance was so simple and proper. And yet, as I thought about what her life must be like, the immorality of it disturbed me perhaps more than if it had taken concrete form before my eyes in some special guise—it was so invisible, like the secret of some romantic story, of some scandal which had driven out of the home of her bourgeois parents and consigned to the public, which had brought to a bloom of beauty and raised to the demimonde and to notoriety, this woman, the play of whose features, the intonations of whose voice, the same as so many others I knew already, made me consider her despite myself to be a young woman from a good family, though she was no longer from any family.

We had gone into the "study," and my uncle, appearing somewhat ill at ease because of my presence, offered her a cigarette.

"No," she said, "my dear, you know I've become used to the ones the grand duke sends me. I told him you were jealous." And from a case she drew cigarettes covered with gilded foreign writing. "Why yes," she added abruptly, "I must have met this young man's father at your house. Isn't he your nephew? How could I have forgotten? He was so good, so exquisite to me," she said modestly and sensitively. But as I thought about what might have been my father's brusque greeting which she had found so exquisite, I, who knew his reserve and his coldness, was embarrassed, as by an indelicacy he had committed, by this disparity between the excessive gratitude that was bestowed on it and his insufficient cordiality. It seemed to me later that it was one of the touching aspects of the role of these idle and studious women that they devote their generosity, their talent, a free-floating dream of beauty in love—for, like artists, they do not carry it to fruition, do not bring it into the framework of a shared existence—and a gold that costs them little, to enrich with a precious and refined setting the rough and ill-polished lives of men. Just as this one, in the smoking room where my uncle was wearing his plain jacket to receive her, generously diffused her soft and sweet body, her dress of pink silk, her pearls, the elegance that emanates from the friendship of a grand duke, so in the same way she had taken some insignificant remark of my father's, had worked it delicately, turned it, given it a precious appellation, and encasing it with



one of her glances of the finest water, tinged with humility and gratitude, had given it back changed into an artistic jewel, into something “completely exquisite.”

“Come now, it’s time for you to go,” my uncle said to me.

I stood up, I had an irresistible desire to kiss the hand of the lady in pink, but it seemed to me this would have been something as bold as an abduction. My heart pounded as I said to myself: “Should I do it, should I not do it,” then I stopped asking myself what I should do so as to be able to do something. And with a blind and senseless gesture divested of all the reasons I had found in its favor a moment ago, I carried to my lips the hand she was holding out to me.

“How nice he is! How gallant! Why, the boy’s a bit of a ladies’ man already: he takes after his uncle. He’ll be a perfect gentleman,”<sup>9</sup> she added, clenching her teeth to give the phrase a slightly British accent. “Couldn’t he come have a *cup of tea* with me sometime, as our neighbors the English say? He need only send me a ‘blue’<sup>10</sup> in the morning.”

I did not know what a “blue” was. I did not understand half the words the lady said, but my fear that there was some question concealed in them which it would have been impolite of me not to answer made me keep on listening to them with close attention, and this made me very tired.

“Oh no, that’s not possible,” said my uncle, shrugging his shoulders, “he’s very busy, he works hard. He wins all the prizes at school,” he added in a low voice so that I would not hear this lie and contradict it. “Who knows? Perhaps the boy will be a little Victor Hugo, another Vaulabelle,<sup>11</sup> you know.”

“I adore artists,” answered the lady in pink, “they’re the only ones who understand women . . . besides a few superior creatures like you. Excuse my ignorance, my dear, but who is Vaulabelle? Is it those gilt-edged volumes in the little glass bookcase in your sitting room? You know you promised to lend them to me, I’ll take great care of them.”

My uncle, who hated lending his books, said nothing in answer and took me to the front hall. Crazy with love for the lady in pink, I covered my old uncle’s tobacco-filled cheeks with mad kisses, and, while with some embarrassment he let me know without venturing to tell me openly that he would just as soon I not talk about this visit to my parents, I said to him, tears in my eyes, that the memory of his goodness was so powerful within me that one day I would certainly find the means to show him my gratitude. It was so powerful, in fact, that two hours later, after a few mysterious phrases that did not seem to me to give my parents a distinct enough idea of the new importance with which I was endowed, I found it more explicit to describe to them every last detail of the visit I had just paid. I did not think that in doing this I was causing problems for my uncle. How could I have thought that, since I did not wish it? And I could not imagine that my parents would see any harm in a visit in which I saw none. Doesn’t it happen every day that a friend asks us to be sure to apologize for him to a woman to whom he has been prevented from writing, and that we neglect to do it, feeling that this person cannot attach any importance to a silence that has none for us? I imagined, like everyone else, that the brain of another person was an inert and docile receptacle, without the power to react specifically to what one introduced into it; and I did not doubt that in depositing in my parents’ brains the news of the acquaintance I had made through my uncle, I was transmitting to them at the same time, as I wished to, the kindly opinion that I had of this introduction. My parents unfortunately deferred to principles entirely different from those I was suggesting they adopt, when they wished to appraise my uncle’s action. My father and grandfather had some violent arguments with him; of this, I was indirectly informed. A few days later, encountering my uncle outdoors as he was passing in an open carriage, I was filled with all the pain, the gratitude, the remorse that I would have liked to express to him. Compared to their immensity, I felt that raising my hat would be shabby and might make my uncle think I did not believe I owed him more than an ordinary sort of courtesy. I decided to refrain from that inadequate gesture and I turned my head away. My uncle thought that in doing this I was following my parents’ orders, he did not forgive them, and he died many years later without any of us ever seeing him again.

And so I no longer went into my uncle Adolphe’s sitting room, now closed, and would linger in the vicinity of the scullery until Françoise appeared in her temple yard and said to me: “I’m going to let my kitchen maid serve the coffee and take up the hot water, I must fly to Mme. Octave,” when I would decide to go back in and would go straight upstairs to read in my room. The kitchen maid was an abstract entity, a permanent institution whose invariable set of attributes assured her a sort of continuity and identity, through the succession of temporary forms in which she was incarnated, for we never had the same one two years running. The year we ate so much asparagus, the kitchen maid usually given the job of “scraping” them was a poor, sickly creature, in a state of pregnancy already rather advanced when we arrived at Easter, and we were in fact surprised that Françoise allowed her to do so many errands and so much heavy work, for she was beginning to have difficulty carrying before her the mysterious basket, rounder every day, whose magnificent form one could divine under her ample smocks. These smocks reminded me of the cloaks worn by certain of Giotto’s symbolic figures, photographs of whom I had been given by M. Swann. He himself was the one who had pointed this out to us and when he asked for news of the kitchen maid he would say: “How is Giotto’s Charity?” What was more, she herself, poor girl, fattened by her pregnancy even in her face, even in her cheeks, which descended straight and square, rather resembled, in fact, those strong, mannish virgins, matrons really, in whom the virtues are personified in the Arena. And I realize now that those Virtues and Vices of Padua<sup>12</sup> resembled her in still another way. Just as the image of this girl was increased by the added symbol she carried before her belly without appearing to understand its meaning, without expressing in her face anything of its beauty and spirit, as a mere heavy burden, in the same way the powerful housewife who is represented at the Arena below the name “Caritas,” and a reproduction of whom hung on the wall of my schoolroom at Combray, embodies this virtue without seeming to suspect it, without any thought of charity seeming ever to have been capable of being expressed by her vulgar, energetic face. Through a lovely invention of the painter, she is trampling upon the treasures of the earth, but absolutely as if she were treading grapes to extract their juice or rather as she would have climbed on some sacks to raise herself up; and she holds her flaming heart out to God, or, to put it more exactly, “hands” it to him, as a cook hands a corkscrew through the vent of her cellar to someone who is asking her for it at the ground-floor window. Envy, too, might have had more of a particular expression of envy. But in this fresco too, the symbol occupies such a large place and is represented as so real, the serpent hissing at the lips of Envy is so fat, it fills her wide-open mouth so completely, that the muscles of her face are distended to contain it, like those of a child swelling a balloon with its breath, and that Envy’s attention—and ours along with it—entirely concentrated as it is on the action of her lips, has scarcely any time for envious thoughts.

Despite all the admiration M. Swann professed for these figures of Giotto, for a long time I took no pleasure in contemplating, in our schoolroom, where the copies he had brought back to me had been hung, this Charity without charity, this Envy which looked like nothing more than a plate in a medical book illustrating the compression of the glottis or uvula by a tumor of the tongue or by the introduction of the operating surgeon's instrument, a Justice whose grayish and meanly regular face was the very same which, in Combray, characterized certain pretty, pious, and unfeeling bourgeois ladies I saw at Mass, some of whom had long since been enrolled in the reserve militia of Injustice. But later I understood that the startling strangeness, the special beauty of these frescoes was due to the large place which the symbol occupied in them, and the fact that it was represented, not as a symbol, since the thought symbolized was not expressed, but as real, as actually experienced or physically handled, gave something more literal and more precise to the meaning of the work, something more concrete and more striking to the lesson it taught. In the case of the poor kitchen maid, too, wasn't one's attention constantly brought back to her belly by the weight that pulled on it; and in the same way, also, the thoughts of the dying are quite often turned toward the aspect of death that is real, painful, dark, visceral, toward the underside of death, which is in fact the side it presents to them and so harshly makes them feel, and which more closely resembles a crushing burden, a difficulty breathing, a need to drink, than what we call the idea of death.

There must have been a good deal of reality in those Virtues and Vices of Padua, since they seemed to me as alive as the pregnant servant, and since she herself did not appear to me much less allegorical. And perhaps this (at least apparent) nonparticipation of a person's soul in the virtue that is acting through her has also, beyond its aesthetic value, a reality that is, if not psychological, at least, as they say, physiognomical. When, later, I had occasion to meet, in the course of my life, in convents for instance, truly saintly embodiments of practical charity, they generally had the cheerful, positive, indifferent, and brusque air of a busy surgeon, the sort of face in which one can read no commiseration, no pity in the presence of human suffering, no fear of offending it, the sort which is the ungentle face, the antipathetic and sublime face of true goodness.

While the kitchen maid—involuntarily causing Françoise's superiority to shine forth, just as Error, by contrast, renders more dazzling the triumph of Truth—served coffee which according to Mama was merely hot water, and then took up to our rooms hot water which was barely lukewarm, I had lain down on my bed, a book in my hand, in my room which tremulously protected its frail transparent coolness from the afternoon sun behind its nearly closed shutters, through which a gleam of daylight had nonetheless contrived to pass its yellow wings, remaining motionless between the wood and the windowpane, in a corner, like a poised butterfly. It was barely light enough to read, and the sensation of the splendid brightness of the day came to me only from the blows struck in the rue de la Cure by Camus (told by Françoise that my aunt was "not resting" and that one could make noise) against some dusty crates, which, however, reverberating in the sonorous atmosphere peculiar to hot weather, seemed to send scarlet stars flying into the distance; and also by the houseflies that performed for me, in a little concert, a sort of chamber music of summer: this music does not evoke summer in the same way as a melody of human music, which, when you happen to hear it during the warm season, afterward reminds you of it; it is connected to the summer by a more necessary bond: born of the fine days, born again only with them, containing a little of their essence, it not only awakens their image in our memory, it guarantees their return, their presence, actual, ambient, immediately accessible.

This dim coolness of my room was to the full sun of the street what a shadow is to a ray of light, that is to say, it was just as luminous and offered my imagination the full spectacle of summer, which my senses, had I been out walking, could have enjoyed only piecemeal; and so it was quite in harmony with my repose, which (because of the stirring adventures narrated in my books) sustained, like the repose of an unmoving hand in the midst of a stream of water, the shock and animation of a torrent of activity.

But my grandmother, even if the hot weather had turned bad, if a storm or merely a squall had arisen, would come and beg me to go out. And not wanting to stop my reading, I would go and continue it in the garden, at least, under the chestnut tree, in a little hooded chair of wicker and canvas, in the depths of which I would sit and think I was hidden from the eyes of the people who might come and pay a visit to my parents.

And wasn't my mind also like another crib in the depths of which I felt I remained ensconced, even in order to watch what was happening outside? When I saw an external object, my awareness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, lining it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever directly touching its substance; it would volatilize in some way before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body brought near a wet object never touches its moisture because it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation. In the sort of screen dappled with different states of mind which my consciousness would simultaneously unfold while I read, and which ranged from the aspirations hidden deepest within me to the completely exterior vision of the horizon which I had, at the bottom of the garden, before my eyes, what was first in me, innermost, the constantly moving handle that controlled the rest, was my belief in the philosophical richness and the beauty of the book I was reading, and my desire to appropriate them for myself, whatever that book might be. For, even if I had bought it in Combray, having seen it in front of Borange's grocery, which was too far away from the house for Françoise to be able to do her shopping there as she did at Camus's, but which was better stocked as stationer and bookshop, held in place by some strings in the mosaic of pamphlets and monthly serials that covered the two panels of its door, which was itself more mysterious, more sown with ideas than the door of a cathedral, the fact was that I had recognized it as having been mentioned to me as a remarkable work by the teacher or friend who appeared to me at that period to hold the secret of the truth and beauty half sensed, half incomprehensible, the knowledge of which was the goal, vague but permanent, of my thoughts.

After this central belief, which moved incessantly during my reading from inside to outside, toward the discovery of the truth, came the emotions aroused in me by the action in which I was taking part, for those afternoons contained more dramatic events than does, often, an entire lifetime. These were the events taking place in the book I was reading; it is true that the people affected by them were not "real," as Françoise said. But all the feelings we are made to experience by the joy or the misfortune of a real person are produced in us only through the intermediary of an image of that joy or that misfortune; the ingeniousness of the first novelist consisted in understanding that in the apparatus of our emotions, the image being the only essential element, the simplification that would consist in purely and simply abolishing real people would be a decisive improvement. A real human being, however profoundly we sympathize with him, is in large part perceived by our senses, that is to say, remains opaque to us, presents a dead weight which our sensibility cannot lift. If a calamity should strike him, it is only in a small part of the total notion we have of him that we will be able to be moved by this; even more, it is only in a part of the total notion he has of himself that he

will be able to be moved himself. The novelist's happy discovery was to have the idea of replacing these parts, impenetrable to the soul, by an equal quantity of immaterial parts, that is to say, parts which our soul can assimilate. What does it matter thenceforth if the actions, and the emotions, of this new order of creatures seem to us true, since we have made them ours, since it is within us that they occur, that they hold within their control, as we feverishly turn the pages of the book, the rapidity of our breathing and the intensity of our gaze. And once the novelist has put us in that state, in which, as in all purely internal states, every emotion is multiplied tenfold, in which his book will disturb us as might a dream but a dream more lucid than those we have while sleeping and whose memory will last longer, then see how he provokes in us within one hour all possible happinesses and all possible unhappinesses just a few of which we would spend years of our lives coming to know and the most intense of which would never be revealed to us because the slowness with which they occur prevents us from perceiving them (thus our heart changes, in life, and it is the worst pain; but we know it only through reading, through our imagination: in reality it changes, as certain natural phenomena occur, slowly enough so that, if we are able to observe successively each of its different states, in return we are spared the actual sensation of change).

Already less interior to my body than these lives of the characters, next came, half projected in front of me, the landscape in which the action unfolded and which exerted on my thoughts a much greater influence than the other, the one I had before my eyes when I lifted them from the book. It was thus that during two summers, in the heat of the garden at Combray, I felt, because of the book I was reading then, homesick for a mountainous and fluvial country, where I would see many sawmills and where, in the depths of the clear water, pieces of wood rotted under tufts of watercress: not far off, climbing along low walls, were clusters of violet and reddish flowers. And since the dream of a woman who would love me was always present in my mind, during those summers that dream was impregnated with the coolness of the running waters; and whichever woman I conjured up, clusters of violet and reddish flowers would rise immediately on either side of her like complementary colors.

This was not only because an image of which we dream remains forever stamped, is adorned and enriched, by the glimmer of the colors not its own that may happen to surround it in our daydream; for the landscapes in the books I read were for me not merely landscapes more vividly portrayed in my imagination than those which Combray set before my eyes but otherwise analogous. Because the author had chosen them, because of the faith with which my mind went to meet his word as though it were a revelation, they seemed to be—an impression hardly ever given me by the countryside in which I happened to be, and especially by our garden, the unmagical product of the perfectly correct conception of the gardener so despised by my grandmother—an actual part of Nature itself, worthy to be studied and explored.

If my parents had allowed me, when I was reading a book, to go visit the region it described, I would have believed I was taking an invaluable step forward in the conquest of truth. For even if we have the sensation of being always surrounded by our own soul, it is not as though by a motionless prison: rather, we are in some sense borne along with it in a perpetual leap to go beyond it, to reach the outside, with a sort of discouragement as we hear around us always that same resonance, which is not an echo from outside but the resounding of an internal vibration. We try to rediscover in things, now precious because of it, the glimmer that our soul projected on them; we are disappointed to find that they seem to lack in nature the charm they derived in our thoughts from the proximity of certain ideas; at times we convert all the forces of that soul into cunning, into magnificence, in order to have an effect on people who are outside us, as we are well aware, and whom we will never reach. Thus, if I always imagined the woman I loved surrounded by the places I longed for most at that time, if I would have liked her to be the one who took me to visit them, who opened the way for me into an unknown world, it was not because of a simple chance association of thoughts; no, it was because my dreams of travel and of love were only moments—which I am separating artificially today as if I were cutting sections at different heights of an apparently motionless iridescent jet of water—in a single inflexible upsurge of all the forces of my life.

Lastly, continuing to trace from the inside to the outside these states simultaneously juxtaposed in my consciousness, and before reaching the real horizon that enveloped them, I find pleasures of another kind, the pleasure of being comfortably seated, of smelling the good scent of the air, of not being disturbed by a visit; and, when an hour rang in the bell tower of Saint-Hilaire, of seeing fall piece by piece what was already consumed of the afternoon, until I heard the last stroke, which allowed me to add up the total and after which the long silence that followed it seemed to commence in the blue sky that whole part that was still granted me for reading until the good dinner which Françoise was preparing and which would restore me from the hardships I had incurred, during the reading of the book, in pursuit of its hero. And at each hour it would seem to me only a few moments since the preceding hour had rung; the most recent would come and inscribe itself close to the other in the sky, and I would not be able to believe that sixty minutes were held in that little blue arc comprised between their two marks of gold. Sometimes, even, this premature hour would ring two strokes more than the last; there was therefore one that I had not heard, something that had taken place had not taken place for me; the interest of the reading, as magical as a deep sleep, had deceived my hallucinated ears and erased the golden bell from the azure surface of the silence. Lovely Sunday afternoons under the chestnut tree in the garden at Combray, carefully emptied by me of the ordinary incidents of my own existence, which I had replaced by a life of foreign adventures and foreign aspirations in the heart of a country washed by running waters, you still evoke that life for me when I think of you and you contain it in fact from having gradually encircled and enclosed it—while I went on with my reading in the falling heat of the day—in the crystalline succession, slowly changing and spanned by leafy branches, of your silent, sonorous, redolent, and limpid hours.

Sometimes I would be drawn from my reading, in the middle of the afternoon, by the gardener's daughter, who would run like a lunatic, overturning an orange tree in its tub as she went by, cutting a finger, breaking a tooth, and shouting, "They're coming, they're coming!" so that Françoise and I should run out too and not miss any of the show. This was on the days when the regiment passed through Combray on its way to garrison maneuvers, generally going down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde. While our servants, sitting in a row on chairs outside the railings, gazed at the people of Combray taking their Sunday walk and allowed themselves to be gazed at in return, the gardener's daughter rushed through a slit left between two distant houses in the avenue de la Gare had caught sight of the glitter of helmets. The servants had rushed to bring in their chairs, for when the cuirassiers paraded down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, they filled its entire breadth, and the cantering horses grazed the houses, covering pavements submerged like banks that offer too narrow a bed for a torrent unleashed.

"Poor children," said Françoise, having barely reached the railings and already in tears; "poor boys, to be mown down like grass in a meadow; the very thought of it gives me a shock," she added, putting her hand on her heart, where she had received that *shock*.

"A fine sight, isn't it, Madame Françoise, all these youngsters with no care for their lives?" said the gardener to get a "rise" out of her.

He had not spoken in vain:

"No care for their lives? Well, now, what should we care for if we don't care for our lives, the only gift the dear Lord never gives us twice over? Alas, dear God! It's quite true, though, they don't care! I saw them in '70; in those wretched wars they've no fear of death left in them; they're nothing more nor less than madmen; and then they're not worth the rope to hang them with; they're not men anymore, they're lions." (For Françoise, the comparison of a man to a lion, which she pronounced lie-on, was not at all complimentary.)

The rue Sainte-Hildegarde turned too sharply for us to be able to see anything coming from far off, and it was through that slit between the two houses in the avenue de la Gare that we saw more and more new helmets flowing and shining in the sun. The gardener wanted to know if there were many more still to come, and he was thirsty, because the sun was beating down. So, all of a sudden, his daughter, leaping out as though from a place besieged, would sally forth, gain the corner of the street, and after braving death a hundred times, come back to us bringing, along with a carafe of licorice water, the news that there were at least a thousand of them coming without a break from the direction of Thiberzy and Méséglise. Françoise and the gardener, reconciled, would discuss what action should be taken in case of war.

"You see, Françoise," said the gardener, "revolution would be better, because when they declare a revolution, it's only them that wants to that goes."

"Well now, at least I can understand that, it's more honest."

The gardener believed that when war was declared they would stop all the railway trains.

"Of course! So we doesn't run off," said Françoise.

And the gardener: "Oh, they're clever ones!" because he would not admit that war was not a kind of bad trick that the State tried to play on the people, and that if only they had the means to do it, there was not a single person who would not have run away from it.

But Françoise would hurry back to my aunt, I would return to my book, the servants would settle in front of the gate again to watch as the dust subsided along with the emotion roused by the soldiers. Long after calm had descended, an unaccustomed flow of people out walking would continue to darken the streets of Combray. And in front of each house, even those where it was not the custom, the servants or even the masters, sitting and watching, would festoon the sill with a border as dark and irregular as the border of seaweed and shells whose crepe and embroidery are left on the shore by a strong tide after it recedes.

Except on those days, however, I could usually read in peace. But the interruption and the commentary that a visit of Swann's once produced as I was in the midst of reading a book by an author quite new to me, Bergotte, had the consequence that for a long time afterward it was not against a wall adorned with spikes of violet flowers, but against a quite different background, before the portal of a Gothic cathedral, that the image now appeared of one of the women I dreamed of.

I had heard Bergotte mentioned for the first time by a friend of mine older than I whom I greatly admired, Bloch. When he heard me admit how much I admired "La Nuit d'Octobre,"<sup>13</sup> he had exploded in laughter as noisy as a trumpet and said to me: "Beware this rather low fondness of yours for the Honorable de Musset. He's an extremely pernicious individual and a rather sinister brute. I must admit, however, that he and even our man Racine did, each of them, in the course of their lives, make one fairly rhythmical line of verse that also has in its favor what I believe to be the supreme merit of meaning absolutely nothing. They are: 'The white Oloossone and the white Camyre' and 'The daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë.'<sup>14</sup> They were pointed out to me in defense of those two rogues in an article by my very dear master, old Leconte, acceptable to the Immortal Gods. Speaking of which, here's a book I don't have time to read right now which is recommended, it seems, by that colossal fellow. I've been told he considers the author, the Honorable Bergotte, to be a most subtle individual; and even though he may evince, at times, a goodness of heart rather hard to explain, for me his word is a Delphic Oracle. Do read these lyrical pieces of prose, therefore, and if the titanic rhymester who composed 'Bhagavat' and 'Le Lévrier de Magnus'<sup>15</sup> has spoken the truth, by Apollo, you will taste, dear master, the nectarine joys of Olympos." It was in a sarcastic tone that he had asked me to call him "dear master" and that he called me the same. But in reality we took a certain pleasure in this game, since we were still close to the age when one believes one creates what one names.

Unfortunately, I was unable to talk to Bloch and ask him for an explanation in order to quiet the disturbance he had caused in me when he told me that fine lines of poetry (from which I expected nothing less than a revelation of the truth) were all the finer if they meant nothing at all. For Bloch was not invited to the house again. At first he had been made quite welcome. It was true that my grandfather claimed that each time I formed a closer attachment to one of my friends than the others and brought him home, he was always a Jew, which would not have displeased him in principle—even his friend Swann was of Jewish extraction—had he not felt that it was not from among the best that I had chosen him. And so when I brought home a new friend, he very seldom failed to hum "Oh God of our Fathers" from *La Juive*<sup>16</sup> or "Israel, break thy bond,"<sup>17</sup> singing only the tune, naturally (Ti la lam talam, talim), but I was afraid my friend would know it and restore the words.

Before he saw them, simply from hearing the name, which quite often had nothing particularly Jewish about it, he would guess not only the Jewish background of those of my friends who were in fact Jewish, but even whatever might be distressing about their family.

"And what is the name of this friend of yours who's coming this evening?"

"Dumont, Grandfather."

"Dumont! Oh, now I'm suspicious!"

And he would sing:

Archers, be on your guard!  
Watch without rest, without sound.<sup>18</sup>

And after adroitly asking us a few more specific questions, he would cry out: "On guard! On guard!" or, if it was the victim himself, already there, whom he had forced, by a subtle interrogation, unwittingly to confess his origins, then, to show us he no longer had any doubts, he would simply gaze at us while barely perceptibly humming:

Let you now guide  
The steps of this timid Israelite!<sup>19</sup>

or:

Fields of our fathers, sweet valley of Hebron.<sup>20</sup>

or else:

Yes, I am of the chosen race.<sup>21</sup>

These little idiosyncrasies of my grandfather's did not imply any feeling of ill will toward my friends. But Bloch had displeased my family for other reasons. He had begun by irritating my father, who, noticing that he was wet, had said to him with lively interest:

"Why, Monsieur Bloch, what's the weather like? Has it been raining? I don't understand this at all, the barometer couldn't have been better."

The only answer he had drawn from him had been this:

"Monsieur, I absolutely cannot tell you if it has been raining. I live so resolutely beyond physical contingencies that my senses do not bother to notify me of them."

"Why, my poor son, that friend of yours is an idiot," my father had said to me when Bloch had gone. "My goodness! He can't even tell me what the weather's like! Why, nothing is more interesting! He's an imbecile."

Then Bloch had displeased my grandmother because after lunch, when she said she was feeling a little indisposed, he had stifled a sob and wiped away a few tears.

"How can you tell me he's sincere?" she said to me. "He doesn't know me; unless he's out of his mind, of course."

And finally he had annoyed everyone because, having come for lunch an hour and a half late covered with mud, instead of apologizing, he had said:

"I never allow myself to be influenced either by atmospheric perturbations or by the conventional divisions of time. I would happily instate the use of the opium pipe and the Malay kris,<sup>22</sup> but I know nothing about the use of those infinitely more pernicious and also insipidly bourgeois implements, the watch and the umbrella."

He would have returned to Combray despite all this. He was not, of course, the friend my parents would have wanted for me; in the end they had believed that the tears he shed over my grandmother's indisposition were not feigned; but they knew, either instinctively or from experience, that our impulsive emotions have little influence over the course of our actions or the conduct of our lives, and that regard for moral obligations, loyalty to friends, the completion of a piece of work, obedience to a rule of life, have a surer foundation in blind habits than in those momentary transports, ardent and sterile. They would have preferred for me, over Bloch, companions who would have given me no more than is suitable to give one's friends, according to the laws of bourgeois morality; who would not unexpectedly send me a basket of fruits because they had been thinking of me with affection that day, but who, being incapable of tipping in my favor the correct balance of the obligations and claims of friendship by a simple impulse of their imagination and sensibility, would also not tamper with it to my detriment. Even our offenses will not easily divert from their duty toward us those natures of which the model was my great-aunt, who, estranged for years from a niece to whom she never spoke, did not for this reason change the will in which she left that niece her entire fortune, because she was her closest relative and it "was proper."

But I liked Bloch, my parents wanted to make me happy, the insoluble problems I posed for myself concerning the meaningless beauty of the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë tired me more and made me more ill than further conversations with him would have done, even though my mother felt they were harmful. And he would still have been received at Combray, if, after that dinner, having just informed me—news that later had a great deal of influence on my life and made it first happier, then less happy—that no woman ever thought about anything but love and that there was not one whose resistance could not be overcome, he had not assured me that he had heard most positively that my great-aunt had had a wild youth and had been known to be a kept woman. I could not stop myself from repeating these remarks to my parents, he was shown the door when he returned, and when I approached him afterward in the street, he was extremely cold to me.

But on the subject of Bergotte what he had said was true.

In the first few days, like a melody with which one will become infatuated but which one cannot yet make out, what I was to love so much in his style was not apparent to me. I could not put down the novel of his that I was reading, but thought I was interested only in the subject, as during that first period of love when you go to meet a woman every day at some gathering, some entertainment, thinking you are drawn to it by its pleasures. Then I noticed the rare, almost archaic expressions he liked to use at certain moments, when a hidden wave of harmony, an inner prelude, would heighten his style; and it was also at these moments that he would speak of the "vain dream of life," the "inexhaustible torrent of beautiful appearance," the "sterile and delicious torment of understanding and loving," the "moving effigies that forever ennoble the venerable and charming facades of our cathedrals," that he expressed an entire philosophy, new to me, through marvelous images which seemed themselves to have awakened this harp song which then arose and to whose accompaniment they gave a sublime quality. One of these passages by Bergotte, the third or fourth that I had isolated from the rest, filled me with a joy that could not be compared to the joy I had discovered in the first one, a joy I felt I was experiencing in a deeper, vaster, more unified region of myself, from which all obstacles and partitions seemed to have been removed. What had happened was that, recognizing the same preference for rare



expressions, the same musical effusion, the same idealist philosophy that had already, the other times, without my realizing it, been the source of my pleasure, I no longer had the impression I was in the presence of a particular passage from a certain book by Bergotte, tracing on the surface of my mind a purely linear figure, but rather of the “ideal passage” by Bergotte, common to all his books, to which all the analogous passages that merged with it had added a sort of thickness, a sort of volume, by which my mind seemed enlarged.

I was not quite Bergotte's only admirer; he was also the favorite writer of a friend of my mother's, a very well read woman, while Dr. du Boulbon would keep his patients waiting as he read Bergotte's most recent book; and it was from his consulting room, and from a park near Combray, that some of the first seeds of that predilection for Bergotte took flight, a rare species then, now universally widespread, so that all through Europe, all through America, even in the smallest village, one can find its ideal and common flower. What my mother's friend and, it seems, Dr. du Boulbon liked above all in Bergotte's books, as I did, was that same melodic flow, those old-fashioned expressions, a few others which were very simple and familiar, but which enjoyed, to judge from the places in which he focused attention on them, a particular preference on his part; lastly, in the sad passages, a certain brusqueness, a tone that was almost harsh. And no doubt he himself must have felt that these were his greatest charms. For in the books that followed, if he had found out some great truth, or the name of a famous cathedral, he would interrupt his narrative and, in an invocation, an apostrophe, a long prayer, he would give vent to those exhalations which in his early works remained interior to his prose, revealed only by the undulations of its surface, even sweeter, perhaps, more harmonious, when they were thus veiled and one could not have pointed out precisely where their murmur rose, where it died. These passages in which he took such pleasure were our favorite passages. I myself knew them by heart. I was disappointed when he resumed the thread of his narrative. Each time he talked about something whose beauty had until then been hidden from me, about pine forests, about hail, about Notre-Dame Cathedral, about *Athalie* or *Phèdre*,<sup>23</sup> with one image he would make that beauty explode into me. And so, realizing how many parts of the universe there were that my feeble perception would not be able to distinguish if he did not convey them to me, I wanted to possess an opinion of his, a metaphor of his, for everything in the world, especially those things that I would have an opportunity to see myself, and, of the latter, particularly some of the historic buildings of France and certain seascapes, because the insistence with which he mentioned them in his books proved that he considered them rich in meaning and beauty. Unfortunately, concerning almost everything in the world I did not know what his opinion was. I did not doubt that it was entirely different from my own, since it came down from an unknown world toward which I was trying to rise: persuaded that my thoughts would have looked like pure ineptitude to that perfect mind, I had made such a clean sweep of them all that, when by chance I happened to encounter in one of his books a thought that I had already had myself, my heart would swell as though a god in his goodness had given it back to me, had declared it legitimate and beautiful. It happened now and then that a page of his would say the same things that I often wrote to my grandmother and my mother at night when I could not sleep, so that this page by Bergotte seemed like a collection of epigraphs to be placed at the beginnings of my letters. Later still, when I began writing a book, and the quality of certain sentences was not high enough to persuade me to continue it, I would find their equivalent in Bergotte. But it was only then, when I read them in his book, that I could enjoy them; when I was the one composing them, anxious that they should reflect exactly what I perceived in my thoughts, afraid I would not "make a good likeness," I hardly had time to ask myself whether what I was writing was agreeable! But in fact there was no other sort of sentence, no other sort of idea, that I really loved. My uneasy and dissatisfied efforts were themselves a sign of love, a love without pleasure but profound. And so, when I suddenly found sentences like these in a book by another person, that is, without having to suffer my usual qualms, my usual severity, without having to torment myself, I would at last abandon myself with delight to my partiality for them, like a cook who, when for once he does not have to prepare the meal, at last finds the time to gormandize. One day, when I encountered in a book by Bergotte a joke about an old servant woman which the writer's magnificent and solemn language made even more ironical, but which was the same joke I had often made to my grandmother when talking about Françoise, another time when I saw that he did not think it unworthy to portray in one of those mirrors of truth which were his books a remark similar to one I had had occasion to make about our friend M. Legrandin (remarks about Françoise and M. Legrandin that were certainly among those I would most resolutely have sacrificed to Bergotte, persuaded that he would find them uninteresting), it seemed to me suddenly that my humble life and the realms of the truth were not as widely separated as I had thought, that they even coincided at certain points, and from confidence and joy I wept over the writer's pages as though in the arms of a father I had found again.

From his books, I imagined Bergotte to be a frail, disappointed old man who had lost several of his children and never recovered. And so I would read, I would sing his prose to myself, more *dolce*, more *lento*<sup>24</sup> perhaps than it was written, and the simplest sentence spoke to me with a more tender intonation. Above all else I loved his philosophy, I had pledged myself to it for life. It made me impatient to reach the age when I would enter secondary school and enroll in the class called Philosophy. But I did not want to do anything else there but live according to Bergotte's ideas exclusively, and, had I been told that the metaphysicians to whom I would be devoting myself by then would not resemble him at all, I would have felt the despair of a lover who wants his love to be lifelong and to whom one talks about the other mistresses he will have later.

One Sunday, as I was reading in the garden, I was disturbed by Swann, who had come to see my parents.

"What are you reading? May I look? Well, well! Bergotte! Now, who told you about his books?" I said it was Bloch.

"Ah, yes! The boy I saw here once, who looks so much like the portrait of Mohammed II by Bellini.<sup>25</sup> Oh, it's quite striking! He has the same circumflex eyebrows, the same curved nose, the same jutting cheekbones. When he has a goatee, he'll be the same person. Well, he has good taste, in any case, because Bergotte is quite enchanting." And seeing how much I appeared to admire Bergotte, Swann, who never talked about the people he knew, out of kindness made an exception and said to me:

"I know him very well. If you would like him to write a few words in the front of your book, I could ask him."

I did not dare accept his offer, but asked Swann some questions about Bergotte. "Could you tell me which is his favorite actor?"

"Actor? I don't know. But I do know that he doesn't consider any man on the stage equal to La Berma; he puts her above everyone else. Have you seen her?"

"No, monsieur, my parents don't allow me to go to the theatre."

"That's unfortunate. You ought to ask them. La Berma in *Phèdre*, in *Le Cid*,<sup>26</sup> is only an actress, you might say, but you know, I'm not much of a believer in the 'hierarchy!' of the arts" (and I noticed, as had often struck me in his conversations with my grandmother's sisters, that when he talked about serious things, when he used an expression that seemed to imply an opinion about an important subject, he took care to isolate it in a tone of voice that was particularly mechanical and ironic, as though he had put it between quotation marks, seeming not to want to take responsibility for it, as though saying "*hierarchy*, you know, as

it is called by silly people?” But then if it was so silly, why did he say hierarchy?). A moment later, he added: “It will give you as noble a vision as any masterpiece, I don’t know, really . . . as”—and he began to laugh—“the Queens of Chartres!”<sup>27</sup> Until then his horror of ever expressing a serious opinion had seemed to me a thing that must be elegant and Parisian and that was the opposite of the provincial dogmatism of my grandmother’s sisters; and I also suspected that it was a form of wit in the social circles in which Swann moved, where, reacting against the lyricism of earlier generations, they went to an extreme in rehabilitating those small, precise facts formerly reputed to be vulgar, and proscribed “fine phrases.” But now I found something shocking in this attitude of Swann’s toward things. It appeared that he dared not have an opinion and was at his ease only when he could with meticulous accuracy offer some precise piece of information. But if that was the case, he did not realize that to postulate that the accuracy of these details was important was to profess an opinion. I thought again of that dinner at which I was so sad because Mama would not be coming up to my room and at which he had said that the balls given by the Princesse de Léon were of no importance whatsoever. But it was to just that sort of pleasure that he devoted his life. I found all this contradictory. For what other lifetime was he reserving the moment when he would at last say seriously what he thought of things, formulate opinions that he did not have to put between quotation marks, and no longer indulge with punctilious politeness in occupations which he declared at the same time to be ridiculous? I also noticed in the way Swann talked to me about Bergotte something that was, on the other hand, not peculiar to him, but shared at the time by all the writer’s admirers, by my mother’s friend, by Dr. du Boulbon. Like Swann, they said about Bergotte: “He’s quite enchanting, so individual, he has his own way of saying things which is a little overly elaborate, but so pleasing. You don’t need to see the signature, you know right away that it’s by him.” But none of them would have gone so far as to say: “He’s a great writer, he has a great talent.” They did not even say he had talent. They did not say it because they did not know it. We are very slow to recognize in the particular features of a new writer the model that is labeled “great talent” in our museum of general ideas. Precisely because these features are new, we do not think they fully resemble what we call talent. Instead, we talk about originality, charm, delicacy, strength; and then one day we realize that all of this is, in fact, talent.

“Are there any books by Bergotte in which he talks about La Berma?” I asked M. Swann.

“I think so, in his slim little volume on Racine, but it must be out of print. There may have been a reissue, though. I’ll find out. I can also ask Bergotte anything you like; there isn’t a week in the whole year when he doesn’t come to dinner at our house. He’s my daughter’s greatest friend. They go off together visiting old towns, cathedrals, castles.”

Since I had no notion of social hierarchy, for a long time the fact that my father found it impossible for us to associate with Mme. and Mlle. Swann had had the effect above all, by making me imagine a great distance between them and us, of giving them prestige in my eyes. I was sorry my mother did not dye her hair and redden her lips as I had heard our neighbor Mme. Sazerat say that Mme. Swann did in order to please, not her husband, but M. de Charlus, and I thought we must be an object of scorn to her, which distressed me most of all because of Mlle. Swann, who, from what I had been told, was such a pretty little girl and about whom I often dreamed, giving her each time the same arbitrary and charming face. But when I learned that day that Mlle. Swann was a creature of so rare a condition, bathing as though in her natural element in the midst of such privileges, that when she asked her parents if anyone was coming to dinner, she would be answered by those syllables filled with light, by the name of that golden dinner guest who was for her only an old friend of the family: Bergotte; that for her the intimate talk at the table, the equivalent for me of my great-aunt’s conversation, would be Bergotte’s words on all the subjects he had not been able to broach in his books, and on which I would have liked to hear him pronounce his oracles; and that, lastly, when she went to visit other towns, he would walk along next to her, unknown and glorious, like the Gods who descended among mortals; then I was conscious both of the worth of a creature like Mlle. Swann and also of how crude and ignorant I would appear to her, and I felt so keenly the sweetness and the impossibility of my being her friend that I was filled with both desire and despair. Most often, now, when I thought of her, I would see her in front of a cathedral porch, explaining to me what the statues signified and, with a smile that said good things about me, introducing me as her friend to Bergotte. And always the charm of all those ideas awakened in me by the cathedrals, the charm of the hills of Île-de-France and the plains of Normandy, cast its glimmers over the picture I was forming of Mlle. Swann: this was what it meant to be on the point of falling in love with her. Our belief that a person takes part in an unknown life which his or her love would allow us to enter is, of all that love demands in order to come into being, what it prizes the most, and what makes it care little for the rest. Even women who claim to judge a man by his appearance alone see that appearance as the emanation of a special life. This is why they love soldiers, firemen; the uniform makes them less particular about the face; they think that under the breastplate they are kissing a different heart, adventurous and sweet; and a young sovereign, a crown prince, may make the most flattering conquests in the foreign countries he visits without needing the regular profile that would perhaps be indispensable to a stockbroker.

While I read in the garden, something my great-aunt would not have understood my doing except on a Sunday, a day when it is forbidden to occupy oneself with anything serious and when she did not sew (on a weekday, she would have said to me, “What? Still *amusing* yourself with a book? This isn’t Sunday, you know,” endowing the word *amusement* with the meaning of childishness and waste of time), my aunt Léonie would gossip with Françoise, waiting until it was time for Eulalie. She would announce that she had just seen Mme. Goupil go by “without an umbrella, in that silk dress she had made for her at Châteaudun. If she has far to go before Vespers, she could very well get it properly drenched.”

“Maybe, maybe” (meaning maybe not), said Françoise so as not to rule out absolutely the possibility of a more favorable alternative.

“Oh dear,” said my aunt, striking her forehead, “that reminds me I never found out if she arrived at church after the Elevation. I will have to remember to ask Eulalie . . . Françoise, just look at that black cloud behind the steeple, and that pitiful sunlight on the slates. It’s sure to rain before the day is done. It couldn’t possibly stay like this, it was too hot. And the sooner the better, because until the storm breaks, my Vichy water won’t go down,” added my aunt, in whose mind her desire to hasten the descent of her Vichy water was infinitely more important than her fear of seeing Mme. Goupil ruin her dress.

“Maybe, maybe.”

"And the fact is, when it rains on the square there isn't much shelter. What, three o'clock?" my aunt cried out suddenly, turning pale. "Why, my goodness, Vespers has begun and I've forgotten my pepsin! Now I know why my Vichy water was lying on my stomach."

And swooping down on a missal bound in violet velvet, with gilt clasps, from which, in her haste, she let escape a few of those pictures edged with a band of yellowing paper lace that mark the pages of the feast days, my aunt, while swallowing her drops, began reading the sacred texts as fast as she could, her comprehension of them slightly obscured by her uncertainty as to whether the pepsin, taken so long after the Vichy water, would still be able to catch up with it and make it go down. "Three o'clock! It's unbelievable how the time passes!"

A little tap against the windowpane, as though something had struck it, followed by a copious light spill, as of grains of sand dropping from a window above, then the spill extending, becoming regular, finding a rhythm, turning fluid, resonant, musical, immeasurable, universal: it was the rain.

"Well, now, Françoise! What did I tell you? How it's coming down! But I think I heard the bell at the garden gate: go and see who could be outside in such weather."

Françoise returned:

"It was Mme. Amédée" (my grandmother). "She said she was going for a little walk. And yet it's raining hard."

"That doesn't surprise me at all," said my aunt, lifting her eyes to the heavens. "I've always said that her way of thinking is different from everyone else's. I'd rather it be her than me outdoors just now."

"Mme. Amédée is always as different as she can be from everyone else," said Françoise gently, refraining until she should be alone with the other servants from saying that she believed my grandmother was a little "touched."

"Now, *see*? The Benediction is over! Eulalie won't be coming," sighed my aunt; "the weather must have frightened her away."

"But it's not five o'clock, Madame Octave, it's only half-past four."

"Only half-past four? And I had to raise the little curtains to get a wretched glimmer of daylight. At half-past four! One week before the Rogations! Oh, my poor Françoise, the Good Lord must be sorely vexed with us. The world is going too far these days! As my poor Octave used to say, we have forgotten the Good Lord too often and he's taking his revenge."

A bright flush enlivened my aunt's cheeks; it was Eulalie. Unfortunately, scarcely had she been shown in before Françoise returned and, with a smile that was meant to indicate her participation in the joy she was sure her words would give my aunt, articulating the syllables to show that, despite her use of the indirect style, she was reporting, good servant that she was, the very words the visitor had condescended to use:

"M. le Curé would be delighted, enchanted, if Mme. Octave is not resting and could see him. M. le Curé does not wish to disturb. M. le Curé is downstairs; I told him to go into the parlor."

In fact, the curé's visits did not give my aunt as much pleasure as Françoise supposed, and the air of jubilation with which Françoise thought she must illuminate her face each time she had to announce him did not entirely correspond to the invalid's feelings. The curé (an excellent man with whom I am sorry I did not have more conversations, for if he understood nothing about the arts, he did know many etymologies), being in the habit of enlightening distinguished visitors with information about the church (he even intended to write a book about the parish of Combray), fatigued her with endless explanations that were in fact always the same. But when his visit came at the very same time as Eulalie's, it became frankly unpleasant for my aunt. She would have preferred to make the most of Eulalie and not have all her company at once. But she did not dare decline to see the curé and only made a sign to Eulalie not to leave at the same time, so that she could keep her there by herself for a little while after he was gone.

"Monsieur le Curé, what's this they've been telling me, that a painter has set up his easel in your church and is copying a window? I must say, old as I am, I've never in my life heard of such a thing! What is the world coming to? And the ugliest part of the church, too!"

"I will not go so far as to say it is the ugliest, for if there are some parts of Saint-Hilaire that are well worth a visit, there are others that are very old now, in my poor basilica, the only one in all the diocese that has never even been restored! My Lord, the porch is dirty and ancient, but still it is really majestic in character; the same is true of the tapestries of Esther, for which personally I would not give two sous but which the experts rank immediately below those at Sens. I can quite see, too, that apart from certain rather realistic details, they offer other details that show a genuine power of observation. But don't talk to me about the windows! Is it really sensible to leave us with windows that give no light and even deceive our eyes with patches of color I would never be able to identify, in a church where no two paving stones are on the same level and they refuse to replace them for me, giving the excuse that these are the tombstones of the Abbés de Combray and the Seigneurs de Guermantes, the old Comtes de Brabant? The direct ancestors of the present Duc de Guermantes and of the Duchesse too since she's a Demoiselle de Guermantes who married her cousin." (My grandmother, who, because she took no great interest in "persons," ended by confusing all names, would claim, each time anyone mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes, that she must be a relative of Mme. de Villeparisis. Everyone would burst out laughing; she would try to defend herself by citing as proof a certain letter containing an announcement: "It seems to me I recall there was something about Guermantes in it." And for once I would side with the others against her, unable to admit that there was any connection between her friend from boarding school and the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant.) "Look at Roussainville, today it is no more than a parish of farmers, though in ancient times the locality experienced a great boom in the commerce of felt hats and clocks. (I'm not sure of the etymology of Roussainville. I'm inclined to think the original name was Rouville [*Radulfi villa*], analogous to Châteauroux [*Castrum radulfi*], but we can talk about that some other time.) Well! The church has superb windows, almost all modern, including that impressive *Entry of Louis-Philippe into Combray*, which would be more suited to Combray itself and is just as good, they say, as the famous windows at Chartres. Only yesterday I saw Dr. Percepied's brother, who goes in for these things and who regards it as a very fine piece of work. But, as I in fact said to this artist, who seems very courteous, by the way, and who is apparently a veritable virtuoso with the paintbrush, I said, now what do you find so extraordinary about this window, which is if anything a little darker than the others?"

"I'm sure that if you asked the bishop," my aunt said feebly, beginning to think she was going to be tired, "he would not refuse you a new window."

"You may depend upon it, Madame Octave," answered the curé. "But it was His Lordship himself who started all the fuss about this wretched window by proving that it represented Gilbert the Bad, Sire de Guermantes, a direct descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, who was a Demoiselle de Guermantes, receiving absolution from Saint Hilaire."

"But I can't see where Saint Hilaire would be."

"Why, in the corner of the window—you never noticed a lady in a yellow dress? Well, now, that's Saint Hilaire, who in certain provinces is also called, you know, Saint Illiers, Saint Hélier, and even, in the Jura, Saint Ylie. And these various corruptions of *sanctus Hilarius* are not the most curious that have occurred in the names of the blessed. For instance, your own patron, my good Eulalie, *sancta Eulalia*—do you know what she is in Burgundy? *Saint Éloi*, quite simply: she has become a male saint. You see Eulalie?—after you die they will turn you into a man."

"Monsieur le Curé always has a joke for us."

"Gilbert's brother, Charles the Stammerer, was a pious prince, but having early in life lost his father, Pépin the Mad, who died as a result of his mental infirmity, he wielded the supreme power with all the arrogance of a man who has had no discipline in his youth, and if in a certain town he saw a man whose face he didn't like, he would massacre every last inhabitant. Gilbert, wishing to take revenge on Charles, caused the church of Combray to be burned down, the original church at the time, which Théodebert, when he and his court left the country house he had near here, at Thiberzy (which would be *Theodeberciacus*), to go fight the Burgundians, had promised to build over the tomb of Saint Hilaire if the Blessed One would grant him the victory. Nothing remains of it now but the crypt which Théodore must have taken you down into, for Gilbert burned the rest. Finally, he defeated the unfortunate Charles with the help of William the Conqueror" (the curé pronounced it Will'am), "which is why so many English visitors come to see it. But he apparently was unable to win the affection of the people of Combray, for they rushed upon him as he was coming out of Mass and cut off his head. Théodore has a little book he lends out to people that explains it all."

"But what is unquestionably the most extraordinary thing about our church is the view from the belfry, which is magnificent. Certainly in your case, since you're not strong, I would never advise you to climb our ninety-seven steps, exactly half the number of the celebrated dome in Milan. It's quite tiring enough for someone in good health, especially as you must go up bent double if you don't want to crack your head, and you collect all the cobwebs off the stairwell on your clothes. In any case you would have to wrap yourself up quite snugly," he added (without noticing my aunt's indignation at the idea that she was capable of climbing into the belfry), "because there's quite a breeze once you get to the top! Some people declare they have felt the chill of death up there. Nonetheless, on Sundays there are always groups coming even from a long way off to admire the beauty of the panorama, and they go away enchanted. Now next Sunday, if the weather holds, you'll be sure to find some people there, since it's Rogation Day. It really must be admitted, though, that from that spot the scene is magical, with what you might call vistas over the plain that have quite a special charm of their own. On a clear day, you can see all the way to Verneuil. But the marvelous thing is that you can see, all in one glance, things you can't usually see except one at a time separately, like the course of the Vivonne and the ditches at Saint-Assise-lès-Combray, which are separated by a screen of tall trees, or the different canals at Jouy-le-Vicomte (*Gaudiacus vice comitis*, as you know). Each time I've gone to Jouy-le-Vicomte, of course, I've seen a bit of the canal, and then I've turned a corner and seen another bit, but by then I could no longer see the preceding bit. I could put them together in my mind, but that didn't have much of an effect for me. But from the Saint-Hilaire belfry it's different, the whole area seems to have been caught in one great net. But you can't see any water; it's as though there were deep clefts dividing the town into different neighborhoods so neatly it looks like a brioche still holding together after it has been sliced. To do it right, you'd have to be in both places at the same time, in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire and at Jouy-le-Vicomte."

The curé had so exhausted my aunt that he was scarcely gone before she had to send Eulalie away too.

"Here, my poor Eulalie," she said weakly, drawing a coin from a little purse that she had within reach of her hand, "this is so that you won't forget me in your prayers."

"Oh, Madame Octave! I don't know if I should; you know I don't come here for that!" Eulalie would say with the same hesitation and the same awkwardness, each time, as if it were the first, and with an appearance of dissatisfaction that diverted my aunt but did not displease her, because if one day Eulalie looked a little less vexed than usual as she took the coin, my aunt would say:

"I don't know what was bothering Eulalie; I gave her the same as usual, and yet she didn't look happy."

"I think she has nothing to complain about, all the same," Françoise would sigh, inclined to consider as small change anything my aunt gave her for herself or her children and as treasure madly squandered on an ingrate the little coins placed in Eulalie's hand each Sunday, but so discreetly that Françoise never managed to see them. It was not that Françoise would have wanted for herself the money my aunt gave Eulalie. She took sufficient pleasure in what my aunt possessed, knowing that the mistress's wealth both elevated and embellished her servant in everyone's eyes; and that she, Françoise, was distinguished and renowned in Combray, Jouy-le-Vicomte, and other places, on account of my aunt's many farms, the curé's frequent and extended visits, the singular number of bottles of Vichy water consumed. She was greedy only for my aunt; if it had been up to her to manage my aunt's fortune, which would have been her dream, she would have preserved it from the encroachments of others with a maternal ferocity. She would not, however, have seen any great harm in what my aunt, whom she knew to be incurably generous, allowed herself to give away, as long as it went to rich people. Perhaps she thought that they, having no need of gifts from my aunt, could not be suspected of showing fondness for her because of them. Besides, gifts made to people of eminence and wealth, like Mme. Sazerat, M. Swann, M. Legrandin, Mme. Goupil, to persons "of the same rank" as my aunt who "were well suited," appeared to her to belong to the customs of the strange and brilliant life of the wealthy who hunt, give balls, visit back and forth, people whom she admired and smiled upon. But it was not the same if the beneficiaries of my aunt's generosity were what Françoise called "people like me, people who are no better than me," the ones of whom she was most scornful unless they called her "Madame Françoise" and considered themselves to be "less than her." And when she saw that despite her advice my aunt did just as she pleased and threw her money away—as Françoise saw it, at least—on the unworthy, she began to think the gifts my aunt made to her were quite small compared to the imaginary sums lavished on Eulalie. There was not a single farm in the vicinity of



Combray so substantial that Françoise did not suppose Eulalie could easily have bought it with all she earned from her visits. It is true that Eulalie formed the same estimate of the immense and hidden riches of Françoise. It was Françoise's habit, when Eulalie had gone, to make unkind predictions about her. She detested her, but she was also afraid of her and believed that when Eulalie was there she had to present a "good face." She made up for it after Eulalie's departure, without ever naming her, in fact, but proffering sibylline oracles or pronouncements of a general character like those in Ecclesiastes, whose application could not escape my aunt. After watching through a corner of the curtain to see if Eulalie had closed the gate behind her, she would say: "Flatterers know how to make themselves welcome and collect a little pocket money; but have patience, the Good Lord will punish them all one fine day," with the sidelong glance and the insinuation of Joas thinking only of Athalie when he says:

The happiness of the wicked rushes down like a mountain stream.<sup>28</sup>

But when the curé had come as well and his interminable visit had exhausted my aunt's strength, Françoise would leave the bedroom behind Eulalie and say:

"Madame Octave, I will let you rest, you look very tired."

And my aunt would not even answer, breathing a sigh that must, it seemed, be the last, her eyes closed, as though dead. But scarcely had Françoise gone down than four peals dealt with the greatest violence would echo through the house, and my aunt, upright on her bed, would cry out:

"Has Eulalie gone yet? Can you believe it—I forgot to ask her if Mme. Goupil arrived at Mass before the Elevation! Quick, run after her!"

But Françoise would return without having been able to catch up with Eulalie.

"It's vexing," my aunt would say, shaking her head. "The only important thing I had to ask her!"

In this way life went on for my aunt Léonie, always the same, in the sweet uniformity of what she called, with affected disdain and deep tenderness, her "little routine." Preserved by everyone, not only in the house, where we had all experienced the futility of advising her to adopt a better health regimen and so had gradually resigned ourselves to respecting the routine, but even in the village where, three streets away from us, the goods packer, before nailing his crates, would send word to ask Françoise if my aunt was "resting"—this routine was, however, disturbed once during that year. Like a hidden fruit that had ripened without anyone's noticing and had dropped spontaneously, one night the kitchen maid gave birth. But her pains were intolerable, and since there was no midwife in Combray, Françoise had to go off before daybreak to find one in Thiberzy. My aunt could not rest because of the kitchen maid's cries, and since Françoise, despite the short distance, did not come back until very late, my aunt missed her very much. And so my mother said to me in the course of the morning: "Go up, why don't you, and see if your aunt needs anything." I went into the first room, and through the open door saw my aunt lying on her side sleeping; I heard her snoring lightly. I was going to go away quietly, but the noise I had made had probably interfered with her sleep and made it "shift gears," as they say about cars, because the music of her snoring broke off for a second and resumed on a lower note, then she woke up and half turned her face, which I could now see; it expressed a sort of terror; she had obviously just had a horrible dream; she could not see me the way she was positioned, and I stayed there not knowing if I should go in to her or leave; but already she seemed to have returned to a sense of reality and had recognized the falsity of the visions that had frightened her; a smile of joy, of pious gratitude to God who permits waking life to be less cruel than dreams, weakly illuminated her face, and in the habit she had formed of talking to herself half aloud when she thought she was alone, she murmured: "God be praised! Our only worry is the kitchen maid, who is having a baby. And here I've gone and dreamed that my poor Octave had come back to life and was trying to make me go for a walk every day!" Her hand went out toward her rosary, which lay on the little table, but sleep was overcoming her again and did not leave her the strength to reach it: she fell asleep, soothed, and I crept out of the room without her or anyone else ever finding out what I had heard.

When I say that except for very rare events, like that confinement, my aunt's routine never suffered any variation, I am not speaking of those variations which, always the same and repeated at regular intervals, introduced into the heart of that uniformity only a sort of secondary uniformity. And so, for instance, every Saturday, because Françoise went to the Roussainville-le-Pin market in the afternoon, lunch was, for everyone, an hour earlier. And my aunt had so thoroughly acquired the habit of this weekly violation of her habits that she clung to it as much as to the others. She was so well "routined" to it, as Françoise said, that if she had had to wait, some Saturday, to have lunch at the regular hour, this would have "disturbed" her as much as if on another day she had had to move her lunch forward to the Saturday hour. What was more, this early lunch gave Saturday, for all of us, a special face, indulgent and almost kindly. At the time of day when one usually has another hour to live through before the relaxation of the meal, we knew that in a few seconds we would see the arrival of some precocious endives, a gratuitous omelette, an undeserved beefsteak. The return of this asymmetrical Saturday was one of those little events, internal, local, almost civic, which, in peaceful lives and closed societies, create a sort of national bond and become the favorite theme of conversations, jokes, stories wantonly exaggerated: it would have been the ready-made nucleus for a cycle of legends, if one of us had had an epic turn of mind. First thing in the morning, before we were dressed, for no particular reason, for the pleasure of feeling the strength of our comradeship, we would say to one another with good humor, warmth, patriotism: "There's no time to lose; don't forget—it's Saturday!" while my aunt, conferring with Françoise and remembering that the day would be longer than usual, would say: "You might make them a nice bit of veal, since it's Saturday." If at ten-thirty one of us absentmindedly drew out his watch and said: "Let's see, still an hour and a half before lunch," everyone was delighted to have to say to him: "Come now, what are you thinking of, you're forgetting it's Saturday!"; we would still be laughing over it a quarter of an hour after and we would promise ourselves to go up and report this lapse to my aunt to amuse her. Even the face of the sky seemed changed. After lunch, the sun, aware that it was Saturday, would linger an hour longer at the top of the sky, and when someone, thinking we were late for our walk, said, "What, only two o'clock?," watching, as they passed, the two strokes from the Saint-Hilaire steeple (which do not usually encounter anyone yet on paths which are deserted because of the midday meal or the afternoon nap, alongside the lively white stream which even the fisherman has abandoned, and go on alone into the empty sky where only a few lazy clouds remain), we would all answer him in chorus: "But you're wrong, we had lunch an hour early; you know very well it's Saturday!" The surprise of a barbarian (this was what we called anyone who did not know what was special about Saturday) who, arriving at eleven o'clock to talk to my father, found us at the table, was one of the things in her life which most amused

Françoise. But if she found it funny that the dumbfounded visitor did not know we had lunch earlier on Saturday, she found it even more comical (while at the same time sympathizing from the bottom of her heart with this narrow chauvinism) that my father himself had not realized that the barbarian might not know this and had responded with no further explanation to his astonishment at seeing us already in the dining room: "Well what do you expect, it's Saturday!" Having reached this point in her story, she would wipe away a few tears of hilarity and, to increase her own pleasure, would prolong the dialogue, invent what had been said in answer by the visitor, to whom this "Saturday" did not explain anything. And quite far from complaining about her embellishments, we would feel they were not enough for us and we would say: "But I think he also said something else. It was longer the first time you told it." Even my great-aunt would put down her needlework, lift her head, and look over her glasses.

What was also special about Saturday was that on this day, during the month of May, we would go out after dinner to attend the "Month of Mary."

Since there we would sometimes meet M. Vinteuil, who was very severe about "the deplorable fashion of slovenliness in young people, which seems to be encouraged these days," my mother would take care that nothing was wrong with my appearance, then we would leave for church. It was in the Month of Mary that I remember beginning to be fond of hawthorns. Not only were they in the church, which was so holy but which we had the right to enter, they were put up on the altar itself, inseparable from the mysteries in whose celebration they took part, their branches running out among the candles and holy vessels, attached horizontally to one another in a festive preparation and made even lovelier by the festoons of their foliage, on which were scattered in profusion, as on a bridal train, little bunches of buds of a dazzling whiteness. But, though I dared not do more than steal a glance at them, I felt that the ceremonious preparations were alive and that it was nature herself who, by carving those indentations in the leaves, by adding the supreme ornament of those white buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was at once a popular festivity and a mystical celebration. Higher up, their corollas opened here and there with a careless grace, still holding so casually, like a last and vaporous adornment, the bouquets of stamens, delicate as gossamer, which clouded them entirely, that in following, in trying to mime deep inside myself the motion of their flowering, I imagined it as the quick and thoughtless movement of the head, with coquettish glance and contracted eyes, of a young girl in white, dreamy and alive. M. Vinteuil had come in with his daughter and sat down beside us. He was from a good family and had been my grandmother's sisters' piano teacher, and when, after his wife died and he came into an inheritance, he retired near Combray, we often entertained him at the house. But he was extremely prudish, and stopped coming so as not to meet Swann, who had made what he called "an unsuitable marriage, as is the fashion these days." My mother, after learning that he composed, had said to him in a friendly way that when she went to see him, he would have to let her hear something of his. M. Vinteuil would have taken great joy in this, but he was so scrupulous in his politeness and kindness that, always putting himself in the place of others, he was afraid he would bore them and appear egotistical if he pursued or even allowed them to infer his own desires. The day my parents had gone to visit him at his home, I had gone with them, but they had allowed me to stay outside and, since M. Vinteuil's house, Montjouvain, stood at the foot of a brush-covered hillock where I had hidden, I had found I was on a level with the second-floor drawing room, a foot or two from the window. When the servant had come to announce my parents, I had seen M. Vinteuil hurry to place a piece of music in a conspicuous position on the piano. But once my parents had entered, he had taken it away and put it in a corner. No doubt he had been afraid of letting them think he was happy to see them only so that he could play them some of his compositions. And each time my mother had made a fresh attempt in the course of the visit, he had repeated several times: "I don't know who put that on the piano, it doesn't belong there," and had diverted the conversation to other subjects, precisely because they interested him less. His only passion was for his daughter, and she, with her boyish appearance, seemed so robust that one could not help smiling at the sight of the precautions her father took for her sake, always having extra shawls to throw over her shoulders. My grandmother pointed out what a gentle, delicate, almost shy expression often came into the eyes of that rough-mannered child, whose face was covered with freckles. After she made a remark, she would hear it with the minds of the people to whom she had made it, would grow alarmed at possible misunderstandings, and one would see, illuminated, showing through as though by transparency, under the mannish face of the "good fellow" that she was, the more refined features of a young girl in tears.

When, before leaving the church, I knelt in front of the altar, I suddenly smelled, as I stood up, a bittersweet scent of almonds escaping from the hawthorns, and then I noticed, on the flowers, little yellower places under which I imagined that scent must be hidden, as the taste of a frangipani must be hidden under the burned parts, or that of Mlle. Vinteuil's cheeks under their freckles. Despite the silence and stillness of the hawthorns, this intermittent scent was like the murmuring of an intense life with which the altar quivered like a country hedge visited by living antennae, of which I was reminded by the sight of certain stamens, almost russet red, that seemed to have preserved the springtime virulence, the irritant power, of insects now metamorphosed into flowers.

We would talk with M. Vinteuil for a moment in front of the porch on our way out of the church. He would intervene among the children squabbling in the square, take up the defense of the little ones, deliver a lecture to the older ones. If his daughter said to us in her loud voice how happy she was to see us, it would immediately seem as if a more sensitive sister within her were blushing at this thoughtless, tomboyish remark, which might have made us think she was asking to be invited to our house. Her father would throw a cloak over her shoulders, they would get up into a little cabriolet, which she would drive herself, and the two of them would return to Montjouvain. As for us, since it was Sunday the next day and we would not get up until it was time for High Mass, if there was moonlight and the air was warm, instead of having us go home directly, my father, out of a love of personal glory, would take us by way of the Calvary on a long walk which my mother's little capacity for orienting herself, or knowing what road she was on, made her consider the feat of a strategic genius. Sometimes we would go as far as the viaduct, whose giant strides of stone began at the railway station and represented to me the exile and distress that lay outside the civilized world, because each year as we came from Paris we were warned to pay careful attention, when Combray set, not to let the station go by, to be ready ahead of time because the train would leave again after two minutes and would set off across the viaduct beyond the Christian countries of which Combray marked for me the farthest limit. We would return by way of the station boulevard, which was lined by the most pleasant houses in the parish. In each garden the moonlight, like Hubert Robert,

scattered its broken staircases of white marble, its fountains, its half-open gates. Its light had destroyed the Telegraph Office. All that remained was one column, half shattered but still retaining the beauty of an immortal ruin. I would be dragging my feet, I would be ready to drop with sleep, the fragrance of the lindens that perfumed the air would seem to me a reward that one could win only at the cost of the greatest fatigue and that was not worth the trouble. From gates far apart, dogs awakened by our solitary steps would send forth alternating volleys of barks such as I still hear at times in the evening and among which the station boulevard (when the public garden of Combray was created on its site) must have come to take refuge, for, wherever I find myself, as soon as they begin resounding and replying, I see it again, with its lindens and its pavement lit by the moon.

Suddenly my father would stop us and ask my mother: "Where are we?" Exhausted from walking but proud of him, she would admit tenderly that she had absolutely no idea. He would shrug his shoulders and laugh. Then, as if he had taken it out of his jacket pocket along with his key, he would show us the little back gate of our own garden, which stood there before us, having come, along with the corner of the rue du Saint-Esprit, to wait for us at the end of these unfamiliar streets. My mother would say to him admiringly: "You are astonishing!" And from that moment on, I would not have to take another step, the ground would walk for me through that garden where for so long now my actions had ceased to be accompanied by any deliberate attention: Habit had taken me in its arms, and it carried me all the way to my bed like a little child.



If Saturday, which began an hour earlier and deprived her of Françoise, passed more slowly than other days for my aunt, she nonetheless awaited its return with impatience from the beginning of the week, because it contained all the novelty and distraction that her weakened and finical body was still able to endure. And yet this was not to say that she did not now and then aspire to some greater change, that she did not experience those exceptional moments when we thirst for something other than what we have, and when people who from a lack of energy or imagination cannot find a source of renewal in themselves ask the next minute that comes, the postman as he rings, to bring them something new, even if it is something worse, some emotion, some sorrow; when our sensibility, which happiness has silenced like an idle harp, wants to resonate under some hand, even a rough one, and even if it might be broken by it; when the will, which has with such difficulty won the right to surrender unimpeded to its own desires, to its own afflictions, would like to throw the reins into the hands of imperious events, even if they may be cruel. Doubtless, since my aunt's strength, drained by the least fatigue, returned to her only drop by drop deep within her repose, the reservoir was very slow to fill up, and months would go by before she had that slight overflow which others divert into activity and which she was incapable of knowing, and deciding, how to use. I have no doubt that then—just as the desire to replace them by potatoes with béchamel sauce ended after a certain time by being born from the very pleasure she felt at the daily return of the mashed potatoes of which she never "got tired"—she would derive from the accumulation of those monotonous days which she valued so the expectation of some domestic cataclysm lasting only a moment but forcing her to effect once and for all one of those changes which she recognized would be beneficial to her and to which she could not of her own accord make up her mind. She truly loved us, she would have taken pleasure in mourning us; had it come at a moment when she felt well and was not in a sweat, the news that the house was being consumed by a fire in which all of us had perished already and which would soon leave not a single stone of the walls standing, but from which she would have ample time to escape without hurrying, so long as she got out of bed right away, must often have lingered among her hopes, since it combined, with the secondary advantages of allowing her to savor all her tenderness for us in an extended grief and to be the cause of stupefaction in the village as she led the funeral procession, courageous and stricken, dying on her feet, that other much more precious advantage of forcing her at the right moment, with no time to lose, no possibility of an enervating hesitation, to go and spend the summer on her pretty farm, Mirougrain, where there was a waterfall. As no event of that sort had ever occurred, the outcome of which she would certainly contemplate when she was alone, absorbed in her innumerable games of patience (and which would have reduced her to despair at the first moment of its realization, at the first of those little unforeseen developments, the first word announcing the bad news, whose accent can never be forgotten afterward, all those things that bear the imprint of real death, so different from its logical, abstract possibility), she would from time to time resort to introducing into her life, to make it more interesting, imaginary incidents which she would follow with passion. She enjoyed suddenly pretending that Françoise was stealing from her, that she herself had been cunning enough to make sure of it, that she had caught her in the act; being in the habit, when she played cards alone, of playing both her own hand and that of her opponent, she would utter out loud to herself Françoise's embarrassed excuses and would answer them with so much fire and indignation that if one of us entered at that moment, we would find her bathed in perspiration, her eyes sparkling, her false hair dislodged and revealing her bald forehead. Françoise would perhaps sometimes hear from the next room mordant pieces of sarcasm addressed to her the invention of which would not have relieved my aunt sufficiently if they had remained in a purely immaterial state and if by murmuring them half aloud she had not given them more reality. Sometimes, even this "theater in bed"<sup>29</sup> was not enough for my aunt, she wanted to have her plays performed. And so, on a Sunday, all doors mysteriously closed, she would confide to Eulalie her doubts about Françoise's honesty, her intention of getting rid of her, and another time, to Françoise, her suspicions about the faithlessness of Eulalie, to whom the door would very soon be closed; a few days later, she would be disgusted with her confidante of the day before and once again consort with the traitor, though for the next performance the two of them would exchange roles yet again. But the suspicions that Eulalie was at times able to inspire in her amounted only to a straw fire and died down quickly, for lack of fuel, since Eulalie did not live in the house. It was not the same for those that concerned Françoise, of whose presence under the same roof my aunt was perpetually conscious, though for fear of catching cold if she left her bed, she did not dare go down to the kitchen to verify whether they were well founded. Gradually her mind would come to be occupied entirely by attempting to guess what, at each moment, Françoise could be doing and trying to hide from her. She would notice the most furtive movements of Françoise's features, a contradiction in something she said, a desire that she seemed to be concealing. And she would show Françoise that

she had unmasked her, with a single word that would make Françoise turn pale and that my aunt seemed to find a cruel amusement in driving deep into the heart of the unfortunate woman. And the following Sunday, a revelation of Eulalie's—like those discoveries that suddenly open an unsuspected field to a young science that has got into something of a rut—would prove to my aunt that her own suppositions were far short of the truth. "But Françoise ought to know that, now that you've given her a carriage." "Given her a carriage!" my aunt would cry. "Oh, well, I don't know really. I thought, well, I saw her passing just a short time ago in a calash, proud as Artaban,<sup>30</sup> going to the market at Roussainville. I thought it was Mme. Octave who gave it to her." And so by degrees Françoise and my aunt, like quarry and hunter, would reach the point of constantly trying to anticipate each other's ruses. My mother was afraid Françoise would develop a real hatred for my aunt, who insulted her as brutally as she could. Certainly Françoise came more and more to pay an extraordinary attention to the least of my aunt's remarks, to the least of her gestures. When she had to ask her something, she would hesitate for a long time over how she should go about it. And when she had tendered her request, she would observe my aunt covertly, trying to guess from the look on her face what she thought and what she would decide. And so—while some artist who reads the memoirs of the seventeenth century and wants to be like the great King, and thinks he will be making progress in that direction if he fabricates a genealogy for himself that traces his own descent from a historic family or if he carries on a correspondence with one of the current sovereigns of Europe, is actually turning his back on what he mistakenly sought in forms that were identical and consequently dead—an old lady from the provinces who was simply yielding to irresistible manias and to a malice born of idleness, saw, without ever thinking of Louis XIV, the most insignificant occupations of her day, those concerned with her rising, her lunch, her afternoon rest, acquire, because of their despotic singularity, some of the interest of what Saint-Simon called the "mechanics" of life at Versailles,<sup>31</sup> and could also believe that her silences, a nuance of good humor or disdain in her features, were for Françoise the object of a commentary as passionate, as fearful as were the silence, the good humor, the disdain of the King when a courtier, or even his greatest lords, handed him a petition at the bend of an avenue at Versailles.

One Sunday when my aunt had had a visit from the curé and Eulalie at the same time and had afterward rested, we all went up to say good evening to her, and Mama offered her her condolences on the bad luck that always brought her visitors at the same hour:

"I know that things turned out poorly again this afternoon, Léonie," she said to her gently, "you had all your company here at the same time."

Which my great-aunt interrupted with: "Too much of a good thing can do no harm . . ." because, ever since her daughter had become ill, she had believed it was her duty to cheer her up by consistently showing her the bright side of everything. But now my father spoke:

"I would like to take advantage," he said, "of the fact that the whole family is together to tell you all about something without having to begin all over again with each of you separately. I'm afraid we've had a falling-out with Legrandin: he barely said hello to me this morning."

I did not stay to hear my father's story, because I had actually been with him after Mass when we met M. Legrandin, and I went down to the kitchen to ask about the menu for our dinner, which diverted me every day like the news in the paper and excited me like the program for some festivity. When M. Legrandin had passed near us as he was coming out of the church, walking by the side of a lady from a neighboring château whom we knew only by sight, my father had greeted him in a way that was at once friendly and reserved, though we had not stopped; M. Legrandin had barely responded, with a surprised look, as if he did not recognize us, and with that perspective in his gaze peculiar to people who do not want to be friendly and who, from the suddenly extended depths of their eyes, seem to perceive you at the end of an interminable road and at so great a distance that they confine themselves to addressing to you a minuscule nod in order to give it the proportions of your puppetlike dimensions.

Now the lady Legrandin was accompanying was a virtuous and esteemed person; it was quite out of the question that he was having an affair and embarrassed at being found out, and my father wondered how he might have annoyed Legrandin. "I would be especially sorry to know he is vexed," said my father, "because of the fact that among all those people dressed up in their Sunday best there is something about him, with his little straight jacket, his loose tie, that is so un-contrived, so truly simple, an air of ingenuousness, almost, that is extremely likable." But the family council was unanimously of the opinion that my father was imagining things, or that Legrandin, at that particular moment, was absorbed in some other thought. And in fact my father's apprehension was dispelled the very next evening. As we were returning from a long walk, near the Pont-Vieux we saw Legrandin, who because of the holidays was staying in Combray for a few days. He came up to us with his hand outstretched: "My young bookworm," he asked me, "do you know this line by Paul Desjardins:

The woods are dark, the sky still blue.<sup>32</sup>

Isn't that a fine rendering of this hour of the day? Perhaps you've never read Paul Desjardins. Read him, my child; today he is transforming himself, they tell me, into a sermonizing friar, but for a long time he was a limpid watercolorist . . .

The woods are dark, the sky still blue.

May the sky remain forever blue for you, my young friend; and even at the hour which is now approaching for me, when the woods are dark already, when night is falling fast, you will console yourself as I do by looking up at the sky." He took a cigarette out of his pocket, remained for a long time with his eyes on the horizon. "Good-bye, friends," he said suddenly, and he left us.

At the hour when I usually went downstairs to find out what the menu was, dinner would already have been started, and Françoise, commanding the forces of nature, which were now her assistants, as in fairy plays where giants hire themselves out as cooks, would strike the coal, entrust the steam with some potatoes to cook, and make the fire finish to perfection the culinary masterpieces first prepared in potters' vessels that ranged from great vats, casseroles, cauldrons, and fishkettles to terrines for game, molds for pastry, and little jugs for cream, and included a complete collection of pans of every shape and size. I would stop by the table, where the kitchen maid had just shelled them, to see the peas lined up and tallied like green marbles in a game; but what delighted me were the asparagus, steeped in ultramarine and pink, whose tips, delicately painted with little strokes of mauve

and azure, shade off imperceptibly down to their feet—still soiled though they are from the dirt of their garden bed—with an iridescence that is not of this earth. It seemed to me that these celestial hues revealed the delicious creatures who had merrily metamorphosed themselves into vegetables and who, through the disguise of their firm, edible flesh, disclosed in these early tints of dawn, in these beginnings of rainbows, in this extinction of blue evenings, the precious essence that I recognized again when, all night long following a dinner at which I had eaten them, they played, in farces as crude and poetic as a fairy play by Shakespeare, at changing my chamber pot into a jar of perfume.

Poor Giotto's Charity, as Swann called her, instructed by Françoise to "scrape" them, would have them beside her in a basket, her expression as mournful as though she were suffering all the misfortunes of the earth; and the light crowns of azure that girded the asparagus stalks above their tunics of pink were delicately drawn, star by star, as, in the fresco, are the flowers bound around the forehead or tucked into the basket of Virtue at Padua. And meanwhile, Françoise would be turning on the spit one of those chickens, such as she alone knew how to roast, which had carried the fragrance of her merits through the far reaches of Combray and which, while she was serving them to us at the table, would cause the quality of gentleness to predominate in my particular conception of her character, the aroma of that flesh which she knew how to render so unctuous and so tender being for me only the specific perfume of one of her virtues.

But the day on which, while my father consulted the family council about the encounter with Legrandin, I went down to the kitchen, was one of those on which Giotto's Charity, very ill from her recent confinement, could not get out of bed; Françoise, having no help now, was late. When I arrived downstairs she was busy in the scullery that opened onto the poultry yard, killing a chicken which, by its desperate and quite natural resistance, but accompanied by Françoise, beside herself as she tried to split its neck under the ear, with cries of "Vile creature! Vile creature!," put the saintly gentleness and unction of our servant a little less in evidence than it would, at dinner the next day, by its skin embroidered with gold like a chasuble and its precious juice drained from a ciborium. When it was dead, Françoise collected the blood, which flowed without drowning her resentment, had another fit of anger, and looking at her enemy's cadaver, said one last time: "Vile creature!" I went back upstairs trembling all over; I wanted them to dismiss Françoise immediately. But who would have prepared me such cozy hot-water bottles, such fragrant coffee, and even . . . those chickens? . . . And in fact, everyone had had to make this cowardly calculation, just as I had. For my aunt Léonie knew—as I did not yet know—that Françoise, who would for her daughter, for her nephews, have given her life without a murmur, was singularly hard-hearted toward other people. Despite this my aunt had kept her, for if she was aware of her cruelty, she valued her service. I gradually came to see that the gentleness, the compunction, the virtues of Françoise concealed scullery tragedies, just as history reveals that the reigns of the kings and queens who are portrayed with their hands joined in church windows were marked by bloody incidents. I realized that, apart from her own relatives, human beings inspired her with more pity for their afflictions the farther away from her they lived. The torrents of tears she shed while reading in the newspaper about the misfortunes of strangers would dry up quickly if she could picture to herself at all precisely the person concerned. On one of the nights following her confinement, the kitchen maid was seized by appalling cramps: Mama heard her moaning, got up, and woke Françoise, who, quite indifferent, declared that all this wailing was a sham, that the girl wanted "to be the center of attention." The doctor, who had been afraid of this sort of attack, had put a marker in a medical book we had, at the page on which the symptoms are described, and told us to consult it in order to find out what kind of first aid to give. My mother sent Françoise to get the book, warning her not to let the bookmark fall out. After an hour, Françoise had not returned; my mother, indignant, thought she had gone back to bed and told me to go to the library myself and see. There I found Françoise, who, having wanted to look at what the marker showed, was reading the clinical description of the attack and sobbing, now that the patient was a hypothetical one whom she did not know. At each painful symptom mentioned by the author of the article, she would exclaim: "Oh dear, Holy Virgin, is it possible that the good Lord would want a wretched human creature to suffer so? Oh, the poor girl!"

But as soon as I called her and she came back to the bedside of Giotto's Charity, her tears immediately stopped flowing; she could recognize neither the pleasant sensation of pity and tenderness which she knew so well and which reading the newspapers had so often given her, nor any kindred pleasure, in the bother and irritation of having gotten up in the middle of the night for the kitchen-maid, and at the sight of the same sufferings whose description had made her cry, she now produced nothing more than bad-tempered mutterings, even nasty pieces of sarcasm, saying, when she thought we had gone and could no longer hear her: "She had only to stop herself doing what you do to get this way! Sure she enjoyed it well enough! So she needn't make a fuss now! Anyways, a boy must be quite forsaken by the good Lord to want to keep company with *that*. Ah, 'tis just as they used to say in my poor mother's own tongue:

Love a dog's arse, and to thy nose 'Twill smell like a rose." <sup>33</sup>

Although when her grandson had a little cold in the head she would set off at night even if she was ill, instead of going to bed, to see if he needed anything, covering four leagues on foot before daybreak in order to be back in time to do her work, this same love of her own people and her desire to ensure the future greatness of her house was expressed, in her policy toward the other servants, by a consistent principle, which was never to let a single one of them become attached to my aunt, whom she took, moreover, a sort of pride in not allowing to be approached by anyone, preferring, when she herself was ill, to get up out of bed in order to give her mistress her Vichy water rather than permit the kitchen maid access to the bedroom. And like the hymenopteran observed by Fabre,<sup>34</sup> the burrowing wasp who, so that its young may have fresh meat to eat after its death, summons anatomy in aid of its cruelty and, after capturing a few weevils and spiders, proceeds with a marvelous knowledge and skill to pierce them in the nerve center that governs the movement of their legs but not their other life functions, in such a way that the paralyzed insect near which it deposits its eggs provides the larvae, when they hatch, with prey that is docile, harmless, incapable of flight or resistance, but not in the least tainted, Françoise found, to serve her abiding desire to make the house intolerable to any other servant, ruses so clever and so merciless that many years later we learned that if we had eaten asparagus almost every day that summer, it was because their smell provoked in the poor kitchen girl who was given the job of scraping them attacks of asthma so violent that she was obliged in the end to leave.



Alas, we had to change our minds definitively about Legrandin. On one of the Sundays following the meeting on the Pont-Vieux after which my father had had to confess himself mistaken, as mass was ending and as something so far from holy was entering the Church, with the sunlight and the noise from outdoors, that Mme. Goupil, Mme. Percepied (all those people who not long before, when I arrived a little late, had remained with their eyes absorbed in their prayers and who I might even have believed had not seen me come in if, at the same time, their feet had not gently pushed back the little kneeling bench that was blocking my path to my seat) began to converse with us loudly about quite temporal subjects as if we were already in the square, we saw on the blazing threshold of the porch, looking out over the motley tumult of the market, Legrandin being introduced by the husband of that lady with whom we had just recently encountered him to the wife of another large landowner of the area. Legrandin's face expressed an animation, and a zeal, that were quite extraordinary; he made a deep bow with a secondary recoil that brought his back sharply up past its starting position and that must have been taught him by the husband of his sister, Mme. de Cambremer. This rapid straightening caused Legrandin's bottom, which I had not supposed was so fleshy, to flow back in a sort of ardent muscular wave; and I do not know why that undulation of pure matter, that quite fleshly billow, with no expression of spirituality and whipped into a storm by a fully contemptible alacrity, suddenly awakened in my mind the possibility of a Legrandin quite different from the one we knew. This lady asked him to say something to her coachman, and as he went over to the carriage, the imprint of timid and devoted joy which the introduction had set upon his face persisted there still. He was smiling, enraptured in a sort of dream, then he hurried back to the lady, and since he was walking more quickly than was his habit, his two shoulders oscillated ridiculously to the right and left, and so entirely did he abandon himself to this, without concern for anything else, that he looked like the inert and mechanical plaything of happiness itself. Meanwhile, we were leaving the porch, we were going to pass right by him, he was too well mannered to turn his head away, but he fastened his gaze, suddenly burdened by a profound reverie, on so distant a point of the horizon that he could not see us and did not have to greet us. His face remained ingenuous above his straight and supple jacket that looked as though it had been led astray against its will into detestably splendid surroundings. And a polka-dotted lavalier bow tie tossed by the wind in the square continued to float in front of Legrandin like the flag of his proud isolation and noble independence. Just as we reached the house, Mama realized that the Saint Honoré cake had been forgotten and asked my father to go back the way we had come, taking me with him, and tell them to bring it immediately. Near the church we met Legrandin, who was coming in the opposite direction escorting the same lady to her carriage. He passed close to us, did not break off his conversation with his neighbor, and from the corner of his blue eye gave us a little sign that was in some way interior to his eyelid and which, not involving the muscles of his face, could go perfectly unnoticed by the lady he was talking to; but seeking to compensate by intensity of feeling for the somewhat narrow field in which he had circumscribed its expression, in the azure corner assigned to us he set sparkling all the liveliness of a grace that exceeded playfulness, bordered on mischievousness; he overrefined the subtleties of amiability into winks of connivance, insinuations, innuendos, the mysteries of complicity; and finally exalted his assurances of friendship into protestations of affection, into a declaration of love, illuminating for us alone, at that moment, with a secret languor invisible to the lady, a love-smitten eye in a face of ice.

He had in fact asked my parents the day before to send me to dine with him that evening: "Come and keep your old friend company," he had said to me. "Like a bouquet sent to us by a traveler from a country to which we will never return, allow me to breathe from the distance of your adolescence those flowers that belong to the spring-times which I too traversed many years ago. Come with the primrose, the monk's beard, the buttercup, come with the sedum that makes the bouquet of love in Balzac's flora,<sup>35</sup> come with the flower of Resurrection Day, the Easter daisy, and the garden snowdrop, which is beginning to perfume your great-aunt's paths even though the last snows dropped by the Easter showers have not yet melted. Come with the glorious silk raiment of the lily worthy of Solomon himself, and with the polychrome enamel of the pansies, but above all come with the breeze still cool from the last frosts, that will open the petals, for the two butterflies that have waited at its door since morning, of the first Jerusalem rose."

At home they wondered if they still ought to send me to have dinner with M. Legrandin even so. But my grandmother refused to believe he had been impolite. "Even you admit that he goes about dressed in very simple clothes, hardly those of a man of high society." She declared that in any case, and at the very worst, if he had been, it was better to appear not to have noticed. In fact, my father himself, though he was the one most irritated by Legrandin's attitude, may still have harbored a last doubt as to what it meant. It was like any attitude or action that reveals a person's deep and hidden character: it has no connection with anything he has said before, we cannot seek confirmation from the culprit's testimony for he will not confess; we are reduced to the testimony of our own senses concerning which we wonder, confronting this isolated and incoherent memory, if they were not the victims of an illusion; so that these attitudes, the only ones of any importance, often leave us with some doubts.

I had dinner with Legrandin on his terrace; the moon was shining: "This silence has a nice quality, does it not?" he said to me; "for wounded hearts such as mine, a novelist whom you will read later asserts that the only fit companions are shadow and silence."<sup>36</sup> And you know, my child, in life there comes a time, still quite remote for you, when our weary eyes can tolerate only one light, that which a lovely night like this prepares and distills from the darkness, when our ears cannot listen to any other music but that which is played by the moonlight on the flute of silence." I was listening to M. Legrandin's words, which always seemed to me so pleasant; but disturbed by the memory of a woman I had seen recently for the first time, and thinking, now that I knew Legrandin was friends with several of the prominent local aristocracy, that perhaps he knew this one, plucking up my courage I said to him: "Monsieur, do you know the lady . . . the ladies of Guermantes?," happy too that in pronouncing this name I was assuming a sort of power over it, by the mere fact of bringing it out of my daydreams and giving it an objective existence in the world of sound.

But at the name of Guermantes, I saw a little brown notch appear in the center of each of our friend's blue eyes as if they had been stabbed by invisible pinpoints, while the rest of the pupil reacted by secreting floods of azure. The arc of his eyelids darkened and drooped. And his mouth, marked by a bitter fold, but recovering more quickly, smiled while his eyes remained sorrowful, like the eyes of a handsome martyr whose body bristles with arrows: "No, I don't know them," he said, but instead of giving so simple a piece of information, so unsurprising an answer in the natural, everyday tone that would have been appropriate, he declaimed it stressing each word, leaning forward, nodding his head, with the insistence one imparts, so as to be

believed, to an improbable statement—as though the fact that he did not know the Guermantes could be due only to a curious accident of fate—and also with the expressive force of a person who, unable to keep silent about a situation that is painful to him, prefers to proclaim it so as to give others the idea that the confession he is making is one that causes him no embarrassment, is easy, pleasant, spontaneous, that the situation itself—the absence of relations with the Guermantes—could well have been, not suffered, but desired by him, could result from some family tradition, moral principle, or mystical vow specifically forbidding him any association with the Guermantes. “No,” he went on, explaining his own intonation by what he said, “no, I don’t know them, I’ve never wanted to, I’ve always made a point of safeguarding my complete independence; deep down I’m a Jacobin<sup>37</sup> in my thinking, you know. Many people have tried to save me, they told me I was wrong not to go to Guermantes, that I was making myself look like a savage, an old bear. But that’s not the sort of reputation that dismays me, it’s so very true! Deep down, I care for nothing in the world now but a few churches, two or three books, scarcely more paintings, and the light of the moon when the breeze of your youth brings me the fragrance of the flower beds that my old eyes can no longer distinguish.” I did not understand very clearly why, in order not to go to the houses of people whom one did not know, it was necessary to cling to one’s independence, or how this might make one look like a savage or a bear. But what I did understand was that Legrandin was not being completely truthful when he said he cared only for churches, moonlight, and youth; he cared very much for the people from the châteaux and in their presence was overcome by so great a fear of displeasing them that he did not dare let them see that some of his friends were bourgeois people, sons of notaries or stockbrokers, preferring, if the truth was to be revealed, that it be revealed in his absence, far away from him and “by default”; he was a snob. Certainly he never said any of this in the language my family and I loved so much. And if I asked: “Do you know the Guermantes?” Legrandin the talker would answer: “No, I have never wanted to know them.” Unfortunately, he was not the first Legrandin to answer, but the second, because another Legrandin whom he kept carefully concealed deep inside himself, whom he did not exhibit because that Legrandin knew some compromising stories about our own, about his snobbishness, had already answered by the wound in his eyes, by the rictus of his mouth, by the excessive gravity in the tone of his answer, by the thousand arrows with which our own Legrandin had been instantly larded, languishing like a Saint Sebastian of snobbishness: “Alas! How you hurt me! No, I don’t know the Guermantes, do not reawaken the great sorrow of my life.” And since this troublemaker Legrandin, this blackmailer Legrandin, though he did not have the other’s pretty language, had the infinitely quicker speech consisting of what are called “reflexes,” when Legrandin the talker wished to impose silence on him, the other had already spoken, and though our friend might grieve over the poor impression that his *alter ego*’s revelations must have produced, he could only attempt to mitigate it.

And this certainly does not mean that M. Legrandin was not sincere when he ranted against snobs. He could not be aware, at least from his own knowledge, that he was one, since we are familiar only with the passions of others, and what we come to know about our own, we have been able to learn only from them. Upon ourselves they act only secondarily, by way of our imagination, which substitutes for our primary motives alternative motives that are more seemly. It was never Legrandin’s snobbishness that advised him to pay frequent visits to a duchess. It would instruct Legrandin’s imagination to make that duchess appear to him as being endowed with all the graces. Legrandin would become acquainted with the duchess, filled with esteem for himself because he was yielding to attractions of wit and virtue unknown to vile snobs. Only other people were aware that he was one himself; for, because they were incapable of understanding the intermediary work of his imagination, they saw, coupled together, Legrandin’s social activity and its primary cause.

Now we at home no longer had any illusions about M. Legrandin, and our contacts with him became less frequent. Mama was infinitely amused each time she caught Legrandin in flagrante delicto in the sin that he would not confess, that he continued to call the sin without forgiveness, snobbishness. My father, on the other hand, had trouble accepting Legrandin’s manifestations of disdain with such detachment and good humor; and when, one year, they thought of sending me to spend my summer vacation at Balbec with my grandmother, he said: “I absolutely must let Legrandin know that you’ll be going to Balbec, to see if he offers to put you in touch with his sister. He probably doesn’t remember telling us she lives only a mile from there.” My grandmother, who believed that when staying at a seaside resort one should be on the beach from morning to evening inhaling the salt and that one ought not to know anyone thereabouts because visits and excursions were only so much time taken from the sea air, asked on the contrary that we not speak about our plans to Legrandin, as she could already see his sister, Mme. de Cambremer, arriving at the hotel just when we were about to go fishing and forcing us to remain confined indoors entertaining her. But Mama laughed at her fears, thinking privately that the danger was not so great, that Legrandin would not be in such a hurry to put us in touch with his sister. Yet no one had to mention Balbec to him, it was Legrandin himself who, never suspecting that we had any intention of going to those parts, walked into the trap of his own accord one evening when we met him on the banks of the Vivonne.

“There are very lovely violets and blues in the clouds this evening, are there not, my friend,” he said to my father, “a blue, especially, more flowery than airy, the blue of a cineraria, which is surprising in the sky. And that little pink cloud, too, has it not the tint of some flower, a sweet william or hydrangea? Nowhere, perhaps, but on the Channel, between Normandy and Brittany, have I made richer observations of this sort of plant kingdom of the atmosphere. There, near Balbec, near those wild areas, there is a little bay, charmingly gentle, where the sunsets of the Auge country, the red and gold sunsets which I do not in the least disdain, let it be said, are characterless, insignificant; but in that damp and mild atmosphere, in the evening, you will see blooming in the space of a few instants celestial bouquets of blue and pink which are incomparable and often last for hours before they fade. There are others that lose their blossoms immediately, and then it is even lovelier to see the entire sky strewn with the scattering of their countless petals, sulfur or pink. In this bay, which they call Opal Bay, the golden beaches seem gentler still because they are chained like blond Andromedas<sup>38</sup> to those terrible rocks of the nearby coast, to that gloomy shore, famed for the number of its wrecks, where every winter many a vessel is lost to the perils of the sea. Balbec! The most ancient geological skeleton of our soil, truly Ar-mor, the Sea,<sup>39</sup> the land’s end, the accursed region which Anatole France<sup>40</sup>—an enchanter whom our little friend here ought to read—has painted so well, under its eternal fogs, like the veritable country of the Cimmerians in the *Odyssey*.<sup>41</sup> From Balbec especially, where they are already building hotels, superimposing them upon the ancient and charming soil which they cannot change, what a delight it is to go for excursions just a step or two away through regions so primitive and so lovely!”

"Oh, do you know someone in Balbec?" asked my father. "As it happens, this boy of ours will be spending two months there with his grandmother, and my wife, too, perhaps."

Lérandin, caught unprepared by this question at a moment when he was looking directly at my father, could not turn his eyes away, but fastening them more intensely second by second—and at the same time smiling sadly—to the eyes of his questioner, with an expression of friendliness and frankness and of not being afraid to look him full in the face, he seemed to have gone right through that face as though it had become transparent, and to be seeing at that moment, far beyond and behind it, a bright and colorful cloud that created a mental alibi for him and would allow him to prove that at the moment when he had been asked if he knew someone at Balbec, he was thinking of something else and had not heard the question. Usually, such an expression makes the other person say: "What are you thinking about?" But my father, curious, irritated, and cruel, said again:

"You know Balbec so well—do you have friends in the area?"

In a last desperate effort, Lérandin's smiling gaze reached its highest degree of tenderness, vagueness, sincerity, and distraction, but, no doubt thinking there was nothing else he could do but answer, he said to us:

"I have friends wherever there are companies of trees, wounded but not vanquished, which huddle together with touching obstinacy to implore an inclement and pitiless sky."

"That was not what I meant," interrupted my father, as obstinate as the trees and as pitiless as the sky. "In case something should happen to my mother-in-law and she needed to feel she was not all alone in an out-of-the-way place, I was asking if you knew anyone there?"

"There as everywhere, I know everyone and I know no one," answered Lérandin, who was not going to give in so quickly; "I know a great deal about things and very little about people. But in that place the very things themselves seem to be people, rare people, delicate in their very essence, disappointed by life. Sometimes it is a manor house that you encounter on a cliff, by the side of a road, where it has stopped to point its sorrow toward the still pink evening where the golden moon rises while the returning boats, fluting the dappled water, hoist the flame of evening on their masts and carry its colors; sometimes it is a simple solitary house, rather ugly, its expression shy but romantic, which conceals from all eyes some imperishable secret of happiness and disenchantment. That land which is so lacking in truth," he added with a Machiavellian delicacy, "that land of pure fiction makes poor reading for a child, and is certainly not what I would choose and recommend for my little friend, already so inclined to sadness, for his heart, already so predisposed. Climates of amorous confessions and vain regrets may suit a disillusioned old man like me, but they are unhealthy for one whose temperament is not yet formed. Please believe me," he went on insistently, "the waters of that bay, already half Breton, may act as a sedative, though a questionable one, on a heart like mine that is no longer undamaged, on a heart for whose wounds there is no longer any compensation. They are contraindicated at your age, my boy. Good night, neighbors," he added, leaving us with that evasive abruptness which was his habit and, turning back toward us with a doctor's raised finger, he summed up his advice: "No Balbec before the age of fifty, and even then it must depend on the state of the heart," he called to us.

Although my father talked to him about this again in our subsequent encounters, torturing him with questions, it was a useless effort: like that erudite crook<sup>42</sup> who used to employ, in fabricating false palimpsests, a labor and a scholarship a hundredth part of which would have been enough to guarantee him a more lucrative, but honorable position, M. Lérandin, had we insisted further, would have ended by constructing a whole system of landscape ethics and a celestial geography of Lower Normandy, sooner than admit to us that his own sister lived a mile from Balbec and be obliged to offer us a letter of introduction which would not have been such an object of terror for him had he been absolutely certain—as in fact he should have been given his experience of my grandmother's character—that we would not have taken advantage of it.

We always returned in good time from our walks so that we could pay a visit to my aunt Léonie before dinner. At the beginning of the season, when the days ended early, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was still a reflection of the sunset on the windowpanes of the house and a band of crimson deep in the timbers of the Calvary, which was reflected farther off in the pool, a red which, often accompanied by a rather brisk chill, was associated in my mind with the red of the fire over which was roasting the chicken that would allow the poetic pleasure given me by the walk to be succeeded by the pleasure of gluttony, warmth and rest. But in the summer, when we returned, the sun was not yet setting; and during the visit we made to my aunt Léonie, its light, lowering and touching the window, had stopped between the great curtains and the curtain loops, divided, ramified, filtered, and, encrusting the lemon wood of the chest of drawers with little pieces of gold, illuminated the room obliquely with the delicacy it acquires in the forest undergrowth. But on certain very rare days, when we returned, the chest had lost its momentary encrustations long before, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was no reflection of the sunset spread over the windowpanes, and the pool at the foot of the Calvary had lost its red, sometimes it was already the color of opal and a long ray of moonlight that grew broader and broader and broke over all the wrinkles of the water traversed it entirely. Then, as we came near the house, we would see a figure on the doorstep and Mama would say to me:

"Dear me! There's Françoise, watching for us. Your aunt must be worried; that means we're late."

And, without taking the time to remove our things, we would quickly go up to my aunt Léonie's room to reassure her and show her that, contrary to what she was already imagining, nothing had happened to us, but that we had gone the "Guermantes way" and, bless us, when one took that walk, my aunt knew very well one could never be sure what time one would be back.

"There, Françoise," said my aunt, "what did I tell you? Didn't I say they must have gone the Guermantes way? Heavens! How hungry they must be! And your leg of lamb all dried up after waiting so long. What a time to be getting back! Well, imagine that, you went the Guermantes way!"

"But I thought you knew, Léonie," said Mama. "I thought Françoise saw us go out the little gate from the kitchen garden."

For in the environs of Combray there were two "ways" which one could go for a walk, in such opposite directions that in fact we left our house by different doors when we wanted to go one way or the other: the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, which we also called the way by Swann's because we passed in front of M. Swann's estate when we went in that direction, and the Guermantes way. About Méséglise-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything but the "way" and some strangers who used to come

and stroll around Combray on a Sunday, people whom, this time, even my aunt, along with all the rest of us, “did not know at all” and whom because of this we assumed to be “people who must have come from Méséglise.” As for Guermantes, I was to know more about it one day, but only much later; and during the whole of my adolescence, if for me Méséglise was something as inaccessible as the horizon, concealed from view, however far we went, by the folds of a landscape that already no longer resembled the landscape of Combray, Guermantes, on the other hand, appeared to me only as the terminus, more ideal than real, of its own “way,” a sort of abstract geographical expression like the line of the equator, like the pole, like the Orient. So, “to set off toward Guermantes” in order to go to Méséglise, or the opposite, would have seemed to me an expression as devoid of meaning as to set off toward the east in order to go west. Since my father always talked about the Méséglise way as the most beautiful view of the plain that he knew and about the Guermantes way as a typical river landscape, I gave them, conceiving of them thus as two entities, the cohesion, the unity that belong only to the creations of our mind; the smallest part of either of them seemed to me precious and to manifest their particular excellence, while compared to them, before one reached the sacred ground of one or the other, the purely material paths in the midst of which they were set down as the ideal view of the plain and the ideal river landscape were no more worth the trouble of looking at than, for the spectator infatuated with the art of drama, the little streets next to a theater. But most importantly I set between them, much more than their distances in miles, the distance that lay between the two parts of my brain where I thought about them, one of those distances of the mind which not only moves things away from each other, but separates them and puts them on different planes. And that demarcation was made even more absolute because our habit of never going both ways on the same day, in a single walk, but one time the Méséglise way, one time the Guermantes way, shut them off, so to speak, far apart from each other, unknowable by each other, in the sealed and uncommunicating vessels of different afternoons.

When we wanted to go in the direction of Méséglise, we would go out (not too early, and even if the sky was overcast, because the walk was not very long and did not take us too far away) as though we were going anywhere at all, through the front door of my aunt’s house on the rue du Saint-Esprit. We would be greeted by the gunsmith, we would drop our letters in the box, we would tell Théodore, from Françoise, as we passed, that she had no more oil or coffee, and we would leave town by the lane that ran along the white gate of M. Swann’s park. Before reaching it, we would meet the smell of his lilacs, coming out to greet the strangers. From among the fresh green little hearts of their leaves, the flowers would curiously lift above the gate of the park their tufts of mauve or white feathers, glazed, even in the shade, by the sun in which they had bathed. A few, half hidden by the little tiled lodge called the Archers’ House, where the caretaker lived, overtopped its Gothic gable with their pink minarets. The Nymphs of Spring would have seemed vulgar compared to these young houris, which preserved within this French garden the pure and vivid tones of Persian miniatures. Despite my desire to entwine their supple waists and draw down to me the starry curls of their fragrant heads, we would pass by without stopping because my parents had ceased to visit Tansonville since Swann’s marriage, and, so as not to appear to be looking into the park, instead of taking the lane that goes along its fence and climbs directly up to the fields, we would take another that leads to the same place, but obliquely, and that brought us out too far away. One day, my grandfather said to my father:

“Don’t you remember Swann’s telling us yesterday that his wife and daughter were going off to Rheims and that he would take the opportunity to spend a day in Paris? We could go along by the park, since the ladies aren’t there; it would make the walk that much shorter for us.”

We stopped for a moment in front of the gate. Lilac time was nearly over; a few, still, poured forth in tall mauve chandeliers the delicate bubbles of their flowers, but in many places among the leaves where only a week before they had still been breaking in waves of fragrant foam, a hollow scum now withered, shrunken and dark, dry and odorless. My grandfather pointed out to my father how the look of the place had remained the same, and how it had changed, since the walk he had taken with M. Swann the day of his wife’s death, and he used the occasion to tell the story of that walk one more time.

In front of us, an avenue bordered by nasturtiums climbed in full sun toward the house. To the right, the park extended over level ground. Darkened by the shade of the tall trees that surrounded it, an ornamental pond had been dug by Swann’s parents; but even in his most artificial creations, man is still working upon nature; certain places will always impose their own particular empire on their surroundings, hoist their immemorial insignia in the middle of a park just as they would have done far from any human intervention, in a solitude which returns to surround them wherever they are, arising from the exigencies of the position they occupy and superimposed on the work of human hands. So it was that, at the foot of the path that overlooked the artificial pond, there might be seen in its two rows woven of forget-me-nots and periwinkles, a natural crown, delicate and blue, encircling the chiaroscuro brow of water, and so it was that the sword lily, bending its blades with a regal abandon, extended over the eupatorium and wet-footed frogbit the ragged fleurs-de-lis, violet and yellow, of its lacustrine scepter.

Mlle. Swann’s departure, which—by taking from me the terrible chance that I might see her appear on a path, that I might be recognized and scorned by the privileged little girl who had Bergotte for a friend and went to visit cathedrals with him—made the contemplation of Tansonville a matter of indifference to me the first time it was allowed me, seemed on the contrary to add to that estate, in the eyes of my grandfather and my father, certain accommodations, a transitory charm, and, as does for an excursion into mountain country the absence of any cloud, to make that day exceptionally favorable for a walk in that direction; I would have liked their calculations to be foiled, a miracle to make Mlle. Swann appear with her father, so close to us that we would not have time to avoid her and would be obliged to make her acquaintance. And so, when suddenly I saw on the grass, like a sign of her possible presence, a creel sitting forgotten next to a line whose bob was floating on the water, I hastened to turn my father’s and grandfather’s eyes away in another direction. In any case, since Swann had told us it was bad of him to go off because he had family at the house just now, the line could belong to one of his guests. We heard no sound of steps on the avenues. Dividing the height of an unknown tree, an invisible bird, contriving to make the day seem short, explored the surrounding solitude with one prolonged note, but received from it a retort so unanimous, a repercussion so redoubled by silence and immobility, that one felt it had arrested forever that moment which it had been trying to make pass more quickly. The light fell so implacably from the still sky that one would have wanted to elude its attention, and the dormant water itself, whose sleep was perpetually irritated by insects, dreaming no doubt of some imaginary maelstrom, increased the disturbance into which I had been plunged by the sight of the cork float, by appearing to draw it at full speed over the silent reaches of the reflected sky; almost

vertical, it seemed about to dive and I was already wondering if, quite beyond my desire to know her and my fear of knowing her, I did not have a duty to warn Mlle. Swann that the fish was biting—when I had to run to rejoin my father and grandfather, who were calling me, surprised that I had not followed them along the little lane they had already entered which leads up to the fields. I found it all humming with the smell of the hawthorns. The hedge formed a series of chapels that disappeared under the litter of their flowers, heaped into wayside altars; below them, the sun was laying down a grid of brightness on the ground as if it had just passed through a stained-glass window; their perfume spread as unctuous, as delimited in its form as if I were standing before the altar of the Virgin, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, each held out with a distracted air its sparkling bunch of stamens, delicate radiating ribs in the flamboyant style like those which, in the church, perforated the balustrade of the rood screen or the mullions of the window and blossomed out into the white flesh of a strawberry flower. How naive and folksy by comparison would seem the sweetbriars which, in a few weeks, would climb in full sun the same country lane, in the smooth silk of their blushing bodices undone by a breath.

But though I remained there in front of the hawthorns, breathing in, bringing into the presence of my thoughts, which did not know what to do with it, then losing and finding again their invisible and unchanging smell, absorbing myself in the rhythm that tossed their flowers here and there with youthful high spirits and at unexpected intervals like certain intervals in music, they offered me the same charm endlessly and with an inexhaustible profusion, but without letting me study it more deeply, like the melodies you replay a hundred times in succession without descending further into their secrets. I turned away from them for a moment, to accost them again with renewed strength. I pursued, all the way onto the embankment behind the hedge that rose steeply toward the fields, some lost poppy, a few cornflowers which had lazily stayed behind, which decorated it here and there with their flower heads like the border of a tapestry on which there appears, thinly scattered, the rustic motif that will dominate the panel; infrequent still, spaced apart like the isolated houses that announce the approach of a village, they announced to me the immense expanse where the wheat breaks in waves, where the clouds fleece, and the sight of a single poppy hoisting its red flame to the top of its ropes and whipping it in the wind above its greasy black buoy made my heart pound like the heart of a traveler who spies on a lowland a first beached boat being repaired by a caulker and, before catching sight of it, cries out: “The Sea!”

Then I came back to stand in front of the hawthorns as you do in front of those masterpieces which, you think, you will be able to see more clearly when you have stopped looking at them for a moment, but although I formed a screen for myself with my hands so that I would have only them before my eyes, the feeling they awakened in me remained obscure and vague, seeking in vain to detach itself, to come and adhere to their flowers. They did not help me to clarify it, and I could not ask other flowers to satisfy it. Then, filling me with the joy we feel when we see a work by our favorite painter that is different from the ones we knew, or if someone takes us up to a painting of which we had until then seen only a pencil sketch, if a piece heard only on the piano appears to us later clothed in the colors of the orchestra, my grandfather, calling me and pointing to the Tansonville hedge, said to me: “You love hawthorns—just look at this pink one. Isn’t it lovely!” Indeed it was a hawthorn, but a pink hawthorn, even more beautiful than the white ones. It, too, wore finery for a holiday—for the only true holidays, which are the religious holidays, since they are not assigned by some fortuitous whim, as are the secular holidays, to an ordinary day that is not especially intended for them, that has nothing essentially festal about it—but their finery was even more opulent, for the flowers, attached to the branch one above another, in such a way as to leave no spot that was not decorated, like pom-poms garlanding a rococo shepherd’s crook, were “in color,” and consequently of a superior quality according to the aesthetics of Combray, if one judged it by the scale of prices in “the store” in the square, or at Camus’s, where the more expensive sponge cakes were the pink ones. Even I preferred cream cheese when it was pink, when I had been allowed to crush strawberries in it. And these flowers had chosen precisely the color of an edible thing, or of a delicate embellishment to an outfit for an important holiday, one of those colors which, because they offer children the reason for their superiority, seem most obviously beautiful to the eyes of children, and for that reason will always seem more vivid and more natural to them than the other tints, even after the children have learned that they did not promise anything for the appetite and had not been chosen by the dressmaker. And certainly, I had felt at once, as I had felt in front of the white hawthorns but with more wonder, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human fabrication that the festive intention of the flowers was expressed, but that nature had spontaneously expressed it with the naïveté of a village shopkeeper laboring over her wayside altar, by overloading the shrub with these rosettes which were too delicate in their color and provincially pompadour in their style. At the tops of the branches, like those little rosebushes, their pots hidden in lace paper, whose thin spindles radiated from the altar on the major feast days, teemed a thousand little buds of a paler tint which revealed, when they began to open, as though at the bottom of a cup of pink marble, reds of a bloody tinge, and expressed even more than the flowers the particular, irresistible essence of the hawthorn which, wherever it budded, wherever it was about to flower, could do so only in pink. Inserted into the hedge, but as different from it as a young girl in a party dress among people in everyday clothes who are staying at home, the shrub was all ready for Mary’s month, and seemed to form a part of it already, shining there, smiling in its fresh pink outfit, catholic and delicious.

Through the hedge we could see within the park an avenue edged with jasmines, pansies, and verbenas between which stocks opened their fresh purses, of a pink as fragrant and faded as an old piece of cordovan leather, while a long green-painted watering hose, uncoiling its loops over the gravel, sent up at each of the points where it was punctured, over the flowers whose fragrances it imbibed, the prismatic vertical fan of its multicolored droplets. Suddenly I stopped, I could not move, as happens when something we see does not merely address our eyes, but requires a deeper kind of perception and possesses our entire being. A little girl with reddish-blond hair, who appeared to be coming back from a walk and held a gardening spade in her hand, was looking at us, lifting toward us a face scattered with pink freckles. Her dark eyes shone, and since I did not know then, nor have I learned since, how to reduce a strong impression to its objective elements, since I did not have enough “power of observation,” as they say, to isolate the notion of their color, for a long time afterward, whenever I thought of her again, the memory of their brilliance would immediately present itself to me as that of a vivid azure, since she was blonde: so that, perhaps if she had not had such dark eyes—which struck one so the first time one saw her—I would not have been, as I was, in love most particularly with her blue eyes.



I looked at her, at first with the sort of gaze that is not merely the messenger of the eyes, but a window at which all the senses lean out, anxious and petrified, a gaze that would like to touch the body it is looking at, capture it, take it away and the soul along with it; then, so afraid was I that at any second my grandfather and my father, noticing the girl, would send me off, telling me to run on a little ahead of them, with a second sort of gaze, one that was unconsciously supplicating, that tried to force her to pay attention to me, to know me! She cast her eyes forward and sideways in order to take stock of my grandfather and father, and no doubt the impression she formed of them was that we were absurd, for she turned away, and, with an indifferent and disdainful look, placed herself at an angle to spare her face from being in their field of vision; and while they, continuing to walk on without noticing her, passed beyond me, she allowed her glances to stream out at full length in my direction, without any particular expression, without appearing to see me, but with a concentration and a secret smile that I could only interpret, according to the notions of good breeding instilled in me, as a sign of insulting contempt; and at the same time her hand sketched an indecent gesture for which, when it was directed in public at a person one did not know, the little dictionary of manners I carried inside me supplied only one meaning, that of intentional insolence.

"Gilberte, come here! What are you doing?" came the piercing, authoritarian cry of a lady in white whom I had not seen, while, at some distance from her, a gentleman dressed in twill whom I did not know stared at me with eyes that started from his head; the girl abruptly stopped smiling, took her spade, and went away without turning back toward me, with an air that was submissive, inscrutable, and sly.

So it was that this name, Gilberte, passed by close to me, given like a talisman that might one day enable me to find this girl again whom it had just turned into a person and who, a moment before, had been merely an uncertain image. Thus it passed, spoken over the jasmines and the stocks, as sour and as cool as the drops from the green watering hose; impregnating, coloring the portion of pure air that it had crossed—and that it isolated—with the mystery of the life of the girl it designated for the happy creatures who lived, who traveled in her company; deploying under the pink thicket, at the height of my shoulder, the quintessence of their familiarity, for me so painful, with her and with the unknown territory of her life which I would never be able to enter.

For a moment (as we moved away, my grandfather murmuring: "Poor Swann, what a role they make him play: they make him leave so that she can stay there alone with her Charlus—because it was him, I recognized him! And the little girl, mixed up in that disgraceful business!") the impression left in me by the despotism with which Gilberte's mother had spoken to her without her answering back, by presenting her to me as someone obliged to obey another person, as not being superior to everything in the world, calmed my suffering a little, restored some of my hope, and diminished my love. But very soon that love welled up in me again like a reaction by which my humiliated heart was trying to put itself on the same level as Gilberte or bring her down to its own. I loved her, I was sorry I had not had the time or the inspiration to insult her, hurt her, and force her to remember me. I thought her so beautiful that I wished I could retrace my steps and shout at her with a shrug of my shoulders: "I think you're ugly, I think you're grotesque, I loathe you!" But I went away, carrying with me forever, as the first example of a type of happiness inaccessible to children of my kind because of certain laws of nature impossible to transgress, the image of a little girl with red hair, her skin scattered with pink freckles, holding a spade and smiling as she cast at me long, cunning, and inexpressive glances. And already the charm with which the incense of her name had imbued that place under the pink hawthorns where it had been heard by her and by me together was beginning to reach, to overlay, to perfume everything that came near it, her grandparents, whom my own had had the ineffable happiness of knowing, the sublime profession of stockbroker, the harrowing neighborhood of the Champs-Élysées where she lived in Paris.

"Léonie," said my grandfather when we returned, "I wish we had had you with us this afternoon. You would not recognize Tansonville. If I had dared, I would have cut you a branch of those pink hawthorns you used to love so much." And so my grandfather told Aunt Léonie the story of our walk, either to entertain her or because they had not lost all hope of inducing her to go outdoors. For at one time she had liked that estate very much, and, too, Swann's visits had been the last she had received, when she had already closed her door to everyone else. And just as, when he now called to inquire after her (she was the only person in our house he still asked to see), she would tell them to answer him that she was tired, but that she would let him come in the next time, so she said, that evening: "Yes, someday when it's nice out, I'll take the carriage and go as far as the gate of the park." She said it sincerely. She would have liked to see Swann and Tansonville again; but this desire was enough for what strength remained to her; its fulfillment would have exceeded her strength. Sometimes the good weather restored a little of her energy, she would get up, get dressed; the fatigue would set in before she had gone into the other room and she would ask to go back to bed. What had begun for her—earlier, merely, than it usually happens—was the great renunciation which comes with old age as it prepares for death, wraps itself in its chrysalis, and which may be observed at the ends of lives that are at all extended, even in old lovers who have loved each other the most, even between friends bound by the closest ties of mutual sympathy, who, after a certain year, stop making the necessary journey or outing to see each other, stop writing to each other and know they will not communicate again in this world. My aunt must have known perfectly well that she would not see Swann again, that she would never again leave the house, but this final seclusion must have been made fairly comfortable to her for the very reason that, in our eyes, ought to have made it more painful for her: it was that this seclusion was required of her by the diminution in her strength which she could observe each day and which, making each action, each movement, a cause of fatigue, if not pain, in her eyes gave inaction, isolation, silence, the restorative and blessed sweetness of repose.

My aunt did not go to see the hedge of pink hawthorns, but again and again I asked my parents if she would not go, if at one time she had often gone to Tansonville, trying to make them talk about Mlle. Swann's parents and grandparents, who seemed to me as great as gods. When I was talking with my parents, I pined from the need to hear them say that name, Swann, which had become almost mythological for me, I did not dare pronounce it myself, but I drew them onto subjects that were close to Gilberte and her family, that concerned them, in which I did not feel I was exiled too far from them; and I would suddenly compel my father, by pretending to believe, for instance, that my grandfather's official appointment had been in our family before his time, or that the hedge of pink hawthorns which my aunt Léonie wanted to see was on communal land, to correct what I had said, to say to me, as though in opposition to me, as though of his own accord: "No, that appointment belonged to Swann's father, that hedge is part of Swann's park." Then I had to catch my breath, so effectively did that name, coming to rest as it did on the spot where it

was always written inside me, oppress me to the point of suffocation, that name which, at the moment I heard it, seemed to me more massive than any other name because it was heavy with all the times I had uttered it beforehand in my mind. It gave me a pleasure that I was embarrassed at having dared to demand from my parents, because that pleasure was so great that it must have required considerable effort on their part to procure it for me, and without compensation, since it was not a pleasure for them. And so I would turn the conversation in another direction out of discretion. Out of compunction, too. All the odd allurements that I invested in this name Swann I would hear in it again when they pronounced it. Then it would suddenly seem to me that my parents could not fail to experience these allurements, that they must share my point of view, that they in their turn perceived, forgave, embraced my dreams, and I was unhappy, as if I had defeated them and corrupted them.

That year, when my parents had decided which day we would be returning to Paris, a little earlier than usual, on the morning of our departure, after they had had my hair curled for a photograph, and carefully placed on my head a hat I had never worn before and dressed me in a quilted velvet coat, after looking for me everywhere, my mother found me in tears on the steep little path beside Tansonville, saying good-bye to the hawthorns, putting my arms around the prickly branches, and, like the princess in the tragedy burdened by vain ornaments, ungrateful to the importunate hand that with such care had gathered up my hair in curls across my brow,<sup>43</sup> trampling underfoot my torn-out curl papers and my new hat. My mother was not moved by my tears, but she could not suppress a cry at the sight of my crushed hat and ruined coat. I did not hear it: "Oh, my poor little hawthorns," I said, weeping, "you're not the ones trying to make me unhappy, you aren't forcing me to leave. You've never hurt me! So I will always love you." And drying my tears, I promised them that when I was grown up I would not let my life be like the senseless lives of other men and that even in Paris, on spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would go out into the countryside to see the first hawthorns.

Once in the fields, we did not leave them again during the rest of our walk toward Méséglise. They were perpetually crossed, as though by an invisible vagabond, by the wind that was for me the presiding spirit of Combray. Each year, the day we arrived, in order to feel that I was really in Combray, I would go up to find it again where it ran along the furrows and made me run after it. We always had the wind beside us when we went the Méséglise way, over that cambered plain where for leagues it encounters no rise or fall in the land. I knew that Mlle. Swann often went to Laon to spend a few days, and even though it was several miles away, since the distance was compensated for by the absence of any obstacle, when, on hot afternoons, I saw a single gust of wind, coming from the farthest horizon, first bend the most distant wheat, then roll like a wave through all that vast expanse and come to lie down murmuring and warm among the sainfoin and clover at my feet, this plain which was shared by us both seemed to bring us together, join us, and I would imagine that this breath of wind had passed close beside her, that what it whispered to me was some message from her though I could not understand it, and I would kiss it as it went by. On the left was a village called Champieu (*Campus pagani*, according to the curé). To the right, you could see beyond the wheat the two chiseled rustic spires of Saint-André-des-Champs, themselves as tapering, scaly, imbricated, checkered, yellowing, and granulose as two spikes of wheat.

At symmetrical intervals, in the midst of the inimitable ornamentation of their leaves, which cannot be confused with the leaves of any other fruit tree, the apple trees opened their broad petals of white satin or dangled the timid bouquets of their reddening buds. It was on the Méséglise way that I first noticed the round shadow that apple trees make on the sunny earth and those silks of impalpable gold which the sunset weaves obliquely under the leaves, and which I saw my father interrupt with his stick without ever deflecting them.

Sometimes in the afternoon sky the moon would pass white as a cloud, furtive, lusterless, like an actress who does not have to perform yet and who, from the audience, in street clothes, watches the other actors for a moment, making herself inconspicuous, not wanting anyone to pay attention to her. I liked finding its image again in paintings and books, but these works of art were quite different—at least during the early years, before Bloch accustomed my eyes and my mind to subtler harmonies—from those in which the moon would seem beautiful to me today and in which I would not have recognized it then. It might be, for example, some novel by Saintine,<sup>44</sup> some landscape by Gleyre<sup>45</sup> in which it stands out distinctly against the sky in the form of a silver sickle, one of those works which were naively incomplete, like my own impressions, and which it angered my grandmother's sisters to see me enjoy. They thought that one ought to present to children, and that children showed good taste in enjoying right from the start, those works of art which, once one has reached maturity, one will admire forever after. The fact is that they probably regarded aesthetic merits as material objects which an open eye could not help perceiving, without one's needing to ripen equivalents of them slowly in one's own heart.

It was along the Méséglise way, at Montjouvain, a house situated at the edge of a large pond and backed up against a brush-covered hillock, that M. Vinteuil lived. And so we often met his daughter on the road driving a cabriolet at top speed. One year, she was not alone when we met her, and from then on she was always accompanied by an older friend, a woman who had a bad reputation in the area and who one day moved permanently into Montjouvain. People said: "Poor M. Vinteuil must be blind with love not to realize what kind of rumors are going around—a man who is shocked by a single remark *out of place* letting his daughter bring a woman like that to live under his roof. He says she's a most superior woman, with a good heart, and that she would have had an extraordinary aptitude for music if she had cultivated it. He can be sure she's not dabbling in music when she's with his daughter." M. Vinteuil did say this; and in fact it is remarkable how a person always inspires admiration for her moral qualities in the family of the person with whom she is having carnal relations. Physical love, so unfairly disparaged, compels people to manifest the very smallest particles they possess of goodness, of self-abnegation, so much so that these particles glow even in the eyes of those immediately surrounding them. Dr. Percepied, whose loud voice and thick eyebrows permitted him to play to his heart's content the role of the villain to which his general appearance was not suited, without in the least compromising his unshakable and undeserved reputation as a kindly old curmudgeon, was capable of making the curé and everyone else laugh until they cried by saying gruffly: "Well, now! It seems young Mlle. Vinteuil is making music with her friend. You seem surprised. Now I don't know. It was old Vinteuil who told me just yesterday. After all, the girl certainly has a right to enjoy her music. It's not for me to go against a child's artistic vocation. Nor Vinteuil either, it seems. And then he himself plays music with his daughter's friend, as well. Heaven help us! There's certainly a good deal of music-making going on in that

establishment. Well, why are you laughing? They play too much music, those people. The other day I met old Vinteuil near the cemetery. He was ready to drop.”

For those like us who saw M. Vinteuil at that time avoiding people he knew, turning away when he saw them, aging in a few months, immersing himself in his sorrow, becoming incapable of any effort whose direct goal was not his daughter's happiness, spending whole days before the grave of his wife—it would have been difficult not to realize that he was dying of sorrow, or to imagine that he was not aware of the talk that was going around. He knew about it, maybe he even believed it. Perhaps there exists no one, however virtuous he may be, who may not be led one day by the complexity of his circumstances to live on familiar terms with the vice he condemns most expressly—without his fully recognizing it, moreover, in the disguise of particular details that it assumes in order to come into contact with him in that way and make him suffer: strange remarks, an inexplicable attitude, one evening, on the part of someone whom he has otherwise so many reasons for liking. But a man like M. Vinteuil must have suffered much more than most in resigning himself to one of those situations which are wrongly believed to be the exclusive prerogative of the bohemian life: they occur whenever a vice which nature itself plants in a child, like the color of its eyes, sometimes merely by mingling the virtues of its father and mother, needs to reserve for itself the space and the security it requires. But the fact that M. Vinteuil perhaps knew about his daughter's behavior does not imply that his worship of her would thereby be diminished. Facts do not find their way into the world in which our beliefs reside; they did not produce our beliefs, they do not destroy them; they may inflict on them the most constant refutations without weakening them, and an avalanche of afflictions or ailments succeeding one another without interruption in a family will not make it doubt the goodness of its God or the talent of its doctor. But when M. Vinteuil thought about his daughter and himself from the point of view of society, from the point of view of their reputation, when he attempted to place himself with her in the rank which they occupied in the general esteem, then he made this social judgment exactly as it would have been made by the most hostile inhabitant of Combray, he saw himself and his daughter in the lowest depths, and because of this his manner had recently acquired that humility, that respect for those who were above him and whom he saw from below (even if they had been well below him until then), that tendency to seek to climb back up to them, which is an almost automatic result of any downfall. One day as we were walking with Swann down a street in Combray, M. Vinteuil, who was emerging from another, found himself face-to-face with us too suddenly to have time to avoid us; and Swann, with the proud charity of a man of the world who, amid the dissolution of all his own moral prejudices, finds in another man's disgrace merely a reason for showing him a kindness whose manifestations are all the more gratifying to the self-regard of the one offering them because he feels they are so precious to the one receiving them, had conversed with M. Vinteuil for a long time, although he had never spoken to him before then, and before leaving us had asked him if he would not send his daughter to play at Tansonville someday. This was an invitation which two years before would have incensed M. Vinteuil, but which now filled him with such feelings of gratitude that he believed he was obliged by them not to have the indiscretion of accepting it. Swann's friendliness toward his daughter seemed to him in itself so honorable and so delightful a support that he thought it would perhaps be better not to make use of it, so as to have the wholly platonic pleasure of preserving it.

“What a charming man,” he said, when Swann had left us, with the same enthusiastic veneration that causes bright and pretty middle-class women to be awed and entranced by a duchess, even if she is ugly and foolish. “What a charming man! How unfortunate that he should have made such an entirely inappropriate marriage!”

And then, since even the most sincere people have a streak of hypocrisy in them which makes them put to one side their opinion of a person while they are talking to him, and express it as soon as he is no longer present, my parents deplored Swann's marriage along with M. Vinteuil in the name of principles and conventions which (by the very fact that they joined him in invoking them, as decent people of the same stamp) they seemed to be implying he had not violated at Montjouvain. M. Vinteuil did not send his daughter to Swann's house. And Swann was the first to regret it. For each time he left M. Vinteuil, he remembered that for some time now he had had a question to ask him about a person who bore the same name, a relative of his, he believed. And this time he had truly promised himself not to forget what he wanted to tell him when M. Vinteuil sent his daughter to Tansonville.

Since the walk along the Méséglise way was the shorter of the two that we took out of Combray and since, because of that, we saved it for uncertain weather, the climate along the Méséglise way was quite rainy and we would never lose sight of the edge of the Roussainville woods, in the thickness of which we could take cover.

Often the sun would hide behind a storm cloud, distorting its oval, yellowing the edges of the cloud. The brilliance, though not the brightness, would be withdrawn from the countryside, where all life seemed suspended, while the little village of Roussainville sculpted its white rooflines in relief upon the sky with an unbearable precision and finish. Nudged by a gust of wind, a crow flew up and dropped down again in the distance, and, against the whitening sky, the distant parts of the woods appeared bluer, as though painted in one of those monochromes that decorate the pier glasses of old houses.

But at other times the rain with which we had been threatened by the little hooded monk in the optician's window<sup>46</sup> would begin to fall; the drops of water, like migrating birds which take flight all at the same time, would descend in close ranks from the sky. They do not separate at all, they do not wander away during their rapid course, but each one keeps to its place, drawing along the one that comes after it, and the sky is more darkened by them than when the swallows leave. We would take refuge in the woods. When their flight seemed to be over, a few of them, feebler, slower, would still be arriving. But we would come back out of our shelter, because raindrops delight in leafy branches, and, when the earth was already nearly dry again, more than one would still linger to play on the ribs of a leaf and, hanging from the tip, tranquil and sparkling in the sun, would suddenly let go, slip off, and drop from the entire height of the branch onto one's nose.

Often, too, we would go and take shelter all crowded in together with the stone saints and patriarchs in the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs. How French that church was! Above the door, the saints, the knight-kings with fleurs-de-lis in their hands, wedding and funeral scenes, were depicted as they might have been in Françoise's soul. The sculptor had also narrated certain anecdotes involving Aristotle and Virgil just as Françoise in her kitchen was apt to talk about Saint Louis as if she had known him personally, usually in order to put my grandparents to shame by comparison since they were less “fair-minded.” One felt that the notions which the medieval artist and the medieval countrywoman (living on into the nineteenth century) had acquired of

ancient or Christian history, and which were distinguished by containing as much inaccuracy as simple good-heartedness, were derived not from books, but from a tradition that was at once very old and very direct, uninterrupted, oral, deformed, hardly recognizable, and alive. Another Combray character whom I also recognized, potential and prophesied, in the Gothic sculpture of Saint-André-des-Champs, was young Théodore, the delivery boy from Camus's grocery. Françoise, in fact, felt so clearly that he was a fellow countryman and a contemporary that when my aunt Léonie was too sick for Françoise by herself to turn her over in bed, or carry her to the armchair, instead of letting the kitchen maid come up and get into my aunt's "good books" she would send for Théodore. Now this boy, who was taken, and rightly, for such a ne'er-do-well, was so filled with the same spirit that had decorated Saint-André-des-Champs and especially with the feelings of respect that Françoise believed were owed to "poor sick folk," to "her poor mistress," that as he raised my aunt's head on her pillow he had the same naive and zealous expression as the little angels in the bas-reliefs, crowding around the fainting Virgin with tapers in their hands, as if the faces of sculpted stone, bare and gray as the woods in winter, were only a deep sleep, a reserve, about to blossom into life again in numberless common faces, reverent and crafty like Théodore's, illuminated with the redness of a ripe apple. No longer affixed to the stone like those little angels, but detached from the porch, of larger than human size, standing on a pedestal as though on a stool that spared her putting her feet on the damp ground, one saint had the full cheeks, the firm breast swelling the folds of the cloth like a cluster of ripe grapes in a horsehair sack, the narrow forehead, the short and saucy nose, the deep-set eyes, the able-bodied, impassive, and courageous demeanor of the countrywomen of the region. This resemblance, which insinuated into the statue a sweetness I had not looked for in it, was often authenticated by some girl from the fields, who, like us, had come to take cover, and whose presence, like the presence of the leaves of a climbing plant that has grown up next to some sculpted leaves, seemed intended to allow us, by confronting it with nature, to judge the truthfulness of the work of art. Before us in the distance, a promised land or an accursed one, Roussainville, was now, when the rain had already stopped for us, either continuing to be chastised like the village in the Bible by all the slanting spears of the storm, which scourged the dwellings of its inhabitants, or else had already been pardoned by God the Father, who caused to descend upon it, unequal in length, like the rays of an altar monstrosity, the frayed golden shafts of his reappearing sun.

Sometimes the weather was completely spoiled, we had to go back home and stay shut up in the house. Here and there, far off in the countryside, which because of the dark and the wet resembled the sea, a few isolated houses, clinging to the side of a hill plunged in watery night, shone forth like little boats that have folded their sails and stand motionless out at sea all night long. But what did the rain matter, what did the storm matter! In summer, bad weather is only a passing, superficial mood on the part of the steady, underlying good weather, which is very different from the fluid and unstable good weather of winter, and having settled on the earth, where it has taken solid form in dense branches of leaves on which the rain may drip without compromising the resistance of their permanent joy, has hoisted for the whole season, even in the streets of the village, on the walls of the houses and gardens, its flags of white or violet silk. Sitting in the little drawing room, where I waited for the dinner hour while I read, I would hear the water dripping from our chestnut trees, but I knew that the downpour was only varnishing their leaves and that they would promise to stay there, like pledges of summer, all the rainy night, ensuring that the good weather would continue; that rain as it might, tomorrow little heart-shaped leaves would undulate just as numerous above the white gate of Tansonville; and it was without sadness that I saw the poplar in the rue des Perchamps meet the storm praying and bowing in despair; it was without sadness that I heard at the back of the garden the last rolls of thunder warbling among the lilacs.

If the weather was bad in the morning, my parents would give up the walk and I would not go out. But I later acquired the habit of going out to walk alone on those days along the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, during the autumn in which we had to come to Combray to settle my aunt Léonie's estate, because she had at last died, proving correct both those who had claimed that her enfeebling regimen would end by killing her, and those who had always maintained that she suffered from an illness that was not imaginary but organic, to the evidence of which the skeptics would certainly be obliged to yield when she succumbed to it; and causing no great suffering by her death except to a single person, but to that one, a grief that was savage. During the two weeks of my aunt's final illness, Françoise did not leave her for an instant, did not undress, did not allow anyone else to care for her in any way, and did not leave her body until it was buried. Then we realized that the kind of dread in which Françoise had lived, of my aunt's ill-natured remarks, suspicions, angry moods, had developed a feeling in her that we had taken for hatred and that was actually veneration and love. Her true mistress, whose decisions were impossible to foresee, whose ruses were difficult to foil, whose good heart was easy to touch, her sovereign, her mysterious and all-powerful monarch, was no more. Next to her we counted for very little. The time was by now far in the past when, as we began coming to spend our holidays at Combray, we possessed as much prestige as my aunt in Françoise's eyes. That autumn, completely occupied as they were with the formalities that had to be observed, the interviews with notaries and tenants, my parents, having scarcely any time to go on excursions, which the weather frustrated in any case, fell into the habit of letting me go for walks without them along the Méséglise way, wrapped in a great plaid that protected me from the rain and that I threw over my shoulders all the more readily because I sensed that its Scottish patterning scandalized Françoise, into whose mind one could not have introduced the idea that the color of one's clothes had nothing to do with mourning and to whom, in any case, the sorrow that we felt over the death of my aunt was not very satisfactory, because we had not offered a large funeral dinner, because we did not adopt a special tone of voice in speaking of her, because I even hummed to myself now and then. I am sure that in a book—and in this I was actually quite like Françoise—such a conception of mourning, in the manner of the *Chanson de Roland*<sup>47</sup> and the portal of Saint-André-des-Champs, would have appealed to me. But as soon as Françoise came near me, some demon would goad me to try to make her angry, I would seize the slightest pretext to tell her that I missed my aunt because she was a good woman despite her ridiculous ways, but not in the least because she was my aunt, that she might have been my aunt and still seemed odious to me, and then her death would not have caused me any pain, remarks that would have seemed to me absurd in a book.

If Françoise then, filled like a poet with a flood of confused thoughts about bereavement, about family memories, excused herself for not knowing how to answer my theories and said: "I don't know how to *espress* myself," I would gloat over that admission with a harsh and ironic common sense worthy of Dr. Percepied; and if she added: "All the same, she was your own kith and kindred,"<sup>48</sup> and there's a proper respect we owe to our kith and kindred, you know," I would shrug my shoulders and say to myself: "Look at me, arguing with an illiterate woman who makes such blunders," adopting, in judging Françoise, the mean-

spirited attitude of men whose behavior those people who despise them the most when contemplating them impartially are quite capable of adopting, when actually playing one of life's vulgar scenes.

My walks that autumn were all the more pleasant because I took them after long hours spent over a book. When I was tired from reading all morning in the parlor, throwing my plaid over my shoulders I would go out: my body, which had had to keep still for so long, but which had accumulated, as it sat, a reserve of animation and speed, now needed, like a top that has been released, to expend them in all directions. The walls of the houses, the Tansonville hedge, the trees of the Roussainville woods, the thickets at the back of Montjouvain, submitted to the blows of my umbrella or walking stick, heard my shouts of joy, these being both merely confused ideas that exhilarated me and found no repose in the light of understanding, because they had preferred, instead of a slow and difficult clarification, the pleasure of an easier diversion toward an immediate outcome. Most of the supposed expressions of our feelings merely relieve us of them in this way by drawing them out of us in an indistinct form that does not teach us to know them. When I try to count up what I owe to the Méséglise way, the humble discoveries for which it was the fortuitous setting or the necessary inspiration, I recall that it was that autumn, on one of those walks, near the bushy hillock that protects Montjouvain, that I was struck for the first time by this discord between our impressions and their habitual expression. After an hour of rain and wind which I had fought cheerfully, as I came to the edge of the Montjouvain pond, beside a little hut covered in tiles where M. Vinteuil's gardener stowed his gardening tools, the sun had just reappeared, and its gildings, washed by the downpour, glistened freshly in the sky, on the trees, on the wall of the hut, on its still-wet tile roof along the crest of which a hen was walking. The wind that was blowing tugged at the wild grass growing in the side of the wall and the downy plumage of the hen, the one and the other streaming out at full length horizontally before its breath, with the abandon of things that are weightless and inert. In the pond, reflective again under the sun, the tile roof made a pink marbling to which I had never before given any attention. And seeing on the water and on the face of the wall a pale smile answering the smile of the sky, I cried out to myself in my enthusiasm, brandishing my furled umbrella: "Damn, damn, damn, damn." But at the same time I felt I was in duty bound not to stop at these opaque words, but to try to see more clearly into my rapture.

And it was at that moment, too—because of a countryman who was passing by, who seemed rather cross already and was more so when my umbrella nearly went in his face, and who responded without warmth to my "fine weather, isn't it, perfect for a walk"—that I learned that the same emotions do not arise simultaneously, in a preestablished order, in all men. Later, each time a rather prolonged session of reading had put me in a mood to chat, the friend I was so eager to talk to would himself have just been indulging in the pleasure of conversation and now wanted to be left to read in peace. If I had just been thinking tenderly about my parents and making the wisest decisions, those most likely to please them, they would have been employing the same time in discovering some peccadillo I had forgotten, and they would reproach me severely for it just at the moment I bounded toward them to give them a hug.

Sometimes the exhilaration I felt at being alone was joined by another kind that I was not able to separate distinctly from it, and that came from my desire to see a peasant girl appear in front of me whom I could clasp in my arms. Born suddenly, and without my having had time to identify exactly what had caused it, from among very different thoughts, the pleasure which accompanied it seemed to me only one degree higher than that which those other thoughts had given me. Everything that was in my mind at that moment acquired an even greater value, the pink reflection of the tile roof, the wild grass, the village of Roussainville to which I had been wanting to go for so long now, the trees of its woods, the steeple of its church, as a result of this new emotion which made them appear more desirable only because I thought it was they that had provoked it, and which seemed only to wish to carry me toward them more rapidly when it filled my sail with a powerful, mysterious, and propitious wind. But if, for me, this desire that a woman should appear added something more exhilarating to the charms of nature, the charms of nature, in return, broadened what would have been too narrow in the woman's charm. It seemed to me that the beauty of the trees was also hers and that the soul of those horizons, of the village of Roussainville, of the books I was reading that year, would be given to me by her kiss; and as my imagination drew strength from contact with my sensuality, as my sensuality spread through all the domains of my imagination, my desire grew boundless. And, too—just as during those moments of reverie in the midst of nature when, the effect of habit being suspended, and our abstract notions of things set aside, we believe with a profound faith in the originality, in the individual life of the place in which we happen to be—the passing woman summoned by my desire seemed to be, not an ordinary exemplar of that general type—woman—but a necessary and natural product of this particular soil. For at that time everything which was not I, the earth and other people, appeared to me more precious, more important, endowed with a more real existence than they appear to grown men. And I did not separate the earth and the people. I desired a peasant girl from Méséglise or Roussainville, a fisherwoman from Balbec, just as I desired Méséglise and Balbec. The pleasure they might give me would have appeared less real to me, I would no longer have believed in it, if I had modified its conditions as I pleased. To meet a fisherwoman from Balbec or a countrywoman from Méséglise in Paris would have been like receiving a seashell I could not have seen on the beach, a fern I could not have found in the woods, it would have subtracted from the pleasure which the woman would give me all those pleasures in which my imagination had enveloped her. But to wander through the woods of Roussainville without a peasant girl to hold in my arms was to see these woods and yet know nothing of their hidden treasure, their profound beauty. For me that girl, whom I could only envisage dappled with leaves, was herself like a local plant, merely of a higher species than the rest and whose structure enabled one to approach more closely than one could in the others the essential flavor of the country. I could believe this all the more readily (and also that the caresses by which she would allow me to reach that flavor would themselves be of a special kind, whose pleasure I would not have been able to experience through anyone else but her) because I was, and would be for a long time to come, at an age when one has not yet abstracted this pleasure from the possession of the different women with whom one has tasted it, when one has not reduced it to a general notion that makes one regard them from then on as the interchangeable instruments of a pleasure that is always the same. This pleasure does not even exist, isolated, distinct and formulated in the mind, as the aim we are pursuing when we approach a woman, as the cause of the previous disturbance that we feel. We scarcely even contemplate it as a pleasure which we will enjoy; rather, we call it her charm; for we do not think of ourselves, we think only of leaving ourselves. Obscurely awaited, immanent and hidden, it merely rouses to such a paroxysm, at the moment of its realization, the other pleasures we find in the soft gazes, the kisses of the woman close to us, that it seems to us, more than anything else, a sort of transport of our gratitude for our

companion's goodness of heart and for her touching predilection for us, which we measure by the blessings, by the beatitude she showers upon us.

Alas, it was in vain that I implored the castle keep of Roussainville, that I asked it to have some child from its village come to me, appealing to it as to the only confidant I had had of my earliest desires, when at the top of our house in Combray in the little room smelling of orris root, I could see nothing but its tower in the middle of the pane of the half-open window, while with the heroic hesitations of a traveler embarking on an exploration or of a desperate man killing himself, with a feeling of faintness, I would clear an unknown and I thought fatal path within myself, until the moment when a natural trail like that left by a snail added itself to the leaves of the wild black currant that leaned in toward me. In vain did I appeal to it now. In vain did I hold the whole expanse of the country before me within the field of my vision, draining it with my eyes which tried to extract a woman from it. I would go as far as the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs; there I would never find the countrywoman I would inevitably have met had I been with my grandfather and therefore prevented from striking up a conversation with her. I would stare endlessly at the trunk of a distant tree from behind which she was going to appear and come to me; the scanned horizon would remain uninhabited, night would fall, hopelessly my attention would attach itself, as though to aspirate the creatures they might harbor, to that sterile ground, to that exhausted earth; and it was no longer with a light heart, but with rage, that I struck the trees of the Roussainville woods, from among which no more living creatures emerged than if they had been trees painted on the canvas background of a panorama, when, unable to resign myself to going back to the house without having held in my arms the woman I had so desired, I was nevertheless obliged to continue along the road to Combray admitting to myself that there was less and less chance that she had been placed in my path. And if she had been there, would I have dared talk to her? It seemed to me she would have thought I was mad; I no longer believed that the desires which I formed during my walks, and which were not fulfilled, were shared by other people, that they had any reality outside of me. They now seemed to me no more than the purely subjective, impotent, illusory creations of my temperament. They no longer had any attachment to nature, to reality, which from then on lost all its charm and significance and was no more than a conventional framework for my life, as is, for the fiction of a novel, the railway carriage on the seat of which a traveler reads it in order to kill time.

It was perhaps from an impression received also near Montjouvain, a few years later, an impression that remained obscure to me at the time, that there emerged, well after, the idea which I formed of sadism. As will be seen later, for quite other reasons the memory of this impression was to play an important part in my life. It was during a spell of very hot weather; my parents, who had had to leave for the whole day, had told me to return home as late as I pleased; and having gone as far as the Montjouvain pond, where I liked to look at the reflections of the tile roof again, I had lain down in the shade and fallen asleep among the bushes of the hillock that overlooks the house, in the same spot where I had once waited for my father on a day when he had gone to see M. Vinteuil. It was almost night when I awoke, I wanted to stand up, but I saw Mlle. Vinteuil (insofar as I actually recognized her, because I had not seen her very often in Combray, and only when she was still a child, whereas now she was growing into a young woman), who had probably just come home, opposite me, a few inches from me, in the room in which her father had entertained my father and which she had made into her own little drawing room. The window was half open, the lamp was lit, I could see her every movement without her seeing me, but if I had gone away I would have made rustling sounds among the bushes, she would have heard me, and she might have thought I had hidden there to spy on her.

She was in deep mourning, because her father had died a short time before. We had not gone to see her, my mother had not wanted to because of a virtue of hers which alone limited the effects of her goodness: her sense of decency; but she pitied her deeply. My mother recalled the sad end of M. Vinteuil's life, completely absorbed as it was first in giving his daughter the care of a mother or a nursemaid, then in the suffering his daughter had caused him; she could still see the tormented expression on the old man's face during that last period; she knew he had entirely given up completing the task of transcribing in clean copies all his work of the last few years, insignificant pieces by an old piano teacher, by a former village organist, which we could well imagine had scarcely any value in themselves, but which we did not disdain because they had so much value for him, having been his reason for living before he sacrificed them for his daughter, and which, for the most part not even written down, preserved only in his memory, a few jotted on scattered sheets of paper, unreadable, would remain unknown; my mother thought of that other, even crueller renunciation which had been forced upon M. Vinteuil, the renunciation of a future of decent and respectable happiness for his daughter; when she remembered all this extreme distress on the part of my aunts' old piano teacher, she was moved by real sorrow and thought with horror of the far more bitter sorrow that Mlle. Vinteuil must be feeling, mingled as it was with remorse at having more or less killed her father. "Poor M. Vinteuil," my mother would say, "he lived and died for his daughter, without getting any reward for it. Will he get it after his death, and in what form? It could only come to him from her."



At the back of Mlle. Vinteuil's drawing room, on the mantelpiece, stood a small portrait of her father which she quickly went to get at the moment when the rattle of a carriage could be heard from the road outside, then she threw herself down on a couch, drew a little table close to her, and set the portrait on it, just as M. Vinteuil had once placed beside him the piece that he wanted to play for my parents. Soon her friend came in. Mlle. Vinteuil greeted her without standing up, both hands behind her head, and withdrew to the other end of the sofa as though to make room for her. But immediately she felt that by doing this she seemed to be forcing her friend into a position that might be annoying to her. She thought her friend might prefer to be some distance away from her on a chair, she thought she had been indiscreet, her tactful heart grew alarmed; moving so that she now occupied all the space on the sofa again, she closed her eyes and began yawning to imply that she had only stretched out like that because she was sleepy. Despite the crude and overweening familiarity with which she treated her friend, I recognized her father's obsequious and reticent gestures, his sudden qualms. Soon she stood up and pretended to be trying to close the shutters without success.

"No, leave them open, I'm hot," said her friend.

"But it's a nuisance, someone will see us," answered Mlle. Vinteuil.

But she must have guessed that her friend would think she had said these words only to goad her into answering with certain others that she in fact wanted to hear, but that out of discretion she wanted to leave her friend the initiative of uttering. And so her face, which I could not see, must have assumed the expression that my grandmother liked so much, as she quickly added:

"When I say see us, I mean see us reading; it's such a nuisance to think that whatever insignificant thing you may be doing, other eyes are watching you."

Out of an instinctive generosity and an involuntary courtesy she did not speak the premeditated words that she had felt were indispensable to the full realization of her desire. And time and again, deep inside her, a timid and supplicant virgin entreated and forced back a rough and swaggering brawler.

"Yes, I'm sure people are watching us at this hour, in this densely populated countryside," her friend said ironically. "And what if they are?" she added (thinking she had to give a mischievous, tender wink as she uttered these words, which she recited good-naturedly like a text she knew Mlle. Vinteuil liked, in a tone that she tried to make cynical). "If someone saw us, so much the better."

Mlle. Vinteuil shuddered and stood up. Her scrupulous and sensitive heart did not know what words ought to come to her spontaneously to suit the scene that her senses demanded. She searched as far away from her true moral nature as she could to find a language that would fit the depraved girl she wanted to be, but the words she thought that girl would have uttered sincerely seemed false on her own lips. And the little she allowed herself to say was said in a stiff tone of voice in which her habitual shyness paralyzed her inclinations toward boldness, and was interlarded with: "You're not too cold, are you, you're not too warm, would you rather be alone and read?"

"Mademoiselle seems to be having rather libidinous thoughts this evening," she said at last, probably repeating a phrase she had heard before on her friend's lips.

Mlle. Vinteuil felt her friend plant a kiss in the opening of her crepe blouse, she gave a little cry, broke free, and they began chasing each other, leaping, fluttering their wide sleeves like wings, and clucking and cheeping like two amorous birds. At last Mlle. Vinteuil collapsed on the couch, with her friend's body covering her. But the friend had her back turned to the little table on which the old piano teacher's picture was placed. Mlle. Vinteuil realized that her friend would not see it if her attention was not drawn to it, and she said to her, as if she had only just noticed it:

"Oh! That picture of my father is looking at us. I don't know who could have put it there. I've told them a dozen times that it doesn't belong there."

I remembered that these were the same words M. Vinteuil had spoken to my father in connection with the piece of music. They were probably in the habit of using the portrait for ritual profanations, because her friend answered her in words which must have been part of her liturgical response:

"Oh, leave him where he is. He's not here to bother us anymore. Just think how he would start whining and try to make you put your coat on if he could see you there with the window open, the ugly old monkey."

Mlle. Vinteuil answered with words of gentle reproach—"Come, come"—which proved the goodness of her nature, not because they were dictated by the indignation she might have felt at this way of referring to her father (evidently this was a feeling that she had grown used to silencing in herself at these times, with the help of who knows what sophisticated reasonings), but because they were a sort of curb that she herself, so as not to seem selfish, was applying to the pleasure that her friend was trying to give her. And, too, such smiling forbearance in response to these blasphemies, such a tender, hypocritical reproach, may have appeared to her frank and generous good nature a particularly unspeakable form, a saccharine form of the wickedness she was trying to emulate. But she could not resist the attraction of the pleasure she would feel at being treated with such tenderness by a woman so implacable toward a defenseless dead man; she jumped on her friend's knees, and chastely presented her forehead for a kiss, as a daughter might have done, with the delightful sensation that the two of them were achieving an extreme of cruelty by robbing M. Vinteuil, even in his grave, of his fatherhood. Her friend took her head in her hands and set a kiss on her forehead with a docility that came easily to her because of her great affection for Mlle. Vinteuil and her desire to bring some amusement into the orphan's life, now so sad.

"Do you know what I would like to do to him—that old horror?" she said, picking up the portrait.

And she murmured in Mlle. Vinteuil's ear something I could not hear.

"Oh, you wouldn't dare!"

"I wouldn't dare spit on him? On *that old thing*?" said her friend with deliberate savagery.

I did not hear any more, because Mlle. Vinteuil, with a manner that was weary, awkward, fussy, honest, and sad, came and closed the shutters and the window, but now I knew that for all the suffering which M. Vinteuil had endured on his daughter's account during his lifetime, this was what he had received from her as his reward after his death.

And yet I have thought, since then, that if M. Vinteuil had been able to witness this scene, he still might not have lost his faith in his daughter's good heart, and perhaps he would not even have been entirely wrong in that. It was true that in Mlle. Vinteuil's habits, the appearance of evil was so complete that it would have been hard to find it so perfectly represented in anyone other than

a sadist; it is behind the footlights of a popular theater rather than in the lamplight of an actual country house that one expects to see a girl encouraging her friend to spit on the portrait of a father who lived only for her; and almost nothing else but sadism provides a basis in real life for the aesthetics of melodrama. In reality, even when she is not a sadist, a girl might perhaps have failings as cruel as those of Mlle. Vinteuil with regard to the memory and wishes of her dead father, but she would not deliberately express them in an act of such rudimentary and naive symbolism; what was criminal about her behavior would be more veiled from the eyes of others and even from her own, and she would do evil without admitting it to herself. But, beyond appearances, even in Mlle. Vinteuil's heart, the evil, in the beginning at least, was probably not unmixed. A sadist of her sort is an artist of evil, something that an entirely bad creature could not be, for then evil would not be exterior to her, it would seem to her quite natural, would not even be distinguishable from her; and as for virtue, memory of the dead, and filial tenderness, since she would not be devoutly attached to them she would take no sacrilegious pleasure in profaning them. Sadists of Mlle. Vinteuil's kind are creatures so purely sentimental, so naturally virtuous that even sensual pleasure seems to them something bad, the privilege of the wicked. And when they allow themselves to yield to it for a moment, they are trying to step into the skin of the wicked and to make their partner do so as well, so as to have the illusion, for a moment, of escaping from their scrupulous and tender soul into the inhuman world of pleasure. And I understood how much she longed for it when I saw how impossible it was for her to succeed in it. At the very moment when she wanted to be so different from her father, what she at once suggested to me were the old piano teacher's ways of thinking, of speaking. Far more than his photograph, what she really desecrated, what she was really using for her pleasures, though it remained between them and her and kept her from enjoying them directly, was the resemblance between her face and his, his own mother's blue eyes which he had handed down to her like a family jewel, those kind gestures which interposed between Mlle. Vinteuil's vice and herself a style of talking, a mentality that was not made for it and that prevented her from recognizing it as something very different from the numberless obligatory courtesies to which she usually devoted herself. It was not evil which gave her the idea of pleasure, which seemed agreeable to her; it was pleasure that seemed to her malign. And since each time she indulged in it, it was accompanied by these bad thoughts which were absent the rest of the time from her virtuous soul, she came to see pleasure as something diabolical, to identify it with Evil. Perhaps Mlle. Vinteuil felt that her friend was not fundamentally bad and was not really sincere when she talked to her in this blasphemous way. At least she had the pleasure of kissing her friend's face with its smiles and glances that might have been feigned but were similar in their depraved and base expression to the smiles and glances of, not a kind, suffering person, but one given to cruelty and pleasure. She could imagine for a moment that she was really playing the games that would have been played, with so unnatural a confederate, by a girl who actually had these barbaric feelings toward her father's memory. Perhaps she would not have thought that evil was a state so rare, so extraordinary, so disorienting, and to which it was so restful to emigrate, if she had been able to discern in herself, as in everyone else, that indifference to the sufferings one causes which, whatever other names one gives it, is the terrible and lasting form assumed by cruelty.

If it was fairly simple to go the Méséglise way, it was another matter to go the Guermantes way, because the walk was long and we wanted to be sure what sort of weather we would be having. When we seemed to be entering a succession of fine days; when Françoise, desperate because not a single drop of water had fallen on the "poor crops," and seeing only rare white clouds swimming on the calm blue surface of the sky, exclaimed with a moan: "Why, they look just like a lot of dog-fishes playing about up yonder showing us their muzzles! Ah, they never think to make it rain a little for the poor farmers! And then as soon as the wheat is well up, that's when the rain will begin to fall pit-a-pat pit-a-pat without a break, and think no more of where it's falling than if 'twas falling on the sea"; when my father had been given the same unvarying favorable responses by both the gardener and the barometer, then we would say over dinner: "Tomorrow, if the weather's the same, we'll go the Guermantes way." We would leave right after lunch by the little garden gate and we would tumble out into the rue des Perchamps, narrow and bent at a sharp angle and filled with different varieties of grasses among which two or three wasps would spend the day botanizing, a street as odd as its name, which it seemed to me was the source of its curious peculiarities and its cantankerous personality, a street one would seek in vain in Combray now, for on its old path the school now stands. But in my daydreams (like those architects, pupils of Viollet-le-Duc,<sup>49</sup> who, thinking they will find under a Renaissance rood screen or a seventeenth-century altar the traces of a Romanesque choir, restore the whole edifice to the state in which it must have been in the twelfth century) I do not leave one stone of the new structure standing, I pierce through it and "reinstate" the rue des Perchamps. And for these reconstructions I also have more precise data than restorers generally have: a few pictures preserved by my memory, perhaps the last still in existence now, and destined soon to be obliterated, of what Combray was during the time of my childhood; and, because Combray itself drew them in me before disappearing, they are as moving—if one may compare an obscure portrait to those glorious representations of which my grandmother liked to give me reproductions—as those old engravings of the Last Supper or that painting by Gentile Bellini, in which one sees, in a state in which they no longer exist, da Vinci's masterpiece and the portal of Saint Mark's.<sup>50</sup>

In the rue de l'Oiseau we would pass in front of the old Hôtellerie de Oiseau Flesché, which in the seventeenth century had sometimes seen in its great courtyard the coaches of the Duchesses de Montpensier, de Guermantes, and de Montmorency when they had to come to Combray for some dispute with their tenants or to accept their homage. We would reach the mall, among whose trees the Saint-Hilaire steeple would appear. And I would have liked to be able to sit down and stay there the whole day reading while I listened to the bells; because it was so lovely and tranquil that, when the hour rang, you would have said not that it broke the calm of the day, but that it relieved the day of what it contained and that the steeple, with the indolent, painstaking precision of a person who has nothing else to do, had merely—in order to squeeze out and let fall the few golden drops which had slowly and naturally collected there in the heat—pressed at the proper moment the fullness of the silence.

The greatest charm of the Guermantes way was that we had next to us, almost the whole time, the course of the Vivonne. We crossed it first, ten minutes after leaving the house, on a footbridge called the Pont-Vieux. The day after we arrived, following the sermon on Easter Sunday, if the weather was fine, I would run there to see, amid all the disorder that prevails on the morning of a great festival, when the sumptuous preparations make the household utensils that are still lying about appear more sordid than

usual, the river already promenading along dressed in sky blue between lands still black and bare, accompanied only by a flock of cuckoo-flowers that had arrived early and primroses ahead of their time, while here and there a violet with a blue beak bowed its stem under the weight of the drop of fragrance it held in its throat. The Pont-Vieux led to a towpath which at this spot would be draped in summer with the blue foliage of a hazel under which a fisherman in a straw hat had taken root. In Combray, where I knew which particular farrier or grocer's boy was concealed within the verger's uniform or choirboy's surplice, this fisherman is the only person whose identity I never discovered. He must have known my parents, because he would raise his hat when we passed; I would then try to ask his name, but they would signal me to keep quiet so as not to frighten the fish. We would enter the towpath, which ran along an embankment a few feet above the stream; on the other side the bank was low, extending in vast meadows to the village and to the train station far away. They were strewn with the remains, half buried in the grass, of the château of the old counts of Combray, who during the Middle Ages had had the stream of the Vivonne as defense on this side against the attacks of the lords of Guermantes and the abbots of Martinville. These remains were now no more than a few fragments of towers embossing the grassland, barely apparent, a few battlements from which in the old days the crossbowman would hurl stones, from which the watchman would keep an eye on Novepont, Clairefontaine, Martinville-le-Sec, Bailleul-l'Exempt, all of them vassal lands of Guermantes among which Combray was enclosed, today level with the grass, gazed down upon by the children of the friars' school, who came here to learn their lessons or play at recreation time—a past that had almost descended into the earth, lying by the edge of the water like some hiker enjoying the cool air, but giving me a great deal to think about, making me add to the little town of today, under the name of Combray, a very different town, captivating my thoughts with its incomprehensible face of long ago, which it half concealed under the buttercups. There were a great many of them in this spot, which they had chosen for their games on the grass, solitary, in couples, in groups, yellow as the yellow of an egg, shining all the more, it seemed to me, because, since I could not channel the pleasure which the sight of them gave me into any impulse to taste them, I would let it accumulate in their golden surface, until it became potent enough to produce some useless beauty; and I did this starting from my earliest childhood, when I would stretch my arms out toward them from the towpath though I could not yet correctly spell their pretty name,<sup>21</sup> the name of some prince from a French fairy tale, whereas perhaps they had come from Asia many centuries ago, but were now naturalized for good in the village, content with the modest horizon, liking the sun and the water's edge, faithful to the little view of the station, but still retaining, like some of our old paintings in their folksy simplicity, a poetic luster of the Orient.

I liked to look at the carafes which the boys put in the Vivonne to catch little fish, and which were filled by the river that in turn enclosed them, so that they became at once a "container" with transparent sides like hardened water and a "content" immersed in a larger container of coursing liquid crystal, and evoked the image of coolness more deliciously and vexingly than they would have done on a table laid for dinner, by showing it only in that perpetual alliterative flight between the water without consistency in which my hands could not capture it and the glass without fluidity in which my palate could not enjoy it. I promised myself I would return there later with some fishing lines; I persuaded them to take out a bit of bread from the provisions for our snack; I threw it into the Vivonne in pellets that seemed sufficient to provoke a phenomenon of supersaturation, for the water immediately solidified around them in ovoid clusters of starving tadpoles which until then it had no doubt been holding in solution, invisible, on the point of beginning to crystallize.

Soon the course of the Vivonne is obstructed by water plants. First they appear singly, like this water lily, for instance, which was allowed so little rest by the current in the midst of which it was unfortunately placed that, like a mechanically activated ferry boat, it would approach one bank only to return to the one from which it had come, eternally crossing back and forth again. Pushed toward the bank, its peduncle would unfold, lengthen, flow out, reach the extreme limit of its tension at the edge where the current would pick it up again, then the green cord would fold up on itself and bring the poor plant back to what may all the more properly be called its point of departure because it did not stay there a second without starting off from it again in a repetition of the same maneuver. I would find it again, walk after walk, always in the same situation, reminding me of certain neurasthenics among whose number my grandfather would count my aunt Léonie, who present year after year the unchanging spectacle of the bizarre habits they believe, each time, they are about to shake off and which they retain forever; caught in the machinery of their maladies and their manias, the efforts with which they struggle uselessly to abandon them only guarantee the functioning and activate the triggers of their strange, unavoidable, and morose regimes. This water lily was the same, and it was also like one of those miserable creatures whose singular torment, repeated indefinitely throughout eternity, aroused the curiosity of Dante, who would have asked the tormented creature himself to recount its cause and its particularities at greater length had Virgil, striding on ahead, not forced him to hurry after immediately, as my parents did me.

But farther on the current slows down, it crosses an estate to which access was opened to the public by the man who owned it, who had delighted in creating works of aquatic horticulture, turning the little pools formed by the Vivonne into true flowering gardens of white water lilies. Because the banks were heavily wooded here, the trees' great shadows gave the water a depth that was usually dark green although sometimes, when we came home on an evening that was calm again after a stormy afternoon, I saw that it was a light, raw blue verging on violet, cloisonné in appearance and Japanese in style. Here and there on the surface, the flower of a water lily blushed like a strawberry, with a scarlet heart, white on its edges. Farther off, the more numerous flowers were paler, less smooth, coarser-grained, creased, and grouped by chance in coils so graceful that one thought one saw, floating adrift as after the melancholy dismantling of some gay party, loosened garlands of moss roses. In another place one corner seemed reserved for the various common species, of a tidy white or pink like dame's rocket, washed clean like porcelain with housewifely care, while a little farther off, others, pressed against one another in a true floating flower border, suggested garden pansies that had come like butterflies to rest their glossy blue-tinged wings on the transparent obliquity of that watery bed; of that celestial bed as well: for it gave the flowers a soil of a color more precious, more affecting than the color of the flowers themselves; and, whether it sparkled beneath the water lilies in the afternoon in a kaleidoscope of silent, watchful, and mobile contentment, or whether toward evening it filled, like some distant port, with the rose and reverie of the sunset, ceaselessly changing so as to remain in harmony, around the more fixed colors of the corollas themselves, with all that is most profound, most fleeting, most mysterious—all that is infinite—in the hour, it seemed to have caused them to flower in the middle of the sky itself.

As it left this park, the Vivonne flowed freely again. How often did I see, and want to imitate, as soon as I should be at liberty to live as I chose, a rower who, having let go of his oars, had lain flat on his back, his head down, in the bottom of his boat, and allowing it to drift, seeing only the sky gliding slowly above him, bore on his face a foretaste of happiness and peace!

We would sit down among the irises at the edge of the water. One idle cloud would linger in the holiday sky. Now and then, oppressed by boredom, a carp would stand up from the water with an anxious gasp. It was time for our snack. Before starting off again we would stay there on the grass for a long time eating fruit, bread, and chocolate, and we would hear, coming all the way to us, horizontal, weakened, but still dense and metallic, the peals of the Saint Hilaire bell which had not melted into the air they had been traversing for so long and which, ribbed by the successive palpitation of all their waves of sound, vibrated as they brushed over the flowers, at our feet.

Sometimes, at the edge of the water and surrounded by woods, we would come upon what is called a "vacation house,"<sup>52</sup> isolated and secluded, seeing nothing of the world but the river that bathed its feet. A young woman whose pensive face and elegant veils did not belong to this region and who had probably come to "bury herself" here, as the expression has it, to taste the bitter sweetness of feeling that her name, and more importantly the name of the one whose heart she had not been able to hold fast, were unknown here, stood framed in a window that did not allow her to look farther than the boat moored near the door. She would absently lift her eyes as she heard, behind the trees along the riverbank, the voices of people passing of whom, even before she glimpsed their faces, she could be certain that they had never known the faithless one nor ever would know him, that nothing in their past bore his imprint, that nothing in their future would have occasion to receive it. One sensed that, in her renunciation, she had deliberately withdrawn from places where she might at least have glimpsed the man she loved, in favor of these places which had never seen him. And I watched her, as she came back from some walk on a path along which she knew he would not pass, drawing from her resigned hands long gloves of a useless grace.

Never in our walk along the Guermantes way could we go as far as the sources of the Vivonne, of which I had often thought and which had in my mind an existence so abstract, so ideal, that I had been as surprised when I was told they could be found within the *département*, at a certain distance in miles from Combray, as I was the day I learned there was another precise spot on the earth where the opening lay, in ancient times, of the entrance to the Underworld. Never, either, could we go all the way to the end point that I would so much have liked to reach, all the way to Guermantes. I knew this was where the castellans, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, lived, I knew they were real and presently existing figures, but when I thought about them, I pictured them to myself sometimes made of tapestry, like the Comtesse de Guermantes in our church's *Coronation of Esther*, sometimes in changing colors, like Gilbert the Bad in the stained-glass window where he turned from cabbage green to plum blue, depending on whether I was still in front of the holy water or was reaching our seats, sometimes completely impalpable like the image of Geneviève de Brabant, ancestor of the Guermantes family, which our magic lantern sent wandering over the curtains of my room or up to the ceiling—but always wrapped in the mystery of Merovingian times and bathing as though in a sunset in the orange light emanating from that syllable *antes*. But if despite this they were, as duke and duchess, real human beings for me, even if strange ones, on the other hand their ducal person was inordinately distended, became immaterial, in order to contain within itself this Guermantes of which they were duke and duchess, all this sunlit "Guermantes way," the course of the Vivonne, its water lilies and its tall trees, and so many lovely afternoons. And I knew that they did not merely bear the title of Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, but that since the fourteenth century when, after uselessly trying to defeat its former lords, they had formed an alliance with them through marriages, they were also Comtes de Combray, and thus the foremost citizens of Combray, and yet the only ones who did not live there. Comtes de Combray, possessing Combray in the midst of their name, of their person, and no doubt actually having within them that strange and pious sadness that was special to Combray; proprietors in the town, but not of a private house, probably dwelling outdoors, in the street, between sky and earth, like Gilbert de Guermantes, of whom I could see, in the windows of the apse of Saint-Hilaire, only the reverse side, of black lake, if I raised my head as I went to get salt at Camus's.

And along the Guermantes way I would sometimes pass damp little enclosures over which climbed clusters of dark flowers. I would stop, thinking I was about to acquire some precious idea, because it seemed to me that there before my eyes I possessed a fragment of that fluvial region I had so much wanted to know ever since I had seen it described by one of my favorite writers. And it was with this, with its imaginary ground traversed by currents of seething water, that Guermantes, changing its appearance in my mind, was identified when I heard Dr. Percepied talk to us about the flowers and beautiful spring waters that could be seen in the park of their country house. I dreamed that Mme. de Guermantes had summoned me there, smitten with a sudden fancy for me; all day long she would fish for trout with me. And in the evening, holding me by the hand as we walked past the little gardens of her vassals, she would show me the flowers that leaned their violet and red stems along the low walls, and would teach me their names. She would make me tell her the subjects of the poems that I intended to compose. And these dreams warned me that since I wanted to be a writer someday, it was time to find out what I meant to write. But as soon as I asked myself this, trying to find a subject in which I could anchor some infinite philosophical meaning, my mind would stop functioning, I could no longer see anything but empty space before my attentive eyes, I felt that I had no talent or perhaps a disease of the brain kept it from being born. Sometimes I counted on my father to make it all come out right. He was so powerful, in such favor with people in office, that he had succeeded in having us transgress the laws that Françoise had taught me to consider more ineluctable than the laws of life and death, to procure for our house alone, in the whole neighborhood, a year's postponement of the work of "replastering," to obtain permission from the minister for Mme. Sazerat's son, who wanted to go take the waters, to pass his *baccalauréat* two months ahead of time, in the series of candidates whose names began with *A*, instead of waiting for the turn of the *Ss*. If I had fallen seriously ill, if I had been captured by bandits, convinced that my father was in too close communication with the supreme powers, had letters of recommendation to the Good Lord too irresistible for my illness or captivity to be anything but empty simulacra that posed no danger to me, I would have waited calmly for the inevitable hour of my return to the correct reality, the hour of my rescue or recovery; perhaps my lack of talent, the black hole that opened in my mind when I looked for the subject of my future writings, was also merely an illusion without substance, and this illusion would cease through the intervention of my father, who must have agreed with the government and Providence that I would be the foremost writer of the day. But at other times, as my parents grew impatient at the sight of me lingering behind and

not following them, my present life, instead of seeming to me an artificial creation of my father's that he could modify as he liked, appeared to me on the contrary to be included in a reality that had not been made for me, against which there was no recourse, within which I had no ally, which concealed nothing beyond itself. At those times it seemed to me that I existed the same way other men did, that I would grow old, that I would die like them, and that among them I was simply one of those who have no aptitude for writing. And so, discouraged, I would give up literature forever, despite the encouragement I had been given by Bloch. This intimate, immediate awareness I had of the worthlessness of my ideas prevailed against all the praise that might be heaped on me, as do, in a wicked man whose good deeds are universally commended, the qualms of his conscience.

One day my mother said to me: "You're always talking about Mme. de Guermantes. Well, because Dr. Percepied took such good care of her four years ago she's coming to Combray to attend his daughter's wedding. You'll be able to see her at the ceremony." It was from Dr. Percepied, in fact, that I had heard the most talk about Mme. de Guermantes, and he had even shown us an issue of an illustrated magazine in which she was depicted in the costume she wore to a fancy-dress ball at the home of the Princesse de Léon.

Suddenly during the wedding service, a movement made by the verger as he shifted his position allowed me to see, sitting in a chapel, a blond lady with a large nose, piercing blue eyes, a full tie of smooth, shiny, new mauve silk, and a little pimple at the corner of her nose. And because on the surface of her face, which was red, as though she were very warm, I could distinguish bits of resemblance, diluted and barely perceptible, to the picture I had been shown, especially because the particular features that I observed in her, if I tried to enunciate them, were formulated in exactly the same words—a large nose, blue eyes—which Dr. Percepied had used when he described the Duchesse de Guermantes in my presence, I said to myself: "That lady looks like Mme. de Guermantes"; now the chapel where she was attending Mass was that of Gilbert the Bad, under the flat tombstones of which, golden and distended like cells of honey, rested the former counts of Brabant, and which, I recalled, was reserved, according to what I had been told, for the Guermantes family when any one of its members came to Combray for a ceremony; there probably could not be more than one woman who resembled Mme. de Guermantes's picture, who on that day, the very day when she was in fact supposed to come, was in that chapel: it was she! I was very disappointed. My disappointment came from the fact that I had never noticed, when I thought of Mme. de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in the colors of a tapestry or a stained-glass window, in another century, of a material different from that of other living people. I had never realized that she might have a red face, a mauve tie like Mme. Sazerat, and the oval of her cheeks reminded me so much of people I had seen at our house that the suspicion touched me, dissipating immediately, however, that this lady, in her generative principle, in all her molecules, was perhaps not essentially the Duchesse de Guermantes, that instead, her body, unaware of the name applied to it, belonged to a certain female type that also included the wives of doctors and shopkeepers. "So that's Mme. de Guermantes—that's what she is, that's all she is!" said the attentive and astonished expression with which I contemplated an image of course quite unrelated to those which under the same name of Mme. de Guermantes had appeared so many times in my daydreams, since this one, this particular one, had not like the others been arbitrarily created by me, but had leaped to my eyes for the first time just a moment before, in the church; an image which was not of the same kind, was not colorable at will like those which had so readily absorbed the orange tint of a syllable, but was so real that everything, even the little pimple flaring up at the corner of her nose, attested to its subjection to the laws of life, just as, in a transformation scene in a theater, a fold of the fairy's dress, a trembling of her little finger, betray the physical presence of a living actress, whereas we had not been sure if we were not looking at a simple projection of light.

But at the same time, I was trying to apply to this image, which the prominent nose, the piercing eyes pinned into my vision (perhaps because it was they that had first reached it, that had made the first notch in it, at a moment when I had not yet had time to imagine that the woman who appeared before me could be Mme. de Guermantes), to this entirely recent, unchangeable image, the idea: "It's Mme. de Guermantes," without managing to do more than maneuver it in front of the image, like two disks separated by a gap. But this Mme. de Guermantes of whom I had so often dreamed, now that I could see that she actually existed outside of me, acquired from this an even greater power over my imagination, which, paralyzed for a moment by this contact with a reality so different from what it had expected, began to react and say to me: "Glorious since before Charlemagne, the Guermantes had the right of life and death over their vassals; the Duchesse de Guermantes is a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant. She does not know, nor would she consent to know, any of the people here."

And—oh, the marvelous independence of the human gaze, tied to the face by a cord so lax, so long, so extensible that it can travel out alone far away from it—while Mme. de Guermantes sat in the chapel above the tombs of her dead, her gaze strolled here and there, climbed up the pillars, paused even on me like a ray of sunlight wandering through the nave, but a ray of sunlight which, at the moment I received its caress, seemed to me conscious. As for Mme. de Guermantes herself, since she remained motionless, sitting there like a mother who does not appear to see the bold pranks and indiscreet enterprises of her children, who play and call out to people she does not know, it was impossible for me to tell if she approved or disapproved, in the idleness of her soul, of the vagabondage of her gaze.

I felt it was important that she not leave before I had looked at her enough, because I remembered that for years now I had considered the sight of her eminently desirable, and I did not detach my eyes from her, as if each gaze could physically carry away, and put in reserve inside me, the memory of that prominent nose, those red cheeks, all the particular details that seemed to me so many precious, authentic, and singular pieces of information about her face. Now that I was impelled to consider it beautiful by all the thoughts I had brought to bear on it—and perhaps most of all by what is a kind of instinct to preserve the best parts of ourselves, by the desire we always have not to be disappointed—placing her once again (since she and that Duchesse de Guermantes whom I had evoked until then were one and the same) above the rest of humanity among whom the pure and simple sight of her body had for a moment made me confound her, I was irritated to hear people around me say: "She's better looking than Mme. Sazerat, she's better looking than Mlle. Vinteuil," as if she were comparable to them. And as my gaze stopped at her blond hair, her blue eyes, the fastening of her collar, and omitted the features that might have reminded me of other faces, I exclaimed in front of this sketch, deliberately incomplete: "How beautiful she is! How noble! What I see before me is indeed a proud Guermantes and a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant!" And the attention with which I illuminated her face isolated her to such an extent that today, if I think back to that ceremony, it is impossible for me to see a single one of the people who were



present except for her and the verger who responded affirmatively when I asked him if that lady was really Mme. de Guermantes. But I can still see her, especially at the moment when the procession entered the sacristy, which was lit by the hot and intermittent sun of a day of wind and storm, and in which Mme. de Guermantes found herself surrounded by all those people of Combray whose names she did not even know, but whose inferiority too loudly proclaimed her supremacy for her not to feel a sincere benevolence toward them, and whom, besides, she hoped to impress even more by her good grace and simplicity. Thus, not being able to bestow those deliberate gazes charged with specific meaning which we address to someone we know, but only to allow her distracted thoughts to break free incessantly before her in a wave of blue light which she could not contain, she did not want that wave to disturb or appear to disdain those common people whom it encountered in passing, whom it touched again and again. I can still see, above her silky, swelling mauve tie, the gentle surprise in her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to intend it for anyone but so that all might take their share of it, the slightly shy smile of a sovereign who looks as though she is apologizing to her vassals and loves them. That smile fell on me, who had not taken my eyes off her. Recalling, then, the gaze she had rested on me during the Mass, as blue as a ray of sunlight passing through Gilbert the Bad's window, I said to myself: "Why, she's actually paying attention to me." I believed that she liked me, that she would still be thinking of me after she had left the church, that because of me perhaps she would be sad that evening at Guermantes. And immediately I loved her, because if it may sometimes be enough for us to fall in love with a woman if she looks at us with contempt, as I had thought Mlle. Swann had done, and if we think she will never belong to us, sometimes, too, it may be enough if she looks at us with kindness, as Mme. de Guermantes was doing, and if we think she may someday belong to us. Her eyes turned as blue as a periwinkle which was impossible to pick, yet which she had dedicated to me; and the sun, threatened by a cloud but still beating down with all its strength on the square and in the sacristy, gave a geranium flesh tint to the red carpets that had been laid on the ground for the solemnities and over which Mme. de Guermantes advanced smiling, and added to their woolly weave a rosy velvet, an epidermis of light, the sort of tenderness, the sort of grave sweetness amid pomp and joy that characterize certain pages of *Lohengrin*,<sup>53</sup> certain paintings by Carpaccio,<sup>54</sup> and that explain why Baudelaire<sup>55</sup> was able to apply to the sound of the trumpet the epithet *delicious*.

How much more distressing still, after that day, during my walks along the Guermantes way, did it seem to me than it had seemed before to have no aptitude for literature, and to have to give up all hope of ever being a famous writer! The sorrow I felt over this, as I daydreamed alone, a little apart from the others, made me suffer so much that in order not to feel it anymore, my mind of its own accord, by a sort of inhibition in the face of pain, would stop thinking altogether about poems, novels, a poetic future on which my lack of talent forbade me to depend. Then, quite apart from all these literary preoccupations and not connected to them in any way, suddenly a roof, a glimmer of sun on a stone, the smell of the road would stop me because of a particular pleasure they gave me, and also because they seemed to be concealing, beyond what I could see, something which they were inviting me to come take and which despite my efforts I could not manage to discover. Since I felt that it could be found within them, I would stay there, motionless, looking, breathing, trying to go with my thoughts beyond the image or the smell. And if I had to catch up with my grandfather, continue on my way, I would try to find them again by closing my eyes; I would concentrate on recalling precisely the line of the roof, the shade of the stone which, without my being able to understand why, had seemed to me so full, so ready to open, to yield me the thing for which they themselves were merely a cover. Of course it was not impressions of this kind that could give me back the hope I had lost, of succeeding in becoming a writer and a poet someday, because they were always tied to a particular object with no intellectual value and no reference to any abstract truth. But at least they gave me an unreasoning pleasure, the illusion of a sort of fecundity, and so distracted me from the tedium, from the sense of my own impotence which I had felt each time I looked for a philosophical subject for a great literary work. But so arduous was the task imposed on my consciousness by the impressions I received from form, fragrance or color—to try to perceive what was concealed behind them—that I would soon look for excuses that would allow me to save myself from this effort and spare myself this fatigue. Fortunately, my parents would call me, I would feel I did not have the tranquillity I needed at the moment for pursuing my search in a useful way, and that it would be better not to think about it anymore until I was back at home, and not to fatigue myself beforehand to no purpose. And so I would stop concerning myself with this unknown thing that was enveloped in a form or a fragrance, feeling quite easy in my mind since I was bringing it back to the house protected by the covering of images under which I would find it alive, like the fish that, on days when I had been allowed to go fishing, I would carry home in my creel covered by a layer of grass that kept them fresh. Once I was back at the house I would think about other things, and so there would accumulate in my mind (as in my room the flowers I had gathered on my walks or objects I had been given) a stone on which a glimmer of light played, a roof, the sound of a bell, a smell of leaves, many different images beneath which the reality I sensed but did not have enough determination to discover had died long before. Once, however—when our walk had extended far beyond its usual duration and we were very happy to encounter halfway home, as the afternoon was ending, Dr. Percepied, who, going past at full speed in his carriage, recognized us and invited us to climb in with him—I had an impression of this kind and did not abandon it without studying it a little. They had had me climb up next to the coachman, we were going like the wind because, before returning to Combray, the doctor still had to stop at Martinville-le-Sec to see a patient at whose door it had been agreed that we would wait for him. At the bend of a road I suddenly experienced that special pleasure which was unlike any other, when I saw the two steeples of Martinville, shining in the setting sun and appearing to change position with the motion of our carriage and the windings of the road, and then the steeple of Vieuxvicq, which, though separated from them by a hill and a valley and situated on a higher plateau in the distance, seemed to be right next to them.

As I observed, as I noted the shape of their spires, the shifting of their lines, the sunlight on their surfaces, I felt that I was not reaching the full depth of my impression, that something was behind that motion, that brightness, something which they seemed at once to contain and conceal.

The steeples appeared so distant, and we seemed to approach them so slowly, that I was surprised when we stopped a few moments later in front of the Martinville church. I did not know why I had taken such pleasure in the sight of them on the horizon and the obligation to try to discover the reason seemed to me quite painful; I wanted to hold in reserve in my head those lines moving in the sun, and not think about them anymore now. And it is quite likely that had I done so, the two steeples would have gone forever to join the many trees, rooftops, fragrances, sounds, that I had distinguished from others because of the



obscure pleasure they gave me which I never thoroughly studied. I got down to talk to my parents while we waited for the doctor. Then we set off again, I was back in my place on the seat, I turned my head to see the steeples again, a little later glimpsing them one last time at a bend in the road. Since the coachman, who did not seem inclined to talk, had hardly answered anything I said, I was obliged, for lack of other company, to fall back on my own and try to recall my steeples. Soon their lines and their sunlit surfaces split apart, as if they were a sort of bark, a little of what was hidden from me inside them appeared to me, I had a thought which had not existed a moment before, which took shape in words in my head, and the pleasure I had just recently experienced at the sight of them was so increased by this that, seized by a sort of drunkenness, I could no longer think of anything else. At that moment, as we were already far away from Martinville, turning my head I caught sight of them again, quite black this time, for the sun had already set. At moments the bends of the road would hide them from me, then they showed themselves one last time, and finally I did not see them again.

Without saying to myself that what was hidden behind the steeples of Martinville had to be something analogous to a pretty sentence, since it had appeared to me in the form of words that gave me pleasure, I asked the doctor for a pencil and some paper and I composed, despite the jolts of the carriage, and in order to ease my conscience and yield to my enthusiasm, the following little piece that I have since found again and that I have not had to submit to more than a few changes:

"Alone, rising from the level of the plain, and appearing lost in the open country, the two steeples of Martinville ascended toward the sky. Soon we saw three: wheeling around boldly to position itself opposite them, the laggard steeple of Vieuxvicq had come along to join them. The minutes were passing, we were going fast, and yet the three steeples were still far away ahead of us, like three birds poised on the plain, motionless, distinguishable in the sunlight. Then the steeple of Vieuxvicq moved away, receded into the distance, and the steeples of Martinville remained alone, illuminated by the light of the setting sun, which even at that distance I saw playing and smiling on their sloping sides. We had taken so long approaching them that I was thinking about the time we would still need in order to reach them, when suddenly the carriage turned and set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so roughly in front of it that we had only just time to stop in order not to run into the porch. We continued on our way; we had already left Martinville a little while before, and the village, after accompanying us for a few seconds, had disappeared, when, lingering alone on the horizon to watch us flee, its steeples and that of Vieuxvicq still waved good-bye with their sunlit tops. At times one of them would draw aside so that the other two could glimpse us again for an instant; but the road changed direction, they swung around in the light like three golden pivots and disappeared from my gaze. But a little later, when we were already close to Combray, and the sun had set, I caught sight of them one last time from very far away, seeming now no more than three flowers painted on the sky above the low line of the fields. They reminded me, too, of the three young girls in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place where darkness was already falling; and while we moved off at a gallop, I saw them timidly seek their way and, after some awkward stumbling of their noble silhouettes, press against one another, slip behind one another, now forming, against the still pink sky, no more than a single black shape, charming and resigned, and fade away into the night." I never thought of this page again, but at that moment, when in the corner of the seat where the doctor's coachman usually placed in a basket the poultry he had bought at the market in Martinville, I had finished writing it, I was so happy, I felt it had so perfectly relieved me of those steeples and what they had been hiding behind them, that, as if I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice.

All day long, during those walks, I had been able to dream about what a pleasure it would be to be a friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes, to fish for trout, to go out in a boat on the Vivonne, and, greedy for happiness, ask no more from life in those moments than for it always to be made up of a succession of happy afternoons. But when on the way back I saw on the left a farm which was fairly distant from two others very close to each other, and from which, in order to enter Combray, one had only to go down an avenue of oaks bordered on one side by meadows, each of which was part of a little enclosure and was planted at equal intervals with apple trees that wore, when they were lit by the setting sun, the Japanese design of their shadows, my heart would abruptly begin to beat faster, I would know that within half an hour we would be home and that, as was the rule on the days when we had gone the Guermantes way and dinner was served later, they would send me to bed as soon as I had had my soup, so that my mother, kept at the table as though there were company for dinner, would not come up to say goodnight to me in my bed. The region of sadness I had just entered was as distinct from the region into which I had hurled myself with such joy only a moment before, as in certain skies a band of pink is separated as though by a line from a band of green or black. One sees a bird fly into the pink, it is about to reach the end of it, it is nearly touching the black, then it has entered it. The desires that had surrounded me a short time ago, to go to Guermantes, to travel, to be happy, were so far behind me now that their fulfillment would not have brought me any pleasure. How I would have given all that up in order to be able to cry all night in Mama's arms! I was trembling, I did not take my anguished eyes off my mother's face, which would not be appearing that evening in the room where I could already see myself in my thoughts, I wanted to die. And that state of mind would continue until the following day, when the morning rays, like the gardener, would lean their bars against the wall clothed in nasturtiums that climbed up to my window, and I would jump out of bed to hurry down into the garden, without remembering, now, that evening would ever bring back with it the hour for leaving my mother. And so it was from the Guermantes way that I learned to distinguish those states of mind that follow one another in me, during certain periods, and that even go so far as to share out each day among them, one returning to drive out the other, with the punctuality of a fever; contiguous, but so exterior to one another, so lacking in means of communication among them, that I can no longer comprehend, no longer even picture to myself in one, what I desired, or dreaded, or accomplished in the other.

And so the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way remain for me linked to many of the little events of that life which, of all the various lives we lead concurrently, is the most abundant in vicissitudes, the richest in episodes, I mean our intellectual life. No doubt it progresses within us imperceptibly, and the truths that have changed its meaning and its appearance for us, that have opened new paths to us, we had been preparing to discover for a long time; but we did so without knowing it; and for us they date only from the day, from the minute in which they became visible. The flowers that played on the grass then, the water that flowed past in the sunlight, the whole landscape that surrounded their appearance continues to accompany the memory of them with its unconscious or abstracted face; and certainly when they were slowly studied by that humble passerby, that child dreaming—as a king is studied by a memorialist lost in the crowd—that corner of nature, that bit of garden could not have

believed it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the fragrance of hawthorn that forages along the hedge where the sweetbriars will soon replace it, a sound of echoless steps on the gravel of a path, a bubble formed against a water plant by the current of the stream and bursting immediately—my exaltation has borne them along with it and managed to carry them across so many years in succession, while the paths round about have disappeared and those who walked on them have died, and the memory of those who walked on them. At times the piece of landscape thus transported into the present detaches itself in such isolation from everything else that it floats uncertain in my mind like a flowery Delos,<sup>56</sup> while I cannot say from which country, which time—perhaps quite simply which dream—it comes. But it is most especially as deep layers of my mental soil, as the firm ground on which I still stand, that I must think of the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way. It is because I believed in things and in people while I walked along them, that the things and people they revealed to me are the only ones that I still take seriously today and that still bring me joy. Whether it is that the faith which creates has dried up in me, or that reality takes shape in memory alone, the flowers I am shown today for the first time do not seem to me to be real flowers. The Méséglise way with its lilacs, its hawthorns, its cornflowers, its poppies, its apple trees, the Guermantes way with its river full of tadpoles, its water lilies and buttercups, formed for me for all time the contours of the countrysides where I would like to live, where I demand above all else that I may go fishing, drift about in a boat, see ruins of Gothic fortifications, and find among the wheat fields a church, like Saint-André-des-Champs, monumental, rustic, and golden as a haystack; and the cornflowers, the hawthorns, the apple trees that I still happen, when traveling, to come upon in the fields, because they are situated at the same depth, on the level of my past, communicate immediately with my heart. And yet, because places have something individual about them, when I am seized by the desire to see the Guermantes way again, you would not satisfy it by taking me to the bank of a river where the water lilies were just as beautiful, more beautiful than in the Vivonne, any more than on my return home in the evening—at the hour when there awakened in me that anguish which later emigrates into love, and may become forever inseparable from it—I would have wished that the mother who came to say goodnight to me would be one more beautiful and more intelligent than my own. No; just as what I needed so that I could go to sleep happy, with that untroubled peace which no mistress has been able to give me since that time because one doubts them even at the moment one believes in them, and can never possess their hearts as I received in a kiss my mother's heart, complete, without the reservation of an afterthought, without the residue of an intention that was not for me—was that it should be her, that she should incline over me that face marked below the eye by something which was, it seems, a blemish, and which I loved as much as the rest, so what I want to see again is the Guermantes way that I knew, with the farm that is not very far from the two that come after pressed so close together, at the entrance to the avenue of oaks; those meadows on which, when the sun turns them reflective as a pond, the leaves of the apple trees are sketched, that landscape whose individuality sometimes, at night in my dreams, clasps me with an almost uncanny power and which I can no longer recover when I wake up. No doubt, by virtue of having forever indissolubly united in me different impressions merely because they had made me experience them at the same time, the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way exposed me, for the future, to many disappointments and even to many mistakes. For often I have wanted to see a person again without discerning that it was simply because she reminded me of a hedge of hawthorns, and I have been led to believe, to make someone else believe, in a revival of affection, by what was simply a desire to travel. But because of that very fact, too, and by persisting in those of my impressions of today to which they may be connected, they give them foundations, depth, a dimension lacking from the others. They add to them, too, a charm, a meaning that is for me alone. When on summer evenings the melodious sky growls like a wild animal and everyone grumbles at the storm, it is because of the Méséglise way that I am the only one in ecstasy inhaling, through the noise of the falling rain, the smell of invisible, enduring lilacs.

Thus I would often lie until morning thinking back to the time at Combray, to my sad sleepless evenings, to the many days, too, whose image had been restored to me more recently by the taste—what they would have called at Combray the “fragrance”—of a cup of tea, and, by an association of memories, to what, many years after leaving that little town, I had learned, about a love affair Swann had had before I was born, with that precision of detail which is sometimes easier to obtain for the lives of people who died centuries ago than for the lives of our best friends, and which seems as impossible as it once seemed impossible to speak from one town to another—as long as we do not know about the expedient by which that impossibility was circumvented. All these memories added to one another now formed a single mass, but one could still distinguish between them—between the oldest, and those that were more recent, born of a fragrance, and then those that were only memories belonging to another person from whom I had learned them—if not fissures, if not true faults, at least that veining, that variegation of coloring, which in certain rocks, in certain marbles, reveal differences in origin, in age, in “formation.”

Of course by the time morning approached, the brief uncertainty of my waking would long since have dissipated. I knew which room I was actually in, I had reconstructed it around me in the darkness and—either by orienting myself with memory alone, or by making use, as a clue, of a faint glimmer that I perceived, under which I placed the casement curtains—I had reconstructed it entirely and furnished it like an architect and a decorator who retain the original openings of the windows and doors, I had put back the mirrors and restored the chest of drawers to its usual place. But scarcely had the daylight—and no longer the reflection of a last ember on the brass curtain rod which I had mistaken for it—traced on the darkness, as though in chalk, its first white, correcting ray, than the window along with its curtains would leave the doorframe in which I had mistakenly placed it, while, to make room for it, the desk which my memory had clumsily moved there would fly off at top speed, pushing the fireplace before it and thrusting aside the wall of the passageway; a small courtyard would extend in the spot where only a moment before the dressing room had been, and the dwelling I had rebuilt in the darkness would have gone off to join the dwellings glimpsed in the maelstrom of my awakening, put to flight by the pale sign traced above the curtains by the raised finger of the dawn.

## PART III

### *Place-Names: The Name*

AMONG THE BEDROOMS whose images I summoned up most often in my nights of insomnia, none resembled less the rooms at Combray, dusted with an atmosphere that was grainy, pollinated, edible, and devout, than the room at the Grand-Hôtel de la Plage, at Balbec, whose enamel-painted walls contained, like the polished sides of a swimming pool which tints the water blue, a pure azure salt sea air. The Bavarian decorator commissioned to furnish the hotel had varied the design schemes of the rooms and on three sides, along the walls, in the one I was occupying, had placed low bookcases, with glass panes, in which, depending on the spot they occupied, and by an effect he had not foreseen, one part or another of the changing picture of the sea was reflected, unfurling a frieze of bright seascapes, which was interrupted only by the solid pieces of mahogany. So much so that the whole room had the look of one of those model dormitories presented in “*modern style*”<sup>1</sup> furniture shows, where they are hung with works of art assumed to be likely to delight the eyes of the person who will be sleeping there, and representing subjects in keeping with the type of site where the room will be found.

But nothing resembled less this real Balbec, either, than the one I had often dreamed of, on stormy days, when the wind was so strong that Françoise as she took me to the Champs-Élysées warned me not to walk too close to the walls or the tiles might fall on my head and moaned to me about the great disasters and shipwrecks reported in the newspapers. I had no greater desire than to see a storm at sea, not so much because it would be a beautiful spectacle as because it would be a moment of nature’s real life unveiled; or rather for me there were no beautiful spectacles except the ones which I knew were not artificially contrived for my pleasure, but were necessary, unchangeable—the beauties of landscapes or of great art. I was curious, I was avid to know only those things which I believed to be more real than myself, which had for me the value of showing me a little of the mind of a great genius, or of the force or grace of nature as it is manifested when left to itself, without the interference of men. Just as the lovely sound of her voice, reproduced in isolation by the phonograph, would not console us for having lost our mother, so too a storm mechanically imitated would have left me as indifferent as the illuminated fountains at the Exposition.<sup>2</sup> And so that the storm would be absolutely real, I also wanted the shore itself to be a natural shore, not a pier recently built by some municipality. In fact, because of all the feelings it awakened in me, nature seemed to me the thing most opposite to the mechanical productions of men. The less it bore their imprint the more room it offered in which my heart could expand. Now, I had remembered the name Balbec, which had been mentioned to us by Legrandin, as that of a seaside resort very close to “those funereal cliffs, famous for their many wrecks, wrapped six months of the year in a shroud of fog and the foam of the waves.”

“In that place you can still feel beneath your feet,” he said, “far more so than at Finistère itself”<sup>3</sup> (and even though hotels are being superimposed upon it now without, however, the power to change the more ancient skeleton of the land), you can still feel the true end of the land of France, of Europe, of the Ancient World. And it’s the last encampment of fishermen, precisely like all the fishermen who have ever lived since the beginning of the world, facing the eternal realm of the mists of the sea and the shadows of the night.” One day when, at Combray, I had mentioned this seaside resort of Balbec in the presence of M. Swann in order to find out from him if it was the choicest spot for seeing the most powerful storms, he had answered me: “Yes indeed I certainly know Balbec! The church at Balbec, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, still half Romanesque, is perhaps the most curious example of our Norman Gothic, and so singular! It’s almost Persian in style.” And that region, which until then had seemed to me similar in nature to the immemorial, still contemporaneous great phenomena of geology—and just as completely outside human history as the Ocean itself or the Great Bear,<sup>4</sup> with those wild fishermen for whom no more than for the whales had there been any Middle Ages—it had been a great delight for me to see it suddenly take its place in the sequence of the centuries, now that it had experienced the Romanesque period, and to know that the Gothic trefoil had come at the proper time to pattern those wild rocks too, like the frail but hardy plants which, when spring comes, spangle here and there the polar snow. And if the Gothic brought to those places and to those men a definition which they lacked, they too conferred one upon it in return. I tried to picture how those fishermen had lived, the timid and unsuspected attempt at social relations which they had made there, during the Middle Ages, clustered on a point along the shores of hell, at the foot of the cliffs of death; and the Gothic seemed to me more alive now that, having separated it from the towns in which until then I had always imagined it, I could see how, in one particular case, on those wild rocks, it had germinated and flowered into a delicate steeple. I was taken to see reproductions of the most famous of the statues at Balbec—the fleecy snub-nosed apostles, the Virgin in the porch—and my breathing stopped in my chest for joy when I thought that I could see them modeled in relief against the eternal briny mist. Then, on the sweet stormy evenings of February, the wind—blowing into my heart, which trembled under its gusts no less powerfully than my bedroom chimney, the plan of a trip to Balbec—mingled in me a desire for Gothic architecture with my desire for a tempest at sea.

I would have liked to leave the very next day on the handsome, generous 1:22 train whose hour of departure I could never read without a palpitating heart, in the railway company’s advertisements or in announcements for circular tours: it seemed to me

to incise at a precise point in the afternoon a delectable notch, a mysterious mark from which the diverted hours, though they still led to the evening, to the next morning, led to an evening and morning which one would see, not in Paris, but in one of those towns through which the train passes and among which it permitted us to choose; for it stopped at Bayeux, at Coutances, at Vitré, at Questambert, at Pontorson, at Balbec, at Lannion, at Lamballe, at Benodet, at Pont-Aven, at Quimperlé, and moved on magnificently overloaded with proffered names so that, among them all, I did not know which one I would have preferred, so impossible was it to sacrifice any of them. But without even waiting for it, I could have, by dressing quickly, left that very evening, if my parents had allowed me, and arrived at Balbec when the morning twilight was rising over the furious sea, from whose volleys of foam I would take refuge in the Persian-style church. But at the approach of the Easter holidays, when my parents promised to let me spend them for once in the north of Italy, now, in place of those dreams of tempests by which I had been so entirely occupied, wanting to see only waves running in from all sides, higher and higher, on the wildest coast, near churches as steep and rugged as cliffs, from whose towers the seabirds would shriek, now suddenly erasing them, taking away all their charm, excluding them because they were its opposite and could only have weakened it, the converse dream now occupied me, of the most dappled spring, not the spring of Combray which still pricked us tartly with all the needles of the frost, but the spring which was already covering the fields of Fiesole with lilies and anemones and dazzling Florence with golden grounds like those of Fra Angelico. From then on, only sunlight, perfumes, colors seemed to me of any value; for this alternation of images had brought about a change of direction in my desire, and—as abrupt as those that occur now and then in music—a complete change of tone in my sensibility. Thus it came about that a simple variation in the atmosphere was enough to provoke this modulation in me without any need to wait for the return of a season. For often, in one season, we find a day that has strayed from another and that immediately evokes its particular pleasures, lets us experience them, makes us desire them, and interrupts the dreams we were having by placing, earlier or later than was its turn, this leaf detached from another chapter, in the interpolated calendar of Happiness. But soon, like those natural phenomena from which our comfort or health can derive only an accidental and rather slender benefit until the day when science seizes hold of them, and producing them at will, puts into our hands the possibility of their appearance, withdrawn from the guardianship and exempted from the consent of chance, in the same way the production of those dreams of the Atlantic and of Italy ceased to be subjected solely to the changes of the seasons and of the weather. I needed only, to make them reappear, to pronounce those names—Balbec, Venice, Florence—in the interior of which had finally accumulated the desire inspired in me by the places they designated. Even in spring, finding the name of Balbec in a book was enough to awaken in me the desire for storms and Norman Gothic; even on a stormy day the name of Florence or Venice gave me a desire for the sun, for lilies, for the Palace of the Doges, and for Saint-Mary-of-the-Flowers.<sup>5</sup>

But if these names absorbed forever the image I had of these towns, it was only by transforming that image, by subjecting its reappearance in me to their own laws; in consequence of this they made it more beautiful, but also more different from what the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could be in reality, and, by increasing the arbitrary joys of my imagination, aggravated the future disappointment of my travels. They exalted the idea I was forming of certain places on the earth, by making them more particular, consequently more real. I did not at the time represent to myself cities, landscapes, monuments as more or less pleasant pictures, cut out here and there from the same material, but each of them as an unknown thing, different in essence from the others, a thing for which my soul thirsted and which it would profit from knowing. How much more individuality still did they assume from being designated by names, names that were theirs alone, proper names like the names people have. Words present us with little pictures of things, clear and familiar, like those that are hung on the walls of schools to give children an example of what a workbench is, a bird, an anthill, things conceived of as similar to all others of the same sort. But names present a confused image of people—and of towns, which they accustom us to believe are individual, unique like people—an image which derives from them, from the brightness or darkness of their tone, the color with which it is painted uniformly, like one of those posters, entirely blue or entirely red, in which, because of the limitations of the process used or by a whim of the designer, not only the sky and the sea are blue or red, but the boats, the church, the people in the streets. Because the name of Parma, one of the towns I had most wanted to visit ever since I had read *La Chartreuse*,<sup>6</sup> seemed to me compact, smooth, mauve, and soft, if anyone mentioned a certain house in Parma in which I would be staying, he gave me the pleasure of thinking I would be living in a house that was smooth, compact, mauve, and soft, that bore no relation to the houses of any real town in Italy, since I had composed it in my imagination with the help only of that heavy syllable, *Parme*, in which no air circulates, and of all that I had made it absorb of Stendhalian softness and the tint of violets. And when I thought of Florence, it was of a town miraculously fragrant and like the petals of a flower, because it was called the City of Lilies and its cathedral Saint-Mary-of-the-Flowers. As for Balbec, it was one of those names in which, as on a piece of old Norman pottery that retains the color of the earth from which it was taken, one can still see depicted the representation of some outmoded custom, of some feudal right, of some locality in an earlier condition, of an abandoned habit of pronunciation which had formed its heteroclitc syllables and which I did not doubt I would rediscover spoken there even by the innkeeper who would serve me coffee with milk on my arrival, taking me down to watch the furious sea in front of the church, and to whom I would ascribe the disputatious, solemn, and medieval aspect of a character from a fabliau.<sup>7</sup>

If my health improved and my parents allowed me, if not to go stay in Balbec, at least to take just once, in order to acquaint myself with the architecture and landscapes of Normandy or Brittany, that one-twenty-two train which I had boarded so many times in my imagination, I would have wished by preference to stop in the most beautiful towns; but compare them as I might, how could I choose, any more than between individual people, who are not interchangeable, between Bayeux, so lofty in its noble red-tinged lace, its summit illuminated by the old gold of its last syllable; Vitré,<sup>8</sup> whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with black wood lozenges; gentle Lamballe, whose whiteness goes from eggshell yellow to pearl gray; Coutances, a Norman cathedral, which its final, fat, yellowing diphthong crowns with a tower of butter; Lannion with the sound, in its village silence, of the coach followed by the fly;<sup>9</sup> Questambert, Pontorson, naive and ridiculous, white feathers and yellow beaks scattered along the road to those poetic river spots; Benodet, a name scarcely moored, which the river seems to want to carry away among its algae; Pont-Aven, a pink-and-white flight of the wing of a lightly poised coif reflected trembling in the greeny waters of a canal; Quimperlé, more firmly attached, ever since the Middle Ages, among the streams about which it babbles as they bead it with a

pearly grisaille like that which is sketched, through the spiderwebs of a stained-glass window, by rays of sunlight which have turned into blunted points of burnished silver?

These images were false for another reason also; namely that they were necessarily quite simplified; doubtless whatever it was that my imagination aspired to and that my senses took in only incompletely and without any immediate pleasure, I had enclosed in the sanctuary of a name; doubtless because I had accumulated there a store of dreams, these names now magnetized my desires; but names themselves are not very spacious; the most I could do was include in them two or three of the towns' principal curiosities, which would be juxtaposed there with nothing to connect them; in the name Balbec, as in the magnifying glass of the penholders you buy at a seaside resort, I saw waves rising around a Persian-style church. Perhaps indeed the simplification of these images was one of the reasons for the hold that they had over me. When my father decided, one year, that we would go spend the Easter holidays in Florence and Venice, not having enough room to insert into the name Florence the elements that usually make up a town, I was forced to produce a supernatural city from the fecundation, by certain springtime fragrances, of what I believed to be, in its essence, the spirit of Giotto. At the very most—and because one cannot attach to a name much more time than space—like certain of Giotto's paintings themselves which show us the same figure at two different moments in the action, here lying in his bed, there getting ready to mount his horse, the name Florence was divided into two compartments. In one, under an architectural canopy, I was contemplating a fresco on part of which was superimposed a curtain of morning sunlight, dusty, oblique, and gradually spreading; in the other (for, since I did not think of names as an inaccessible ideal but as a real atmosphere in which I was going to immerse myself, the life not yet lived, the pure and intact life that I enclosed in them gave to the most material pleasures, to the simplest scenes, the attraction they have in the works of the primitives), I was walking quickly—the sooner to reach the lunch that was waiting for me with fruits and wine from Chianti—across a Ponte Vecchio crowded with jonquils, narcissus, and anemones. That (even though I was in Paris) was what I saw, and not what was actually around me. Even from a simple realistic point of view, the countries we long for occupy a far larger place in our actual life, at any given moment, than the country in which we happen to be. Doubtless, had I myself paid more attention at the time to what was in my mind when I pronounced the words “go to Florence, to Parma, to Pisa, to Venice,” I would have realized that what I saw was not a town at all, but something as different from anything I knew, something as delightful, as might be, for a human race whose whole life had been spent in the late afternoons of winter, that unknown marvel: a spring morning. These images, unreal, fixed, always alike, filling my nights and my days, differentiated this period of my life from those that had gone before it (and might have been confused with it in the eyes of an observer who sees things only from outside, that is to say who sees nothing), as in an opera a melodic motif introduces something new that one could not have suspected if one had only read the libretto, still less if one had remained outside the theater only counting the quarter hours as they passed. And besides, even from this point of view, of mere quantity, in our lives the days are not all equal. As they travel through the days, temperaments that are slightly nervous, as mine was, have available to them, like automobiles, different “speeds.” There are arduous mountainous days which one spends an infinite time climbing, and downward-sloping days which one can descend at full tilt singing. During that month—in which I replayed over and over like a melody, without ever becoming sated, those images of Florence, Venice, and Pisa for which the desire they excited in me retained something as profoundly individual as if it had been love, love of a person—I did not cease to believe that they corresponded to a reality independent of me, and they introduced me to a hope as beautiful as that which a Christian of the earliest era might have nourished on the eve of entering Paradise. Thus without my worrying about the contradiction of wanting to look at and touch with the organs of my senses what I had created in a daydream and not perceived with my senses—though all the more tempting to them in consequence, more different from anything they knew—it was whatever reminded me of the reality of these images that most inflamed my desire, because it was a sort of promise that my desire would be gratified. And although the motive for my exhilaration was a desire for artistic delights, the guidebooks sustained it even more than the books on aesthetics and, more than the guidebooks, the railway timetable. What moved me was the thought that if this Florence which I could see near but inaccessible in my imagination was separated from me, in myself, by a tract which I could not cross, I could reach it indirectly, by a detour, by taking the land route. Certainly when I repeated to myself, thus giving such a high value to what I was going to see, that Venice was “the school of Giorgione, the home of Titian, the most complete museum of medieval domestic architecture,”<sup>10</sup> I felt happy. Yet I was even happier when, out on an errand and walking quickly because of the weather, which, after a few days of precocious spring, had turned back into winter (like the weather we usually found at Combray in Holy Week)—seeing on the boulevards that the chestnut trees, though plunged in an atmosphere as icy and as liquid as water, were nonetheless beginning, punctual guests, already in formal dress, and not allowing themselves to be discouraged, to chisel out of their frozen masses the round shapes of the irresistible greenery whose steady growth the abortive power of the cold might hinder but could not succeed in restraining—I thought that already the Ponte Vecchio was abundantly strewn with hyacinths and anemones and the spring sunshine was already dyeing the waves of the Grand Canal with so dark an azure and such noble emeralds that when they came to break at the feet of Titian's paintings, they might rival them in richness of color. I could no longer contain my joy when my father, even as he consulted the barometer and deplored the cold, began to seek out which would be the best trains, and when I realized that by making one's way, after lunch, into the coal-blackened laboratory, the magic chamber charged with working the complete transmutation of everything around it, one could wake the next morning in the city of marble and gold “bossed with jasper and paved with emeralds.”<sup>11</sup> So that it and the City of Lilies were not merely fictive pictures which one could set up at will before one's imagination, but existed at a certain distance from Paris that one absolutely had to cross if one wanted to see them, at a certain determined place on the earth, and at no other, in a word were quite real. They became even more so for me, when my father, by saying: “So you could stay in Venice from the twentieth of April until the twenty-ninth and arrive in Florence on Easter morning” made them both emerge no longer merely from abstract Space, but from that imaginary Time in which we situate, not one journey at a time but others simultaneously and without too much emotion since they are only possibilities—that Time which re-creates itself so effectively that we can spend it again in one town after we have spent it in another—and devoted to them some of those particular days which are the certificate of authenticity of the objects on which one employs them, for those unique days are consumed by use, they do not come back, one cannot live them here when one has lived them there; I felt that it was toward the week which began on the Monday when the washerwoman was to bring back the white waistcoat I had covered with ink that the two Queen Cities were heading, to absorb



themselves in it as they emerged from that ideal time in which they did not yet exist—those two Queen Cities the domes and towers of which I was soon going to be able, by the most moving kind of geometry, to inscribe on the map of my own life. But I was still merely on the way to the last degree of bliss; I reached it finally (for only then did the revelation come to me that on those wave-splashed streets, reddened by reflections from Giorgione's frescoes,<sup>12</sup> it was not, as I had, despite so many admonitions, continued to imagine, men "majestic and terrible as the sea, bearing armour that gleamed with bronze beneath the folds of their blood-red cloaks"<sup>13</sup> who would be walking through Venice next week, on the eve of Easter, but that I myself might be the minuscule figure, in a large photograph of St. Mark's that had been lent to me, whom the illustrator represented, in a bowler hat, in front of the porches), when I heard my father say: "It must be quite cold, still, on the Grand Canal; you would do well to put your winter overcoat and your heavy jacket in your trunk just in case." At these words I was lifted into a kind of ecstasy; I felt myself to be truly making my way, as I had until then thought impossible, between those "rocks of amethyst like a reef in the Indian Ocean";<sup>14</sup> by a supreme feat of gymnastics beyond my strength, divesting myself, as of a useless carapace, of the air of my bedroom that surrounded me, I replaced it by equal parts of Venetian air, that marine atmosphere as indescribable and particular as the atmosphere of dreams, which my imagination had enclosed in the name of Venice; I felt myself undergoing a miraculous disincarnation; it was immediately accompanied by that vague desire to vomit which one feels when one has come down with a severe sore throat, and they had to put me to bed with a fever so tenacious that the doctor declared they would not only have to give up the idea of allowing me to leave for Florence and Venice now but, even when I was entirely well again, spare me for at least a year any plans for traveling and any cause of excitement.

And also, alas, he forbade them absolutely to allow me to go to the theater to hear La Berma; the sublime artist whom Bergotte had regarded as a genius would have, by introducing me to something that was perhaps as important and as beautiful, consoled me for not having been to Florence and Venice, for not going to Balbec. They had to confine themselves to sending me to the Champs-Élysées every day under the supervision of someone who would keep me from tiring myself out, and that person was Françoise, who had entered our service after the death of my aunt Léonie. To go to the Champs-Élysées was unbearable to me. If only Bergotte had described it in one of his books, I probably would have wanted to get to know it, like all the things whose "double" someone had begun by putting into my imagination. It would warm them, bring them to life, give them a personality, and I would want to find them again in reality; but in this public garden nothing formed a part of my dreams.

One day, because I was bored in our usual spot, next to the merry-go-round, Françoise had taken me on an excursion—beyond the frontier guarded at equal intervals by the little bastions of the barley-sugar sellers—into those neighboring but foreign regions where the faces are unfamiliar, where the goat cart passes: then she had gone back to get her things from her chair, which stood with its back to a clump of laurels; as I waited for her I was pacing the broad lawn, sparse and shorn, yellowed by the sun, at the far end of which a statue stands above the pool, when, from the path, addressing a little girl with reddish hair playing with a shuttlecock in front of the basin, another girl, while putting on her cloak and stowing her racket, shouted to her in a sharp voice: "Good-bye, Gilberte, I'm going home, don't forget we're coming to your house tonight after dinner." The name Gilberte passed close by me, evoking all the more forcefully the existence of the girl it designated in that it did not merely name her, as one speaks of someone who is absent, but addressed her directly; thus it passed close by me, in action so to speak, with a force that increased with the curve of its trajectory and the approach of its target;—transporting along with it, I felt, the knowledge, the notions concerning her to whom it was addressed that belonged not to me, but to the friend who was calling her, everything that, as she uttered it, she saw again or at least possessed in her memory, of their daily companionship, of the visits they paid to each other, of the whole of that unknown existence which was all the more inaccessible and all the more painful to me for being conversely so familiar and so malleable for that happy girl who brushed me with it without my being able to penetrate it and hurled it up in the air in a shout;—letting float in the air the delicious emanation it had released, by touching them so precisely, from several invisible points in the life of Mlle. Swann, from the evening that was to come, such as it might be, after dinner, at her house;—forming, in its celestial passage among the children and the nursemaids, a little cloud of precious color, like that which, billowing over a lovely garden by Poussin,<sup>15</sup> reflects minutely like a cloud in an opera, full of horses and chariots, some manifestation of the life of the gods;—casting, finally, on that bald grass, at the spot where it was at once a patch of withered lawn and a moment in the afternoon of the blond shuttlecock player (who did not stop launching the shuttlecock and catching it again until a governess wearing a blue ostrich feather called her), a marvelous little band the color of heliotrope as impalpable as a reflection and laid down like a carpet over which I did not tire of walking back and forth with lingering, nostalgic, and desecrating steps, while Françoise cried out to me: "Come on now, button up your coat and let's make ourselves scarce," and I noticed for the first time with irritation that she had a vulgar way of speaking, and alas, no blue feather in her hat.

But would she come back to the Champs-Élysées? The next day she was not there; but I saw her there on the following days; I spent all my time circling around the spot where she played with her friends, so that once when they found they were short of players for their game of prisoners' base, she sent to ask if I wanted to make up the number on their side, and after that I played with her each time she was there. But this was not every day; there were days when she was kept from coming by her lessons, by the catechism, a tea, that whole life separate from mine which twice, condensed in the name of Gilberte, I had felt pass so painfully close to me, on the steep path at Combray and on the lawn at the Champs-Élysées. On those days, she would announce in advance that we would not be seeing her; if it was because of her studies, she would say: "It's an awful bore, I won't be able to come tomorrow; you'll all be having fun without me," with a sorrowful air that consoled me a little; but when she was invited to a party and I, not knowing, asked her if she would be coming out to play, she would answer: "I should certainly hope not! I certainly hope Mama will let me go to my friend's." At least on those days, I knew I would not see her, whereas other times, it was quite unexpectedly that her mother would take her shopping, and the next day she would say: "Oh yes! I went out with Mama," as though it were a natural thing and not, for someone else, the greatest possible misfortune. There were also the days of bad weather when her governess, who herself could not endure the rain, did not want to take her to the Champs-Élysées.

And so if the sky was dubious, from early in the morning I would question it constantly, taking every omen into account. If I saw the lady opposite, near the window, putting on her hat, I would say to myself: "That lady is going to go out; so it's the sort of weather one can go out in: why wouldn't Gilberte do the same as that lady?" But the weather would darken, my mother would say it could lift again, that a ray of sunlight would be enough, but that more probably it would rain; and if it rained what was the

good of going to the Champs-Élysées? And so from lunch on my anxious eyes never left the unsettled, cloudy sky. It remained dark. Before the window, the balcony was gray. Suddenly, on its gloomy stone I did not see a color that was less dull, but I felt a sort of effort toward a color less dull, the pulsation of a hesitant ray that wished to discharge its light. A moment later, the balcony was as pale and reflective as a pool at dawn, and a thousand reflections of its ironwork lattice had alighted on it. A breath of wind dispersed them, the stone had darkened again, but, as though tamed, they returned; it began imperceptibly to whiten again and, in one of those continuous crescendos like those which, in music, at the end of an overture, carry a single note to the highest fortissimo by making it pass rapidly through all the intermediary degrees, I saw it reach that fixed, unalterable gold of fine days, against which the cutout shadow of the elaborate support of the balustrade stood out in black like a whimsical vegetation, with a delicacy in the delineation of its slightest details that seemed to betray a painstaking consciousness, an artistic satisfaction, and with such sharp relief, such velvet in the restfulness of its dark and happy masses that in truth those broad and leafy reflections resting on that lake of sun seemed to know they were pledges of calm and happiness.

Instantaneous ivy, fleeting wall flora! The least colorful, the saddest, in the opinion of many, of those that clamber over the wall or decorate the casement; for me, the dearest of them all since the day it appeared on our balcony, like the very shadow of the presence of Gilberte, who was perhaps already in the Champs-Élysées and, as soon as I arrived there, would say to me: "Let's start playing prisoners' base right away, you're on my side"; fragile, carried off by a breath, but also in harmony, not with the season, but with the hour; a promise of the immediate happiness which the day will deny or fulfill, and thereby of the highest sort of immediate happiness, the happiness of love; softer, warmer on the stone even than moss; hardy, for it needs only a ray of light to come into being and blossom into joy, even in the heart of winter.

And even on those days when all other vegetation has disappeared, when the handsome green leather that wraps the trunks of the old trees is hidden under snow, when the snow had stopped falling, but the weather was still too overcast to hope that Gilberte would go out, then suddenly, making my mother say: "Well now, it's actually nice out, perhaps you might try going to the Champs-Élysées after all," on the mantle of snow that covered the balcony the sun that had appeared was weaving gold threads together and embroidering black glimmers. That day we found no one, or one solitary girl about to leave, who assured me that Gilberte was not coming. The chairs, deserted by the imposing but chilly assembly of governesses, were empty. Alone, near the lawn, sat a lady of a certain age who came in all weathers, always dressed in the same clothing, magnificent and dark, to make whose acquaintance I would at that time have sacrificed, had the exchange been allowed me, all the greatest future advantages of my life. For Gilberte went up to greet her every day; she asked Gilberte for news of "her love of a mother"; and it seemed to me that, had I known her, I would have been someone quite different for Gilberte, someone who knew her parents' friends. While her grandchildren played farther off, she always read *Les Débats*,<sup>16</sup> which she called "my old *Débats*," and with an aristocratic affection would say, when speaking of the policeman or the woman who rented the chairs:<sup>17</sup> "my old friend the policeman," "the chair warden and I who are old friends."

Françoise was too cold to sit still; we walked to the pont de la Concorde to see the frozen Seine, which everyone including the children approached without fear as though it were a beached whale, immense, defenseless and about to be cut up. We returned to the Champs-Élysées; I was growing sick with misery between the motionless merry-go-round and the white lawn caught in the black web of paths from which the snow had been cleared and above which the statue had in its hand an added jet of ice which seemed to explain its gesture. Even the old lady, after folding her *Débats*, asked a passing nanny what time it was and thanked her by saying: "How kind of you!" then begged the man tending the paths to tell her grandchildren to come back, because she was cold, adding: "You are infinitely good. I am overwhelmed!" Suddenly the air was torn apart: between the puppet theater and the circus, on the clearing horizon, against the opening sky, I had just spied, as though it were a fabulous sign, Mademoiselle's blue feather. And already Gilberte was running as fast as possible in my direction, sparkling and red under a square fur hat, animated by the cold, the lateness, and her desire to play; a little before reaching me, she let herself slide along the ice, and either to help keep her balance, or because she thought it more graceful, or pretending to move like a skater, her arms opened wide as she came forward smiling, as if she wanted to take me into them. "Brava! Brava! That was very good. I would say, as you do, that it was champion, first-rate, if I were not from another age, if I did not belong to the Ancien Régime," cried the old lady, speaking on behalf of the silent Champs-Élysées to thank Gilberte for having come without letting herself be intimidated by the weather. "You're like me, faithful to our old Champs-Élysées despite everything; we're two brave souls, you and I. I tell you I love it, even this way. This snow—you'll laugh at me—reminds me of ermine!" And the old lady began to laugh.

The first of these days—to which the snow, image of the forces that could stop me from seeing Gilberte, imparted the sadness of a day of separation and even the aspect of a day of departure because it changed the appearance and almost prevented the use of the customary site of our only encounters, now changed, all wrapped in dustcovers—this day, however, caused my love to progress, for it was like a first sorrow that she had shared with me. There were only the two of us out of all our gang, and to be thus the only one there with her was not only like a beginning of intimacy, but also on her part—as though she had come out only for me, in such weather—it seemed to me as touching as if on one of those days when she was invited to a party she had given it up to come to find me in the Champs-Élysées; I gained more confidence in the vitality and the future of our friendship, which remained hardy in the midst of the numbness, loneliness, and ruin of the things around us; and while she put snowballs down my neck, I smiled with emotion at what seemed to me both a preference she was showing me by tolerating me as her traveling companion in this new and wintry land, and also a sort of loyalty she was cherishing for me in the midst of misfortune. Soon one after the other, like hesitant sparrows, her friends arrived all black against the snow. We began to play, and since this day so sadly begun was to end in joy, when I went up, before playing prisoners' base, to the friend with the sharp voice whom I had heard the first day shouting the name Gilberte, she said to me: "No, no, we know perfectly well you'd rather be on Gilberte's side, besides look, she's signaling to you." She was indeed calling me over to join her camp on the snowy lawn, which the sun, giving it glimmers of pink, the metallic worn surface of an old brocade, was turning into a Field of the Cloth of Gold.<sup>18</sup>

That day which I had so dreaded was, in fact, one of the only ones on which I was not too unhappy.

For, although I no longer thought, now, of anything else but of not allowing a single day to pass without seeing Gilberte (so much so that once when my grandmother had not returned by dinnertime, I could not help saying to myself immediately that if she had been run over by a carriage, I would not be able to go to the Champs-Élysées for a long time; we no longer love anyone

else when we are in love), yet those moments when I was with her and which since the day before I had been awaiting so impatiently, for which I had trembled, for which I would have sacrificed everything else, were in no way happy moments; and I knew it very well for they were the only moments in my life on which I concentrated a meticulous, fierce attention, and that attention did not discover in them one atom of pleasure.

All the time I was away from Gilberte, I needed to see her because, constantly trying to form a picture of her for myself, in the end I could not do it, and no longer knew precisely to what my love corresponded. And then she had never yet told me she loved me. Quite the contrary, she had often claimed there were boys she liked better than me, that I was a good enough friend she was always willing to play with, though too distracted, not involved enough in the game; finally, she had often given me apparent signs of coldness that might have shaken my belief that for her I was someone different from the others, if the source of that belief had been the love Gilberte might feel for me, and not, as was the case, the love I felt for her, which rendered it far more resistant, since this made it depend entirely on the manner in which I was obliged, by an inner necessity, to think of Gilberte. But the feelings I had for her, I myself had not yet declared to her. Certainly, on every page of my notebooks I copied out her name and address endlessly, but at the sight of those indeterminate lines which I wrote without inducing her to think any more about me because of that, which made her take up so much apparent space around me without being any more involved in my life, I felt discouraged because they spoke to me not of Gilberte, who would not even see them, but of my own desire, which they seemed to show me as something purely personal, unreal, tedious, and impotent. The most urgent thing was that we should see each other, Gilberte and I, and that we should be able to make a reciprocal avowal of our love, which until then would not so to speak have begun. No doubt the various reasons that made me so impatient to see her would have been less imperious for a grown man. When we are older, more skilled in the cultivation of our pleasures, we are sometimes content with the enjoyment of thinking about a woman as I thought about Gilberte, without worrying about whether that image corresponds to the reality, and also with the pleasure of loving her without needing to be certain that she loves us; or we forgo the pleasure of confessing our warm feelings for her, in order to encourage the hardness of hers for us, imitating those Japanese gardeners who, to obtain one lovelier flower, sacrifice several others. But during the period when I loved Gilberte, I still believed that Love really existed outside of us; that, allowing us at the very most to remove obstacles in our way, it offered its joys in an order which we were not free to alter; it seemed to me that if I had, on my own initiative, substituted for the sweetness of confession the simulation of indifference, I would not only have deprived myself of one of the joys of which I had dreamed most often but that I would have fabricated for myself in my own way a love that was artificial and without value, without any connection to the real one, whose mysterious and preexisting paths I would have had to forgo following.

But when I reached the Champs-Élysées—and when, before anything else, I would be able to confront my love, so as to subject it to the necessary corrections, with its living cause, independent of me—as soon as I was in the presence of that Gilberte Swann on the sight of whom I had counted to refresh the images that my tired memory could no longer recapture, of that Gilberte Swann with whom I had played yesterday, and whom I had just been moved to greet and recognize by a blind instinct like that which, when we are walking, sets one of our feet in front of the other before we have had time to think, immediately it was as if she and the little girl who was the object of my dreams had been two different creatures. For example if, since the day before, I had been carrying in my memory two blazing eyes in full and shining cheeks, Gilberte's face now presented me insistently with something that quite specifically I had not recalled, a certain sharp tapering of the nose, which, instantaneously associating itself with certain other features, assumed the importance of those characteristics which in natural history define a whole species, and transmuted her into a little girl of the type that have pointed snouts. While I was preparing to take advantage of this longed-for moment in order to devote myself to submitting the image of Gilberte which I had prepared before coming, and which I could no longer find again in my mind, to an amendment that would allow me, in the long hours when I was alone, to be sure it was truly she whom I was recalling, that it was truly my love for her that I was augmenting little by little like a book as it is being written, she would pass me a ball; and, like the idealist philosopher whose body makes allowances for the external world in the reality of which his intelligence does not believe, the same self who had made me greet her before I identified her, hastened to make me take the ball she was holding out to me (as if she were a friend with whom I had come here to play, and not a sister soul with whom I had come to be united), made me exchange with her, for the sake of decorum, until the hour when she went off, a thousand friendly and meaningless remarks and thus kept me both from preserving a silence during which I could at last have laid hands once more on the urgent truant image and from uttering the words that might have brought about the decisive progress in our love, the hope of which I was obliged each time to postpone until the following afternoon. It did, however, make some progress. One day when we had gone off with Gilberte to the booth of the vendor who was particularly nice to us—for it was to her that M. Swann sent for his spice cake,<sup>19</sup> and for health reasons, he consumed a great deal of it, suffering from ethnic eczema and the Prophets' constipation—Gilberte showed me with a smile two little boys who were like the little artist and the little naturalist in children's storybooks. For one of them did not want a stick of red barley sugar because he preferred violet, and the other, tears in his eyes, was refusing the plum his nanny wanted to buy for him because, he finally said with passion: "I like the other plum better, because it has a worm!" I bought two one-sou marbles. I gazed with admiration at the agates, luminous and captive in their separate wooden bowl, precious in my eyes because they were as blond and beaming as young girls and because they cost fifty centimes apiece. Gilberte, who was given a great deal more money than I was, asked me which I thought was the most beautiful. They had the molten transparency of life itself. I did not want to make her sacrifice a single one of them. I would have liked her to be able to buy them, liberate them, all. Yet I pointed to one which was the same color as her eyes. Gilberte took it, looked for its golden ray of light, stroked it, paid its ransom, but immediately handed her captive over to me saying: "Here, it's for you, I'm giving it to you, keep it as a souvenir."

Another time, still preoccupied by the desire to hear La Berma in a classical play, I had asked her if she happened to own a little book in which Bergotte talked about Racine, and which one could no longer find. She had asked me to remind her of its exact title and that evening I had addressed an express letter to her, writing on the envelope that name, Gilberte Swann, which I had so often copied out in my notebooks. The next day she brought me a packet tied up in mauve ribbons and sealed with white wax containing the little book, which she had asked someone to find for her. "You see? It really is the one you asked for," she said, taking from her muff the letter I had sent her. But on the address of this *pneumatique*<sup>20</sup>—which, only yesterday, was

nothing, was merely a *petit bleu* which I had written, and which, now that a telegraph boy had delivered it to Gilberte's concierge and a servant had carried it to her room, had become this priceless thing, one of the *petits bleus* she had received that day—it was hard for me to recognize the insignificant, solitary lines of my handwriting under the printed circles apposed to it by the post office, under the inscriptions added in pencil by one of the telegraph messengers, signs of actual realization, stamps from the outside world, violet bands symbolizing life, which for the first time came to espouse, sustain, uplift, delight my dream.

And there was also one day when she said to me: "You know, you can call me Gilberte, I'm going to call you by your first name anyway. It's too tiresome otherwise." Yet for a while she went on simply calling me *vous*<sup>21</sup> and when I pointed this out to her, she smiled, and composing, constructing a sentence like the ones in grammar books of foreign languages whose only aim is to make us use a new word, she ended it with my given name. And remembering later what I had felt then, I could distinguish within it the impression that I had been held for a moment in her mouth, I myself, naked, without any of the social terms and conditions that also belonged, either to her other friends, or, when she said my family name, to my parents, and of which her lips—in the effort she made, rather like her father, to articulate the words she wanted to emphasize—seemed to strip me, undress me, as one removes the skin from a fruit of which only the pulp can be eaten, while her gaze, adopting the same new degree of intimacy as her words, reached me more directly also, while at the same time showing its awareness of this, its pleasure and even its gratitude, by accompanying itself with a smile.

But in the moment itself, I could not appreciate the value of these new pleasures. They were given, not by the little girl I loved, to me who loved her, but by the other, the one I played with, to my other self who possessed neither the memory of the true Gilberte, nor the inalienable heart which alone could have known the price of such a happiness, because it alone had desired it. Even after returning home I did not savor them, for, each day, the same need which made me hope that the next day I would be able to enjoy a clear, calm, happy contemplation of Gilberte, that she would at last confess her love for me, explaining why she had to hide it from me until now, also forced me to regard the past as nothing, to look ahead of me only, to consider the small attentions she had shown me not in themselves and as if they were enough, but as new rungs on which to set my foot, new rungs which would permit me to take another step up and at last attain the happiness I had not yet found.

If she gave me these signs of friendliness from time to time, she also hurt me by seeming not to be pleased to see me, and this often happened on the very days I had most counted on for the realization of my hopes. I was sure that Gilberte would come to the Champs-Élysées and I felt an elation that seemed to me only the vague anticipation of a great happiness when—entering the drawing room first thing in the morning to kiss Mama, who was already dressed to go out, the tower of her black hair fully constructed, and her lovely plump white hands still smelling of soap—I learned, seeing a column of dust standing by itself above the piano and hearing a barrel organ playing "En Revenant de la Revue"<sup>22</sup> under the window, that until nightfall winter would be receiving the unexpected and radiant visit of a day of spring. While we were eating lunch, the lady opposite, by opening her casement, had sent flying in the blink of an eye, from next to my chair—streaking the entire width of our dining room in a single bound—a beam of light that had settled there for its afternoon rest and returned to continue it a moment later. At school, during the one o'clock class,<sup>23</sup> the sun made me languish with impatience and boredom by trailing a glimmer of gold over my desk, like an invitation to a party I would not be able to attend before three o'clock, the hour when Françoise came to pick me up at the school gate and we made our way toward the Champs-Élysées through streets decorated with light, choked with crowds, where the balconies, unsealed by the sun and vaporous, floated before the houses like clouds of gold. Alas, in the Champs-Élysées I did not see Gilberte, she had not arrived yet. Motionless on the lawn fed by the invisible sun which here and there ignited the tip of a stalk of grass, while the pigeons that had landed on it looked like ancient sculptures which the gardener's pick had brought back up to the surface of the venerable soil, I stood with my eyes fixed on the horizon, expecting at any moment to see the image of Gilberte following her governess appear behind the statue, which seemed to hold out the child it was carrying, streaming with rays of light, to the benediction of the sun. The old lady who read *Les Débats* was sitting in her seat, still in the same spot; she hailed a park keeper, to whom she made a friendly gesture with her hand, calling out to him: "What fine weather!" And when the chair attendant approached to collect the price of the seat, she smirked and simpered as she put the ten-centime ticket away in the opening of her glove, as if it were a bouquet for which she was seeking, out of kindness toward the giver, the most flattering place possible. When she had found it, she performed a circular motion with her neck, straightened her boa, and fastened upon the attendant, showing her the bit of yellow paper sticking out over her wrist, the beautiful smile with which a woman, showing her bodice to a young man, says to him: "Recognize your roses?"

I led Françoise out as far as the Arc de Triomphe hoping to meet Gilberte, we did not find her, and I was returning to the lawn convinced that now she would not be coming, when, in front of the merry-go-round, the little girl with the sharp voice flung herself at me: "Quick, quick, Gilberte's already been here for a quarter of an hour. She's going soon. We were waiting for you to make up a game of prisoners' base." While I was going up the avenue des Champs-Élysées, Gilberte had come by way of the rue Boissy-d'Anglas, Mademoiselle having taken advantage of the fine weather to do some shopping for her; and M. Swann was coming to pick up his daughter. So it was my fault; I should not have left the lawn; for one never knew for certain which way Gilberte would come, if it would be later or earlier, and in the end this waiting caused me to be more deeply moved, not only by the whole of the Champs-Élysées and the entire extent of the afternoon, a sort of immense expanse of space and time at each point and at each moment of which it was possible that Gilberte's image would appear, but even by that image itself, because behind that image I felt there lay concealed the reason why it had been fired into my heart at four o'clock instead of two-thirty, topped by a hat for paying calls rather than a beret for playing, in front of the "Ambassadeurs"<sup>24</sup> and not between the two puppet theaters, I could divine one of those occupations in which I could not follow Gilberte and which forced her to go out or stay at home, I touched the mystery of her unknown life. It was this mystery, too, that disturbed me when, running on orders from the little girl with the sharp voice to begin our game of prisoners' base right away, I saw Gilberte, so brusque and lively with us, curtsying to the lady with *Les Débats* (who was saying to her: "What lovely sunshine, it's like a burning fire"), talking to her with a shy smile, with a formal air which called to my mind the different young girl that Gilberte must be at home with her parents, with the friends of her parents, when paying calls, in the whole of her other existence which eluded me. But of that existence no one gave me so strong an impression as did M. Swann, who came a little later to find his daughter. For he and Mme. Swann—because their daughter lived in their home, because her studies, her games, her friendships depended on them—



contained for me, like Gilberte, perhaps even more than Gilberte, as was proper for gods all-powerful with respect to her, in whom it must have had its source, an inaccessible strangeness, a painful charm. Everything that concerned them was the object of a preoccupation so constant on my part that on the days when, as on these, M. Swann (whom I had seen so often in the past without his having aroused my curiosity, when he was on friendly terms with my parents) came to pick Gilberte up in the Champs-Élysées, once the pounding of my heart that had been excited by the appearance of his gray hat and traveling cape had subsided, his appearance still impressed me like that of a historical character about whom we have just been reading a series of books and whose least peculiarities impassion us. His relations with the Comte de Paris, which, when I heard them discussed at Combray, had left me indifferent, now assumed for me something wonderful, as if no one else had ever known the Orléans; they caused him to stand out vividly against the vulgar background of people of different classes out for a walk who were crowding that path of the Champs-Élysées, and in the midst of whom I admired his consenting to appear without demanding of them any special consideration, which none of them dreamed of giving him anyway, so profound was the incognito in which he was wrapped.

He responded politely to the greetings of Gilberte's friends, even to mine although he had quarreled with my family, but without appearing to know me. (This reminded me that he had, however, seen me quite often in the country; a memory I had retained, but somewhere in a dim place, because ever since I had seen Gilberte again, for me Swann was preeminently her father, and no longer Swann of Combray; as the ideas with which I now linked his name were different from the ideas which had once formed the network in which it was included and which I no longer ever used when I wanted to think about him, he had become a new person; I did attach him, however, by an artificial, secondary, and transversal line to our guest of earlier times; and since nothing had any value for me anymore except to the extent that my love could profit from it, it was with a burst of shame and regret at not being able to erase them that I returned to the years when, in the eyes of this same Swann who was at this moment before me in the Champs-Élysées and to whom, happily, Gilberte had perhaps not mentioned my name, I had so often in the evenings made myself ridiculous by sending word asking Mama to come up to my room and say goodnight to me, while she was having coffee with him, my father, and my grandparents at the table in the garden.) He told Gilberte he would let her play one game, that he could wait a quarter of an hour, and sitting down like anyone else on an iron chair, paid for his ticket with the same hand which Philippe VII<sup>25</sup> had so often held in his own, while we began playing on the lawn, putting to flight the pigeons whose beautiful heart-shaped iridescent bodies, like the lilacs of the bird kingdom, went to seek refuge as though in so many sanctuaries, one on the large stone vase to which its beak, by disappearing into it, imparted the gesture, and assigned the purpose, of offering in abundance the fruits or seeds which the bird seemed to be pecking from it, another on the forehead of the statue, which it seemed to crown with one of those enameled objects whose polychrome varies the monotony of the stone in certain ancient works of art, and with an attribute which, when the goddess carries it, earns her a particular epithet, and makes her, as does for a mortal woman a different first name, a new divinity.

On one of those sunny days that had not fulfilled my hopes, I did not have the courage to hide my disappointment from Gilberte.

"I had so many things to ask you," I said to her. "I thought that today was going to mean such a lot to our friendship. And as soon as you get here, you have to leave again! Try to come early tomorrow, so I can finally talk to you."

Her face shone and she was jumping with joy as she answered me:

"Tomorrow, you may depend upon it, my dear friend, I won't be coming at all! I've got a big tea party; nor the day after tomorrow, either, I'm going to a friend's house to watch the arrival of King Theodosius <sup>26</sup> from her windows, it will be splendid, and then the day after we're going to *Michel Strogoff*<sup>27</sup> and then after that, Christmas will be coming soon and the New Year's holidays. Maybe they'll take me to the Midi.<sup>28</sup> How nice that would be! Though it will mean I won't have a Christmas tree; anyway, if I stay in Paris, I won't be coming here because I'll be paying calls with Mama. Good-bye, there's Papa, he's calling me."

I returned home with Françoise through streets that were still bedecked with sunlight, as on the evening of a holiday that is over. I could scarcely drag my legs along.

"It's not a bit surprising," said Françoise. "This weather is not right for the time of the year, it's far too hot. Alas! My Lord, think of all the folk around and about that must be ill today. It makes one think that things are all awry in the heavens above, as well!"

I repeated to myself, stifling my sobs, the words in which Gilberte had exploded with joy at the prospect of not coming back to the Champs-Élysées for such a long time. But already the charm with which, by the mere act of thinking, my mind was filled as soon as I thought about her, and the special, unique position—painful though it was—in which I was inevitably placed in relation to Gilberte by the internal constraint of a mental habit had begun to add, even to this sign of indifference, something romantic, and in the midst of my tears a smile formed that was simply the timid adumbration of a kiss. And when it was time for the mail to come, I said to myself that evening as on every evening: "I'm going to get a letter from Gilberte, she's going to tell me at last that she has always loved me, and explain the mysterious reason why she has been forced to hide it from me until now, to pretend she could be happy without seeing me, the reason why she has disguised herself as the other Gilberte who is merely a playmate."

Every evening I liked to imagine this letter, I would believe I was reading it, I would recite each sentence of it to myself. All of a sudden I stopped in alarm. I realized that if I were to receive a letter from Gilberte, it could not be that one anyway since I was the one who had just written it. And from then on, I forced myself to turn my thoughts away from the words I would have liked her to write to me, for fear that by articulating them, I would exclude precisely those—the dearest, the most desired—from the field of all possible compositions. Even if through an improbable coincidence it had been precisely the letter that I had invented that Gilberte on her own account addressed to me, recognizing my work in it I would not have had the impression of receiving something that did not come from me, something real, new, a happiness external to my mind, independent of my will, truly given by love.

Meanwhile I reread a page which had not been written to me by Gilberte, but which at least came to me from her, that page by Bergotte on the beauty of the old myths that inspired Racine, and which, next to the agate marble, I kept near me always. I was

moved by the goodness of my friend who had had someone find it for me; and because everyone needs to discover reasons for his passion, so much so that he is happy to recognize in the person he loves qualities which literature or conversation have taught him are among those worthy of inspiring love, so much so that he assimilates them by imitation and makes them new reasons for his love, even if these qualities were the most diametrically opposed to those his love would have sought so long as it remained spontaneous—as Swann had done once upon a time, with the aesthetic nature of Odette’s beauty—I, who had at first loved Gilberte, back in Combray, because of all that was unknown about her life, into which I would have liked to hurl myself, become incarnated, abandoning my own life which was no longer anything to me, I now thought, as of an inestimable advantage, that of this life of mine, too well known, disdained, Gilberte might one day become the humble servant, the companionable and comfortable collaborator who in the evening, helping me in my work, would compare and collate pamphlets for me. As for Bergotte, that infinitely wise and almost divine old man because of whom I had first loved Gilberte, even before I saw her, now it was above all because of Gilberte that I loved him. With as much pleasure as the pages he had written on Racine, I looked at the paper closed with great seals of white wax and tied with a cascade of mauve ribbons in which she had brought them to me. I kissed the agate marble which was the best part of my friend’s heart, the part that was not frivolous, but faithful, and which even though adorned with the mysterious charm of Gilberte’s life remained close to me, lived in my bedroom, slept in my bed. But as for the beauty of that stone, and the beauty also of those pages by Bergotte, which I was so pleased to associate with the idea of my love for Gilberte, as if in the moments when that love appeared to me to be nothing at all they gave it a sort of substance, I saw that they were anterior to that love, that they did not resemble it, that their elements had been determined by talent or by the laws of mineralogy before Gilberte knew me, that nothing in the book or in the stone would have been different if Gilberte had not loved me and that consequently nothing entitled me to read in them a message of happiness. And while my love, ceaselessly expecting from the next day an avowal of Gilberte’s love, annulled and undid each evening the badly done work of the day, in the darkness inside me an unknown seamstress did not leave the pulled threads in the scrap heap but arranged them, with no concern for pleasing me or working for my happiness, in the different order to which she gave all her work. Showing no particular interest in my love, nor beginning by deciding that I was indeed loved, she gathered up those of Gilberte’s actions which had seemed inexplicable to me, along with her faults, which I had excused. Then the first and the second acquired a meaning. It seemed to say, this new order, that when I saw that Gilberte, instead of coming to the Champs-Élysées, attended a party, went shopping with her governess, and prepared to be away over the New Year’s holidays, I was wrong to think: “It’s because she’s frivolous or submissive.” For she would have ceased to be either if she had loved me, and if she had been forced to obey it would have been with the same despair that I felt on the days when I did not see her. It told me further, this new order, that I must after all know what it was to love since I loved Gilberte; it pointed out to me the perpetual concern I felt to show myself to advantage in her eyes, because of which I tried to persuade my mother to buy Françoise a waterproof coat and a hat with a blue ostrich feather, or better still not to continue sending me to the Champs-Élysées with that maid who made me blush (to which my mother answered that I was unfair to Françoise, that she was a good woman and devoted to us), and also that exclusive need to see Gilberte because of which months in advance I thought only of trying to learn at what time of the year she would be leaving Paris and where she would be going, finding even the most pleasant countryside a place of exile if she was not going to be there, and wanting only to stay in Paris all the time as long as I could see her at the Champs-Élysées; and it had no difficulty showing me that I would not find that concern, or that need, behind Gilberte’s actions. She on the contrary appreciated her governess, without worrying about what I thought of her. She found it natural not to come to the Champs-Élysées, if she was going to make some purchases with Mademoiselle, pleasant if she was going out with her mother. And even supposing she would have allowed me to spend the holidays in the same place as she, at least in choosing that place she considered her parents’ desires, the thousand amusements she had heard about, and not in the least that this was the place where my family was intending to send me. When she assured me from time to time that she liked me less than one of her other friends, less than she had liked me the day before because I had made her lose the game through my carelessness, I would ask her to forgive me, I would ask her what I should do so that she would begin to like me again as much as the others, so that she would like me more than them; I wanted her to tell me that it was already done, I begged her for it as if she could change her affection for me as she wished, as I wished, in order to please me, merely by the words that she would say, depending on my good or my bad behavior. Did I not know, then, that what I myself felt, for her, depended neither on her actions nor on my own will?

And, finally, this new order designed by the invisible seamstress showed me that if we may wish that the actions of a person who has hurt us up to now were not sincere, they are followed by a clarity against which our wishes are powerless and to which, rather than to them, we must address ourselves in asking what that person’s actions will be tomorrow.

These new words were heard by my love; they persuaded it that the next day would not be different from what all the other days had been; that Gilberte’s feeling for me, already too old to be able to change, was indifference; that in my friendship with Gilberte, I was the only one who loved. “It’s true,” my love answered, “there’s nothing more to be done with this friendship, it won’t change.” And so, the very next day (or waiting for a public holiday if there was one coming up soon, or an anniversary, or the New Year perhaps, one of those days which are not like the others, when time makes a fresh start by rejecting the heritage of the past, by not accepting the legacy of its sorrows) I would ask Gilberte to give up our old friendship and lay the foundations of a new one.

I always had within reach of my hand a map of Paris which, because one could distinguish on it the street where M. and Mme. Swann lived, seemed to me to contain a treasure. And for pleasure, out of a sort of chivalrous loyalty also, apropos of anything at all, I would say the name of that street, until my father would ask, not being, as were my mother and grandmother, fully informed about my love:

“Now why do you talk about that street all the time, there’s nothing extraordinary about it, it’s a very pleasant street to live on because it’s two steps from the Bois, but there are ten others quite like it.”

I contrived at every turn to make my parents say the name Swann; of course I repeated it to myself in my own mind incessantly; but I also needed to hear the delicious sound of it and to have someone else play me this music the silent reading of



which was not enough. The name Swann, which I had known for such a long time, was for me also, now, as happens for certain aphasics with the most everyday words, a new name. It was always present in my mind and yet my mind could not grow accustomed to it. I took it apart, I spelled it, its orthography was a surprise to me. And at the same time that it had ceased to be familiar, it had ceased to appear innocent. The joy I felt at hearing it I believed was so guilty that it seemed to me others guessed my thoughts and changed the conversation if I tried to lead it there. I resorted to subjects that still touched upon Gilberte, I recited the same words endlessly, and although I knew they were only words—words spoken far away from her, which she could not hear, words without potency that repeated what was, but could not modify it—yet it seemed to me that by dint of thus feeling, handling everything that touched Gilberte I would perhaps make something happy emerge from it. I told my parents again that Gilberte liked her governess very much, as if that proposition enunciated for the hundredth time were at last going to result in the sudden entrance of Gilberte, coming to live with us forever. I resumed my praise of the old lady who read *Les Débats* (I had hinted to my parents that she was an ambassadress or perhaps a royal highness) and I continued to celebrate her beauty, her magnificence, her nobility, until the day I said that from what I had heard Gilberte call her, her name must be Mme. Blatin.

"Oh, now I know who she is!" exclaimed my mother while I felt myself blushing from shame. "On guard! On guard! as your poor grandfather would have said. So she's the one you find so beautiful! Why, she's horrible and always has been. She's the widow of an usher. You don't remember when you were little the lengths I went to to avoid her at the gymnastics class where, though she didn't know me, she would come up to me and try to talk with the excuse of wanting to tell me you were 'too nice looking for a boy.' She always had a mania for getting to know people and she must indeed be rather mad as I always thought, if she really knows Mme. Swann. For though her background is quite common, at least there was never anything said against her so far as I know. But she always had to cultivate a new acquaintance. She's horrible, frightfully vulgar, and a troublemaker into the bargain."

As for Swann, in order to try to resemble him, I would spend all my time at the table pulling on my nose and rubbing my eyes. My father would say: "The child has no sense, he'll make himself quite hideous." I would especially have liked to be as bald as Swann. He seemed to me a person so extraordinary that I found it amazing that people I knew actually knew him too and that the chance events of an ordinary day might bring one face-to-face with him. And one time, my mother, in the course of telling us, as she did every evening at dinner, about the errands she had run that afternoon, merely by saying: "Speaking of which, guess who I ran into in Trois Quartiers,<sup>29</sup> at the umbrella counter: Swann," caused the center of her story, so very dry for me, to blossom with a mysterious flower. What a delectable melancholy pleasure, to learn that that very afternoon, profiling his supernatural form against the crowd, Swann had gone to buy an umbrella! Among the great and tiny events, equally unimportant, this one alone awoke in me those peculiar vibrations by which my love for Gilberte was perpetually stirred. My father said I was not interested in anything because I did not listen when they talked about the political consequences that might follow from the visit of King Theodosius, at this moment the guest of France and, it was claimed, its ally. But how keenly, on the other hand, I wanted to know if Swann was wearing his traveling cape!

"Did you say hello to each other?" I asked.

"Why, naturally," answered my mother, who always seemed to be afraid that, were she to admit there was any coolness between them and Swann, people would have tried to bring about a reconciliation closer than she wished, because of Mme. Swann, whom she did not want to know. "It was he who came up and spoke to me, I didn't see him."

"Then you haven't quarreled?"

"Quarreled? Now what makes you think we might have quarreled?" she answered briskly, as if I had assaulted the fiction of her good relations with Swann and tried to effect a "rapprochement."

"He might be cross with you for not inviting him anymore."

"One isn't obliged to invite everyone; does he invite me? I don't know his wife."

"But at Combray he used to come."

"Well, yes! He came at Combray, and now in Paris he has other things to do and so have I. But I promise you we didn't look in the least like two people who had quarreled. We stood there together for a moment because they hadn't yet brought him his parcel. He asked after you, he told me you played with his daughter," added my mother, stunning me with the prodigious fact that I existed in Swann's mind, even more, that I existed there in so complete a manner that, when I trembled with love there before him in the Champs-Élysées, he knew my name, who my mother was, and could amalgamate around my qualifications as playmate of his daughter certain facts about my grandparents, their family, the place where we lived, certain details of our past life which were perhaps unknown even to me. But my mother did not seem to have found any particular charm in that counter at Trois Quartiers where she had represented for Swann, at the moment when he saw her, a definite person with whom he had memories in common that had inspired the impulse to approach her, the gesture of greeting her.

Nor did she or my father either seem to find, in talking about Swann's grandparents, about the title of honorary stockbroker, a pleasure that surpassed all others. My imagination had singled out and sanctified one particular family from within the social Paris just as it had from within the Paris of stone one particular house whose carriage entrance it had sculpted and whose windows it had made precious. But I was the only one who could see these ornaments. In the same way that my father and mother regarded the house that Swann lived in as similar to the other houses built at the same time in the neighborhood of the Bois, so Swann's family seemed to them of the same sort as many other families of stockbrokers. They judged it more favorably or less depending on the degree to which it shared in merits common to the rest of the universe and did not see in it anything unique. On the contrary, what they appreciated in it they encountered to an equal, or higher, degree elsewhere. And so, after having agreed that the house was well situated, they would talk about another that was better situated, but that had nothing to do with Gilberte, or about financiers a cut above her grandfather; and if they had seemed for a moment to be of the same opinion as me, it was because of a misunderstanding that would soon be dispelled. For, in order to perceive in everything that surrounded Gilberte an indefinable quality analogous in the world of emotions to what infrared may be in the world of colors, my parents would have needed that supplementary and ephemeral sense with which I had been endowed by love.

On the days when Gilberte had let me know she would not be coming to the Champs-Élysées, I would try to go for a walk that brought me a little closer to her. Sometimes I would lead Françoise on a pilgrimage before the house where the Swanns

lived. I would make her repeat endlessly what, through the governess, she had learned relating to Mme. Swann. "It seems she puts a good deal of trust in her medals. You won't find her going off on a trip if she's heard an owl hooting, or something ticking like a clock inside the wall, or if she's seen a cat at midnight, or if the wood furniture creaks. Oh, yes! She's a person of great faith!" I was so in love with Gilberte that if, along the way, I saw their old butler walking a dog, my emotion would force me to stop, I would stare at his white whiskers with eyes full of passion. Françoise would say:

"What's wrong with you?"

Then we would continue on our way until we reached their carriage entrance, where a concierge different from any other concierge, and steeped even to the braid of his livery in the same painful charm I had felt in the name Gilberte, seemed to know that I was one of those people whom a primordial unworthiness would prohibit forever from penetrating into the mysterious life that he was charged with guarding and on which the windows of the entresol seemed conscious of being closed, resembling far less, between the stately fall of their muslin curtains, any other windows than they did Gilberte's own eyes. At other times, we would go down the boulevards and I would take up a position at the corner of the rue Duphot; I had been told that here one could often see Swann going past on his way to the dentist; and my imagination so differentiated Gilberte's father from the rest of humanity, his presence in the midst of the real world introduced into it such magic, that, even before I reached the Madeleine, I was moved at the thought of approaching a street where I might suddenly encounter that supernatural apparition.

But most often—when I was not going to see Gilberte—since I had learned that Mme. Swann went for a walk almost every day in the allée des Acacias, around the Grand Lac, and in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite,<sup>30</sup> I would steer Françoise in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne. For me it was like those zoological gardens in which one sees diverse flora and contrasting landscapes brought together in one place; where, after a hill, one finds a grotto, a meadow, rocks, a stream, a ditch, a hill, a marsh, but knows they are there only to provide the frolicking of the hippopotamus, zebras, crocodiles, albino rabbits, bears, and heron with an appropriate environment or a picturesque setting; the Bois too, equally complex, bringing together as it does diverse enclosed little worlds—first a farm planted with red trees, American oaks, like an agricultural estate in Virginia, then a stand of firs at the edge of the lake, or a forest from which would rise suddenly in her supple fur, with the lovely eyes of an animal, some woman walking quickly—it was the Garden of Woman; and—like the Alley of the Myrtles in *The Aeneid*<sup>31</sup>—planted for their sake with trees of a single species, the allée des Acacias was a favorite spot of the most famous Beauties. Just as, from a long way off, the top of the rock from which it will dive into the water thrills the children who know they are about to see the sea lion, so, well before reaching the allée des Acacias, first their fragrance, which, radiating all around, allowed one to sense from a distance the approach and the singularity of a powerful, soft, vegetative entity, then, when I drew near, the glimpsed crest of their greenery, light and childishly graceful, with its easy elegance, its coquettish cut, its thin material, on which hundreds of flowers had swooped down like vibrant winged colonies of precious parasites, and, finally, even their name, feminine, indolent, and sweet—all of this made my heart pound, but with a worldly desire, like those waltzes which remind us only of the names of the beautiful guests whom the usher announces as they enter the ballroom. I had been told that in the avenue I would see certain fashionable women who, even though they were not all married, were habitually mentioned along with Mme. Swann, but most often by their professional name; their new name, when they had one, was only a sort of incognito which those who wanted to talk about them took care to remove in order to make themselves understood. Thinking that Beauty—in the order of feminine elegance—was governed by occult laws into the knowledge of which these women had been initiated, and that they had the power to bring it into being, I accepted in advance as a revelation the vision of their clothes, their carriages and horses, a thousand details deep within which I placed my belief as in an interior soul which gave the cohesiveness of a masterpiece to that ephemeral and shifting tableau. But it was Mme. Swann whom I wanted to see, and I waited for her to pass, as moved as if she were Gilberte, whose parents, steeped like all that surrounded her in her charm, excited in me as much love as she did, indeed a disturbance that was even more painful (because their point of contact with her was that domestic part of her life which was forbidden to me), and lastly (because I soon knew, as will be seen, that they did not like my playing with her) that feeling of veneration which we always have for those who wield unrestrained power to do us harm.

I assigned the first place to simplicity, in the order of aesthetic merits and social grandeur, when I saw Mme. Swann on foot, wearing a cloth polonaise, on her head a little toque trimmed with a pheasant wing, a bouquet of violets at her bodice, hurrying down the allée des Acacias as if it were merely the shortest way to return home and answering with a wink the gentlemen in carriages who, recognizing her figure from far away, bowed to her and said to themselves that no one was as smart. But in place of simplicity, it was ostentation that I put on the highest rank, if, after I had forced Françoise, who was exhausted and said her legs were "folding up," to walk back and forth for an hour, at last I would see, emerging from the avenue that comes from the Porte Dauphine—the picture for me of royal dignity, of a sovereign's arrival, an impression such as no real queen has since been able to give me, because my notion of their power was less vague and more founded upon experience—borne along by two flying fiery horses as slender and smoothly turned as in the drawings of Constantin Guys,<sup>32</sup> carrying an enormous coachman settled on his seat and wrapped in furs like a Cossack, next to a little groom who recalled the "tiger" of "the late Baudenord"<sup>33</sup> I would see—or rather I would feel it imprint its form on my heart with a neat and exhausting wound—a matchless victoria, in its design a little high and with allusions to the old forms showing through its "dernier cri" opulence, in the depths of which Mme. Swann lay back carelessly, her hair now blond with a single gray lock and girded with a thin band of flowers, most often violets, from which descended long veils, in her hand a mauve parasol, on her lips an ambiguous smile in which I saw only the beneficence of a monarch and in which there was, more than anything else, a cocotte's provocativeness, and which she inclined gently on the people who bowed to her. That smile in reality said to some of them: "I remember it very well—it was exquisite!"; to others: "How I would have loved to! What bad luck!"; to others: "Why yes, if you like! I'll stay in line for a moment longer and cut out as soon as I can." When strangers passed, she would still allow an idle smile to linger around her lips, as though it were turned toward the expectation or the memory of a friend, which made people say: "How beautiful she is!" And for certain men only she had a smile that was sour, stiff, reticent, and cold, and meant: "Yes, you beast, I know you have the tongue of a viper, that you can't keep from talking! But do I care about you? Do I?" Coquelin<sup>34</sup> went past holding forth among a group of attentive friends, and with his hand gave a broad theatrical hello to the people in the carriages. But I was thinking only about Mme. Swann and I pretended I had not seen her yet, for I knew that once she drew level with the Tir aux Pigeons<sup>35</sup> she would

tell her coachman to cut out of the line and stop so that she could come back down the avenue on foot. And on the days when I felt I had the courage to pass close to her, I would drag Françoise in that direction. At a certain moment, in fact, in the footpath, walking toward us, I would see Mme. Swann letting the long train of her mauve dress spread out behind her, clothed, as the common people imagine queens, in fabrics and rich finery that other women did not wear, lowering her eyes now and then to the handle of her parasol, paying little attention to the people passing, as if her great business and her goal were to take some exercise, without thinking that she was being observed and that all heads were turned toward her. But now and then when she had looked back to call her greyhound, she would imperceptibly cast a circular gaze around her.

Even those who did not know her were alerted by something singular and excessive—or perhaps by a telepathic radiation like those that triggered bursts of applause from the ignorant crowd at moments when La Berma was sublime—that this must be some well-known person. They would ask one another: “Who is she?” or sometimes question a passing stranger, or promise themselves they would remember the way she was dressed as a reference for some better-informed friend who would immediately enlighten them. Others, half stopping in their walk, would say:

“Do you know who that is? Mme. Swann! That means nothing to you? Odette de Crécy?”

“Odette de Crécy? Why in fact I was just wondering . . . Those sad eyes . . . But you know she can’t be as young as she once was! I remember I slept with her the day MacMahon resigned.”

“You’d better not remind her of it. She’s now Mme. Swann, wife of a gentleman in the Jockey Club who’s a friend of the Prince of Wales. But she’s still superb.”

“Yes, but if only you’d known her then—how pretty she was! She lived in a very strange little house filled with Chinese bric-a-brac. I remember we were bothered by the newsboys shouting outside, in the end she made me get up.”

Though I could not hear these comments, I did perceive all around her the indistinct murmur of celebrity. My heart raced with impatience at the thought that yet another instant was going to pass before the moment when all these people, among whom I was disconsolate not to find a certain mulatto banker by whom I felt I was despised, would see the young stranger to whom they had paid no attention bow (without knowing her, in fact, but I felt I was authorized to do so because my parents knew her husband and I was her daughter’s playmate) to that woman whose reputation for beauty, improper behavior, and elegance was universal. But I was already very close to Mme. Swann, so I raised my hat to her with a motion so large, so extended, so prolonged, that she could not help smiling. People laughed. As for her, she had never seen me with Gilberte, she did not know my name, but for her I was—like one of the keepers of the Bois, or the boatman or the ducks on the lake to which she threw bread—one of those secondary, familiar, anonymous figures, as lacking in individual character as an “extra” onstage, of her outings in the Bois. On certain days when I had not seen her in the allée des Acacias, I would sometimes find her in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite, where women go who want to be alone, or to appear to want to be alone; she would not remain alone for long, soon joined by some friend, often wearing a gray “topper,” whom I did not know and who would talk to her for a long time, while their two carriages followed.

That complexity of the Bois de Boulogne which makes it an artificial place and, in the zoological or mythological sense of the word, a Garden, I discovered again this year as I was crossing it to go to Trianon,<sup>36</sup> on one of the first mornings of this month of November when, in Paris, inside the houses, we are so close to the autumn spectacle, and yet denied it, as it rapidly comes to an end without our witnessing it, that we are filled with a yearning, a veritable fever for the dead leaves that may go so far as to stop us from sleeping. In my closed room, they had been coming for a month now, summoned by my desire to see them, between my thoughts and any object to which I applied myself, and they eddied like those yellow spots that sometimes, whatever we may be looking at, dance in front of our eyes. And that morning, no longer hearing the rain fall as on the days before, seeing the fine weather smile at the corners of the drawn curtains as at the corners of a closed mouth that betrays the secret of its happiness, I had felt that I might be able to look at those yellow leaves as the light passed through them, in their supreme beauty; and being no more able to keep myself from going to see the trees than in earlier days, when the wind blew too hard in my chimney, from departing for the seaside, I had left to go to Trianon, by way of the Bois de Boulogne. It was the hour and it was the season when the Bois seems perhaps most multiform, not only because it is more subdivided, but also because it is subdivided in a different way. Even in the open parts where one embraces a great space, here and there, in front of the dark distant masses of the trees that had no leaves or still had their summer leaves, a double row of orange chestnut trees seemed, as in a picture just begun, to be the only thing painted so far by the scene painter, who had not put any color on the rest, and it offered its avenue in full light for the episodic walk of figures that would be added later on.

Farther off, at a place where the trees were still covered in all their green leaves, one alone, small, squat, lopped, obstinate, shook in the wind a homely head of red hair. Elsewhere, again, there was a first awakening of this May of the leaves, and those of an ampelopsis as marvelous and smiling as a pink winter hawthorn had since that same morning been all in flower. And the Bois had the temporary and artificial look of a tree nursery or a park, where for botanical purposes or in preparation for a festival, they have just placed, among the trees of a common sort that have not yet been transplanted, two or three precious species with fantastic foliage which seem to be reserving an empty space around themselves, giving air, creating light. Thus it was the season when the Bois de Boulogne reveals the most numerous different varieties and juxtaposes the most numerous distinct parts in a composite aggregation. And it was the hour, as well. In the places where the trees still kept their leaves, they seemed to be undergoing a change in substance starting from the point where they were touched by the light of the sun, almost horizontal in the morning as it would be again a few hours later at the moment when in the early twilight it flames up like a lamp, projects over a distance onto the foliage a warm and artificial glow, and sets ablaze the topmost leaves of a tree that remains the dull and incombustible candelabrum of its burning tip. Here, it thickened the leaves of the chestnut trees like bricks and, like a piece of yellow Persian masonry patterned in blue, crudely cemented them against the sky, there on the contrary detached them from it as they clutched at it with their fingers of gold. Halfway up a tree clothed in Japanese ivy, it had grafted and brought into bloom, too dazzling to discern clearly, an immense bouquet as though of red flowers, perhaps a variety of carnation. The different parts of the Bois, merging more completely in summer in the thickness and monotony of their green, were now separated. Open spaces

made visible the entrance to almost every one of them, or a sumptuous bit of foliage marked it like a banner. One could distinguish, as on a colored map, Armenonville, the Pré Catelan, Madrid, the Race Course, the shores of the lake. From time to time there would appear some useless construction, a fake grotto, a mill for which the trees parted to make room or which a lawn carried forward on its soft platform. One sensed that the Bois was not merely a wood, that it fulfilled a purpose foreign to the life of its trees, the exhilaration I was experiencing was not caused merely by an admiration for autumn, but by some desire. The great source of a joy which the soul feels at first without recognizing its cause, without understanding that it is motivated by nothing outside. And so I looked at the trees with an unsatisfied tenderness that passed beyond them and went on without my knowing it toward that masterpiece of lovely strolling women which they enclose each day for several hours. I went toward the allée des Acacias. I passed through old groves where the morning light imposed new divisions, pruning the trees, joining together the different stems, and composing bouquets. Deftly it drew toward itself a pair of trees; using the powerful scissors of a ray of light and a shadow, it cut off from each of them half its trunk and branches and, weaving together the two halves that remained, made of them either a single pillar of shadow, delimited by the sunshine around it, or a single phantom of brightness whose tremulous artificial contour was ringed by a net of black shadow. When a ray of sun gilded the highest branches, they seemed, steeped in a sparkling dampness, to emerge alone from the liquid emerald-colored atmosphere in which the entire forest was plunged as though under the sea. For the trees continued to live their own life and, when they had no more leaves, that life shone more brightly on the sheath of green velvet that wrapped their trunks or in the white enamel of the spheres of mistletoe that spangled the tops of the poplars, as round as the sun and the moon in Michelangelo's *Creation*. But forced as they have been for so many years by a sort of grafting to live a life shared with women, they conjured up for me the wood nymph, the lovely quick and colorful worldly beauty whom they cover with their branches as she passes beneath them, obliging her to feel as they do the power of the season; they recalled to me the happy time of my believing youth, when I would avidly come to the places where masterpieces of feminine elegance were created for a few moments among the unconscious and complicitous leaves. But the beauty which the pines and acacias of the Bois de Boulogne made me desire, trees more disturbing because of this than the chestnuts and lilacs of Trianon that I was going to see, was not fixed outside me in the mementos of some historic period, in works of art, in a little temple to the god of Love whose base is piled with golden palmate leaves. I reached the shores of the lake, I went on as far as the Tir aux Pigeons. The idea of perfection which I carried inside me I had conferred at that time upon the height of a victoria, upon the slenderness of those horses, as furious and light as wasps, their eyes bloodshot like the cruel steeds of Diomedes,<sup>37</sup> which now, filled as I was with a desire to see again what I had once loved, as ardent as the desire that had driven me down these same paths many years before, I wanted to see before my eyes again at the moment when Mme. Swann's enormous coachman, watched over by a little groom as fat as a fist and as childlike as Saint George, tried to control those wings of steel as they thrashed about quivering with fear. Alas, now there were only automobiles driven by mustached mechanics with tall footmen by their sides. I wanted to hold in front of my bodily eyes, so as to know if they were as charming as they appeared in the eyes of my memory, women's little hats so low they seemed to be simple crowns. All the hats were now immense, covered with fruits and flowers and varieties of birds. In place of the lovely dresses in which Mme. Swann looked like a queen, I now saw Greco-Saxon tunics with Tanagra<sup>38</sup> folds, and sometimes in the style of the Directoire, made of liberty-silk chiffons sprinkled with flowers like wallpaper. On the heads of the gentlemen who could have walked with Mme. Swann in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite, I did not find the gray hats of earlier times, nor any others. They went out bare-headed. And I no longer had any belief to infuse into all these new elements of the spectacle, to give them substance, unity, life; they went past scattered before me, randomly, without reality, containing in themselves no beauty that my eyes might have tried as they had in earlier times to form into a composition. These were ordinary women, in whose elegance I had no faith and whose dress seemed to me unimportant. But when a belief disappears, there survives it—more and more vigorous so as to mask the absence of the power we have lost to give reality to new things—a fetishistic attachment to the old things which our belief once animated, as if it were in them and not in us that the divine resided and as if our present lack of belief had a contingent cause, the death of the Gods.

How awful! I said to myself: can anyone think these automobiles are as elegant as the old carriages and pairs? I'm probably too old now—but I'm not meant for a world in which women hobble themselves in dresses that aren't even made of cloth. What's the use of walking among these trees, if nothing is left of what used to gather under the delicate reddening leaves, if vulgarity and idiocy have taken the place of the exquisite thing they once framed? How awful! My consolation is to think about the women I once knew, now that there is no more elegance. But how could anyone contemplating these horrible creatures under their hats topped with a birdcage or a vegetable patch even perceive what was so charming about the sight of Mme. Swann in a simple mauve hood or a little hat with a single stiff, straight iris poking up from it? Could I even have made them understand the emotion I felt on winter mornings when I met Mme. Swann on foot, in a sealskin coat, wearing a simple beret with two blades of partridge feathers sticking up from it, but enveloped also by the artificial warmth of her apartment, which was conjured by nothing more than the bouquet of violets crushed at her breast whose live blue flowering against the gray sky, the icy air, the bare-branched trees, had the same charming manner of accepting the season and the weather merely as a setting, and of living in a human atmosphere, in the atmosphere of this woman, as had, in the vases and flower stands of her drawing room, close to the lit fire, before the silk sofa, the flowers that looked out through the closed window at the falling snow? But it would not have been enough for me anyway for the clothes to be the same as in those earlier times. Because of the dependence which the different parts of a recollection have on one another, parts which our memory keeps balanced in an aggregate from which we are not permitted to abstract anything, or reject anything, I would have wanted to be able to go spend the last part of the day in the home of one of these women, over a cup of tea, in an apartment with walls painted in dark colors, as Mme. Swann's still was (in the year after the one in which the first part of this story ends) and in which the orange flares, the red combustion, the pink and white flame of the chrysanthemums would gleam in the November twilight, during moments like those in which (as we will see later) I was not able to discover the pleasures I desired. But now, even though they had led to nothing, those moments seemed to me to have had enough charm in themselves. I wanted to find them again as I remembered them. Alas, there was no longer anything but Louis XVI apartments all white and dotted with blue hydrangeas. Moreover, people no longer returned to Paris until very late. Mme. Swann would have answered me from a country house that she would not be back until February, well after the time of the chrysanthemums, had I asked her to reconstruct for me the elements of that memory which I felt belonged to a distant year, to a

vintage to which I was not allowed to go back, the elements of that desire which had itself become as inaccessible as the pleasure it had once vainly pursued. And I would also have needed them to be the same women, those whose dress interested me because, at the time when I still believed, my imagination had individualized them and given them each a legend. Alas, in the avenue des Acacias—the Alley of the Myrtles—I did see a few of them again, old, now no more than terrible shadows of what they had been, wandering, desperately searching for who knows what in the Virgilian groves. They had fled long since as I still vainly questioned the deserted paths. The sun had hidden itself. Nature was resuming its rule over the Bois, from which the idea that it was the Elysian Garden of Woman had vanished; above the artificial mill the real sky was gray; the wind wrinkled the Grand Lac with little wavelets, like a real lake; large birds swiftly crossed the Bois, like a real wood, and uttering sharp cries alighted one after another in the tall oaks which under their druidical crowns and with a Dodonean<sup>39</sup> majesty seemed to proclaim the inhuman emptiness of the disused forest, and helped me better understand what a contradiction it is to search in reality for memory's pictures, which would never have the charm that comes to them from memory itself and from not being perceived by the senses. The reality I had known no longer existed. That Mme. Swann did not arrive exactly the same at the same moment was enough to make the Avenue different. The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions which formed our life at that time; the memory of a certain image is but regret for a certain moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years.



BOOK II  
WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Part Four

MADAME SWANN AT HOME

My mother, when it was a question of our having M. de Norpois to dinner for the first time, having expressed her regret that Professor Cottard was away from home and that she herself had quite ceased to see anything of Swann, since either of these might have helped to entertain the ex-ambassador, my father replied that so eminent a guest, so distinguished a man of science as Cottard could never be out of place at a dinner-table, but that Swann, with his ostentation, his habit of crying aloud from the house-tops the name of everyone he knew, however slightly, was a vulgar show-off whom the Marquis de Norpois would be sure to dismiss as—to use his own epithet—a “pestilent” fellow. Now, this attitude on my father’s part may be felt to require a few words of explanation, inasmuch as some of us, no doubt, remember a Cottard of distinct mediocrity and a Swann by whom modesty and discretion, in all his social relations, were carried to the utmost refinement of delicacy. But in his case what had happened was that, to the original “young Swann” and also to the Swann of the Jockey Club, our old friend had added a new personality (which was not to be his last), that of Odette’s husband. Adapting to the humble ambitions of that lady the instinct, the desire, the industry which he had always had, he had laboriously constructed for himself, a long way beneath the old, a new position more appropriate to the companion who was to share it with him. In this new position he revealed himself a different man. Since (while continuing to meet his own personal friends by himself, not wishing to impose Odette on them unless they expressly asked to be introduced to her) it was a second life that he had begun to lead, in common with his wife, among a new set of people, it would have been understandable if, in order to gauge the social importance of these new acquaintances and thereby the degree of self-esteem that might be derived from entertaining them, he had used, as a standard of comparison, not the brilliant society in which he himself had moved before his marriage, but former connections of Odette’s. But, even when one knew that it was with uncouth functionaries and tainted women, the ornaments of ministerial ball-rooms, that he now wished to associate, it was still astonishing to hear him, who in the old days, and even still, would so gracefully refrain from mentioning an invitation to Twickenham or to Buckingham Palace, proclaim with quite unnecessary emphasis that the wife of some junior minister had returned Mme Swann’s call. It will perhaps be objected here that what this really implied was that the simplicity of the fashionable Swann had been simply a more refined form of vanity, and that, like certain other Jews, my parents’ old friend had contrived to illustrate in turn all the successive stages through which those of his race had passed, from the most naïve snobbery and the crudest caddishness to the most exquisite good manners. But the chief reason—and one which is applicable to humanity as a whole—was that our virtues themselves are not free and floating qualities over which we retain a permanent control and power of disposal; they come to be so closely linked in our minds with the actions in conjunction with which we have made it our duty to exercise them that if we come to engage in an activity of a different kind, it catches us off guard and without the slightest awareness that it might involve the application of those same virtues. Swann, in his solicitude for these new connections and in the pride with which he referred to them, was like those great artists—modest or generous by nature—who, if in their declining years they take to cooking or to gardening, display a naïve gratification at the compliments that are paid to their dishes or their borders, and will not allow any of the criticism which they readily accept when it is applied to their real achievements; or who, while giving away a canvas for nothing, cannot conceal their annoyance if they lose a couple of francs at dominoes.

As for Professor Cottard, we shall meet him again, at length, much later, with the “Mistress,” Mme Verdurin, in her country house La Raspelière. For the present, the following observations must suffice: first of all, whereas in the case of Swann the alteration may indeed be surprising, since it had been accomplished and yet was not suspected by me when I used to see Gilberte’s father in the Champs-Élysées, where in any case, as he never spoke to me, he could not very well boast to me of his political connections (it is true that if he had done so, I might not at once have discerned his vanity, for the idea that one has long held of a person is apt to stop one’s eyes and ears; my mother, for three whole years, had no more noticed the rouge with which one of her nieces used to paint her lips than if it had been invisibly dissolved in some liquid; until one day a streak too much, or else some other cause, brought about the phenomenon known as super-saturation; all the paint that had hitherto passed unperceived now crystallised, and my mother, in the face of this sudden riot of colour, declared, in the best Combray manner, that it was a perfect scandal, and almost severed relations with her niece). In the case of Cottard, on the other hand, the period when we saw him in attendance at Swann’s first meetings with the Verdurins was already fairly remote; and honours, offices and titles come with the passage of the years. Secondly, a man may be illiterate, and make stupid puns, and yet have a special gift which no amount of general culture can replace—such as the gift of a great strategist or physician. And so it was not merely as an obscure practitioner, who had attained in course of time to European celebrity, that the rest of his profession regarded Cottard. The most intelligent of the younger doctors used to assert—for a year or two at least, for fashions change, being themselves begotten of the desire for change—that if they themselves ever fell ill Cottard was the only one of the leading men to whom they would entrust their lives. No doubt they preferred the company of certain others who were better read, more artistic, with whom they could discuss Nietzsche and Wagner. When there was a musical party at Mme Cottard’s, on the evenings when—in the hope that it might one day make him Dean of the Faculty—she entertained the colleagues and pupils of her husband, the latter, instead of listening, preferred to play cards in another room. But everyone praised

the quickness, the penetration, the unerring judgment of his diagnoses. Thirdly, in considering the general impression which Professor Cottard must have made on a man like my father, we must bear in mind that the character which a man exhibits in the latter half of his life is not always, though it often is, his original character developed or withered, attenuated or enlarged; it is sometimes the exact reverse, like a garment that has been turned. Except from the Verdurins, who were infatuated with him, Cottard's hesitating manner, his excessive shyness and affability had, in his young days, called down upon him endless taunts and sneers. What charitable friend counselled that glacial air? The importance of his professional standing made it all the more easy for him to adopt. Wherever he went, save at the Verdurins', where he instinctively became himself again, he would assume a repellent coldness, remain deliberately silent, adopt a peremptory tone when he was obliged to speak, and never fail to say the most disagreeable things. He had every opportunity of rehearsing this new attitude before his patients, who, seeing him for the first time, were not in a position to make comparisons, and would have been greatly surprised to learn that he was not at all a rude man by nature. Impassiveness was what he strove to attain, and even while visiting his hospital wards, when he allowed himself to utter one of those puns which left everyone, from the house physician to the most junior student, helpless with laughter, he would always make it without moving a muscle of his face, which was itself no longer recognisable now that he had shaved off his beard and moustache.

Who, finally, was the Marquis de Norpois? He had been Minister Plenipotentiary before the War, and was actually an ambassador on the Sixteenth of May;<sup>1</sup> in spite of which, and to the general astonishment, he had since been several times chosen to represent France on special missions—even, as Controller of Debts, in Egypt, where, thanks to his considerable financial skill, he had rendered important services—by Radical cabinets under which a simple bourgeois reactionary would have declined to serve, and in whose eyes M. de Norpois, in view of his past, his connexions and his opinions, ought presumably to have been suspect. But these advanced ministers seemed to be aware that, in making such an appointment, they were showing how broadminded they were when the higher interests of France were at stake, were raising themselves above the general run of politicians to the extent that the *Journal des Débats* itself referred to them as “statesmen,” and were reaping direct advantage from the prestige that attaches to an aristocratic name and the dramatic interest always aroused by an unexpected appointment. And they knew also that, in calling upon M. de Norpois, they could reap these advantages without having to fear any want of political loyalty on his part, a fault against which his noble birth not only need not put them on their guard but offered a positive guarantee. And in this calculation the Government of the Republic was not mistaken. In the first place, because an aristocrat of a certain type, brought up from his cradle to regard his name as an innate asset of which no accident can deprive him (and of whose value his peers, or those of even nobler birth, can form a fairly exact estimate), knows that he can dispense with the efforts (since they can in no way enhance his position) in which, without any appreciable result, so many public men of the middle class spend themselves to profess only orthodox opinions and associate only with right-thinking people. Anxious, on the other hand, to enhance his own importance in the eyes of the princely or ducal families which take immediate precedence of his own, he knows that he can do so only by complementing his name with something that it lacked, something that will give it priority over other names heraldically its equals: such as political influence, a literary or an artistic reputation, or a large fortune. And so what he saves by ignoring the ineffectual squires who are sought after by his bourgeois colleagues, but of his sterile friendship with whom a prince would think nothing, he will lavish on the politicians who (freemasons, or worse, though they be) can advance him in diplomacy or support him in elections, and on the artists or scientists whose patronage can help him to “break into” the branches in which they are predominant, on anyone, in fact, who is in a position to confer a fresh distinction or to help bring off a rich marriage.

But in the case of M. de Norpois there was above all the fact that, in the course of a long career in diplomacy, he had become imbued with that negative, methodical, conservative spirit, a “governmental mind,” which is common to all governments and, under every government, particularly inspires its foreign service. He had imbibed, during that career, an aversion, a dread, a contempt for the methods of procedure, more or less revolutionary and at the very least improper, which are those of an Opposition. Save in the case of a few illiterates—high or low, it makes no matter—by whom no difference in quality is perceptible, what brings men together is not a community of views but a consanguinity of minds. An Academician of the Legouvé type, an upholder of the classics, would have applauded Maxime Du Camp's or Mézière's eulogy of Victor Hugo with more fervour than that of Boileau by Claudel. A common nationalism suffices to endear Barrés to his electors, who scarcely distinguish between him and M. Georges Berry, but not to those of his brother Academicians who, with the same political opinions but a different type of mind, will be more partial even to enemies such as M. Ribot and M. Deschanel, with whom, in turn, the most loyal Monarchists feel themselves more at home than with Maurras or Léon Daudet, who nevertheless also desire the King's return. Sparing of his words, not only from a professional habit of prudence and reserve, but because words themselves have more value, present more subtleties of definition to men whose efforts, protracted over a decade, to bring two countries to an understanding are condensed, translated—in a speech or in a protocol—into a single adjective, colourless in all appearance, but to them pregnant with a world of meaning, M. de Norpois was considered very stiff, on the Commission, where he sat next to my father, whom everyone else congratulated on the astonishing way in which the ex-ambassador unbent to him. My father was himself more astonished than anyone. For, being generally somewhat unsociable, he was not used to being sought after outside the circle of his intimates, and frankly admitted it. He realised that these overtures on the part of the diplomat were a reflection of the completely individual standpoint which each of us adopts for himself in making his choice of friends, and

from which all a man's intellectual qualities or his sensibility will be a far less potent recommendation to someone who is bored or irritated by him than the frankness and gaiety of another man whom many would consider vapid, frivolous and null. "De Norpois has asked me to dinner again; it's quite extraordinary; everyone on the Commission is amazed, as he has no personal relations with anyone else. I'm sure he's going to tell me some more fascinating things about the 'Seventy war." My father knew that M. de Norpois had warned, had perhaps been alone in warning the Emperor of the growing strength and bellicose designs of Prussia, and that Bismarck rated his intelligence most highly. Only the other day, at the Opera, during the gala performance given for King Theodosius, the newspapers had all drawn attention to the long conversation which that monarch had had with M. de Norpois. "I must ask him whether the King's visit had any real significance," my father went on, for he was keenly interested in foreign policy. "I know old Norpois keeps very close as a rule, but when he's with me he opens out quite charmingly."

As for my mother, perhaps the Ambassador had not the type of mind towards which she felt herself most attracted. And it must be said that his conversation furnished so exhaustive a glossary of the superannuated forms of speech peculiar to a certain profession, class and period—a period which, for that profession and that class, might be said not to have altogether passed away—that I sometimes regret not having kept a literal record simply of the things that I heard him say. I should thus have obtained an effect of old-fashioned usage by the same process and at as little expense as that actor at the Palais-Royal who, when asked where on earth he managed to find his astounding hats, answered, "I do not find my hats. I keep them." In a word, I suppose that my mother considered M. de Norpois a trifle "out-of-date," which was by no means a fault in her eyes, so far as manners were concerned, but attracted her less in the realm, not, in this instance, of ideas—for those of M. de Norpois were extremely modern—but of idiom. She felt, however, that she was paying a delicate compliment to her husband when she spoke admiringly of the diplomat who had shown so remarkable a predilection for him. By reinforcing in my father's mind the good opinion that he already had of M. de Norpois, and so inducing him to form a good opinion of himself also, she knew that she was carrying out that wifely duty which consisted in making life pleasant and comfortable for her husband, just as when she saw to it that his dinner was perfectly cooked and served in silence. And as she was incapable of deceiving my father, she compelled herself to admire the Ambassador in order to be able to praise him with sincerity. In any event she could naturally appreciate his air of kindliness, his somewhat antiquated courtesy (so ceremonious that when, as he was walking along the street, his tall figure rigidly erect, he caught sight of my mother driving past, before raising his hat to her he would fling away the cigar that he had just lighted), his conversation, so elaborately circumspect, in which he referred as seldom as possible to himself and always considered what might interest the person to whom he was speaking, and his promptness in answering a letter, which was so astonishing that whenever my father, just after posting one himself to M. de Norpois, saw his handwriting on an envelope, his first impulse was always one of annoyance that their letters must unfortunately have crossed: it was as though he enjoyed at the post office the special and luxurious privilege of supplementary deliveries and collections at all hours of the day and night. My mother marvelled at his being so punctilious although so busy, so friendly although so much in demand, never realising that "although," with such people, is invariably an unrecognised "because," and that (just as old men are always wonderful for their age, and kings extraordinarily simple, and country cousins astonishingly well-informed) it was the same system of habits that enabled M. de Norpois to meet so many social demands and to be so methodical in answering letters, to go everywhere and to be so friendly when he came to us. Moreover she made the mistake which everyone makes who is unduly modest; she rated everything that concerned herself below, and consequently outside, the range of other people's duties and engagements. The letter which it seemed to her so meritorious in my father's friend to have written us promptly, since in the course of the day he must have had so many letters to write, she excepted from that great number of letters of which it was only one; in the same way she did not consider that dining with us was, for M. de Norpois, merely one of the innumerable activities of his social life: she never guessed that the Ambassador had trained himself, long ago, to look upon dining-out as part of his diplomatic functions, and to display, at table, an inveterate charm which it would have been too much to have expected him specially to discard when he came to dine with us.

The evening on which M. de Norpois first appeared at our table, in a year when I still went to play in the Champs-Élysées, has remained fixed in my memory because the afternoon of the same day was that upon which I at last went to a *matinée* to see Berma in *Phèdre*, and also because in talking to M. de Norpois I realised suddenly, and in a new and different way, how completely the feelings aroused in me by all that concerned Gilberte Swann and her parents differed from those which the same family inspired in everyone else.

It was no doubt the dejection into which I was plunged by the approach of the New Year holidays during which, as she herself had informed me, I was to see nothing of Gilberte, that prompted my mother to suggest one day, in the hope of distracting my mind: "If you're still longing to see Berma, I think your father might perhaps allow you to go; your grandmother can take you."

But it was because M. de Norpois had told him that he ought to let me see Berma, that it was an experience for a young man to remember in later life, that my father, who had hitherto been so resolutely opposed to my going and wasting my time, with the added risk of my falling ill again, on what he used to shock my grandmother by calling "futilities," was now not far from regarding this outing recommended by the Ambassador as vaguely forming part of a sum of precious formulae for success in a brilliant career. My grandmother, who, in renouncing on my behalf the benefit which, according to her, I should have derived from hearing Berma, had made a considerable sacrifice in the interests of my health, was surprised to find that

this last had become of no account at a mere word from M. de Norpois. Reposing the unconquerable hopes of her rationalist spirit in the strict course of fresh air and early hours which had been prescribed for me, she now deplored as something disastrous the infringement of these rules that I was about to commit, and in anguished tones exclaimed "How frivolous you are!" to my father, who replied angrily "What! So now it's you who don't want him to go! It's really a bit much, after your telling us all day and every day that it would be so good for him."

M. de Norpois had also brought about a change in my father's plans in a matter of far greater importance to myself. My father had always wanted me to be a diplomat, and I could not endure the thought that, even if I were to remain for some years attached to the Ministry, I might run the risk of being sent later on as ambassador to capitals in which there would be no Gilberte. I should have preferred to return to the literary projects which I had formerly planned and abandoned in the course of my wanderings along the Guermantes way. But my father had steadily opposed my devoting myself to literature, which he regarded as vastly inferior to diplomacy, refusing even to dignify it with the title of career, until the day when M. de Norpois, who had little love for the more recent generations of diplomatic officials, assured him that it was quite possible, as a writer, to attract as much attention, to receive as much consideration, to exercise as much influence as in the ambassadorial world, and at the same time to preserve more independence.

"Well, well, I should never have believed it—old Norpois doesn't at all disapprove of the idea of your taking up writing," my father had reported. And as he had a certain amount of influence himself, he imagined that there was nothing that could not be arranged, no problem for which a happy solution might not be found in the conversation of people who counted. "I shall bring him back to dinner, one of these days, from the Commission. You must talk to him a bit, so that he can get some idea of your calibre. Write something good that you can show him; he's a great friend of the editor of the *Deux-Mondes*; he'll get you in there; he'll fix it all, the cunning old fox; and, upon my soul, he seems to think that diplomacy, nowadays ...!"

My happiness at the prospect of not being separated from Gilberte made me desirous, but not capable, of writing something good which could be shown to M. de Norpois. After a few laboured pages, the tedium of it made the pen drop from my fingers, and I wept with rage at the thought that I should never have any talent, that I was not gifted, that I could not even take advantage of the chance that M. de Norpois's coming visit offered me of spending the rest of my life in Paris. The recollection that I was to be taken to see Berma alone distracted me from my grief. But just as I wished to see storms only on those coasts where they raged with most violence, so I should not have cared to see the great actress except in one of those classic parts in which Swann had told me that she touched the sublime. For when it is in the hope of making a priceless discovery that we desire to receive certain impressions from nature or from works of art, we have qualms lest our soul imbibe inferior impressions which might lead us to form a false estimate of the value of Beauty. Berma in *Andromaque*, in *Les Caprices de Marianne*, in *Phèdre*, was one of those famous spectacles which my imagination had long desired. I should enjoy the same rapture as on the day when a gondola would deposit me at the foot of the Titian of the Frari or the Carpaccios of San Giorgio dei Schiavoni, were I ever to hear Berma recite the lines beginning,

They say a prompt departure takes you from us,  
Prince ...

I was familiar with them from the simple reproduction in black and white which was given of them upon the printed page; but my heart beat furiously at the thought—as of the realisation of a long-planned voyage—that I should see them at length bathed and brought to life in the atmosphere and sunshine of the golden voice. A Carpaccio in Venice, Berma in *Phèdre*, masterpieces of pictorial or dramatic art which the glamour, the dignity attaching to them made so vividly alive for me, that is to say so indivisible, that if I had been to see Carpaccios in one of the galleries of the Louvre, or Berma in some piece of which I had never heard, I should not have experienced the same delicious amazement at finding myself at last, with wide-open eyes, before the unique and inconceivable object of so many thousand dreams. Then, expecting as I did from Berma's playing the revelation of certain aspects of nobility and tragic grief, it seemed to me that whatever greatness, whatever truth there might be in her playing must be enhanced if the actress superimposed it upon a work of real value, instead of what would, after all, be but embroidering a pattern of truth and beauty upon a commonplace and vulgar web.

Finally, if I went to see Berma in a new play, it would not be easy for me to assess her art and her diction, since I should be unable to discriminate between a text which was not already familiar to me and what she added to it by her vocal inflexions and gestures, an addition which would seem to me to be an integral part of it; whereas the old plays, the classics which I knew by heart, presented themselves to me as vast and empty walls, reserved and made ready for my inspection, on which I should be able to appreciate without restriction the devices by which Berma would cover them, as with frescoes, with the perpetually fresh discoveries of her inspiration. Unfortunately, for some years now, since she had abandoned the serious stage to throw in her lot with a commercial theatre where she was the star, she had ceased to appear in classic parts, and in vain did I scan the hoardings, they never advertised any but the newest pieces, written specially for her by authors in fashion at the moment. When, one morning, searching through the column of theatre advertisements to find the afternoon performances for the week of the New Year holidays, I saw there for the first time—at the foot of the bill, after some probably insignificant curtain-raiser, whose title was opaque to me because it contained all the particulars of a plot I did not know—two acts of *Phèdre* with Mme Berma, and, on the following afternoons, *Le Demi-Monde* and *Les Caprices de Marianne*, names which, like that of *Phèdre*, were for me transparent, filled with light only, so familiar were those works to me, illuminated to their very depths by the

revealing smile of art. They seemed to me to invest with a fresh nobility Mme Berma herself when I read in the newspapers, after the programme of these performances, that it was she who had decided to show herself once more to the public in some of her early creations. She was conscious, then, that certain roles have an interest which survives the novelty of their first production or the success of a revival; she regarded them, when interpreted by herself, as museum pieces which it might be instructive to set once more before the eyes of the generation which had admired her in them long ago, or of the one which had never yet seen her in them. In thus advertising, in the middle of a column of plays intended only to while away an evening, this *Phèdre*, whose title was no bigger than any of the rest, nor set in different type, she added to it, as it were, the unspoken comment of a hostess who, on introducing you to her other guests before going in to dinner, casually mentions amid the string of names which are the names of guests and nothing more, and without any change of tone:—"M. Anatole France."

The doctor who was attending me—the same who had forbidden me to travel—advised my parents not to let me go to the theatre; I should only be ill again afterwards, perhaps for weeks, and in the long run derive more pain than pleasure from the experience. The fear of this might have availed to stop me, if what I had anticipated from such a spectacle had been only a pleasure which a subsequent pain could offset and annul. But what I demanded from this performance—as from the visit to Balbec and the visit to Venice for which I had so intensely longed—was something quite different from pleasure: verities pertaining to a world more real than that in which I lived, which, once acquired, could never be taken from me again by any trivial incident—even though it were to cause me bodily suffering—of my otiose existence. At most, the pleasure which I might experience during the performance appeared to me as the perhaps necessary form of the perception of these truths; and I hoped only that the predicted ailments would not begin until the play was finished, so that this pleasure should not be in any way compromised or spoiled. I implored my parents, who, after the doctor's visit, were no longer inclined to let me go to *Phèdre*. I recited to myself all day long the speech beginning,

They say a prompt departure takes you from us ...

trying out every inflexion and intonation that could be put into it, the better to appreciate the unexpected way which Berma would have found of uttering the lines. Concealed, like the Holy of Holies, beneath the veil that screened her from my gaze and behind which I invested her from one moment to the next with a fresh aspect, according to whichever of the words of Bergotte (in the booklet that Gilberte had found for me) came to my mind—"plastic nobility," "Christian hair shirt" or "Jansenist pallor," "Princess of Troezen and of Cleves," "Mycenean drama," "Delphic symbol," "solar myth"—the goddess of beauty whom Berma's acting was to reveal to me was enthroned, night and day, upon an altar perpetually lit, in the sanctuary of my mind—on whose behalf my stern and fickle parents were to decide whether or not it was to enshrine, and for all time, the perfections of the Deity unveiled in that same spot where her invisible form now reigned. And with my eyes fastened on that inconceivable image, I strove from morning to night to overcome the barriers which my family were putting in my way. But when these had at last fallen, when my mother—although this matinée was actually to coincide with the meeting of the Commission from which my father had promised to bring M. de Norpois home to dinner—had said to me, "Very well, we don't want to make you unhappy—if you think you will enjoy it so very much, you must go," when this visit to the theatre, hitherto forbidden and unattainable, depended now on myself alone, then for the first time, being no longer troubled by the wish that it might cease to be impossible, I wondered whether it was desirable, whether there were not other reasons than my parents' prohibition which should have made me abandon it. In the first place, whereas I had hated them for their cruelty, their consent made them now so dear to me that the thought of causing them pain stabbed me also with a pain through which the purpose of life now appeared to me as the pursuit not of truth but of loving-kindness, and life itself seemed good or evil only in so far as my parents were happy or sad. "I would rather not go, if it distresses you," I told my mother, who, on the contrary, strove hard to expel from my mind any lurking fear that she might regret my going, since that, she said, would spoil the pleasure which I should otherwise derive from *Phèdre* and in consideration of which she and my father had reversed their earlier decision. But then this sort of obligation to find pleasure in the performance seemed to me very burdensome. Besides, if I returned home ill, should I be well again in time to be able to go to the Champs-Élysées as soon as the holidays were over and Gilberte returned? Against all these arguments I set, in order to decide which course I should take, the idea, invisible there behind its veil, of Berma's perfection. I placed on one side of the scales "Making Mamma unhappy," "risking not being able to go to the Champs-Élysées," and on the other, "Jansenist pallor," "solar myth," until the words themselves grew dark and clouded in my mind's vision, ceased to say anything to me, lost all their force; and gradually my hesitations became so painful that if I had now opted for the theatre it would have been only in order to bring them to an end and he delivered from them once and for all. It would have been to fix a term to my sufferings, and no longer in the expectation of an intellectual benediction, yielding to the attractions of perfection, that I would have allowed myself to be led, not now to the Wise Goddess, but to the stern, implacable Divinity, faceless and unnamed, who had been surreptitiously substituted for her behind her veil. But suddenly everything was altered. My desire to go and see Berma received a fresh stimulus which enabled me to await the coming of the matinée with impatience and with joy. Having gone to take up my daily station, as excruciating, of late, as that of a stylite, in front of the column on which the playbills were displayed, I had seen there, still moist and wrinkled, the complete bill of *Phèdre*, which had just been pasted up for the first time (and on which, I must confess, the rest of the cast furnished no additional attraction which could help me to decide). But it gave to one of the goals between



which my indecision wavered a form at once more concrete and—inasmuch as the bill bore the date not of the day on which I was reading it but that on which the performance would take place, and the very hour at which the curtain would rise—almost imminent, already well on the way to its realisation, so that I jumped for joy before the column at the thought that on that day, and at that hour precisely, I should be sitting there in my seat, ready to hear the voice of Berma; and for fear lest my parents might not now be in time to secure two good seats for my grandmother and myself, I raced back to the house, whipped on by the magic words which had now taken the place in my mind of “Jansenist pallor” and “solar myth”: “Ladies will not be admitted to the stalls in hats. The doors will be closed at two o’clock.”

Alas! that first matinée was to prove a bitter disappointment. My father offered to drop my grandmother and me at the theatre, on his way to the Commission. Before leaving the house he said to my mother: “Try and have a good dinner for us tonight; you remember I’m bringing de Norpois back with me.” My mother had not forgotten. And ever since the day before, Françoise, rejoicing in the opportunity to devote herself to that art of cooking at which she was so gifted, stimulated, moreover, by the prospect of a new guest, and knowing that she would have to compose, by methods known to her alone, a dish of *boeuf à la gelée*, had been living in the effervescence of creation; since she attached the utmost importance to the intrinsic quality of the materials which were to enter into the fabric of her work, she had gone herself to the Halles to procure the best cuts of rump-steak, shin of beef, calves’-feet, just as Michelangelo spent eight months in the mountains of Carrara choosing the most perfect blocks of marble for the monument of Julius II. Françoise expended on these comings and goings so much ardour that Mamma, at the sight of her flaming cheeks, was alarmed lest our old servant should fall ill from overwork, like the sculptor of the Tombs of the Medici in the quarries of Pietrasanta. And overnight Françoise had sent to be cooked in the baker’s oven protected with breadcrumbs, like a block of pink marble packed in sawdust, what she called a “Nev’-York ham.” Believing the language to be less rich in words than it is, and her own ears untrustworthy, the first time she had heard someone mention York ham she had thought, no doubt—feeling it to be hardly conceivable that the dictionary could be so prodigal as to include at once a “York” and a “New York”—that she had misheard, and that the ham was really called by the name already familiar to her. And so, ever since, the word York was preceded in her ears, or before her eyes when she read it in an advertisement, by the affix “New” which she pronounced “Nev’.” And it was with the utmost conviction that she would say to her kitchen-maid: “Go and get me some ham from Olida’s. Madame told me especially that it must be Nev’-York.”

On that particular day, if Françoise was consumed by the burning certainty of creative genius, my lot was the cruel anxiety of the seeker after truth. No doubt, so long as I had not yet heard Berma speak, I still felt some pleasure. I felt it in the little square that lay in front of the theatre, in which, in two hours’ time, the bare boughs of the chestnut-trees would gleam with a metallic lustre as the lighted gas-lamps showed up every detail of their structure; and before the ticket attendants, whose selection, advancement and ultimate fate depended upon the great artist—for she alone held power in this administration at the head of which ephemeral and purely nominal managers followed one after the other in an obscure succession—who took our tickets without even glancing at us, so preoccupied were they in seeing that all Mme Berma’s instructions had been duly transmitted to the new members of the staff, that it was clearly understood that the hired applause must never sound for her, that the windows must all be kept open so long as she was not on the stage and every door closed tight the moment she appeared, that a bowl of hot water must be concealed somewhere close to her to make the dust settle. And, indeed, at any moment now her carriage, drawn by a pair of horses with flowing manes, would be stopping outside the theatre, she would alight from it muffled in furs, and, crossly acknowledging people’s salutes, would send one of her attendants to find out whether a stage box had been kept for her friends, what the temperature was “in front,” who were in the other boxes, how the programme sellers were turned out; theatre and audience being to her no more than a second, outer cloak which she would put on, and the medium, the more or less good conductor, through which her talent would have to pass. I was happy, too, in the theatre itself; since I had made the discovery that—contrary to the notion so long entertained by my childish imagination—there was but one stage for everybody, I had supposed that I should be prevented from seeing it properly by the presence of the other spectators, as one is when in the thick of a crowd; now I registered the fact that, on the contrary, thanks to an arrangement which is, as it were, symbolical of all spectatorship, everyone feels himself to be the centre of the theatre; which explained to me why, when Françoise had been sent once to see some melodrama from the top gallery, she had assured us on her return that her seat had been the best in the house, and that instead of finding herself too far from the stage she had been positively frightened by the mysterious and living proximity of the curtain. My pleasure increased further when I began to distinguish behind this lowered curtain such obscure noises as one hears through the shell of an egg before the chicken emerges, sounds which presently grew louder and suddenly, from that world which, impenetrable to our eyes, yet scrutinised us with its own, addressed themselves indubitably to us in the imperious form of three consecutive thumps as thrilling as any signals from the planet Mars. And—once this curtain had risen—when on the stage a writing-table and a fireplace, in no way out of the ordinary, had indicated that the persons who were about to enter would be, not actors come to recite as I had once seen some of them do at an evening party, but real people, just living their lives at home, on whom I was thus able to spy without their seeing me, my pleasure still endured. It was broken by a momentary uneasiness: just as I was pricking up my ears in readiness before the piece began, two men appeared on the stage obviously furious with one another since they were talking so loud that in this auditorium where there were at least a thousand people one could hear every word, whereas in quite a small café one is obliged to ask the waiter what two individuals who appear to be quarrelling are saying; but at that

moment, while I sat astonished to find that the audience was listening to them without protest, submerged as it was in a unanimous silence upon which presently a little wave of laughter broke here and there, that these insolent fellows were the actors, and that the short piece known as “the curtain-raiser” had now begun. It was followed by an interval so long that the audience, having returned to their seats, grew impatient and began to stamp their feet. I was terrified at this; for just as in the report of a criminal trial, when I read that some noble-minded person was coming, in defiance of his own interests, to testify on behalf of an innocent man, I was always afraid that they would not be nice enough to him, would not show enough gratitude, would not recompense him lavishly, and that he, in disgust, would then range himself on the side of injustice, so now, assimilating genius with virtue, I was afraid lest Berma, vexed by the bad behaviour of so ill-bred an audience—in which, on the contrary, I should have liked her to recognise with gratification a few celebrities to whose judgment she would be bound to attach importance—should express her displeasure and disdain by acting badly. And I looked round imploringly at these stamping brutes, who were about to shatter, in their insensate rage, the rare and fragile impression which I had come to seek. The last moments of my pleasure were during the opening scenes of the *Phèdre*. The heroine herself does not appear in these first scenes of the second act; and yet, as soon as the curtain rose, and another curtain, of red velvet this time, was drawn aside (a curtain which was used to halve the depth of the stage in all the plays in which the star appeared), an actress entered from the back who had the face and voice which, I had been told, were those of Berma. The cast must therefore have been changed; all the trouble that I had taken in studying the part of the wife of Theseus was wasted. But a second actress now responded to the first. I must have been mistaken in supposing that the first was Berma, for the second resembled her even more closely and, more than the other, had her diction. Both of them, moreover, embellished their roles with noble gestures—which I could clearly distinguish, and could appreciate in their relation to the text, while they raised and let fall the folds of their beautiful robes—and also with skilful changes of tone, now passionate, now ironical, which made me understand the significance of lines that I had read to myself at home without paying sufficient attention to what they really meant. But all of a sudden, in the cleft of the red curtain that veiled her sanctuary, as in a frame, a woman appeared, and instantly, from the fear that seized me, far more anxious than Berma’s own fear could be, lest someone should upset her by opening a window, or drown one of her lines by rustling a programme, or annoy her by applauding the others and by not applauding her enough, from the way in which, from that moment, more absolutely than Berma herself, I considered theatre, audience, play and my own body only as an acoustic medium of no importance save in the degree to which it was favourable to the inflexions of that voice, I realised that the two actresses whom I had been admiring for some minutes bore not the least resemblance to her whom I had come to hear. But at the same time all my pleasure had ceased; in vain did I strain towards Berma eyes, ears, mind, so as not to let one morsel escape me of the reasons which she would give me for admiring her, I did not succeed in gleaning a single one. I could not even, as I could with her companions, distinguish in her diction and in her playing intelligent modulations or beautiful gestures. I listened to her as though I were reading *Phèdre*, or as though Phaedra herself had at that moment uttered the words that I was hearing, without its appearing that Berma’s talent had added anything at all to them. I could have wished—in order to be able to explore them fully, to try to discover what it was in them that was beautiful—to arrest, to immobilise for a time before my senses every inflexion of the artist’s voice, every expression of her features; at least I did attempt, by dint of mental agility, by having, before a line came, my attention ready and tuned to catch it, not to waste upon preparations any morsel of the precious time that each word, each gesture occupied, and, thanks to the intensity of my observation, to contrive to penetrate as far into them as if I had had whole hours to spend upon them by myself. But how short their duration was! Scarcely had a sound been received by my ear than it was displaced there by another. In one scene, where Berma stands motionless for a moment, her arm raised to the level of her face, bathed, by some artifice of lighting, in a greenish glow, before a back-cloth painted to represent the sea, the whole house broke out in applause; but already the actress had moved, and the tableau that I should have liked to study existed no longer. I told my grandmother that I could not see very well, and she handed me her glasses. But when one believes in the reality of things, making them visible by artificial means is not quite the same as feeling that they are close at hand. I thought that it was no longer Berma but her image that I was seeing in the magnifying lenses. I put the glasses down. But perhaps the image that my eye received of her, diminished by distance, was no more exact; which of the two Bermas was the real one? As for her declaration to Hippolyte, I had greatly counted on that, since, to judge by the ingenious significance which her companions were disclosing to me every moment in less beautiful passages, she would certainly render it with modulations more surprising than any which, when reading the play at home, I had contrived to imagine; but she did not attain even to the heights which Oenone or Aricie would naturally have reached, she planed down into a uniform chant the whole of a speech in which there were mingled together contrasts so striking that the least intelligent of actresses, even the pupils of an academy, could not have missed their effect; besides which, she delivered it so rapidly that it was only when she had come to the last line that my mind became aware of the deliberate monotony which she had imposed on it throughout.

Then at last I felt my first impulse of admiration, which was provoked by the frenzied applause of the audience. I mingled my own with theirs, endeavouring to prolong it so that Berma, in her gratitude, should surpass herself, and I be certain of having heard her on one of her great days. A curious thing, by the way, was that the moment when this storm of enthusiasm broke loose was, as I afterwards learned, that in which Berma has one of her finest inspirations. It would appear that certain transcendent realities emit all around them a sort of radiation to which the crowd is sensitive. Thus it is that when any great event occurs, when on a

distant frontier an army is in jeopardy, or defeated, or victorious, the vague and conflicting reports from which an educated man can derive little enlightenment stimulate in the crowd an emotion which surprises him and in which, once the experts have informed him of the actual military situation, he recognises the popular perception of that "aura" which surrounds momentous happenings and which may be visible hundreds of miles away. One learns of a victory either after the event, when the war is over, or at once, from the hilarious joy of one's hall porter. One discovers the touch of genius in Berma's acting either a week after one has heard her, from a review, or else on the spot, from the thundering acclamation of the stalls. But this immediate recognition by the crowd being mingled with a hundred others, all erroneous, the applause came most often at wrong moments, apart from the fact that it was mechanically produced by the effect of the applause that had gone before, just as in a storm, once the sea is sufficiently disturbed, it will continue to swell even after the wind has begun to subside. No matter; the more I applauded, the better, it seemed to me, did Berma act. "I say," a fairly ordinary-looking woman sitting next to me was saying, "she fairly gives it you, she does; you'd think she'd do herself an injury, the way she runs about. I call that acting, don't you?" And happy to find these reasons for Berma's superiority, though not without a suspicion that they no more accounted for it than a peasant's gawping exclamations—"That's a good bit of work. It's all gold, look! Fine, ain't it?"—would for that of the Gioconda or Benvenuto's Perseus, I greedily imbibed the rough wine of this popular enthusiasm. Nevertheless, when the curtain had fallen for the last time, I was disappointed that the pleasure for which I had so longed had not been greater, but at the same time I felt the need to prolong it, not to relinquish for ever, by leaving the auditorium, this strange life of the theatre which for a few hours had been mine, and from which I should have torn myself away as though I were being dragged into exile by going straight home, had I not hoped there to learn a great deal more about Berma from her admirer M. de Norpois, to whom I was indebted already for having been permitted to go to *Phèdre*.

I was introduced to him before dinner by my father, who summoned me into his study for the purpose. As I entered, the Ambassador rose, held out his hand, bowed his tall figure and fixed his blue eyes attentively on my face. As the foreign visitors who used to be presented to him, in the days when he still represented France abroad, were all more or less (even the famous singers) persons of note, with regard to whom he therefore knew that he would be able to say later on, when he heard their names mentioned in Paris or in Petersburg, that he remembered perfectly the evening he had spent with them in Munich or Sofia, he had formed the habit of impressing upon them, by his affability, the pleasure he felt in making their acquaintance; but in addition to this, being convinced that in the life of foreign capitals, in contact at once with all the interesting personalities that passed through them and with the manners and customs of the native populations, one acquired a deeper insight than could be gleaned from books into the history, the geography, the traditions of the different nations, and into the intellectual trends of Europe, he would exercise upon each newcomer his keen power of observation, so as to decide at once with what manner of man he had to deal. It was some time since the Government had entrusted him with a post abroad, but as soon as anyone was introduced to him, his eyes, as though they had not yet received notification of their master's retirement, began their fruitful observation, while by his whole attitude he endeavoured to convey that the stranger's name was not unknown to him. And so, while speaking to me kindly and with the air of self-importance of a man who is conscious of the vastness of his experience, he never ceased to examine me with a sagacious curiosity for his own profit, as though I had been some exotic custom, some historic and instructive monument or some star on tour. And in this way he gave proof, in his attitude towards me, at once of the majestic benevolence of the sage Mentor and of the zealous curiosity of the young Anacharsis.

He offered me absolutely no opening to the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, but put a number of questions to me about my life and my studies, and about my tastes which I heard thus spoken of for the first time as though it might be a reasonable thing to obey their promptings, whereas hitherto I had always supposed it to be my duty to suppress them. Since they inclined me towards literature, he did not dissuade me from it; on the contrary, he spoke of it with deference, as of some venerable and charming personage whose select circle, in Rome or at Dresden, one remembers with pleasure and regrets only that one's multifarious duties in life enable one to revisit so seldom. He appeared to envy me, with an almost rakish smile, the delightful hours which, more fortunate than himself and more free, I should be able to spend with such a mistress. But the very terms that he employed showed me Literature as something entirely different from the image that I had formed of it at Combray, and I realised that I had been doubly right in renouncing it. Until now, I had concluded only that I had no gift for writing; now M. de Norpois took away from me even the desire to write. I wanted to express to him what had been my dreams; trembling with emotion, I was painfully anxious that all the words I uttered would be the sincerest possible equivalent of what I had felt and had never yet attempted to formulate; which is to say that my words were very unclear. Perhaps from a professional habit, perhaps by virtue of the calm that is acquired by every important personage whose advice is commonly sought, and who, knowing that he will keep the control of the conversation in his own hands, allows his interlocutor to fret, to struggle, to toil to his heart's content, perhaps also to show off the character of his face (Greek, according to himself, despite his sweeping whiskers), M. de Norpois, while anything was being expounded to him, would preserve a facial immobility as absolute as if you had been addressing some ancient—and deaf—bust in a museum. Until suddenly, falling upon you like an auctioneer's hammer or a Delphic oracle, the Ambassador's voice, as he replied to you, would be all the more striking in that nothing in his face had allowed you to guess what sort of impression you had made on him, or what opinion he was about to express.

"Precisely," he suddenly began, as though the case were now heard and judged, after having allowed me to stammer incoherently beneath those motionless eyes which never for an instant left my face; "a friend of mine

has a son whose case, *mutatis mutandis*, is very much like yours." He adopted in speaking of our common predisposition the same reassuring tone as if it had been a predisposition not for literature but for rheumatism, and he had wished to assure me that it would not necessarily prove fatal. "He too chose to leave the Quai d'Orsay, although the way had been paved for him there by his father, and without caring what people might say, he settled down to write. And certainly, he's had no reason to regret it. He published two years ago—of course, he's much older than you—a book about the Sense of the Infinite on the western shore of Lake Victoria Nyanza, and this year he has brought out a short treatise, less weighty but written with a lively, not to say cutting pen, on the Repeating Rifle in the Bulgarian Army; and these have put him quite in a class by himself. He's already gone pretty far, and he's not the sort of man to stop halfway. I happen to know that (without any suggestion, of course, of his standing for election) his name has been mentioned several times in conversation, and not at all unfavourably, at the Academy of Moral Sciences. And so, though one can't say yet, of course, that he's exactly at the pinnacle, he has fought his way by sheer merit to a very fine position indeed, and success—which doesn't always come only to the pushers and the muddlers, the fusspots who are generally show-offs—success has crowned his efforts."

My father, seeing me already, in a few years' time, an Academician, exuded a satisfaction which M. de Norpois raised to the highest pitch when, after a momentary hesitation during which he appeared to be calculating the possible consequences of his act, he handed me his card and said: "Why not go and see him yourself? Tell him I sent you. He may be able to give you some good advice," plunging me by these words into as painful a state of anxiety as if he had told me that I was to embark next day as cabin-boy on board a wind-jammer.

My aunt Léonie had bequeathed to me, together with a multiplicity of objects and furniture which were something of an embarrassment, almost all her liquid assets—revealing thus after her death an affection for me which I had little suspected in her lifetime. My father, who was trustee of this estate until I came of age, now consulted M. de Norpois with regard to a number of investments. He recommended certain stocks bearing a low rate of interest, which he considered particularly sound, notably English consols and Russian four per cents. "With absolutely first-class securities such as those," said M. de Norpois, "even if your income from them is nothing very great, you may be certain of never losing any of your capital." My father then gave him a rough indication of what else he had bought. M. de Norpois gave a just perceptible smile of congratulation; like all capitalists, he regarded wealth as an enviable thing, but thought it more delicate to compliment people upon their possessions only by an inconspicuous sign of intelligent sympathy; at the same time, as he was himself colossally rich, he thought it in good taste to seem to regard as considerable the inferior incomes of his friends, with, however, a happy and comforting reference to the superiority of his own. On the other hand, he did not hesitate to congratulate my father on the "composition" of his portfolio, selected "with so sure, so delicate, so fine a taste." It was as though he attributed to the relative values of shares, and even to shares themselves, something akin to aesthetic merit. Of one, comparatively recent and still little known, which my father mentioned, M. de Norpois, like the people who have always read the books of which you imagined you alone had ever heard, said at once, "Ah, yes, I used to amuse myself for a time following it in the share index; it was not uninteresting," with the retrospective smile of a regular subscriber who has read the latest novel already, in monthly instalments, in his magazine. "It wouldn't be at all a bad idea to apply for some of this new issue. It's distinctly attractive; they're offering it at a most tempting discount." But when he came to some of the older investments, my father, who could not remember their exact names, which it was easy to confuse with others of the same kind, opened a drawer and showed the securities themselves to the Ambassador. The sight of them enchanted me. They were ornamented with cathedral spires and allegorical figures, like some of the old romantic editions that I had pored over as a child. All the products of one period resemble one another; the artists who illustrate the poetry of their generation are the same artists who are employed by the big financial houses. And nothing reminds me more strongly of the instalments of *Notre-Dame de Paris* and of various works of Gérard de Nerval, that used to hang outside the grocer's door at Combray, than does, in its rectangular and flowery border, supported by recumbent river-gods, a registered share in the Water Company.

The contempt which my father had for my kind of intelligence was so far tempered by affection that, in practice, his attitude towards everything I did was one of blind indulgence. And so he had no qualm about sending me to fetch a little prose poem which I had made up years before at Combray on coming home from a walk. I had written it in a state of exaltation which must, I felt certain, communicate itself to everyone who read it. But it was not destined to captivate M. de Norpois, for he handed it back to me without a word.

My mother, who was full of respect for all my father's occupations, came in now to ask timidly whether dinner might be served. She was afraid to interrupt a conversation in which she herself could have no part. And indeed my father was continually reminding the Marquis of some useful measure which they had decided to support at the next meeting of the Commission, speaking in the peculiar tone always adopted in a strange environment by a pair of colleagues—akin, in this respect, to a pair of schoolfellows—whose professional routine has furnished them with a common fund of memories to which others have no access and to which they apologise for referring in their presence.

But the absolute control over his facial muscles to which M. de Norpois had attained allowed him to listen without seeming to hear a word. At length my father became uneasy: "I had thought," he ventured, after an endless preamble, "of asking the advice of the Commission ..." Then from the face of the noble virtuoso, who had maintained the passivity of an orchestral player whose moment has not yet come, there emerged with an even delivery, on a sharp note, and as though they were no more than the completion (but scored for a

different voice) of the phrase that my father had begun, the words: "of which you will not hesitate, of course, to call a meeting, more especially as the members are all known to you personally and can easily make themselves available." It was not in itself a very remarkable ending. But the immobility that had preceded it made it detach itself with the crystal clarity, the almost mischievous unexpectedness of those phrases with which the piano, silent until then, takes over, at a given moment, from the cello to which one has just been listening, in a Mozart concerto.

"Well, did you enjoy your *matinée*?" asked my father as we moved to the dining-room, hoping to draw me out and with the idea that my enthusiasm would give M. de Norpois a good opinion of me. "He has just been to see Berma. You remember we talked about it the other day," he went on, turning towards the diplomat, in the same tone of retrospective, technical and mysterious allusiveness as if he had been referring to a meeting of the Commission.

"You must have been enchanted, especially if you had never seen her before. Your father was alarmed at the possible repercussions that this little jaunt might have upon your health, which is none too good, I am told, none too robust. But I soon set his mind at rest. Theatres today are not what they were even twenty years ago. You have more or less comfortable seats now, and a certain amount of ventilation, although we have still a long way to go before we come up to the standard of Germany or England, who in that respect as in many others are immeasurably ahead of us. I have never seen Mme Berma in *Phèdre*, but I have always heard that she is excellent in the part. You were charmed with her, of course?"

M. de Norpois, a man a thousand times more intelligent than myself, must know that hidden truth which I had failed to extract from Berma's playing, and would reveal it to me; in answering his question I would ask him to let me know in what that truth consisted; and he would thereby justify me in the longing that I had felt to see and hear the actress. I had only a moment; I must take advantage of it and bring my cross-examination to bear upon the essential points. But what were they? Fastening my whole attention upon my own so confused impressions, with no thought of winning the admiration of M. de Norpois but only that of learning from him the truth that I had still to discover, I made no attempt to substitute ready-made phrases for the words that failed me but stood there stammering until finally, in the hope of provoking him into declaring what was so admirable about Berma, I confessed that I had been disappointed.

"What's that?" cried my father, annoyed at the bad impression which this admission of my failure to appreciate the performance must make on M. de Norpois, "How can you possibly say that you didn't enjoy it? Why, your grandmother has been telling us that you sat there hanging on every word that Berma uttered, with your eyes starting out of your head; that everyone else in the theatre seemed quite bored beside you."

"Oh, yes, I listened as hard as I could, trying to find out what it was that was supposed to be so wonderful about her. Of course, she's frightfully good ..."

"If she is frightfully good, what more do you want?"

"One of the things that have undoubtedly contributed to the success of Mme Berma," said M. de Norpois, turning with application towards my mother, so as not to leave her out of the conversation, and in conscientious fulfilment of his duty of politeness to the lady of the house, "is the perfect taste that she shows in her choice of roles, which always assures her of complete success, and success of the right sort. She hardly ever appears in anything trivial. Look how she has thrown herself into the part of *Phèdre*. And then, she brings the same good taste to the choice of her costumes, and to her acting. In spite of her frequent and lucrative tours in England and America, the vulgarity—I will not say of John Bull, which would be unjust, at any rate as regards the England of the Victorian era—but of Uncle Sam has not infected her. No loud colours, no rant. And then that admirable voice, which serves her so well and upon which she plays so ravishly—I should almost be tempted to describe it as a musical instrument!"

My interest in Berma's acting had continued to grow ever since the fall of the curtain because it was no longer compressed within the limits of reality; but I felt the need to find explanations for it; moreover it had been concentrated with equal intensity, while Berma was on the stage, upon everything that she offered, in the indivisibility of a living whole, to my eyes and ears; it had made no attempt to separate or discriminate; accordingly it welcomed the discovery of a reasonable cause for itself in these tributes paid to the simplicity, to the good taste of the actress, it drew them to itself by its power of absorption, seized upon them as the optimism of a drunken man seizes upon the actions of his neighbour, in each of which he finds an excuse for maudlin emotion. "It's true!" I told myself, "what a beautiful voice, what an absence of shrillness, what simple costumes, what intelligence to have chosen *Phèdre*! No, I have not been disappointed!"

The cold spiced beef with carrots made its appearance, couched by the Michelangelo of our kitchen upon enormous crystals of aspic, like transparent blocks of quartz.

"You have a first-rate cook, Madame," said M. de Norpois, "and that is no small matter. I myself, who have had, when abroad, to maintain a certain style in housekeeping, I know how difficult it often is to find a perfect chef. This is a positive banquet that you have set before us!"

And indeed Françoise, in the excitement of her ambition to make a success, for so distinguished a guest, of a dinner the preparation of which had been sown with difficulties worthy of her powers, had put herself out as she no longer did when we were alone, and had recaptured her incomparable Combray manner.

"That is a thing you don't get in a chophouse, not even in the best of them: a spiced beef in which the aspic doesn't taste of glue and the beef has caught the flavour of the carrots. It's admirable! Allow me to come again," he went on, making a sign to show that he wanted more of the aspic. "I should be interested to see how your chef managed a dish of quite a different kind; I should like, for instance, to see him tackle a *bœuf Stroganoff*."



To add his own contribution to the pleasures of the repast, M. de Norpois entertained us with a number of the stories with which he was in the habit of regaling his diplomatic colleagues, quoting now some ludicrous period uttered by a politician notorious for long sentences packed with incoherent images, now some lapidary epigram of a diplomat sparkling with Attic salt. But, to tell the truth, the criterion which for him set the two kinds of sentence apart in no way resembled that which I was in the habit of applying to literature. Most of the finer shades escaped me; the words which he recited with derision seemed to me not to differ very greatly from those which he found remarkable. He belonged to the class of men who, had we come to discuss the books I liked, would have said: "So you understand that, do you? I must confess that I don't; I'm not initiated," but I could have retaliated in kind, for I did not grasp the wit or folly, the eloquence or pomposity which he found in a retort or in a speech, and the absence of any perceptible reason for this being good and that bad made that sort of literature seem more mysterious, more obscure to me than any other. All that I grasped was that to repeat what everybody else was thinking was, in politics, the mark not of an inferior but of a superior mind. When M. de Norpois used certain expressions which were common currency in the newspapers, and uttered them with emphasis, one felt that they became an official pronouncement by the mere fact of his having employed them, and a pronouncement which would provoke widespread comment.

My mother was counting greatly upon the pineapple and truffle salad. But the Ambassador, after fastening for a moment on the confection the penetrating gaze of a trained observer, ate it with the inscrutable discretion of a diplomat, without disclosing his opinion. My mother insisted on his taking some more, which he did, but saying only, in place of the compliment for which she was hoping: "I obey, Madame, for I can see that it is, on your part, a positive ukase."

"We saw in the papers that you had a long talk with King Theodosius," my father ventured.

"Why, yes, the King, who has a wonderful memory for faces, was kind enough to remember, when he noticed me in the stalls, that I had had the honour to meet him on several occasions at the Court of Bavaria, at a time when he had never dreamed of his oriental throne—to which, as you know, he was summoned by a European Congress, and indeed had grave doubts about accepting, regarding that particular sovereignty as unworthy of his race, the noblest, heraldically speaking, in the whole of Europe. An aide-de-camp came down to bid me pay my respects to His Majesty, whose command I hastened, naturally, to obey."

"And I trust you are satisfied with the results of his visit?"

"Enchanted! One was justified in feeling some apprehension as to the manner in which a sovereign who is still so young would handle such an awkward situation, particularly at this highly delicate juncture. For my own part, I had complete confidence in the King's political sense. But I must confess that he far surpassed my expectations. The speech that he made at the Elysée, which, according to information that has come to me from a most authoritative source, was composed from beginning to end by the King himself, was fully deserving of the interest that it has aroused in all quarters. It was simply masterly; a trifle daring, I quite admit, but it was an audacity which, after all, was fully justified by the event. Traditional diplomacy is all very well in its way, but in practice it has made his country and ours live in a hermetically sealed atmosphere in which it was no longer possible to breathe. Very well! There is one method of letting in fresh air, obviously not a method that one could officially recommend, but one which King Theodosius could allow himself to adopt—and that is to break the windows. Which he accordingly did, with a spontaneous good humour that delighted everybody, and also with an aptness in his choice of words in which one could at once detect the race of scholarly princes from whom he is descended through his mother. There can be no question that when he spoke of the 'affinities' that bind his country to France, the expression, unusual though it be in the vocabulary of the chancelleries, was a singularly happy one. You see that literary ability is no drawback, even in diplomacy, even upon a throne," he added, turning to me. "The community of interests had long been apparent, I quite admit, and relations between the two powers were excellent. Still, it needed saying. The word was awaited; it was chosen with marvellous aptitude; you have seen the effect it had. For my part, I thoroughly applaud it."

"Your friend M. de Vaugoubert will be pleased, after preparing for the agreement all these years."

"All the more so in that His Majesty, who is quite incorrigible in some ways, had taken care to spring it on him as a surprise. And it did come as a complete surprise, incidentally, to everyone concerned, beginning with the Foreign Minister himself, who—I have heard—did not find it at all to his liking. It appears that when someone spoke to him about it he replied pretty sharply, and loud enough to be overheard by people in the vicinity: 'I was neither consulted nor informed,' indicating clearly that he declined to accept any responsibility in the matter. I must own that the incident has caused a great furore, and I should not go so far as to deny," he went on with a mischievous smile, "that certain of my colleagues, who are only too inclined to take the line of least resistance, may have been shaken from their habitual repose. As for Vaugoubert, you are aware that he has been bitterly attacked for his policy of bringing that country into closer relations with France, and this must have been more than ordinarily painful to him since he is a sensitive and tender-hearted man. I can amply testify to that, since, for all that he is considerably my junior, I have had many dealings with him, we are friends of long standing and I know him intimately. Besides, who could help knowing him? His is a heart of crystal. Indeed, that is the one fault to be found with him; it is not necessary for the heart of a diplomat to be as transparent as his. Nevertheless there is talk of his being sent to Rome, which would be a splendid promotion, but a pretty big plum to swallow. Between ourselves, I fancy that Vaugoubert, utterly devoid of ambition as he is, would be extremely pleased, and would by no means ask for that cup to pass from him. For all we know, he may do wonders down there; he is the chosen candidate of the Consulta, and for my part I can see him perfectly well, with his artistic leanings, in the setting of the Farnese Palace and the Caracci

Gallery. You would suppose that at least it was impossible for anyone to hate him; but there is a whole camarilla collected round King Theodosius which is more or less pledged to the Wilhelmstrasse, whose suggestions it slavishly follows, and which did everything in its power to spike his guns. Not only did Vaugoubert have to face these backstairs intrigues, he also had to endure the insults of a gang of paid hacks who later on, being like every hireling journalist the most arrant cowards, were the first to cry quits, but in the interval did not shrink from hurling at our representative the most fatuous accusations that the wit of irresponsible fools could invent. For a month and more Vaugoubert's enemies danced around him howling for his scalp" (M. de Norpois detached this word with sharp emphasis). "But forewarned is forearmed; he treated their insults with the contempt they deserved," he added even more forcibly, and with so fierce a glare in his eye that for a moment we forgot our food. "In the words of a fine Arab proverb, 'The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on!'"

After launching this quotation M. de Norpois paused and examined our faces, to see what effect it had had upon us. The effect was great, the proverb being familiar to us already. It had taken the place, that year, among the men of consequence, of "He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind," which was sorely in need of a rest, not having the perennial freshness of "Working for the King of Prussia." For the culture of these eminent men was an alternating one, usually triennial. Of course, the use of quotations such as these, with which M. de Norpois excelled in sprinkling his articles in the *Revue*, was in no way essential to their appearing sound and well-in-formed. Even without the ornament which the quotations supplied, it sufficed that M. de Norpois should write at a suitable point (as he never failed to do): "The Court of St James was not the last to be sensible of the peril," or "Feeling ran high on the Singers' Bridge, where the selfish but skilful policy of the Dual Monarchy was being followed with anxious eyes," or "A cry of alarm sounded from Montecitorio," or yet again, "That perpetual double dealing which is so characteristic of the Ballplatz."<sup>2</sup> By these expressions the lay reader had at once recognised and acknowledged the career diplomat. But what had made people say that he was something more than that, that he was endowed with a superior culture, had been his judicious use of quotations, the perfect example of which, at that date, was still: "Give me a good policy and I will give you good finances, to quote the favourite words of Baron Louis": for we had not yet imported from the Far East: "Victory is on the side that can hold out a quarter of an hour longer than the other, as the Japanese say." This reputation as a literary man, combined with a positive genius for intrigue which he concealed beneath a mask of indifference, had secured the election of M. de Norpois to the Académie des Sciences Morales. And there were some who even thought that he would not be out of place in the Académie Française, on the famous day when, wishing to indicate that it was only by strengthening the Russian Alliance that we could hope to arrive at an understanding with Great Britain, he had not hesitated to write: "Let it be clearly understood in the Quai d'Orsay, let it be taught henceforward in all the manuals of geography, which appear to be incomplete in this respect, let his certificate of graduation be remorselessly withheld from every candidate who has not learned to say, 'If all roads lead to Rome, on the other hand the way from Paris to London runs of necessity through St Petersburg.'"

"In short," M. de Norpois went on, addressing my father, "Vaugoubert has brought off a considerable triumph, and one that even surpassed his expectations. He expected, you understand, a formal toast (which, after the storm-clouds of recent years, would have been already an achievement) but nothing more. Several persons who had the honour to be present have assured me that it is impossible merely from reading the speech to form any conception of the effect that it produced when articulated with marvellous clearness of diction by the King, who is a master of the art of public speaking and underlined in passing every delicate intention, every subtle courtesy. In this connection, one of my informants told me a little anecdote which brings out once again that frank, boyish charm by which King Theodosius has won so many hearts. I am assured that, precisely at that word 'affinities,' which was, on the whole, the great innovation of the speech, and one that, you will see, will be the talk of the chancelleries for years to come, His Majesty, anticipating the delight of our ambassador, who would see it as the just consummation of his efforts—of his dreams, one might almost say—and, in a word, his marshal's baton, made a half turn towards Vaugoubert and fixing upon him the arresting gaze so characteristic of the Oettingens, brought out that admirably chosen word 'affinities,' a veritable brain-wave, in a tone which made it plain to all his hearers that it was employed of set purpose and with full knowledge of its implications. It appears that Vaugoubert found some difficulty in mastering his emotion, and I must confess that, to a certain extent, I can well understand it. Indeed, a person worthy of absolute credence confided to me that the King came up to Vaugoubert after the dinner, when His Majesty was holding informal court, and was heard to say, 'Are you satisfied with your pupil, my dear Marquis?'"

"One thing, however," M. de Norpois concluded, "is certain; and that is that a speech of such a nature has done more than twenty years of negotiation towards bringing the two countries together, uniting their 'affinities,' to borrow the picturesque expression of Theodosius II. It is no more than a word, if you like, but look what success it has had, how the whole of the European press is repeating it, what interest it has aroused, what a new note it has struck. Besides, it is entirely in keeping with the young sovereign's style. I will not go so far as to say that he lights upon a diamond of that water every day. But it is very seldom, that, in his prepared speeches, or better still in the spontaneous flow of his conversation, he does not reveal his character—I was on the point of saying 'does not affix his signature'—by the use of some incisive word. I myself am quite free from any suspicion of partiality in this respect since I am opposed to all innovations in terminology. Nine times out of ten they are most dangerous."

"Yes, I was thinking only the other day that the recent telegram from the Emperor of Germany could not be much to your liking," said my father.

M. de Norpois raised his eyes to heaven, as who should say, "Oh, that fellow!" before he replied: "In the first place, it is an act of ingratitude. It is more than a crime, it's a blunder, and one of a crassness which I can describe only as pyramidal! Indeed, unless someone puts a check on his activities, the man who got rid of Bismarck is quite capable of repudiating by degrees the whole of the Bismarckian policy; after which it will be a leap in the dark."

"My husband tells me, Monsieur, that you may perhaps take him to Spain one summer. I'm delighted for his sake."

"Why yes, it's an idea that greatly appeals to me. I should very much like to make this journey with you, my dear fellow. And you, Madame, have you decided yet how you are going to spend your holidays?"

"I shall perhaps go with my son to Balbec, but I'm not certain."

"Ah! Balbec is quite charming. I was down that way a few years ago. They are beginning to build some very attractive little villas there; I think you'll like the place. But may I ask what made you choose Balbec?"

"My son is very anxious to visit some of the churches in that neighbourhood, and Balbec church in particular. I was a little afraid that the tiring journey there and the discomfort of staying in the place might be too much for his health. But I hear that they have just opened an excellent hotel, in which he will be able to get all the comfort that he requires."

"Indeed! I must make a note of that for a certain person who will not turn up her nose at a comfortable hotel."

"The church at Balbec is very beautiful, is it not, Monsieur?" I inquired, repressing my sorrow at learning that one of the attractions of Balbec consisted in its pretty little villas.

"No, it's not bad; but it cannot be compared for a moment with such positive jewels in stone as the cathedrals of Rheims and Chartres, or with what is to my mind the pearl among them all, the Sainte-Chapelle here in Paris."

"But Balbec church is partly Romanesque, is it not?"

"Why, yes, it is in the Romanesque style, which is to say very cold and lifeless, with not the slightest hint of the grace, the fantasy of the later Gothic builders, who worked their stone as if it had been so much lace. Balbec church is well worth a visit if one is in the neighbourhood; it is decidedly quaint. On a wet day, when you have nothing better to do, you might look inside; you'll see the tomb of Tourville."<sup>3</sup>

"Tell me, were you at the Foreign Ministry dinner last night?" asked my father. "I couldn't go."

"No," M. de Norpois smiled, "I must confess that I renounced it for a party of a very different sort. I was dining with a lady of whom you may possibly have heard, the beautiful Mme Swann."

My mother repressed a shudder of apprehension, for, being more rapid in perception than my father, she grew alarmed on his account over things which only began to vex him a moment later. Whatever might cause him annoyance was first noticed by her, just as bad news of France is always known abroad sooner than among ourselves. But being curious to know what sort of people the Swanns might entertain, she inquired of M. de Norpois as to whom he had met there.

"Why, my dear lady, it is a house which (or so it struck me) is especially attractive to ... gentlemen. There were several married men there last night, but their wives were all, as it happened, unwell, and so had not come with them," replied the Ambassador with a slyness veiled by good-humour, casting round the table a glance the gentleness and discretion of which appeared to be tempering while in reality intensifying its malice.

"In all fairness," he went on, "I must add that women do go to the house, but women who ... belong rather—what shall I say—to the Republican world than to Swann's" (he pronounced it "Svann's") "circle. Who knows? Perhaps it will turn into a political or a literary salon some day. Anyhow, they appear to be quite content as they are. Indeed, I feel that Swann advertises his contentment just a trifle too blatantly. He told us the names of all the people who had asked him and his wife out for the next week, people whose friendship there is no reason to be proud of, with a want of reserve, of taste, almost of tact, which I was astonished to remark in so refined a man. He kept on repeating, 'We haven't a free evening!' as though that was a thing to boast of, positively like a parvenu, and he is certainly not that. For Swann had always plenty of friends, women as well as men, and without seeming over-bold, without the least wish to appear indiscreet, I think I may safely say that not all of them, of course, nor even the majority of them, but one at least, who is a lady of the very highest rank, would perhaps not have shown herself inexorably averse from the idea of entering into relations with Mme Swann, in which case it is safe to assume that more than one sheep of the social flock would have followed her lead. But it seems that there has been no indication of any approach on Swann's part in that direction ... What do I see? A Nesselrode pudding! As well! I declare I shall need a course at Carlsbad after such a Lucullan feast as this ... Possibly Swann felt that there would be too much resistance to overcome. The marriage—so much is certain—was not well received. There has been some talk of his wife's having money, but that's the grossest fallacy. At all events, the whole affair has been looked upon with disfavour. And then, Swann has an aunt who is excessively rich and in an admirable position socially, married to a man who, financially speaking, is a power in the land. Not only did she refuse to meet Mme Swann, she conducted an out-and-out campaign to force her friends and acquaintances to do the same. I don't mean to say that any well-bred Parisian has shown actual incivility to Mme Swann ... No! A hundred times no! Quite apart from her husband's being eminently a man to take up the gauntlet. At all events, the odd thing is to see the alacrity with which Swann, who knows so many of the most select people, cultivates a society of which the best that can be said is that it is extremely mixed. I myself, who knew him in the old days, must admit that I felt more astonished than amused at seeing a man so well-bred as he, so much at home in the most exclusive circles,

effusively thanking the Principal Private Secretary to the Minister of Posts for coming to their house, and asking him whether Mme Swann might *take the liberty* of calling upon his wife. He must feel like a fish out of water, don't you know; obviously, it's quite a different world. All the same, I don't think Swann is unhappy. It's true that for some years before the marriage she was always trying to blackmail him in a rather disgraceful way; she would take the child away whenever Swann refused her anything. Poor Swann, who is as ingenuous as he is in other ways discerning, believed every time that the child's disappearance was a coincidence, and declined to face the facts. Apart from that, she made such continual scenes that everyone expected that, as soon as she achieved her object and was safely married, nothing could possibly restrain her and that their life would be a hell on earth. Instead of which, just the opposite has happened. People are inclined to laugh at the way Swann speaks of his wife; it's become a standing joke. Of course one hardly expected that, more or less aware of being ... (you know Molière's word),<sup>4</sup> he would go and proclaim it *urbi et orbi*; all the same, people find it a little excessive when he says that she's an excellent wife. And yet that is not so far from the truth as people imagine. In her own way—which is not, perhaps, what all husbands would choose, but then, between you and me, I find it difficult to believe that Swann, who has known her for a long time and is far from being an utter fool, did not know what to expect—there can be no denying that she does seem to have a certain regard for him. I don't say she isn't flighty, and Swann himself is not noted for his constancy, if one is to believe the charitable tongues which, as you may suppose, continue to wag. But she is grateful to him for what he has done for her, and, contrary to the fears that were generally expressed, her temper seems to have become angelic."

This alteration was perhaps not so extraordinary as M. de Norpois professed to find it. Odette had not believed that Swann would ever consent to marry her; each time she made the tendentious announcement that some man about town had just married his mistress she had seen him stiffen into a glacial silence, or at the most, if she challenged him directly by asking: "Don't you think it's very good and very right, what he's done for a woman who sacrificed all her youth to him?" had heard him answer dryly: "But I don't say that there's anything wrong in it. Everyone does as he thinks fit." She came very near, indeed, to believing that (as he used to threaten in moments of anger) he would leave her altogether, for she had heard it said, not long since, by a woman sculptor, that "You can't be surprised at anything men do, they're such cads," and impressed by the profundity of this pessimistic maxim she had appropriated it for herself, and repeated it on every possible occasion with a despondent air that seemed to imply: "After all, it's not at all impossible; it would be just my luck." Meanwhile all the virtue had gone from the optimistic maxim which had hitherto guided Odette through life: "You can do anything with men when they're in love with you, they're such idiots!"; a doctrine which was expressed on her face by the same flicker of the eyelids that might have accompanied such words as: "Don't be frightened; he won't break anything." While she waited, Odette was tormented by the thought of what such and such a friend of hers, who had been married by a man who had not lived with her for nearly so long as she herself had lived with Swann, and had no child by him, and who was now relatively esteemed, invited to balls at the Elysée and so forth, must think of Swann's behaviour. A consultant more discerning than M. de Norpois would doubtless have been able to diagnose that it was this feeling of shame and humiliation that had embittered Odette, that the infernal temper she displayed was not an essential part of her nature, was not an incurable disease, and so would easily have foretold what had indeed come to pass, namely that a new regimen, that of matrimony, would put an end with almost magic swiftness to those painful incidents, of daily occurrence but in no sense organic. Almost everyone was surprised at the marriage, and that in itself is surprising. No doubt very few people understand the purely subjective nature of the phenomenon that we call love, or how it creates, so to speak, a supplementary person, distinct from the person whom the world knows by the same name, a person most of whose constituent elements are derived from ourselves. And so there are very few who can regard as natural the enormous proportions that a person comes to assume in our eyes who is not the same as the person that they see. It would seem, none the less, that so far as Odette was concerned people could have taken into account the fact that if, indeed, she had never entirely understood Swann's mentality, at least she was acquainted with the titles and with all the details of his studies, so much so that the name of Vermeer was as familiar to her as that of her own dressmaker; while as for Swann himself, she knew intimately those traits of character of which the rest of the world is ignorant or which it scoffs at, and of which only a mistress or a sister possesses the true and cherished image; and so strongly are we attached to such idiosyncrasies, even to those of them which we are most anxious to correct, that it is because a woman comes in time to acquire an indulgent, an affectionately mocking familiarity with them, such as we ourselves or our relatives have, that love affairs of long standing have something of the sweetness and strength of family affection. The bonds that unite us to another human being are sanctified when he or she adopts the same point of view as ourselves in judging one of our imperfections. And among these special traits there were others, besides, which belonged as much to Swann's intellect as to his character, but which nevertheless, because they had their roots in the latter, Odette had been able more easily to discern. She complained that when Swann turned author, when he published his essays, these characteristics were not to be found in them to the same extent as in his letters or in his conversation, where they abounded. She urged him to give them a more prominent place. She wanted this because it was these things that she herself most liked in him, but since she liked them because they were the things most typical of him, she was perhaps not wrong in wishing that they might be found in his writings. Perhaps also she thought that his work, if endowed with more vitality, so that it ultimately brought him success, might enable her also to form what at the Verdurins' she had been taught to value above everything else in the world—a salon.

Among the people to whom this sort of marriage appeared ridiculous, people who in their own case would ask themselves, "What will M. de Guermantes think, what will Bréauté say, when I marry Mlle de Montmorency?", among the people who cherished that sort of social ideal, would have figured, twenty years earlier, Swann himself, the Swann who had taken endless pains to get himself elected to the Jockey Club and had reckoned at that time on making a brilliant marriage which, by consolidating his position, would have made him one of the most prominent figures in Paris. However, the visions which such a marriage suggests to the mind of the interested party need, like all visions, if they are not to fade away and be altogether lost, to receive sustenance from without. Your most ardent longing is to humiliate the man who has insulted you. But if you never hear of him any more, having removed to some other place, your enemy will come to have no longer the slightest importance to you. If for twenty years one has lost sight of all the people on whose account one would have liked to be elected to the Jockey Club or the Institute, the prospect of becoming a member of one or other of those establishments will have ceased to tempt one. Now, fully as much as retirement, ill-health or religious conversion, a protracted love affair will substitute fresh visions for the old. There was no renunciation on Swann's part, when he married Odette, of his social ambitions, for from those ambitions Odette had long ago, in the spiritual sense of the word, detached him. Besides, had he not been so detached, his marriage would have been all the more creditable. It is because they entail the sacrifice of a more or less advantageous position to a purely private happiness that, as a general rule, ignominious marriages are the most estimable of all. (One cannot very well include among ignominious marriages those that are made for money, there being no instance on record of a couple, of whom the wife or else the husband has thus sold himself, who have not sooner or later been admitted into society, if only by tradition, and on the strength of so many precedents, and so as not to have, as it were, one law for the rich and another for the poor.) Perhaps, on the other hand, the artistic, if not the perverse side of Swann's nature would in any event have derived a certain pleasure from coupling himself, in one of those crossings of species such as Mendelians practise and mythology records, with a creature of a different race, archduchess or prostitute—from contracting a royal alliance or marrying beneath him. There had been but one person in all the world whose opinion he took into consideration whenever he thought of his possible marriage with Odette; this was, and from no snobbish motive, the Duchesse de Guermantes—with whom Odette, on the contrary, was but little concerned, thinking only of those people whose position was immediately above her own rather than in so vague an empyrean. But when Swann in his day-dreams saw Odette as already his wife he invariably pictured to himself the moment when he would take her—her, and above all his daughter—to call upon the Princesse des Laumes (who was shortly, on the death of her father-in-law, to become Duchesse de Guermantes). He had no desire to introduce them anywhere else, but his heart would soften as he imagined—articulating to himself their actual words—all the things that the Duchess would say of him to Odette, and Odette to the Duchess, the affection that she would show for Gilberte, spoiling her, making him proud of his child. He enacted to himself the scene of this introduction with the same precision in each of its imaginary details that people show when they consider how they would spend, supposing they were to win it, a lottery prize the amount of which they have arbitrarily determined. In so far as a mental picture which accompanies one of our resolutions may be said to motivate it, so it might be said that if Swann married Odette it was in order to introduce her, together with Gilberte, without anyone else being present, without, if need be, anyone else ever coming to know of it, to the Duchesse de Guermantes. We shall see how this sole social ambition that he had entertained for his wife and daughter was precisely the one whose realisation proved to be forbidden him, by a veto so absolute that Swann died in the belief that the Duchess could never come to know them. We shall see too that, on the contrary, the Duchesse de Guermantes did strike up a friendship with Odette and Gilberte after Swann's death. And doubtless he would have been wiser—in so far as he could attach such importance to so small a matter—not to have formed too dark a picture of the future in this connexion, but to have consoled himself with the hope that the desired meeting might indeed take place when he was no longer there to enjoy it. The laborious process of causation which sooner or later will bring about every possible effect, including, consequently, those which one had believed to be least possible, naturally slow at times, is rendered slower still by our desire (which in seeking to accelerate only obstructs it), by our very existence, and comes to fruition only when we have ceased to desire, and sometimes ceased to live. Was not Swann conscious of this from his own experience, and was there not already in his lifetime—as it were a prefiguration of what was to happen after his death—a posthumous happiness in this marriage with Odette whom he had passionately loved—even if she had not attracted him at first sight—whom he had married when he no longer loved her, when the person who, in Swann, had so longed to live and so despaired of living all his life with Odette, when that person was dead?

I began to talk about the Comte de Paris, to ask whether he was not one of Swann's friends, for I was afraid lest the conversation should drift away from him. "Why, yes!" replied M. de Norpois, turning towards me and fixing upon my modest person the azure gaze in which there floated, as in their vital element, his immense capacity for work and his power of assimilation. "And upon my word," he added, once more addressing my father, "I do not think that I shall be over-stepping the bounds of the respect which I have always professed for the Prince (without, however, maintaining any personal relations with him, which would inevitably compromise my position, unofficial though it may now be) if I tell you of a little episode which is not unintriguing. No more than four years ago, at a small railway station in one of the countries of Central Europe, the Prince happened to set eyes on Mme Swann. Naturally, none of his circle ventured to ask His Royal Highness what he thought of her. That would not have been seemly. But when her name came up by chance in conversation, by certain signs—barely perceptible, if you like, but quite unmistakable—the Prince

appeared willing enough to let it be understood that his impression of her had on the whole been far from unfavourable."

"But there could have been no possibility, surely, of her being presented to the Comte de Paris?" inquired my father.

"Well, we don't know; with princes one never does know," replied M. de Norpois. "The most exalted, those who know best how to secure what is due to them, are as often as not the last to let themselves be embarrassed by the decrees of popular opinion, even by those for which there is most justification, especially when it is a question of their rewarding a personal attachment to themselves. And it is certain that the Comte de Paris has always most graciously acknowledged the devotion of Swann, who is moreover a man of wit if ever there was one."

"And what was your own impression, Your Excellency?" my mother asked, from politeness as well as from curiosity.

All the vigour of an old connoisseur broke through the habitual moderation of his speech as he answered: "Quite excellent!"

And knowing that the admission that a strong impression has been made on one by a woman takes its place, provided that one makes it in a playful tone, in a certain form of the art of conversation that is highly appreciated, he broke into a little laugh that lasted for several moments, moistening the old diplomat's blue eyes and making his nostrils, with their network of tiny scarlet veins, quiver. "She is altogether charming!"

"Was there a writer of the name of Bergotte at this dinner, Monsieur?" I asked timidly, still trying to keep the conversation to the subject of the Swanns.

"Yes, Bergotte was there," replied M. de Norpois, inclining his head courteously towards me, as though in his desire to be agreeable to my father he attached to everything connected with him a genuine importance, even to the questions of a boy of my age who was not accustomed to see such politeness shown to him by persons of his. "Do you know him?" he went on, fastening on me that clear gaze the penetration of which had won the admiration of Bismarck.

"My son does not know him, but he admires his work immensely," my mother explained.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed M. de Norpois, inspiring me with doubts of my own intelligence far graver than those that ordinarily tormented me, when I saw that what I valued a thousand times more than myself, what I regarded as the most exalted thing in the world, was for him at the bottom of the scale of admiration, "I do not share your son's point of view. Bergotte is what I call a flute-player: one must admit that he plays very agreeably, although with a great deal of mannerism, of affectation. But when all is said, there's no more to it than that, and that is not much. Nowhere does one find in his flaccid works what one might call structure. No action—or very little—but above all no range. His books fail at the foundation, or rather they have no foundation at all. At a time like the present, when the ever-increasing complexity of life leaves one scarcely a moment for reading, when the map of Europe has undergone radical alterations and is on the eve, perhaps, of undergoing others more drastic still, when so many new and threatening problems are arising on every side, you will allow me to suggest that one is entitled to ask that a writer should be something more than a clever fellow who lulls us into forgetting, amid otiose and byzantine discussions of the merits of pure form, that we may be overwhelmed at any moment by a double tide of barbarians, those from without and those from within our borders. I am aware that this is to blaspheme against the sacrosanct school of what these gentlemen term 'Art for Art's sake,' but at this period of history there are tasks more urgent than the manipulation of words in a harmonious manner. I don't deny that Bergotte's manner can be quite seductive at times, but taken as a whole, it is all very precious, very thin, and altogether lacking in virility. I can now understand more easily, when I bear in mind your altogether excessive regard for Bergotte, the few lines that you showed me just now, which it would be ungracious of me not to overlook, since you yourself told me in all simplicity that they were merely a childish scribble." (I had indeed said so, but I did not mean a word of it.) "For every sin there is forgiveness, and especially for the sins of youth. After all, others as well as yourself have such sins upon their conscience, and you are not the only one who has believed himself a poet in his idle moments. But one can see in what you showed me the unfortunate influence of Bergotte. You will not, of course, be surprised when I say that it had none of his qualities, since he is a past-master in the art—entirely superficial by the by—of handling a certain style of which, at your age, you cannot have acquired even the rudiments. But already there is the same fault, that nonsense of stringing together fine-sounding words and only afterwards troubling about what they mean. That is putting the cart before the horse. Even in Bergotte's books, all those Chinese puzzles of form, all those subtleties of a deliquescent mandarin seem to me to be quite futile. Given a few fireworks let off prettily enough by an author, and up goes the shout of masterpiece. Masterpieces are not so common as all that! Bergotte cannot place to his credit—does not carry in his baggage, if I may use the expression—a single novel that is at all lofty in its conception, one of those books which one keeps in a special corner of one's library. I cannot think of one such in the whole of his work. But that does not mean that, in his case, the work is not infinitely superior to the author. Ah! there's a man who justifies the wit who insisted that one ought never to know an author except through his books. It would be impossible to imagine an individual who corresponded less to his—more pretentious, more pompous, more ill-bred. Vulgar at times, at others talking like a book, and not even like one of his own, but like a boring book, which his, to do them justice, are not—such is your Bergotte. He has the most confused and convoluted mind, what our forebears called sesquipedalian, and he makes the things that he says even more unpleasing by the manner in which he says them. I forget for the moment whether it is Loménie or Sainte-Beuve who tells us that Vigny repelled



people by the same failing. But Bergotte has never given us a *Cinq-Mars*, or a *Cachet rouge*, certain pages of which are veritable anthology pieces."

Shattered by what M. de Norpois had just said to me with regard to the fragment which I had submitted to him, and remembering at the same time the difficulties that I experienced when I attempted to write an essay or merely to devote myself to serious thought, I felt conscious once again of my intellectual nullity and that I was not cut out for the literary life. Doubtless in the old days at Combray certain impressions of a very humble order, or a few pages of Bergotte, had plunged me into a state of reverie which had appeared to me to be of great value. But this state was what my prose poem reflected; there could be no doubt that M. de Norpois had at once grasped and seen through the fallacy of what I had thought to be beautiful simply through a deceptive mirage, since the Ambassador had not been taken in by it. He had shown me, on the contrary, what an infinitely unimportant place was mine when I was judged from outside, objectively, by the best-disposed and most intelligent of experts. I felt dismayed, diminished; and my mind, like a fluid which is without dimensions save those of the vessel that is provided for it, just as it had expanded in the past to fill the vast capacity of genius, contracted now, was entirely contained within the straitened mediocrity in which M. de Norpois had of a sudden enclosed and sealed it.

"Our first introduction—I speak of Bergotte and myself," he resumed, turning to my father, "was somewhat beset with thorns (which is, after all, only another way of saying that it was piquant). Bergotte—some years ago, now—paid a visit to Vienna while I was Ambassador there; he was introduced to me by the Princess Metternich, came and wrote his name in the Embassy book, and made it known that he wished to be invited. Now, being when abroad the representative of France, to which he has after all done some honour by his writings, to a certain extent (let us say, to be precise, to a very slight extent), I was prepared to set aside the unfavourable opinion that I hold of his private life. But he was not travelling alone, and moreover he let it be understood that he was not to be invited without his companion. I trust that I am no more of a prude than most men, and, being a bachelor, I was perhaps in a position to throw open the doors of the Embassy a little wider than if I had been married and the father of a family. Nevertheless, I confess that there are depths of ignominy to which I refuse to accommodate myself and which are made more repulsive still by the tone, more than just moral, but frankly moralising, that Bergotte adopts in his books, where one finds nothing but perpetual and, between ourselves, somewhat wearisome analyses, painful scruples, morbid remorse, and, for the merest peccadilloes, veritable preachifying (one knows what that's worth), while all the time he is showing such frivolity and cynicism in his private life. To cut a long story short, I avoided answering, the Princess returned to the charge, but with no greater success. So that I do not suppose that I appear exactly in the odour of sanctity to the gentleman, and I am not sure how far he appreciated Swann's kindness in inviting him and myself on the same evening. Unless of course it was he who asked for the invitation. One can never tell, for really he is a sick man. Indeed that is his sole excuse."

"And was Mme Swann's daughter at the dinner?" I asked M. de Norpois, taking advantage, to put this question, of a moment in which, as we all moved towards the drawing-room, I could more easily conceal my emotion than would have been possible at table, where I was held fast in the glare of the lamplight.

M. de Norpois appeared to be trying for a moment to remember:

"Ah, yes, you mean a young person of fourteen or fifteen? Yes, of course, I remember now that she was introduced to me before dinner as the daughter of our Amphitryon. I'm afraid that I saw little of her; she retired to bed early. Or else she went out to see some friends—I forget which. But I can see that you are very intimate with the Swann household."

"I play with Mlle Swann in the Champs-Élysées, and she's delightful."

"Oh! so that's it? But I assure you, I too thought her charming. I must confess to you, however, that I do not believe that she will ever come anywhere near her mother, if I may say as much without hurting your feelings."

"I prefer Mlle Swann's face, but I admire her mother, too, enormously. I go for walks in the Bois simply in the hope of seeing her pass."

"Ah! But I must tell them that; they will be highly flattered."

While he was uttering these words, and for a few seconds after he had uttered them, M. de Norpois was still in the same position as anyone else who, hearing me speak of Swann as an intelligent man, of his family as respectable stockbrokers, of his house as a fine house, imagined that I would speak just as readily of another man equally intelligent, of other stockbrokers equally respectable, of another house equally fine; it was the moment in which a sane man who is talking to a lunatic has not yet perceived that he is a lunatic. M. de Norpois knew that there is nothing unnatural in the pleasure one derives from looking at pretty women, that it is good manners, when someone speaks to you of a pretty woman with any warmth, to pretend to think that he is in love with her, and to promise to further his designs. But in saying that he would speak of me to Gilberte and her mother (which would enable me, like an Olympian deity who has taken on the fluidity of a breath of wind, or rather the aspect of the old greybeard whose form Minerva borrows, to insinuate myself, unseen, into Mme Swann's drawing-room, to attract her attention, to occupy her thoughts, to arouse her gratitude for my admiration, to appear before her as the friend of an important person, to seem to her worthy to be invited by her in the future and to enter into the intimate life of her family), this important person who was going to use on my behalf the great influence which he must have with Mme Swann inspired in me suddenly an affection so compelling that I had difficulty in restraining myself from kissing his soft, white, wrinkled hands, which looked as though they had been left lying too long in water. I almost made as if to do so, in an impulsive movement which I believed that I alone had noticed. For it is difficult for any of us to calculate exactly the

extent to which our words or gestures are apparent to others. Partly from the fear of exaggerating our own importance, and also because we enlarge to enormous proportions the field over which the impressions formed by other people in the course of their lives are obliged to extend, we imagine that the incidentals of our speech and of our postures scarcely penetrate the consciousness, still less remain in the memory of those with whom we converse. It is, no doubt, to a supposition of this sort that criminals yield when they touch up the wording of a statement already made, thinking that the new variant cannot be confronted with any existing version. But it is quite possible that, even with respect to the millennial existence of the human race, the philosophy of the journalist, according to which everything is doomed to oblivion, is less true than a contrary philosophy which would predict the conservation of everything. In the same newspaper in which the moralist of the leader column says to us of an event, of a work of art, *a fortiori* of a singer who has enjoyed her "hour of fame": "Who will remember this in ten years' time?", does not the report of the Académie des Inscriptions overleaf speak often of a fact in itself of smaller importance, of a poem of little merit, which dates from the epoch of the Pharaohs and is still known in its entirety? Perhaps this does not quite hold true for the brief life of a human being. And yet, some years later, in a house in which M. de Norpois, who was also a guest there, seemed to me the most solid support that I could hope to find, because he was a friend of my father, indulgent, inclined to wish us all well, and moreover, by profession and upbringing trained to discretion, when, after the Ambassador had gone, I was told that he had alluded to an evening long ago when he had "seen the moment in which I was about to kiss his hand," not only did I blush to the roots of my hair but I was stupefied to learn how different from what I might have believed was not only the manner in which M. de Norpois spoke of me but also the composition of his memory. This piece of gossip enlightened me as to the incalculable proportions of absence and presence of mind, of recollection and forgetfulness, of which the human mind is composed; and I was as marvellously surprised as on the day on which I read for the first time, in one of Maspero's books, that there existed a precise list of the sportsmen whom Assurbanipal used to invite to his hunts a thousand years before the birth of Christ.

"Oh, Monsieur," I assured M. de Norpois, when he told me that he would inform Gilberte and her mother how much I admired them, "if you would do that, if you would speak of me to Mme Swann my whole life would not be long enough to prove my gratitude, and that life would be all at your service. But I feel bound to point out to you that I do not know Mme Swann, and that I have never been introduced to her."

I had added these last words from a scruple of conscience, and so as not to appear to be boasting of an acquaintance which I did not possess. But as I uttered them I sensed that they were already superfluous, for from the beginning of my speech of thanks, with its chilling ardour, I had seen flitting across the face of the Ambassador an expression of hesitation and displeasure, and in his eyes that vertical, narrow, slanting look (like, in the drawing of a solid body in perspective, the receding line of one of its surfaces), that look which one addresses to the invisible interlocutor whom one has within oneself at the moment when one is telling him something that one's other interlocutor, the person to whom one has been talking up till then—myself, in this instance—is not meant to hear. I realised in a flash that the words I had pronounced, which, feeble as they were when measured against the flood of gratitude that was coursing through me, had seemed to me bound to touch M. de Norpois and to confirm his decision upon an intervention which would have given him so little trouble and me so much joy, were perhaps (out of all those that could have been chosen with diabolical malice by persons anxious to do me harm) the only ones that could result in his abandoning his intention. Indeed, on hearing them, in the same way as when a stranger with whom we have been pleasantly exchanging impressions which we might have supposed to be similar about passers-by whom we agreed in regarding as vulgar, reveals suddenly the pathological abyss that divides him from us by adding carelessly as he feels his pocket: "What a pity I haven't got my revolver with me; I could have picked off the lot of them," M. de Norpois, who knew that nothing was less costly or more simple than to be commended to Mme Swann and taken to her house, and saw that to me, on the contrary, such favours bore so high a price and must consequently be very difficult to obtain, thought that the desire I had expressed, though ostensibly normal, must cloak some different motive, some suspect intention, some prior transgression, on account of which, in the certainty of displeasing Mme Swann, no one had hitherto been willing to undertake the responsibility for conveying a message to her from me. And I realised that this mission was one he would never discharge, that he might see Mme Swann daily, for years to come, without ever mentioning my name. He did indeed ask her, a few days later, for some information which I required, and charged my father to convey it to me. But he had not thought fit to tell her on whose behalf he was inquiring. So she would never discover that I knew M. de Norpois and that I so longed to be asked to her house; and this was perhaps a lesser misfortune than I supposed. For the second of these discoveries would probably not have added much to the efficacy of the first, which was in any event dubious: for Odette, the idea of her own life and of her own home awakened no mysterious uneasiness, and a person who knew her, who came to her house, did not seem to her a fabulous creature such as he seemed to me who would have flung a stone through Swann's windows if I could have written upon it that I knew M. de Norpois; I was convinced that such a message, even when transmitted in so brutal a fashion, would have given me far more prestige in the eyes of the lady of the house than it would have prejudiced her against me. But even if I had been capable of understanding that the mission which M. de Norpois did not perform must have remained futile, indeed that it might have damaged my credit with the Swanns, I should not have had the courage, had he proved himself willing, to relieve the Ambassador of it and to renounce the pleasure—however fatal its consequences might prove—of feeling that my name and my person were thus brought for a moment into Gilberte's presence, into her unknown life and home.

After M. de Norpois had gone my father cast an eye over the evening paper, and I thought once more of Berma. The pleasure which I had experienced in listening to her required all the more to be reinforced in that it had fallen far short of what I had promised myself; and so it at once assimilated everything that was capable of giving it nourishment, for instance those merits which M. de Norpois had ascribed to her and which my mind had imbibed at a single draught, like a dry lawn when water is poured on it. Then my father handed me the newspaper, pointing out to me a paragraph which ran more or less as follows:—

The performance of *Phèdre*, given this afternoon before an enthusiastic audience which included the foremost representatives of the artistic and critical world, was for Mme Berma, who played the heroine, the occasion of a triumph as brilliant as any that she has known in the course of her phenomenal career. We shall return at greater length to this performance, which is indeed an event in the history of the stage; suffice it to say here that the best qualified judges were unanimous in declaring that this interpretation shed an entirely new light on the role of *Phèdre*, which is one of the finest and most complex of Racine's creations, and that it constituted the purest and most exalted manifestation of dramatic art which it has been the privilege of our generation to witness.

As soon as my mind had conceived this new idea of “the purest and most exalted manifestation of dramatic art,” it, the idea, sped to join the imperfect pleasure which I had felt in the theatre, adding to it a little of what it lacked, and the combination formed something so exalting that I exclaimed to myself: “What a great artist!” It will doubtless be argued that I was not absolutely sincere. But let us bear in mind, rather, the countless writers who, dissatisfied with the passage they have just written, read some eulogy of the genius of Chateaubriand, or evoke the spirit of some great artist whose equal they aspire to be, humming to themselves, for instance, a phrase of Beethoven the melancholy of which they compare with what they have been trying to express in their prose, and become so imbued with this idea of genius that they add it to their own productions when they return to them, no longer see them in the light in which they appeared at first, and, hazarding an act of faith in the value of their work, say to themselves: “After all!” without taking into account that, into the total which determines their ultimate satisfaction, they have introduced the memory of marvellous pages of Chateaubriand which they assimilate to their own but which, after all, they did not write; let us bear in mind the numberless men who believe in the love of a mistress who has done nothing but betray them; all those, too, who are sustained by the alternative hopes, on the one hand of an incomprehensible survival after death, when they think, inconsolable husbands, of the wives whom they have lost but have not ceased to love, or, artists, of the posthumous glory which they may thus enjoy, and on the other of a reassuring void, when their thoughts turn to the misdeeds that otherwise they must expiate after their death; let us bear in mind also the travellers who come home enraptured by the over-all splendour of a journey from which day by day they experienced nothing but tedium; and let us then declare whether, in the communal life that is led by our ideas in the enclosure of our minds, there is a single one of those that makes us most happy which has not first sought, like a real parasite, and won from an alien but neighbouring idea the greater part of the strength that it originally lacked.

My mother appeared none too pleased that my father no longer thought of a diplomatic career for me. I fancy that, anxious above all else that a definite rule of life should discipline the vagaries of my nervous system, what she regretted was not so much seeing me abandon diplomacy as the prospect of my devoting myself to literature. “Don’t worry,” my father told her, “the main thing is that a man should find pleasure in his work. He’s no longer a child. He knows pretty well now what he likes, it’s very unlikely that he will change, and he’s quite capable of deciding for himself what will make him happy in life.”

That evening, as I waited for the time to arrive when, thanks to the freedom of choice which they allowed me, I should or should not begin to be happy in life, my father’s words caused me great uneasiness. His unexpected kindnesses, when they occurred, had always made me long to kiss his glowing cheeks above his beard, and if I did not yield to the impulse, it was simply because I was afraid of annoying him. Now, as an author becomes alarmed when he sees the fruits of his own meditations, which do not appear to him to be of great value since he does not separate them from himself, oblige a publisher to choose a brand of paper, to employ a type-face finer, perhaps, than they deserve, I asked myself whether my desire to write was of sufficient importance to justify my father in dispensing so much generosity. But apart from that, in speaking of my inclinations as no longer liable to change, and of what was destined to make my life happy, he aroused in me two very painful suspicions. The first was that (at a time when, every day, I regarded myself as standing upon the threshold of a life which was still intact and would not enter upon its course until the following morning) my existence had already begun, and that, furthermore, what was yet to follow would not differ to any extent from what had gone before. The second suspicion, which was really no more than a variant of the first, was that I was not situated somewhere outside Time, but was subject to its laws, just like those characters in novels who, for that reason, used to plunge me into such gloom when I read of their lives, down at Combray, in the fastness of my hooded wicker chair. In theory one is aware that the earth revolves, but in practice one does not perceive it, the ground upon which one treads seems not to move, and one can rest assured. So it is with Time in one’s life. And to make its flight perceptible novelists are obliged, by wildly accelerating the beat of the pendulum, to transport the reader in a couple of minutes over ten, or twenty, or even thirty years. At the top of one page we have left a lover full of hope; at the foot of the next we meet him again, a bowed old man of eighty, painfully dragging himself on his daily walk around the courtyard of a hospital, scarcely replying to what is said to him, oblivious of the past. In saying of me, “He’s no longer a child,” “His tastes won’t change now,” and so forth, my father had suddenly made me conscious of myself in Time, and caused me the same kind of depression as if I had been, not yet the enfeebled old pensioner, but

one of those heroes of whom the author, in a tone of indifference which is particularly galling, says to us at the end of a book: "He very seldom comes up from the country now. He has finally decided to end his days there."

Meanwhile my father, in order to forestall any criticism that we might feel tempted to make of our guest, said to my mother: "Upon my word, old Norpois was a bit 'stuffy,' as you call it, this evening, wasn't he? When he said that it wouldn't have been 'seemly' to ask the Comte de Paris a question, I was quite afraid you would burst out laughing."

"Not at all!" answered my mother. "I was delighted to see a man of his standing and his age with that sort of simplicity, which is really a sign of decency and good breeding."

"I dare say. But that doesn't prevent him from having a shrewd and discerning mind—as I know very well since I see him on the Commission, remember, where he's very different from what he was here," exclaimed my father, who was glad to see that Mamma appreciated M. de Norpois, and anxious to persuade her that he was even better than she supposed, because a cordial nature exaggerates a friend's qualities with as much pleasure as a mischievous one finds in depreciating them. "What was it that he said, again—'With princes one never does know' ...?"

"Yes, that was it. I noticed it at the time; it was very shrewd. You can see that he has a profound experience of life."

"It's extraordinary that he should have dined with the Swanns, and that he seems to have found quite respectable people there, government officials. How on earth can Mme Swann have managed to get hold of them?"

"Did you notice the malicious way he said: 'It is a house which is especially attractive to gentlemen!'?"

And each of them attempted to reproduce the manner in which M. de Norpois had uttered these words, as they might have attempted to capture some intonation of Bressant's voice or of Thiron's in *L'Aventurière* or in *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*. But of all his sayings there was none so keenly relished as one was by Françoise, who, years afterwards, could not "keep a straight face" if we reminded her that she had been described by the Ambassador as "a first-rate chef," a compliment which my mother had gone in person to transmit to her, like a War Minister passing on the congratulations of a visiting sovereign after reviewing the troops. I had, as it happened, preceded my mother to the kitchen. For I had extorted from Françoise, who though a pacifist was cruel, a promise that she would cause no undue suffering to the rabbit which she had to kill, and I had had no report yet of its death. Françoise assured me that it had passed away as peacefully as could be desired, and very swiftly. "I've never seen a beast like it; it died without saying a blessed word; you would have thought it was dumb." Being but little versed in the language of beasts, I suggested that rabbits perhaps did not squeal like chickens. "Just wait till you see," said Françoise, filled with contempt for my ignorance, "if rabbits don't squeal every bit as much as chickens. Why, their voices are even louder."

Françoise received the compliments of M. de Norpois with the proud simplicity, the joyful and (if only momentarily) intelligent expression of an artist when someone speaks to him of his art. My mother had sent her when she first came to us to several of the big restaurants to see how the cooking there was done. I had the same pleasure, that evening, in hearing her dismiss the most famous of them as mere cookshops, that I had had long ago when I learned with regard to theatrical artists that the hierarchy of their merits did not at all correspond to that of their reputations. "The Ambassador," my mother told her, "assured me that he knows nowhere where one can get cold beef and soufflés as good as yours." Françoise, with an air of modesty and of paying just homage to the truth, agreed, but seemed not at all impressed by the title "Ambassador"; she said of M. de Norpois, with the friendliness due to a man who had taken her for a chef: "He's a good old soul, like me." She had indeed hoped to catch sight of him as he arrived, but knowing that Mamma hated people lurking behind doors and at windows, and thinking that she would get to know from the other servants or from the porter that she had been keeping watch (for Françoise saw everywhere nothing but "jealousies" and "tale-bearings," which played the same baleful and perennial role in her imagination as, for certain other people, the intrigues of the Jesuits or the Jews), she had contented herself with a peep from the kitchen window, "so as not to have words with Madame," and from her momentary glimpses of M. de Norpois had "thought it was Monsieur Legrandin," because of what she called his "agility" and in spite of their having not a single point in common.

"Well then," inquired my mother, "and how do you explain that nobody else can make an aspic as well as you—when you choose?" "I really couldn't say how that becomes about," replied Françoise, who had established no very clear line of demarcation between the verb "to come," in certain of its meanings, and the verb "to become." She was speaking the truth, moreover, if only in part, being scarcely more capable—or desirous—of revealing the mystery which ensured the superiority of her aspics or her creams than a well-dressed woman the secrets of her toilettes or a great singer those of her voice. Their explanations tell us little; it was the same with the recipes of our cook. "They do it in too much of a hurry," she went on, alluding to the great restaurants, "and then it's not all done together. You want the beef to become like a sponge, then it will drink up all the juice to the last drop. Still, there was one of those cafés where I thought they did know a little bit about cooking. I don't say it was altogether my aspic, but it was very nicely done, and the soufflés had plenty of cream."

"Do you mean Henry's?" asked my father (who had now joined us), for he greatly enjoyed that restaurant in the Place Gaillon where he went regularly to regimental dinners. "Oh, dear no!" said Françoise with a mildness which cloaked a profound contempt. "I meant a little restaurant. At that Henry's it's all very good, sure enough, but it's not a restaurant, it's more like a—soup-kitchen." "Weber's, then?" "Oh, no, Monsieur, I

meant a good restaurant. Weber's, that's in the Rue Royale; that's not a restaurant, it's a brasserie. I don't know that the food they give you there is even served. I think they don't even have any table-cloths; they just shove it down in front of you like that, with a take it or leave it." "Ciro's?" Françoise smiled. "Oh! there I should say the main dishes are ladies of the world." (*Monde* meant for Françoise the *demi-monde*.) "Lord! they need them to fetch the boys in."

We could see that, with all her air of simplicity, Françoise was for the celebrities of her profession a more ferocious "colleague" than the most jealous, the most self-infatuated of actresses. We felt, all the same, that she had a proper feeling for her art and a respect for tradition, for she added: "No, I mean a restaurant where it looked like they kept a very good little family table. It's a place of some consequence, too. Plenty of custom there. Oh, they raked in the coppers, there, all right." (Françoise, being thrifty, reckoned in coppers, where your plunger would reckon in gold.) "Madame knows the place well enough, down there to the right along the main boulevards, a little way back." The restaurant of which she spoke with this blend of pride and good-humoured tolerance was, it turned out, the Café Anglais.

When New Year's Day came, I first of all paid a round of family visits with Mamma who, so as not to tire me, had planned them beforehand (with the aid of an itinerary drawn up by my father) according to district rather than degree of kinship. But no sooner had we entered the drawing-room of the distant cousin whose claim to being visited first was that her house was at no distance from ours, than my mother was horrified to see standing there, his present of marrons glacés or déguisés in his hand, the bosom friend of the most sensitive of all my uncles, to whom he would at once go and report that we had not begun our round with him. And this uncle would certainly be hurt; he would have thought it quite natural that we should go from the Madeleine to the Jardin des Plantes, where he lived, before stopping at Saint-Augustin, on our way to the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine.

Our visits ended (my grandmother had dispensed us from the duty of calling on her, since we were to dine there that evening), I ran all the way to the Champs-Élysées to give to our own special stall-keeper, with instructions to hand it over to the person who came to her several times a week from the Swanns to buy gingerbread, the letter which, on the day when my beloved had caused me so much pain, I had decided to send her at the New Year, and in which I told her that our old friendship was vanishing with the old year, that I would now forget my grievances and disappointments, and that, from this first day of January, it was a new friendship that we were going to build, so solid that nothing could destroy it, so wonderful that I hoped Gilberte would go out of her way to preserve it in all its beauty and to warn me in time, as I promised to warn her, should either of us detect the least sign of a peril that might endanger it.

On the way home Françoise made me stop at the corner of the Rue Royale, before an open-air stall from which she selected for her own stock of presents photographs of Pius IX and Raspail, while for myself I purchased one of Berma. The wholesale admiration which that artist excited gave an air of slight impoverishment to this one face that she had to respond with, immutable and precarious like the garments of people who have none "spare," this face on which she must continually expose to view only the tiny dimple upon her upper lip, the arch of her eyebrows, and a few other physical characteristics, always the same, which, after all, were at the mercy of a burn or a blow. This face, moreover, would not in itself have seemed to me beautiful, but it gave me the idea and consequently the desire to kiss it, by reason of all the kisses that it must have sustained and for which, from its page in the album, it seemed still to be appealing with that coquettishly tender gaze, that artfully ingenuous smile. For Berma must indeed have felt for many young men those desires which she confessed under cover of the character of Phèdre, desires which everything, even the glamour of her name which enhanced her beauty and prolonged her youth, must make it so easy for her to appease. Night was falling; I stopped before a column of playbills, on which was posted the performance in which she was to appear on January 1. A moist and gentle breeze was blowing. It was a weather with which I was familiar; I suddenly had a feeling and a presentiment that New Year's Day was not a day different from the rest, that it was not the first day of a new world in which I might, by a chance that was still intact, have made Gilberte's acquaintance anew as at the time of the Creation, as though the past did not yet exist, as though, together with the lessons I could have drawn from them for my future guidance, the disappointments which she had sometimes brought me had been obliterated; a new world in which nothing should subsist from the old—save one thing, my desire that Gilberte should love me. I realised that if my heart hoped for such a regeneration all around it of a universe that had not satisfied it before, it was because it, my heart, had not altered, and I told myself that there was no reason to suppose that Gilberte's had altered either; I felt that this new friendship was the same, just as there is no boundary ditch between their fore-runners and those new years which our desire, without being able to reach and so to modify them, invests, unknown to themselves, with a different name. For all that I might dedicate this new year to Gilberte, and, as one superimposes a religion on the blind laws of nature, endeavour to stamp New Year's Day with the particular image that I had formed of it, it was in vain. I felt that it was not aware that people called it New Year's Day, that it was passing in a wintry dusk in a manner that was not new to me: in the gentle breeze that blew around the column of playbills, I had recognised, had sensed the reappearance of, the eternal common substance, the familiar moisture, the unheeding fluidity of the old days and years.

I returned home. I had just spent the New Year's Day of old men, who differ on that day from their juniors, not because people have ceased to give them presents but because they themselves have ceased to believe in the New Year. Presents I had indeed received, but not that present which alone could bring me pleasure, namely a line from Gilberte. I was nevertheless still young, since I had been able to write her one, by means of which I hoped, in telling her of my solitary dreams of love and longing, to arouse similar dreams in her. The

sadness of men who have grown old lies in their no longer even thinking of writing such letters, the futility of which their experience has shown.

When I was in bed, the noises of the street, unduly prolonged on this festive evening, kept me awake. I thought of all the people who would end the night in pleasure, of the lover, the troop of debauchees perhaps, who would be going to meet Berma at the stage-door after the performance that I had seen announced for this evening. I was not even able, to calm the agitation which this idea engendered in me during my sleepless night, to assure myself that Berma was not, perhaps, thinking about love, since the lines that she recited, which she had long and carefully rehearsed, reminded her at every moment that love is an exquisite thing, as of course she already knew, and knew so well that she displayed its familiar pangs—only enriched with a new violence and an unsuspected sweetness—to her astonished audience, each member of which had felt them for himself. I lighted my candle again, to look at her face once more. At the thought that it was no doubt at that very moment being caressed by those men whom I could not prevent from giving to Berma and receiving from her joys superhuman but vague, I felt an emotion more cruel than voluptuous, a longing that was presently intensified by the sound of the horn, as one hears it on the nights of the mid-Lent festival and often of other public holidays, which, because it then lacks all poetry, is more saddening, coming from a tavern, than “at evening, in the depths of the woods.” At that moment, a message from Gilberte would perhaps not have been what I wanted. Our desires cut across one another, and in this confused existence it is rare for happiness to coincide with the desire that clamoured for it.

I continued to go to the Champs-Élysées on fine days, along streets whose elegant pink houses seemed to be washed (because exhibitions of water-colours were then the height of fashion) in a lightly floating atmosphere. It would be untrue to say that in those days the palaces of Gabriel struck me as being of greater beauty than, or even of another period from, the neighbouring houses. I found more style and should have supposed more antiquity if not in the Palais de l’Industrie at any rate in the Trocadéro. Plunged in a restless sleep, my adolescence embraced in one uniform vision the whole of the quarter through which it guided it, and I had never dreamed that there could be an eighteenth-century building in the Rue Royale, just as I should have been astonished to learn that the Porte Saint-Martin and the Porte Saint-Denis, those glories of the age of Louis XIV, were not contemporary with the most recently built tenements in the sordid districts that bore their names. Once only one of Gabriel’s palaces made me stop for more than a moment; this was because, night having fallen, its columns, dematerialised by the moonlight, had the appearance of having been cut out in pasteboard, and by reminding me of a set from the operetta *Orphée aux Enfers*, gave me for the first time an impression of beauty.

Meanwhile Gilberte never came to the Champs-Élysées. And yet it was imperative that I should see her, for I could not so much as remember her face. The questing, anxious, exacting way that we have of looking at the person we love, our eagerness for the word which will give us or take from us the hope of an appointment for the morrow, and, until that word is uttered, our alternate if not simultaneous imaginings of joy and despair, all this makes our attention in the presence of the beloved too tremulous to be able to carry away a very clear impression of her. Perhaps, also, that activity of all the senses at once which yet endeavours to discover with the eyes alone what lies beyond them is over-indulgent to the myriad forms, to the different savours, to the movements of the living person whom as a rule, when we are not in love, we immobilise. Whereas the beloved model does not stay still; and our mental photographs of it are always blurred. I no longer really knew how Gilberte’s features were composed, except in the heavenly moments when she unfolded them to me: I could remember nothing but her smile. And being unable to visualise that beloved face, despite every effort that I might make to recapture it, I was disgusted to find, etched on my memory with a maddening precision of detail, the meaningless, emphatic faces of the roundabout man and the barley-sugar woman; just as those who have lost a loved one whom they never see again in sleep, are enraged at meeting incessantly in their dreams any number of insupportable people whom it is quite enough to have known in the waking world. In their inability to form an image of the object of their grief they are almost led to accuse themselves of feeling no grief. And I was not far from believing that, since I could not recall Gilberte’s features, I had forgotten Gilberte herself, and no longer loved her.

At last she returned to play there almost every day, setting before me fresh pleasures to desire, to demand of her for the morrow, in this sense indeed making my love for her each day a new love. But an incident was to change once again, and abruptly, the manner in which, at about two o’clock every afternoon, the problem of my love confronted me. Had M. Swann intercepted the letter that I had written to his daughter, or was Gilberte merely confessing to me long after the event, and so that I should be more prudent in future, a state of affairs already long established? As I was telling her how greatly I admired her father and mother, she assumed that vague air, full of reticence and secrecy, which she invariably wore when one spoke to her of what she was going to do, her walks, drives, visits, then suddenly said to me: “You know, they can’t stand you!” and, slipping from me like the watersprite that she was, burst out laughing. Often her laughter, out of harmony with her words, seemed, as music seems, to be tracing an invisible surface on another plane. M. and Mme Swann did not require Gilberte to give up playing with me, but they would have been just as well pleased, she thought, if we had never begun. They did not look upon our relations with a kindly eye, believed me to be a person of low moral standard and imagined that I could only be a bad influence on their daughter. This type of unscrupulous youth whom Swann thought I resembled, I pictured to myself as detesting the parents of the girl he loves, flattering them to their faces but, when he is alone with her, making fun of them, urging her on to disobey them and, when once he has completed his conquest, preventing them even from seeing her. With these characteristics (though they are never those under which the basest of scoundrels



recognises himself) how vehemently did my heart contrast the sentiments by which it was animated with regard to Swann, so passionate, on the contrary, that I had no doubt that had he had an inkling of them he would have repented of his judgment of me as of a judicial error. All that I felt towards him I made bold to express to him in a long letter which I entrusted to Gilberte with the request that she deliver it to him. She agreed to do so. Alas! he must have seen in me an even greater impostor than I had feared; he must have suspected the sentiments which I had supposed myself to be portraying, in sixteen pages, with such conviction and truth: in short, the letter that I wrote to him, as ardent and as sincere as the words that I had uttered to M. de Norpois, met with no more success. Gilberte told me next day, after taking me aside behind a clump of laurels, on a little path where we sat down on a couple of chairs, that as he read my letter, which she had now brought back to me, her father had shrugged his shoulders and said: "All this means nothing; it only goes to prove how right I was." I who knew the purity of my intentions, the goodness of my soul, was furious that my words should not even have impinged upon the surface of Swann's ridiculous error. For it was an error; of that I had then no doubt. I felt that I had described with such accuracy certain irrefutable characteristics of my generous sentiments that, if Swann had not at once recognised their authenticity, had not come to ask my forgiveness and to admit that he had been mistaken, it must be because he himself had never experienced these noble sentiments, and this would make him incapable of understanding their existence in other people.

But perhaps it was simply that Swann knew that nobility is often no more than the inner aspect which our egotistical feelings assume when we have not yet named and classified them. Perhaps he had recognised in the regard that I expressed for him simply an effect—and the strongest possible proof—of my love for Gilberte, by which—and not by my secondary veneration for himself—my subsequent actions would be inevitably controlled. I was unable to share his predictions, since I had not succeeded in abstracting my love from myself, in fitting it into the common experience of humanity and computing, experimentally, its consequences; I was in despair. I was obliged to leave Gilberte for a moment; Françoise had called me. I had to accompany her into a little pavilion covered in a green trellis, not unlike one of the disused toll-houses of old Paris, in which had recently been installed what in England they call a lavatory but in France, by an ill-judged piece of Anglomaniac, "water-closets." The old, damp walls of the entrance, where I stood waiting for Françoise, emitted a cool, fusty smell which, relieving me at once of the anxieties that Swann's words, as reported by Gilberte, had just awakened in me, filled me with a pleasure of a different kind from other pleasures, which leave one more unstable, incapable of grasping them, of possessing them, a pleasure that was solid and consistent, on which I could lean for support, delicious, soothing, rich with a truth that was lasting, unexplained and sure. I should have liked, as, long ago, in my walks along the Guermantes way, to endeavour to penetrate the charm of this impression which had seized hold of me, and, remaining there motionless, to explore this antiquated emanation which invited me not to enjoy the pleasure which it was offering me only as a bonus, but to descend into the underlying reality which it had not yet disclosed to me. But the keeper of the establishment, an elderly dame with painted cheeks and an auburn wig, began to talk to me. Françoise thought her "a proper lady." Her young "missy" had married what Françoise called "a young man of family," which meant that he differed more, in her eyes, from a workman than, in Saint-Simon's, a duke did from a man "risen from the dregs of the people." No doubt the keeper, before entering upon her tenancy, had suffered setbacks. But Françoise was positive that she was a "marquise," and belonged to the Saint-Ferréol family. This "marquise" now warned me not to stand outside in the cold, and even opened one of her doors for me, saying: "Won't you go inside for a minute? Look, here's a nice clean one, and I shan't charge *you* anything." Perhaps she made this offer simply in the spirit in which the young ladies at Gouache's, when we went in there to order something, used to offer me one of the sweets which they kept on the counter under glass bells, and which, alas, Mamma would never allow me to accept; perhaps, less innocently, like the old florist whom Mamma used to have in to replenish her flower-stands, who rolled languishing eyes at me as she handed me a rose. In any event, if the "marquise" had a weakness for little boys, when she threw open to them the hypogean doors of those cubicles of stone in which men crouch like sphinxes, she must have been moved to that generosity less by the hope of corrupting them than by the pleasure which all of us feel in displaying a needless prodigality to those whom we love, for I never saw her with any other visitor except an old park-keeper.

A moment later I said good-bye to the "marquise," and went out accompanied by Françoise, whom I left to return to Gilberte. I caught sight of her at once, on a chair, behind the clump of laurels. She was there so as not to be seen by her friends: they were playing hide-and-seek. I went and sat down beside her. She had on a flat cap which came low over her eyes, giving her the same "underhand," brooding, sly look which I had remarked in her that first time at Combray. I asked her if there was not some way for me to have it out with her father face to face. Gilberte said that she had suggested that to him, but that he had thought it pointless. "Here," she went on, "don't go away without your letter. I must run along to the others, as they haven't found me."

Had Swann appeared on the scene then before I had recovered this letter by the sincerity of which I felt that he had been so unreasonable in not letting himself be convinced, perhaps he would have seen that it was he who had been in the right. For, approaching Gilberte, who, leaning back in her chair, told me to take the letter but did not hold it out to me, I felt myself so irresistibly attracted by her body that I said to her: "I say, why don't you try to stop me from getting it; we'll see who's the stronger."

She thrust it behind her back; I put my arms round her neck, raising the plaits of hair which she wore over her shoulders, either because she was still of an age for it or because her mother chose to make her look a child for a little longer so as to make herself seem younger; and we wrestled, locked together. I tried to pull her towards me, and she resisted; her cheeks, inflamed by the effort, were as red and round as two cherries;

she laughed as though I were tickling her; I held her gripped between my legs like a young tree which I was trying to climb; and, in the middle of my gymnastics, when I was already out of breath with the muscular exercise and the heat of the game, I felt, like a few drops of sweat wrung from me by the effort, my pleasure express itself in a form which I could not even pause for a moment to analyse; immediately I snatched the letter from her. Whereupon Gilberte said good-naturedly: "You know, if you like, we might go on wrestling a bit longer."

Perhaps she was dimly conscious that my game had another object than the one I had avowed, but too dimly to have been able to see that I had attained it. And I who was afraid that she had noticed (and a slight movement of recoil and constraint as of offended modesty which she made and checked a moment later made me think that my fear had not been unfounded) agreed to go on wrestling, lest she should suppose that I had indeed had no other object in view than the one after which I wished only to sit quietly by her side.

On my way home I perceived, I suddenly recalled the impression, concealed from me until then, of which, without letting me distinguish or recognise it, the cold and almost sooty smell of the trellised pavilion had reminded me. It was that of my uncle Adolphe's little sitting-room at Combray, which had indeed exhaled the same odour of humidity. But I could not understand, and I postponed until later the attempt to discover why the recollection of so trivial an impression had filled me with such happiness. Meanwhile it struck me that I did indeed deserve the contempt of M. de Norpois: I had preferred hitherto to all other writers one whom he styled a mere "flute-player," and a positive rapture had been conveyed to me, not by some important idea, but by a musty smell.

For some time past, in certain households, the name of the Champs-Élysées, if a visitor mentioned it, would be greeted by the mothers with that baleful air which they reserve for a physician of established reputation whom they claim to have seen make too many false diagnoses to have any faith left in him; people insisted that these gardens were not good for children, that they knew of more than one sore throat, more than one case of measles and any number of feverish chills for which they must be held responsible. Without venturing openly to doubt the maternal affection of Mamma, who continued to let me play there, several of her friends deplored her inability to see what was as plain as daylight.

Neurotic subjects are perhaps less addicted than any, despite the time-honoured phrase, to "listening to their insides": they hear so many things going on by which they realise later that they were wrong to let themselves be alarmed, that they end by paying no attention to any of them. Their nervous systems have so often cried out to them for help, as though with some serious malady, when it was simply going to start snowing or they were going to move house, that they have acquired the habit of paying no more heed to these warnings than a soldier who in the heat of battle perceives them so little that he is capable, although dying, of carrying on for some days still the life of a man in perfect health. One morning, bearing within me all my habitual ailments, from whose constant internal circulation I kept my mind turned as resolutely away as from the circulation of my blood, I came running blithely into the dining-room where my parents were already at table, and—having assured myself, as usual, that to feel cold may mean not that one ought to warm oneself but that, for instance, one has received a scolding, and not to feel hungry may mean that it is going to rain and not that one ought to fast—had taken my place between them when in the act of swallowing the first mouthful of a particularly tempting cutlet, a nausea and dizziness brought me to a halt, the feverish reaction of an illness that had already begun, the symptoms of which had been masked and retarded by the ice of my indifference, but which obstinately refused the nourishment that I was not in a fit state to absorb. Then, at the same moment, the thought that I would be prevented from going out if I was seen to be unwell gave me, as the instinct of self-preservation gives a wounded man, the strength to crawl to my own room, where I found that I had a temperature of 104, and then to get ready to go to the Champs-Élysées. Through the languid and vulnerable shell which encased them, my eager thoughts were urging me towards, were clamouring for the soothing delight of a game of prisoner's base with Gilberte, and an hour later, barely able to keep on my feet, but happy in being by her side, I had still the strength to enjoy it.

Françoise, on our return, declared that I had been "taken bad," that I must have caught a "hot and cold," while the doctor, who was called in at once, declared that he "preferred" the "severity," the "virulence" of the rise in temperature which accompanied my congestion of the lungs, and would be no more than "a flash in the pan," to other symptoms, more "insidious" and "masked." For some time now I had been liable to fits of breathlessness, and our doctor, braving the disapproval of my grandmother, who saw me already dying a drunkard's death, had recommended me to take, as well as the caffeine which had been prescribed to help me to breathe, beer, champagne or brandy when I felt an attack coming. These attacks would subside, he said, in the "euphoria" brought on by the alcohol. I was often obliged, so that my grandmother should allow it to be given to me, instead of disguising, almost to make a display of my state of suffocation. On the other hand, as soon as I felt it coming, never being quite certain what proportions it would assume, I would grow distressed at the thought of my grandmother's anxiety, of which I was far more afraid than of my own sufferings. But at the same time my body, either because it was too weak to keep those sufferings secret, or because it feared lest, in their ignorance of the imminent attack, people might demand of me some exertion which it would have found impossible or dangerous, gave me the need to warn my grandmother of my symptoms with a precision into which I put a sort of physiological punctiliousness. If I observed in myself a disturbing symptom which I had not previously discerned, my body was in distress so long as I had not communicated it to my grandmother. If she pretended to take no notice, it made me insist. Sometimes I went too far; and that beloved face, which was no longer able always to control its emotion as in the past, would betray an expression of pity, a painful contraction. Then my heart was wrung by the sight of her grief; as if my kisses

had the power to expel that grief, as if my affection could give my grandmother as much joy as my recovery, I flung myself into her arms. And its scruples being at the same time calmed by the certainty that she was now aware of the discomfort that I felt, my body offered no opposition to my reassuring her. I protested that this discomfort was not really painful, that I was in no sense to be pitied, that she might be quite sure that I was now happy; my body had wished to secure exactly the amount of pity that it deserved, and, provided that someone knew that it had a pain in its right side, it could see no harm in my declaring that this pain was of no consequence and was not an obstacle to my happiness; for my body did not pride itself on its philosophy; that was outside its province. Almost every day during my convalescence I had some of these fits of suffocation. One evening, after my grandmother had left me comparatively well, she returned to my room very late and, seeing me struggling for breath, "Oh, my poor boy," she exclaimed, her face quivering with sympathy, "you must be in dreadful pain." She left me at once; I heard the street door open, and in a little while she came back with some brandy which she had gone out to buy since there was none in the house. Presently I began to feel better. My grandmother, who was rather flushed, seemed somehow embarrassed, and her eyes had a look of weariness and dejection.

"I shall leave you alone now, and let you take advantage of this improvement," she said, rising suddenly to go. I detained her, however, for a kiss, and could feel on her cold cheek something moist, but did not know whether it was the dampness of the night air through which she had just passed. Next day, she did not come to my room until the evening, having had, she told me, to go out. I considered that this showed a surprising indifference to my well-being, and I had to restrain myself in order not to reproach her with it.

My suffocations having persisted long after any congestion remained that could account for them, my parents brought in Professor Cottard. It is not enough that a physician who is called in to treat cases of this sort should be learned. Confronted with symptoms which may be those of three or four different complaints, it is in the long run his flair, his instinctive judgment, that must decide with which, despite the more or less similar appearance of them all, he has to deal. This mysterious gift does not imply any superiority in the other departments of the intellect, and a person of the utmost vulgarity, who admires the worst pictures, the worst music, who is without the slightest intellectual curiosity, may perfectly well possess it. In my case, what was physically evident might well have been caused by nervous spasms, by incipient tuberculosis, by asthma, by a toxi-alimentary dyspnoea with renal insufficiency, by chronic bronchitis, or by a complex state into which more than one of these factors entered. Now, nervous spasms required to be treated firmly, and discouraged, tuberculosis with infinite care and the sort of "feeding-up" which would have been bad for an arthritic condition such as asthma and might indeed have been dangerous in a case of toxi-alimentary dyspnoea, this last calling for a strict diet which, in turn, would be fatal to a tubercular patient. But Cottard's hesitations were brief and his prescriptions imperious: "Purges, violent and drastic purges; milk for some days, nothing but milk. No meat. No alcohol." My mother murmured that I needed, all the same, to be "built up," that I was already very nervy, that drenching me like a horse and restricting my diet would make me worse. I could see in Cottard's eyes, as anxious as if he was afraid of missing a train, that he was wondering whether he had not succumbed to his natural gentleness. He was trying to think whether he had remembered to put on his mask of coldness, as one looks for a mirror to see whether one has forgotten to tie one's tie. In his uncertainty, and in order to compensate just in case, he replied brutally: "I am not in the habit of repeating my prescriptions. Give me a pen. Now remember, milk! Later on, when we've got the breathlessness and the agrypnia under control, I'm prepared to let you take a little clear soup, and then a little broth, but always with milk; *au lait*! You'll enjoy that, since Spain is all the rage just now; *olé, olé!*" (His pupils knew this joke well, for he made it at the hospital whenever he had to put a heart or liver case on a milk diet.) "After that, you'll gradually return to your normal life. But whenever there's any coughing or choking—purges, enemas, bed, milk!" He listened with icy calm, and without replying, to my mother's final objections, and as he left us without having condescended to explain the reasons for this course of treatment, my parents concluded that it had no bearing on my case, and would weaken me to no purpose, and so they did not make me try it. Naturally they sought to conceal their disobedience from the Professor, and to make sure of it avoided all the houses in which they might have run across him. Then, as my health deteriorated, they decided to make me follow Cottard's prescriptions to the letter; in three days my rattle and cough had ceased, I could breathe freely. Whereupon we realised that Cottard, while finding, as he told us later on, that I was distinctly asthmatic, and above all "batty," had discerned that what was really the matter with me at the moment was toxæmia, and that by loosening my liver and washing out my kidneys he would clear my bronchial tubes and thus give me back my breath, my sleep and my strength. And we realised that this imbecile was a great physician.

At last I was able to get up. But there was talk of my no longer being allowed to go to the Champs-Élysées. The reason given was that the air there was bad; but I felt sure that this was only a pretext so that I should no longer be able to see Mile Swann, and I forced myself to repeat the name of Gilberte all the time, like the native tongue which peoples in captivity endeavour to preserve among themselves so as not to forget the land that they will never see again.

Sometimes my mother would stroke my forehead, saying: "So little boys don't tell Mamma their troubles any more?" And Françoise used to come up to me every day and say: "What a face, to be sure! If you could just see yourself! You look like death!" It is true that, if I had simply had a cold in the head, Françoise would have assumed the same funereal air. These lamentations pertained rather to her "class" than to the state of my health. I could not at the time distinguish whether this pessimism was due to sorrow or to satisfaction. I decided provisionally that it was social and professional.

One day, after the postman had called, my mother laid a letter upon my bed. I opened it carelessly, since it could not bear the one signature that would have made me happy, the name of Gilberte, with whom I had no relations outside the Champs-Élysées. But there, at the foot of the page, which was embossed with a silver seal representing a helmeted head above a scroll with the device *Per viam rectam*, beneath a letter written in a large and flowing hand in which almost every phrase appeared to be underlined, simply because the crosses of the “t”s ran not across but over them, and so drew a line beneath the corresponding letters of the word above, it was precisely Gilberte’s signature that I saw. But because I knew this to be impossible in a letter addressed to me, the sight of it unaccompanied by any belief in it gave me no pleasure. For a moment it merely gave an impression of unreality to everything around me. With dizzy speed the improbable signature danced about my bed, the fireplace, the four walls. I saw everything reel, as one does when one falls from a horse, and I asked myself whether there was not an existence altogether different from the one I knew, in direct contradiction to it, but itself the real one, which, being suddenly revealed to me, filled me with that hesitation which sculptors, in representing the Last Judgment, have given to the awakening dead who find themselves at the gates of the next world. “My dear friend,” said the letter, “I hear that you have been very ill and have given up going to the Champs-Élysées. I hardly ever go there either because there has been such an enormous lot of illness. But my friends come to tea here every Monday and Friday. Mamma asks me to tell you that it will be a great pleasure to us all if you will come too as soon as you are well again, and we can have some more nice talks here as we did in the Champs-Élysées. Good-bye, my dear friend; I hope that your parents will allow you to come to tea very often. With all my kindest regards. GILBERTE.”

While I was reading these words, my nervous system received, with admirable promptitude, the news that a great happiness had befallen me. But my mind, that is to say myself, in other words the party principally concerned, was still unaware of it. Happiness, happiness through Gilberte, was a thing I had never ceased to think of, a thing wholly in my mind—as Leonardo said of painting, *cosa mentale*. Now, a sheet of paper covered with writing is not a thing that the mind assimilates at once. But as soon as I had finished reading the letter, I thought of it, it became an object of reverie, it too became *cosa mentale*, and I loved it so much now that every few minutes I had to re-read it and kiss it. Then at last I was conscious of my happiness.

Life is strewn with these miracles for which people who love can always hope. It is possible that this one had been artificially brought about by my mother who, seeing that for some time past I had lost all interest in life, may have suggested to Gilberte to write to me, just as, when I first went sea-bathing, in order to make me enjoy diving which I hated because it took away my breath, she used secretly to hand to my bathing instructor marvellous boxes made of shells, and branches of coral, which I believed that I myself discovered lying at the bottom of the sea. However, with every occurrence in life and its contrasting situations that relates to love, it is best to make no attempt to understand, since in so far as these are as inexorable as they are unlooked-for, they appear to be governed by magic rather than by rational laws. When a multi-millionaire—who for all his millions is a charming man—sent packing by a poor and unattractive woman with whom he has been living, calls to his aid, in his despair, all the resources of wealth and brings every worldly influence to bear without succeeding in making her take him back, it is wiser for him, in the face of the implacable obstinacy of his mistress, to suppose that Fate intends to crush him and to make him die of an affection of the heart rather than to seek any logical explanation. These obstacles against which lovers have to contend and which their imagination, over-excited by suffering, seeks in vain to analyse, are to be found, as often as not, in some peculiar characteristic of the woman whom they cannot win back—in her stupidity, in the influence acquired over her and the fears suggested to her by people whom the lover does not know, in the kind of pleasures which at that moment she demands of life, pleasures which neither her lover nor her lover’s wealth can procure for her. In any event, the lover is not in the best position to discover the nature of these obstacles which the woman’s guile conceals from him and his own judgment, distorted by love, prevents him from estimating exactly. They may be compared with those tumours which the doctor succeeds in reducing, but without having traced them to their source. Like them these obstacles remain mysterious but are temporary. Only they last, as a rule, longer than love itself. And as the latter is not a disinterested passion, the lover who no longer loves does not seek to know why the woman, neither rich nor virtuous, with whom he was in love refused obstinately for years to let him continue to keep her.

Now the same mystery which often veils from our eyes the reason for a catastrophe envelops just as frequently, when love is in question, the suddenness of certain happy solutions, such as had been brought to me by Gilberte’s letter. Happy, or at least seemingly happy, for there are few that can really be happy when we are dealing with a sentiment of such a kind that any satisfaction we can give it does no more, as a rule, than dislodge some pain. And yet sometimes a respite is granted us, and we have for a little while the illusion of being healed.

As regards this letter, at the foot of which Françoise refused to recognise Gilberte’s name because the elaborate capital “G” leaning against the undotted “i” looked more like an “A,” while the final syllable was indefinitely prolonged by a waving flourish, if we persist in looking for a rational explanation of the sudden change of feeling towards me which it reflected, and which made me so radiantly happy, we may perhaps find that I was to some extent indebted for it to an incident which I should have supposed, on the contrary, to be calculated to ruin me for ever in the eyes of the Swann family. A short while back, Bloch had come to see me at a time when Professor Cottard, who, now that I was following his prescriptions, had again been called in, happened to be in my room. As his examination was over and he was sitting with me simply as a visitor because my parents had invited him to stay to dinner, Bloch was allowed to come in. While we were all talking, Bloch having mentioned that he had been told by a lady with whom he had been dining the day

before, and who was a great friend of Mme Swann's, that the latter was very fond of me, I should have liked to reply that he was most certainly mistaken, and to establish the fact (from the same scruple of conscience that had made me proclaim it to M. de Norpois, and for fear that Mme Swann might take me for a liar) that I did not know her and had never spoken to her. But I did not have the heart to correct Bloch's mistake, because I realised that it was deliberate, and that, if he had made up something that Mme Swann could not possibly have said, it was simply to let us know (what he considered flattering to himself, and was not true either) that he had been dining with one of that lady's friends. And thus it came about that whereas M. de Norpois, on learning that I did not know but would very much like to know Mme Swann, had taken good care to avoid speaking to her about me, Cottard, who was her doctor, having gathered from what he had heard Bloch say that she knew me quite well and thought highly of me, concluded that to remark, when next he saw her, that I was a charming young fellow and a great friend of his could not be of the smallest use to me and would be advantageous to himself, two reasons which induced him to speak of me to Odette whenever an opportunity arose.

Thus at length I came to know that house from which was wafted even on to the staircase the scent that Mme Swann used, but which was more redolent still of the peculiar, disturbing charm that emanated from the life of Gilberte. The implacable concierge, transformed into a benevolent Eumenid, adopted the habit, when I asked him if I might go upstairs, of indicating to me, by raising his cap with a propitious hand, that he granted my prayer. Those windows which, seen from outside, used to interpose between me and the treasures within, which were not destined for me, a polished, distant and superficial stare, which seemed to me the very stare of the Swanns themselves, it fell to my lot, when in the warm weather I had spent a whole afternoon with Gilberte in her room, to open myself so as to let in a little air and even to lean out of beside her, if it was her mother's "at home" day, to watch the visitors arrive who would often look up as they stepped out of their carriages and greet me with a wave of the hand, taking me for some nephew of their hostess. At such moments Gilberte's plaits used to brush my cheek. They seemed to me, in the fineness of their grain, at once natural and supernatural, and in the strength of their skilfully woven tracery, a matchless work of art in the composition of which had been used the very grass of Paradise. To a section of them, however infinitesimal, what celestial herbarium would I not have given as a reliquary? But since I never hoped to obtain an actual fragment of those plaits, if at least I had been able to have a photograph of them, how far more precious than one of a sheet of flowers drawn by Leonardo! To acquire one, I stooped to servilities, with friends of the Swanns and even with photographers, which not only failed to procure for me what I wanted, but tied me for life to a number of extremely boring people.

Gilberte's parents, who for so long had prevented me from seeing her, now—when I entered the dark hall in which hovered perpetually, more formidable and more to be desired than, at Versailles, the apparition of the King, the possibility of my encountering them, in which too, invariably, after bumping into an enormous seven-branched hat-stand, like the Candlestick in Holy Writ, I would begin bowing profusely to a footman, seated among the skirts of his long grey coat upon the wood chest, whom in the dim light I had mistaken for Mme Swann—Gilberte's parents, if one of them happened to be passing at the moment of my arrival, so far from seeming annoyed would come and shake hands with me with a smile, and say: "How d'y'e do?" (which they both pronounced in the same clipped way, which, as may be imagined, I made it my incessant and delightful task to imitate when I was back at home). "Does Gilberte know you're here? She does? Then I'll leave you to her."

Better still, the tea-parties themselves to which Gilberte invited her friends, parties which for so long had seemed to me the most insurmountable of the barriers heaped up between her and myself, became now an opportunity for bringing us together of which she would inform me in a few lines written (because I was still a comparative stranger) on writing-paper that was always different. Once it was adorned with a poodle embossed in blue, above a humorous inscription in English with an exclamation mark after it; another time it would be engraved with an anchor, or with the initials G. S. preposterously elongated in a rectangle which ran from top to bottom of the page, or else with the name Gilberte, now traced across one corner in letters of gold which imitated her signature and ended with a flourish, beneath an open umbrella printed in black, now enclosed in a monogram in the shape of a Chinaman's hat which contained all the letters of the name in capitals without its being possible to make out a single one of them. Finally, as the series of different writing-papers which Gilberte possessed, numerous though it was, was not unlimited, after a certain number of weeks I saw reappear the sheet that bore (like the first letter she had written me) the motto *Per viam rectam*, and over it the helmeted head set in a medallion of tarnished silver. And each of them was chosen for one day rather than another by virtue of a certain ritual, as I then supposed, but more probably, I now think, because she tried to remember which of them she had already used, so as never to send the same one twice to any of her correspondents, of those at least whom she took special pains to please, save at the longest possible intervals. As, on account of the different times of their lessons, some of the friends whom Gilberte used to invite to her parties were obliged to leave just as the rest were arriving, while I was still on the stairs I could hear emanating from the hall a murmur of voices which, such was the emotion aroused in me by the imposing ceremony in which I was to take part, suddenly broke the bonds that connected me with my previous life long before I had reached the landing, so that I did not even remember that I was to take off my muffler as soon as I felt too hot and to keep an eye on the clock so as not to be late in getting home. That staircase, too, all of wood as they were built about that time in certain apartment houses in that Henri II style which had for so long been Odette's ideal though she was shortly to abandon it, and furnished with a placard, to which there was no equivalent at home, on which one read the words: "NOTICE. Do not use the lift when going down,"

seemed to me a thing so marvellous that I told my parents that it was an antique staircase brought from ever so far away by M. Swann. My regard for the truth was so great that I should not have hesitated to give them this information even if I had known it to be false, for it alone could enable them to feel for the dignity of the Swanns' staircase the same respect that I felt myself—just as when one is talking to some ignorant person who cannot understand what constitutes the genius of a great doctor, it is well not to admit that he does not know how to cure a cold in the head. But since I was extremely unobservant, and since, as a general rule, I never knew either the name or the nature of the things I came across and could understand only that when they were connected with the Swanns they must be extraordinary, it did not seem absolutely certain to me that in notifying my parents of the artistic value and remote origin of the staircase I was guilty of a falsehood. It did not seem certain; but it must have seemed probable, for I felt myself turn very red when my father interrupted me with: "I know those houses. I've been in one of them. They're all alike; Swann just has several floors in one; it was Berlioz built them all." He added that he had thought of taking a flat in one of them, but that he had changed his mind, finding that they were not conveniently arranged, and that the landings were too dark. So he said; but I felt instinctively that I must make the sacrifices necessary to the glory of the Swanns and to my own happiness, and by an internal decree, in spite of what I had just heard, I banished for ever from my mind, as a good Catholic banishes Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, the corrupting thought that their house was just an ordinary flat in which we ourselves might have been living.

Meanwhile, on those tea-party days, pulling myself up the staircase step by step, reason and memory already cast off like outer garments, and myself no more now than the sport of the basest reflexes, I would arrive in the zone in which the scent of Mme Swann greeted my nostrils. I could already visualise the majesty of the chocolate cake, encircled by plates heaped with biscuits, and by tiny napkins of patterned grey damask, as required by convention but peculiar to the Swanns. But this ordered and unalterable design seemed, like Kant's necessary universe, to depend on a supreme act of free will. For when we were all together in Gilberte's little sitting-room, suddenly she would look at the clock and exclaim:

"I say! It's getting a long time since luncheon, and we aren't having dinner till eight. I feel as if I could eat something. What do you say?"

And she would usher us into the dining-room, as sombre as the interior of an Asiatic temple painted by Rembrandt, in which an architectural cake, as urbane and familiar as it was imposing, seemed to be enthroned there on the off-chance as on any other day, in case the fancy seized Gilberte to disown it of its chocolate battlements and to hew down the steep brown slopes of its ramparts, baked in the oven like the bastions of the palace of Darius. Better still, in proceeding to the demolition of that Ninevite pastry, Gilberte did not consider only her own hunger; she inquired also after mine, while she extracted for me from the crumbling monument a whole glazed slab jewelled with scarlet fruits, in the oriental style. She would even ask me what time my parents dined, as if I still knew, as if the agitation which overwhelmed me had allowed the sensation of satiety or of hunger, the notion of dinner or the image of my family, to persist in my empty memory and paralysed stomach. Alas, its paralysis was but momentary. A time would come when I should have to digest the cakes that I took without noticing them. But that time was still remote. Meanwhile Gilberte was making "my" tea. I would go on drinking it indefinitely, although a single cup would keep me awake for twenty-four hours. As a consequence of which my mother used always to say: "What a nuisance it is; this child can never go to the Swanns' without coming home ill." But was I aware even, when I was at the Swanns', that it was tea that I was drinking? Had I known, I should have drunk it just the same, for even supposing that I had recovered for a moment the sense of the present, that would not have restored to me the memory of the past or the apprehension of the future. My imagination was incapable of reaching to the distant time in which I might have the idea of going to bed and the need to sleep.

Gilberte's girl friends were not all plunged in that state of intoxication in which it is impossible to make any decisions. Some of them even refused tea! Then Gilberte would say, using a phrase that was very popular that year: "I can see I'm not having much of a success with my tea!" And to eradicate even more completely any notion of ceremony, she would disarrange the chairs that were drawn up round the table, saying: "It's just like a wedding breakfast. Goodness, how stupid servants are!"

She would nibble away, perched sideways upon a cross-legged seat placed at an angle to the table. And then, just as though she could have had all those cakes at her disposal without having asked her mother's permission, when Mme Swann, whose "day" coincided as a rule with Gilberte's tea-parties, having shown one of her visitors to the door, came sweeping in a moment later, dressed sometimes in blue velvet, more often in a black satin gown draped with white lace, she would say with an air of astonishment: "I say, that looks good, what you've got there. It makes me quite hungry to see you all eating cake."

"But, Mamma, do! We invite you," Gilberte would answer.

"Thank you, no, my precious; what would my visitors say? I've still got Mme Trombert and Mme Cottard and Mme Bontemps. You know dear Mme Bontemps never pays very short visits, and she has only just come. What would all those good people say if I didn't go back to them? If no one else calls, I'll come back and have a chat with you (which will be far more amusing) after they've all gone. I really think I've earned a little rest. I've had forty-five different people today, and forty-two of them have told me about Gérôme's picture! But you must come along one of these days," she turned to me, "and take 'your' tea with Gilberte. She'll make it for you just as you like it, as you have it in your own little 'den'," she added as she rushed off to her visitors and as if it had been something as familiar to me as my own habits (such as the habit I might have had of drinking tea, had I ever done so; as for my "den," I was uncertain whether I had one or not) that I had come to seek in this mysterious world. "When can you come? Tomorrow? We'll make you some toast that's every bit as good



as you get at Colombin's. No? You are horrid!"—for, since she too had begun to form a salon, she was adopting Mme Verdurin's mannerisms, and notably her tone of simpering autocracy. "Toast" being as unfamiliar to me as "Colombin's," this further promise could not have added to my temptation. It will appear stranger, now that everyone uses such expressions—perhaps even at Combray—that I had not at first understood who Mme Swann was speaking of when I heard her sing the praises of our old "nurse." I did not know any English; I soon gathered, however, that the word was intended to denote Françoise. Having been so terrified in the Champs-Élysées of the bad impression that she must make, I now learned from Mme Swann that it was all the things that Gilberte had told them about my "nurse" that had attracted her husband and her to me. "One feels that she is so devoted to you, that she must be so nice!" (At once my opinion of Françoise was diametrically changed. Conversely, to have a governess equipped with a waterproof and a feather in her hat no longer appeared quite so essential.) Finally I learned from some words which Mme Swann let fall with regard to Mme Blatin (whose good nature she acknowledged but whose visits she dreaded) that personal relations with that lady would have been of less value to me than I had supposed, and would not in any way have improved my standing with the Swanns.

If I had now begun to explore with tremors of reverence and joy the enchanted domain which, against all expectations, had opened to me its hitherto impenetrable approaches, this was still only in my capacity as a friend of Gilberte. The realm into which I was admitted was itself contained within another, more mysterious still, in which Swann and his wife led their supernatural existence and towards which they made their way, after shaking my hand, when they crossed the hall at the same moment as myself but in the other direction. But soon I was to penetrate also to the heart of the Sanctuary. For instance, Gilberte might be out when I called, but M. or Mme Swann was at home. They would ask who had rung, and on being told that it was I, would send out to ask me to come in for a moment and talk to them, desiring me to use in one way or another, with this or that object in view, my influence over their daughter. I remembered the letter, so complete and so persuasive, which I had written to Swann only the other day, and which he had not deigned even to acknowledge. I marvelled at the impotence of the mind, the reason and the heart to effect the least conversion, to solve a single one of those difficulties which subsequently life, without one's so much as knowing how it went about it, so easily unravels. My new position as the friend of Gilberte, endowed with an excellent influence over her, now enabled me to enjoy the same favours as if, having had as a companion at some school where I was always at the top of my class the son of a king, I had owed to that accident the right of informal entry into the palace and to audiences in the throne-room. Swann, with an infinite benevolence and as though he were not over-burdened with glorious occupations, would take me into his library and there allow me for an hour on end to respond in stammered monosyllables, timid silences broken by brief and incoherent bursts of courage, to observations of which my excitement prevented me from understanding a single word; would show me works of art and books which he thought likely to interest me, things as to which I had no doubt that they infinitely surpassed in beauty anything that the Louvre or the Bibliothèque Nationale possessed, but at which I found it impossible to look. At such moments I should have been delighted if Swann's butler had demanded from me my watch, my tie-pin, my boots, and made me sign a deed acknowledging him as my heir; in the admirable words of a popular expression of which, as of the most famous epics, we do not know the author, although, like these epics, and with all deference to Wolf and his theory,<sup>5</sup> it most certainly had one (one of those inventive and modest souls such as we come across every year, who light upon such gems as "putting a name to a face," though their own names they never reveal), *I no longer knew what I was doing*. The most I was capable of was astonishment, when my visit was at all prolonged, at the nullity of achievement, at the utter inconclusiveness of those hours spent in the enchanted dwelling. But my disappointment arose neither from the inadequacy of the works of art that were shown to me nor from the impossibility of fixing upon them my distracted gaze. For it was not the intrinsic beauty of the objects themselves that made it miraculous for me to be sitting in Swann's library, it was the attachment to those objects—which might have been the ugliest in the world—of the particular feeling, melancholy and voluptuous, which I had for so many years located in that room and which still impregnated it; similarly the multitude of mirrors, of silver-backed brushes, of altars to Saint Anthony of Padua carved and painted by the most eminent artists, her friends, counted for nothing in the feeling of my own unworthiness and of her regal benevolence which was aroused in me when Mme Swann received me for a moment in her bedroom, in which three beautiful and impressive creatures, her first, second and third lady's-maids, smilingly prepared for her the most marvellous toilettes, and towards which, on the order conveyed to me by the footman in knee-breeches that Madame wished to say a few words to me, I would make my way along the tortuous path of a corridor perfumed for the whole of its length with the precious essences which ceaselessly wafted from her dressing-room their fragrant exhalations.

When Mme Swann had returned to her visitors, we could still hear her talking and laughing, for even with only two people in the room, and as though she had to cope with all the "chums" at once, she would raise her voice, ejaculate her words, as she had so often in the "little clan" heard the "Mistress" do, at the moments when she "led the conversation." The expressions which we have recently borrowed from other people being those which, for a time at least, we are fondest of using, Mme Swann used to select sometimes those which she had learned from distinguished people whom her husband had not been able to avoid introducing to her (it was from them that she derived the mannerism which consists in suppressing the article or demonstrative pronoun before an adjective qualifying a person's name), sometimes others more vulgar (such as "He's a mere nothing!"—the favourite expression of one of her friends), and tried to place them in all the stories which, from a habit formed in the "little clan," she loved to tell. She would follow these up automatically with, "I do

love that story!" or "Do admit, it's a very *good* story!" which came to her, through her husband, from the Guermantes whom she did not know.

Mme Swann had left the dining-room, but her husband, having just returned home, would make his appearance among us in turn. "Do you know if your mother is alone, Gilberte?" "No, Papa, she still has some visitors." "What, still? At seven o'clock! It's appalling. The poor woman must be absolutely broken. It's odious." (At home I had always heard the first syllable of this word pronounced with a long "o," like "ode," but M. and Mme Swann made it short, as in "odd.") "Just think of it; ever since two o'clock this afternoon!" he went on, turning to me. "And Camille tells me that between four and five he let in at least a dozen people. Did I say a dozen? I believe he told me fourteen. No, a dozen; I don't remember. When I came home I had quite forgotten it was her 'day,' and when I saw all those carriages outside the door I thought there must be a wedding in the house. And just now, while I've been in the library for a short while, the bell has never stopped ringing; upon my word, it's given me quite a headache. And are there a lot of them in there still?" "No; only two." "Who are they, do you know?" "Mme Cottard and Mme Bontemps." "Oh! the wife of the Chief Secretary to the Minister of Public Works." "I know her husband works in some Ministry or other, but I don't know what as," Gilberte would say in a babyish manner.

"What's that? You silly child, you talk as if you were two years old. What do you mean: 'works in some Ministry or other' indeed! He's nothing less than Chief Secretary, head of the whole show, and what's more—what on earth am I thinking of? Upon my word, I'm getting as stupid as yourself: he isn't the Chief Secretary, he's the Permanent Secretary."

"How should I know? Is that supposed to mean a lot, being Permanent Secretary?" answered Gilberte, who never let slip an opportunity of displaying her own indifference to anything that gave her parents cause for vanity. (She may, of course, have considered that she only enhanced the brilliance of such an acquaintance by not seeming to attach any undue importance to it.)

"I should think it did 'mean a lot!'" exclaimed Swann, who preferred to this modesty, which might have left me in doubt, a more explicit parlance. "Why it means simply that he's the first man after the Minister. In fact, he's more important than the Minister, because it's he who does all the work. Besides, it appears that he's immensely able, a man quite of the first rank, a most distinguished individual. He's an Officer of the Legion of Honour. A delightful man, and very good-looking too."

(This man's wife, incidentally, had married him against everyone's wishes and advice because he was a "charming creature." He had, what may be sufficient to constitute a rare and delicate whole, a fair, silky beard, good features, a nasal voice, bad breath, and a glass eye.)

"I may tell you," he added, turning to me, "that I'm greatly amused to see that lot serving in the present government, because they are Bontemps of the Bontemps-Chenut family, typical of the old-fashioned bourgeoisie, reactionary, clerical, tremendously straitlaced. Your grandfather knew quite well, at least by name and by sight, old Chenut, the father, who never tipped cabmen more than a sou, though he was a rich man for those days, and the Baron Bréau-Chenut. All their money went in the Union Générale smash—you're too young to remember that, of course—and, gad! they've had to get it back as best they could."

"He's the uncle of a girl who used to come to my lessons, in a class a long way below mine, the famous 'Albertine.' She's certain to be dreadfully 'fast' when she's older, but meanwhile she's an odd fish."

"She is amazing, this daughter of mine. She knows everyone."

"I don't know her. I only used to see her about, and hear them calling 'Albertine' here and 'Albertine' there. But I do know Mme Bontemps, and I don't like her much either."

"You are quite wrong; she's charming, pretty, intelligent. She's even quite witty. I shall go in and say how d'ye do to her, and ask her if her husband thinks we're going to have a war, and whether we can rely on King Theodosius. He's bound to know, don't you think, since he's in the counsels of the gods."

It was not thus that Swann used to talk in days gone by; but which of us cannot call to mind some quite unpretentious royal princess who has let herself be carried off by a footman, and then, ten years later, trying to get back into society and sensing that people are not very willing to call on her, spontaneously adopts the language of all the old bores, and, when a fashionable duchess is mentioned, can be heard to say: "She came to see me only yesterday," or "I live a very quiet life"? Thus it is superfluous to make a study of social mores, since we can deduce them from psychological laws.

The Swanns shared this failing of people who are not much sought after; a visit, an invitation, a mere friendly word from anyone at all prominent was for them an event to which they felt the need to give full publicity. If bad luck would have it that the Verdurins were in London when Odette gave a rather smart dinner-party, it would be arranged for some common friend to cable a report to them across the Channel. The Swanns were incapable even of keeping to themselves the complimentary letters and telegrams received by Odette. They spoke of them to their friends, passed them from hand to hand. Thus the Swanns' drawing-room was reminiscent of a seaside hotel where telegrams are posted up on a board.

Moreover, people who had known the old Swann not merely outside society, as I had, but in society, in that Guermantes set which, with certain concessions to Highnesses and Duchesses, was infinitely exacting in the matter of wit and charm, from which banishment was sternly decreed for men of real eminence whom its members found boring or vulgar,—such people might have been astonished to observe that the old Swann had ceased not only to be discreet when he spoke of his acquaintance, but particular when it came to choosing it. How was it that Mme Bontemps, so common, so ill-natured, failed to exasperate him? How could he possibly describe her as attractive? The memory of the Guermantes set must, one would suppose, have prevented him; in fact it encouraged him. There was certainly among the Guermantes, as compared with the great majority of

groups in society, a degree of taste, even refined taste, but also a snobbishness from which there arose the possibility of a momentary interruption in the exercise of that taste. In the case of someone who was not indispensable to their circle, of a Minister of Foreign Affairs, a slightly pompous Republican, or an Academician who talked too much, their taste would be brought to bear heavily against him; Swann would condole with Mme de Guermantes on having had to sit next to such people at dinner at one of the embassies; and they would a thousand times rather have a man of fashion, that is to say a man of the Guermantes kind, good for nothing, but endowed with the wit of the Guermantes, someone who belonged to the same clique. Only, a Grand Duchess, a Princess of the Blood, should she dine often with Mme de Guermantes, would soon find herself enrolled in that clique also, without having any right to be there, without being at all so endowed. But with the naïvety of society people, from the moment they had her in their houses they went out of their way to find her agreeable, since they were unable to say to themselves that it was because she was agreeable that they invited her. Swann, coming to the rescue of Mme de Guermantes, would say to her after the Highness had gone: "After all, she's not such a bad sort; really, she has quite a sense of humour. I don't suppose for a moment she has mastered the *Critique of Pure Reason*; still, she's not unpleasant." "Oh, I do so entirely agree with you!" the Duchess would reply. "Besides, she was a little shy: you'll see that she can be charming." "She is certainly a great deal less boring than Mme X" (the wife of the talkative Academician, who was in fact a remarkable woman) "who quotes twenty volumes at you." "Oh, but there's no comparison." The faculty of saying such things as these, and of saying them sincerely, Swann had acquired from the Duchess, and had never lost. He made use of it now with reference to the people who came to his house. He went out of his way to discern and to admire in them the qualities that every human being will display if we examine him with a prejudice in his favour and not with the distaste of the nice-minded; he extolled the merits of Mme Bontemps as he had once extolled those of the Princesse de Parme, who must have been excluded from the Guermantes set if there had not been privileged terms of admission for certain Highnesses, and if, when they too presented themselves for election, the only consideration had been wit and a certain charm. We have seen already, moreover, that Swann had always an inclination (which he was now putting into practice merely in a more lasting fashion) to exchange his social position for another which, in certain circumstances, might suit him better. It is only people incapable of dissecting what at first sight appears indivisible in their perception who believe that one's position is an integral part of one's person. One and the same man, taken at successive points in his life, will be found to breathe, on different rungs of the social ladder, in atmospheres that do not of necessity become more and more refined; whenever, in any period of our existence, we form or re-form associations with a certain circle, and feel cherished and at ease in it, we begin quite naturally to cling to it by putting down human roots.

Where Mme Bontemps was concerned, I believe also that Swann, in speaking of her with so much emphasis, was not sorry to think that my parents would hear that she had been to see his wife. To tell the truth, in our house the names of the people whom Mme Swann was gradually getting to know aroused more curiosity than admiration. At the name of Mme Trombert, my mother exclaimed: "Ah! there's a new recruit who will bring in others." And as though she found a similarity between the somewhat summary, rapid, and violent manner in which Mme Swann conquered her new connections and a colonial expedition, Mamma went on to observe: "Now that the Tromberts have been subdued, the neighbouring tribes will soon surrender." If she had passed Mme Swann in the street, she would tell us when she came home: "I saw Mme Swann in all her war-paint; she must have been embarking on some triumphant offensive against the Massachutoes, or the Singhalese, or the Tromberts." And so with all the new people whom I told her that I had seen in that somewhat composite and artificial society, to which they had often been brought with some difficulty and from widely different worlds, Mamma would at once divine their origin, and, speaking of them as of trophies dearly bought, would say: "Brought back from the expedition against the so-and-so!"

As for Mme Cottard, my father was astonished that Mme Swann could see anything to be gained from inviting so utterly undistinguished a woman to her house, and said: "In spite of the Professor's position, I must say that I cannot understand it." Mamma, on the other hand, understood very well; she knew that a great deal of the pleasure which a woman finds in entering a class of society different from that in which she has previously lived would be lacking if she had no means of keeping her old associates informed of those others, relatively more brilliant, with whom she has replaced them. For this, she requires an eye-witness who may be allowed to penetrate this new, delicious world (as a buzzing, browsing insect bores its way into a flower) and will then, so it is hoped, as the course of her visits may carry her, spread abroad the tidings, the latent germ of envy and of wonder. Mme Cottard, who might have been created on purpose to fulfil this role, belonged to that special category in a visiting list which Mamma (who inherited certain facets of her father's turn of mind) used to call "Go tell the Spartans" people. Besides—apart from another reason which did not come to our knowledge until many years later—Mme Swann, in inviting this good-natured, reserved and modest friend to her "at homes," had no need to fear lest she might be introducing into her drawing-room a traitor or a rival. She knew what a vast number of bourgeois calyxes that busy worker, armed with her plume and card-case, could visit in a single afternoon. She knew her power of pollination, and, basing her calculations upon the law of probability, was justified in thinking that almost certainly some intimate of the Verdurins would be bound to hear, within two or three days, how the Governor of Paris had left cards upon her, or that M. Verdurin himself would be told how M. Le Hault de Pressigny, the President of the Horse Show, had taken them, Swann and herself, to the King Theodosius gala; she imagined the Verdurins to be informed of these two events, both so flattering to herself, and of these alone, because the particular manifestations in which we envisage and pursue fame are but few in number, through the deficiency of our own minds, which are

incapable of imagining at one and the same time all the forms which we none the less hope—on the whole—that fame will not fail simultaneously to assume for our benefit.

Mme Swann had, however, met with no success outside what was called the “official world.” Elegant women did not go to her house. It was not the presence there of Republican notables that frightened them away. In the days of my early childhood, everything that pertained to conservative society was worldly, and no respectable salon would ever have opened its doors to a Republican. The people who lived in such an atmosphere imagined that the impossibility of ever inviting an “opportunist”—still, more a “horrid radical”—was something that would endure for ever, like oil-lamps and horse-drawn omnibuses. But, like a kaleidoscope which is every now and then given a turn, society arranges successively in different orders elements which one would have supposed immutable, and composes a new pattern. Before I had made my first Communion, right-minded ladies had had the stupefying experience of meeting an elegant Jewess while paying a social call. These new arrangements of the kaleidoscope are produced by what a philosopher would call a “change of criterion.” The Dreyfus case brought about another, at a period rather later than that in which I began to go to Mme Swann’s, and the kaleidoscope once more reversed its coloured lozenges. Everything Jewish, even the elegant lady herself, went down, and various obscure nationalists rose to take its place. The most brilliant salon in Paris was that of an ultra-Catholic Austrian prince. If instead of the Dreyfus case there had come a war with Germany, the pattern of the kaleidoscope would have taken a turn in the other direction. The Jews having shown, to the general astonishment, that they were patriots, would have kept their position, and no one would any longer have cared to go, or even to admit that he had ever gone any longer to the Austrian prince’s. None of this alters the fact, however, that whenever society is momentarily stationary, the people who live in it imagine that no further change will occur, just as, in spite of having witnessed the birth of the telephone, they decline to believe in the aeroplane. Meanwhile the philosophers of journalism are at work castigating the preceding epoch, and not only the kind of pleasures in which it indulged, which seem to them to be the last word in corruption, but even the work of its artists and philosophers, which have no longer the least value in their eyes, as though they were indissolubly linked to the successive moods of fashionable frivolity. The one thing that does not change is that at any and every time it appears that there have been “great changes.” At the time when I went to Mme Swann’s the Dreyfus storm had not yet broken, and some of the more prominent Jews were extremely powerful—none more so than Sir Rufus Israels, whose wife, Lady Israels, was Swann’s aunt. She herself had no intimate connections as distinguished as those of her nephew, who, since he did not care for her, had never much cultivated her society, although he was presumed to be her heir. But she was the only one of Swann’s relations who had any idea of his social position, the others having always remained in the state of ignorance, in that respect, which had long been our own. When one of the members of a family emigrates into high society—which to him appears a feat without parallel until after the lapse of a decade he observes that it has been performed in other ways and for different reasons by more than one young man whom he knew as a boy—he draws round about himself a zone of shadow, a *terra incognita*, which is clearly visible in its minutest details to all those who inhabit it but is darkest night, pure nothingness, to those who do not penetrate it but touch its fringe without the least suspicion of its existence in their midst. There being no news agency to furnish Swann’s cousins with intelligence of the people with whom he consorted, it was (before his appalling marriage, of course) with a smile of condescension that they would tell one another over family dinner-tables that they had spent a “virtuous” Sunday in going to see “cousin Charles,” whom (regarding him as a poor relation who was inclined to envy their prosperity) they used wittily to name, playing upon the title of Balzac’s novel, “Le Cousin Bête.” Lady Israels, however, knew exactly who the people were who lavished upon Swann a friendship of which she was frankly jealous. Her husband’s family, which was roughly the equivalent of the Rothschilds, had for several generations managed the affairs of the Orléans princes. Lady Israels, being immensely rich, exercised a wide influence, and had employed it so as to ensure that no one whom she knew should be “at home” to Odette. One alone had disobeyed her, in secret, the Comtesse de Marsantes. And then, as ill luck would have it, Odette having gone to call upon Mme de Marsantes, Lady Israels had entered the room almost at her heels. Mme de Marsantes was on tenterhooks. With the cowardice of those who are nevertheless in a position to act as they choose, she did not address a single word to Odette, who thus found little encouragement to pursue any further an incursion into a world which was not in any case the one into which she wished to be received. In her complete detachment from the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Odette continued to be the illiterate courtesan, utterly different from those bourgeois snobs, “well up” in all the minutest points of genealogy, who endeavour to quench by reading old memoirs their thirst for the aristocratic connections with which real life has omitted to provide them. And Swann, for his part, continued no doubt to be the lover in whose eyes all these peculiarities of an old mistress seem lovable or at least inoffensive, for I often heard his wife perpetuate veritable social heresies without his attempting to correct them, whether from lingering affection, lack of esteem, or weariness of the effort to improve her. It was perhaps also another form of the simplicity which for so long had misled us at Combray, and which now had the effect that, while he continued to know, on his own account at least, very grand people, he had no wish for them to appear to be regarded as of any importance in conversation in his wife’s drawing-room. They had, indeed, less importance than ever for Swann, the centre of gravity of his life having shifted. In any case, Odette’s ignorance in social matters was such that if the name of the Princesse de Guermantes were mentioned in conversation after that of the Duchess, her cousin, “Those ones are princes, are they?” she would exclaim; “So they’ve gone up a step?” Were anyone to say “the Prince,” in speaking of the Duc de Chartres, she would put him right: “The Duke, you mean; he’s Duc de Chartres, not Prince.” As for the Duc d’Orléans, son of the Comte de Paris: “That’s funny; the son is higher than the father!” she would remark,

adding, for she was afflicted with Anglomania, "Those *Royalties* are so dreadfully confusing!"—while to someone who asked her from what province the Guermantes family came she would reply: "From the Aisne."

But so far as Odette was concerned, Swann was quite blind, not merely to these deficiencies in her education but to the general mediocrity of her intelligence. More than that; whenever Odette told a silly story Swann would sit listening to his wife with a complacency, a merriment, almost an admiration in which some vestige of desire for her must have played a part; while in the same conversation, anything subtle or even profound that he himself might say would be listened to by Odette with an habitual lack of interest, rather curtly, with impatience, and would at times be sharply contradicted. And we may conclude that this subservience of refinement to vulgarity is the rule in many households, when we think, conversely, of all the superior women who yield to the blandishments of a boor, merciless in his censure of their most delicate utterances, while they themselves, with the infinite indulgence of love, are enraptured by the feeblest of his witticisms. To return to the reasons which prevented Odette, at this period, from gaining admittance to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, it must be observed that the latest turn of the social kaleidoscope had been actuated by a series of scandals. Women to whose houses one had been going with perfect confidence had been discovered to be common prostitutes or British spies. For some time thereafter one expected people to be (such at least was one's intention) staid and solidly based. Odette represented exactly what one had just severed relations with, only, incidentally, to renew them at once (for men, their natures not altering overnight, seek in every new order a continuance of the old), though seeking it under another form which would allow one to be taken in, and to believe that it was no longer the same society as before the crisis. However, the "branded" women of that society and Odette were too closely alike. Society people are very short-sighted; at the moment when they cease to have any relations with the Jewish ladies they know, while they are wondering how they are to fill the gap thus made in their lives, they perceive, thrust into it as by the windfall of a night of storm, a new lady, also Jewish; but by virtue of her novelty she is not associated in their minds with her predecessors, with what they are convinced that they must abjure. She does not ask that they shall respect her God. They take her up. There was no question of anti-Semitism at the time when I used first to visit Odette. But she resembled what people wished for a time to avoid.

As for Swann himself, he still often called on some of his former acquaintances, who, of course, belonged to the very highest society. And yet when he spoke to us of the people whom he had just been to see I noticed that, among those whom he had known in the old days, the choice that he made was dictated by the same kind of taste, partly artistic, partly historic, that inspired him as a collector. And remarking that it was often some Bohemian noblewoman who interested him because she had been the mistress of Liszt or because one of Balzac's novels had been dedicated to her grandmother (as he would purchase a drawing if Chateaubriand had written about it), I conceived a suspicion that we had, at Combray, replaced one error, that of regarding Swann as a rich bourgeois who did not go into society, by another, when we supposed him to be one of the smartest men in Paris. To be a friend of the Comte de Paris means nothing at all. Is not the world full of such "friends of princes," who would not be received in any house that was at all exclusive? Princes know themselves to be princes, and are not snobs; besides, they believe themselves to be so far above everything that is not of their blood royal that noblemen and commoners appear, in the depths beneath them, to be practically on a level.

But Swann was not content with seeking in society, and fastening on the names which the past has inscribed on its roll and which are still to be read there, a simple artistic and literary pleasure; he indulged in the slightly vulgar diversion of arranging as it were social nosegays by grouping heterogeneous elements, by bringing together people taken at random here, there and everywhere. These amusing (to Swann) sociological experiments did not always provoke an identical reaction from all his wife's friends. "I'm thinking of asking the Cottards to meet the Duchesse de Vendôme," he would say to Mme Bontemps with a laugh, in the zestful tone of an epicure who has thought of and intends to try substituting cayenne pepper for cloves in a sauce. But this plan, which might indeed appear agreeable to the Cottards, was calculated to infuriate Mme Bontemps. She herself had recently been introduced by the Swanns to the Duchesse de Vendôme, and had found this as agreeable as it seemed to her natural. The thought of being able to boast about it at the Cottards' had been by no means the least savoury ingredient of her pleasure. But like those persons recently decorated who, their investiture once accomplished, would like to see the fountain of honour turned off at the main, Mme Bontemps would have preferred that, after herself, no one else in her own circle should be made known to the Princess. She inwardly cursed the depraved taste which caused Swann, in order to gratify a wretched aesthetic whim, to destroy at one swoop the dazzling impression she had made on the Cottards when she told them about the Duchesse de Vendôme. How was she even to dare to announce to her husband that the Professor and his wife were in their turn to partake of this pleasure of which she had boasted to him as though it were unique. If only the Cottards could be made to know that they were being invited not seriously but for the amusement of their host! It is true that the Bontemps had been invited for the same reason, but Swann, having acquired from the aristocracy that eternal Donjuanism which, in treating with two women of no importance, makes each of them believe that it is she alone who is seriously loved, had spoken to Mme Bontemps of the Duchesse de Vendôme as of a person with whom it was essential for her to dine. "Yes, we're having the Princess here with the Cottards," said Mme Swann a few weeks later. "My husband thinks that we might get something quite amusing out of the conjunction." For if she had retained from the "little nucleus" certain habits dear to Mme Verdurin, such as that of shouting things aloud so as to be heard by all the faithful, she made use, at the same time, of certain expressions, such as "conjunction," which were dear to the Guermantes circle, of which she was thus undergoing the attraction, unconsciously and at a distance, as the sea is swayed by the moon, though without being drawn perceptibly closer to it. "Yes, the Cottards and the Duchesse de Vendôme. Don't you think that might be rather fun?" asked Swann.

"I think it will go very badly, and can only lead to a lot of bother. People oughtn't to play with fire," snapped Mme Bontemps, furious. She and her husband, and also the Prince d'Agrigente, were, as it happened, invited to this dinner, which Mme Bontemps and Cottard had each two alternative ways of describing, according to whom they were addressing. To some Mme Bontemps for her part, and Cottard for his, would say casually, when asked who else had been of the party: "Only the Prince d'Agrigente; it was very intimate." But there were others who might, alas, be better informed (once, indeed, someone had challenged Cottard with: "But weren't the Bontemps there too?" "Oh, I forgot them," Cottard had blushing admitted to the tactless questioner whom he ever afterwards classified among the mischief-makers). For these the Bontemps and the Cottards had each adopted, without any mutual arrangement, a version the framework of which was identical for both parties, their own names being interchanged. "Let me see," Cottard would say, "there were our host and hostess, the Duc and Duchesse de Vendôme—" (with a self-satisfied smile) "Professor and Mme Cottard, the Prince d'Agrigente, and, upon my soul, heaven only knows how they got there, for they were like fish out of water, M. and Mme Bontemps!" Mme Bontemps would recite exactly the same "piece," only it was M. and Mme Bontemps who were named with self-satisfied emphasis between the Duchesse de Vendôme and the Prince d'Agrigente, while the scurvy lot, whom she wound up by accusing of having invited themselves, and who completely spoiled the picture, were the Cottards.

When he had been paying social calls Swann would often come home with little time to spare before dinner. At that point in the evening, around six o'clock, when in the old days he used to feel so wretched, he no longer asked himself what Odette might be about, and was hardly at all concerned to hear that she had people with her or had gone out. He recalled at times that he had once, years ago, tried to read through its envelope a letter addressed by Odette to Forcheville. But this memory was not pleasing to him, and rather than plumb the depths of shame that he felt in it he preferred to indulge in a little grimace, twisting up the corners of his mouth and adding, if need be, a shake of the head which signified "What do I care about it?" True, he considered now that the hypothesis on which he had often dwelt at that time, according to which it was his



jealous imagination alone that blackened what was in reality the innocent life of Odette—that this hypothesis (which after all was beneficent, since, so long as his amorous malady had lasted, it had diminished his sufferings by making them seem imaginary) was not the correct one, that it was his jealousy that had seen things in the correct light, and that if Odette had loved him more than he supposed, she had also deceived him more. Formerly, while his sufferings were still keen, he had vowed that, as soon as he had ceased to love Odette and was no longer afraid either of vexing her or of making her believe that he loved her too much, he would give himself the satisfaction of elucidating with her, simply from his love of truth and as a point of historical interest, whether or not Forcheville had been in bed with her that day when he had rung her bell and rapped on her window in vain, and she had written to Forcheville that it was an uncle of hers who had called. But this so interesting problem, which he was only waiting for his jealousy to subside before clearing up, had precisely lost all interest in Swann's eyes when he had ceased to be jealous. Not immediately, however. Long after he had ceased to feel any jealousy with regard to Odette, the memory of that day, that afternoon spent knocking vainly at the little house in the Rue La Pérouse, had continued to torment him. It was as though his jealousy, not dissimilar in that respect from those maladies which appear to have their seat, their centre of contagion, less in certain persons than in certain places, in certain houses, had had for its object not so much Odette herself as that day, that hour in the irrevocable past when Swann had knocked at every entrance to her house in turn, as though that day, that hour alone had caught and preserved a few last fragments of the amorous personality which had once been Swann's, that there alone could he now recapture them. For a long time now it had been a matter of indifference to him whether Odette had been, or was being, unfaithful to him. And yet he had continued for some years to seek out old servants of hers, to such an extent had the painful curiosity persisted in him to know whether on that day, so long ago, at six o'clock, Odette had been in bed with Forcheville. Then that curiosity itself had disappeared, without, however, his abandoning his investigations. He went on trying to discover what no longer interested him, because his old self, though it had shrivelled to extreme decrepitude, still acted mechanically, in accordance with preoccupations so utterly abandoned that Swann could not now succeed even in picturing to himself that anguish—so compelling once that he had been unable to imagine that he would ever be delivered from it, that only the death of the woman he loved (though death, as will be shown later on in this story by a cruel corroboration, in no way diminishes the sufferings caused by jealousy) seemed to him capable of smoothing the path of his life which then seemed impassably obstructed.

But to bring to light, some day, those passages in the life of Odette to which he had owed his sufferings had not been Swann's only ambition; he had also resolved to avenge himself for his sufferings when, being no longer in love with Odette, he should no longer be afraid of her; and the opportunity of gratifying this second ambition had now presented itself, for Swann was in love with another woman, a woman who gave him no grounds for jealousy but none the less made him jealous, because he was no longer capable of altering his mode of loving, and it was the mode he had employed with Odette that must serve him now for another. To make Swann's jealousy revive it was not necessary for this woman to be unfaithful; it sufficed that for some reason or other she should have been away from him, at a party for instance, and should have appeared to enjoy herself. That was enough to reawaken in him the old anguish, that lamentable and contradictory excrescence of his love, which alienated Swann from what was in fact a sort of need to attain (the real feelings this young woman had for him, the hidden longing that absorbed her days, the secret places of her heart), for between Swann and the woman whom he loved this anguish piled up an unyielding mass of previous suspicions, having their cause in Odette, or in some other perhaps who had preceded Odette, which allowed the ageing lover to know his mistress of today only through the old, collective spectre of the "woman who aroused his jealousy" in which he had arbitrarily embodied his new love. Often, however, Swann would accuse his jealousy of making him believe in imaginary infidelities; but then he would remember that he had given Odette the benefit of the same argument, and wrongly. And so everything that the young woman whom he loved did in the hours when he was not with her ceased to appear innocent. But whereas at that other time he had made a vow that if ever he ceased to love the woman who, though he did not then know it, was to be his future wife, he would show her an implacable indifference that would at last be sincere, in order to avenge his pride that had so long been humiliated, now that he could enforce those reprisals without risk to himself (for what harm could it do him to be taken at his word and deprived of those intimate moments with Odette that had once been so necessary to him?), he no longer wished to do so; with his love had vanished the desire to show that he no longer loved. And he who, when he was suffering at the hands of Odette, so longed to let her see one day that he had fallen for another, now that he was in a position to do so took infinite precautions lest his wife should suspect the existence of this new love.

It was not only in those tea-parties, on account of which I had formerly had the sorrow of seeing Gilberte leave me and go home earlier than usual, that I was henceforth to take part, but the excursions she made with her mother which, by preventing her from coming to the Champs-Élysées, had deprived me of her on those days when I loitered alone upon the lawn in front of the roundabout—in these also M. and Mme Swann now included me: I had a seat in their landau, and indeed it was me that they asked if I would rather go to the theatre, to a dancing lesson at the house of one of Gilberte's friends, to some social gathering given by a friend of Mme Swann's (what the latter called "a little *meeting*") or to visit the tombs at Saint-Denis.

On the days when I was to go out with the Swanns I would arrive at their house in time for what Mme Swann called "le lunch." As one was not expected before half-past twelve, while my parents in those days had their meal at a quarter past eleven, it was not until they had risen from table that I made my way towards that

sumptuous quarter, deserted enough at any time, but more particularly at that hour, when everyone had gone home. Even on frosty days in winter if the weather was fine, tightening every few minutes the knot of a gorgeous Charvet tie and looking to see that my patent-leather boots were not getting dirty, I would wander up and down the avenues, waiting until twenty-seven minutes past the hour. I could see from afar in the Swanns' little garden-plot the sunlight glittering like hoar-frost from the bare-boughed trees. It is true that the garden boasted only two. The unusual hour presented the scene in a new light. These pleasures of nature (intensified by the suppression of habit and indeed by my physical hunger), were infused by the thrilling prospect of sitting down to lunch with Mme Swann. It did not diminish them, but dominated and subdued them, made of them social accessories; so that if, at this hour when ordinarily I did not notice them, I seemed now to be discovering the fine weather, the cold, the wintry sunlight, it was all as a sort of preface to the creamed eggs, as a patina, a cool pink glaze applied to the decoration of that mystic chapel which was the habitation of Mme Swann, and in the heart of which there was by contrast so much warmth, so many scents and flowers.

At half-past twelve I would finally make up my mind to enter the house which, like an immense Christmas stocking, seemed ready to bestow upon me supernatural delights. (The French name "Noël" was, by the way, unknown to Mme Swann and Gilberte, who had substituted for it the English "Christmas," and would speak of nothing but "Christmas pudding," what people had given them as "Christmas presents," of going away—the thought of which maddened me with grief—"for Christmas." Even at home I should have thought it degrading to use the word "Noël," and always said "Christmas," which my father considered extremely silly.)

I encountered no one at first but a footman who, after leading me through several large drawing-rooms, showed me into one that was quite small, empty, its windows beginning to dream already in the blue light of afternoon. I was left alone there in the company of orchids, roses and violets, which, like people waiting beside you who do not know you, preserved a silence which their individuality as living things made all the more striking, and warmed themselves in the heat of a glowing coal fire, preciously ensconced behind a crystal screen, in a basin of white marble over which it spilled from time to time its dangerous rubies.

I had sat down, but rose hurriedly on hearing the door open; it was only another footman, and then a third, and the slender result that their vainly alarming entrances and exits achieved was to put a little more coal on the fire or water in the vases. They departed, and I found myself alone again, once that door was shut which Mme Swann was surely soon to open. Of a truth, I should have been less ill at ease in a magician's cave than in this little waiting-room where the fire appeared to me to be performing alchemical transmutations as in Klingsor's laboratory. Footsteps sounded afresh, but I did not get up; it was sure to be yet another footman. It was M. Swann. "What! all by yourself? What is one to do? That poor wife of mine has never been able to remember what time means! Ten minutes to one. She gets later every day. And as you'll see, she will come sailing in without the least hurry, and imagine she's in heaps of time." And since he was still subject to neuritis, and was becoming a trifle ridiculous, the fact of possessing so unpunctual a wife, who came in so late from the Bois, forgot everything at her dressmaker's and was never in time for lunch, made Swann anxious for his digestion but flattered his self-esteem.

He would show me his latest acquisitions and explain to me the interesting points about them, but my emotion, added to the unfamiliarity of being still unfed at this hour, stirred my mind while leaving it void, so that while I was capable of speech I was incapable of hearing. In any event, as far as the works of art in Swann's possession were concerned, it was enough for me that they were contained in his house, formed a part there of the delicious hour that preceded luncheon. The Gioconda herself might have appeared there without giving me any more pleasure than one of Mme Swann's indoor gowns, or her bottles of smelling-salts.

I continued to wait, alone, or with Swann and often Gilberte, who came in to keep us company. The arrival of Mme Swann, prepared for me by all those majestic apparitions, must, I felt, be something truly immense. I strained my ears to catch the slightest sound. But one never finds a cathedral, a wave in a storm, a dancer's leap in the air quite as high as one has been expecting; after those liveried footmen, suggesting the chorus whose processional entry upon the stage leads up to and at the same time diminishes the final appearance of the queen, Mme Swann, creeping furtively in, in a little otter-skin coat, her veil lowered to cover a nose pink-tipped by the cold, did not fulfil the promises lavished upon my imagination during my vigil.

But if she had stayed at home all morning, when she arrived in the drawing-room she would be clad in a brightly coloured crêpe-de-Chine housecoat which seemed to me more exquisite than any of her dresses.

Sometimes the Swanns decided to remain in the house all afternoon, and then, as we had lunched so late, very soon I would see, beyond the garden-wall, the sun setting on that day which had seemed to me bound to be different from other days; and in vain might the servants bring in lamps of every size and shape, burning each upon the consecrated altar of a console, a wall-bracket, a corner-cupboard, an occasional table, as though for the celebration of some strange and secret rite, nothing extraordinary transpired in the conversation, and I went home disappointed, as one often is in one's childhood after midnight mass.

But that disappointment was scarcely more than spiritual. I was radiant with happiness in this house where Gilberte, when she was not yet with us, was about to appear and would bestow on me in a moment, and for hours to come, her speech, her smiling and attentive gaze as I had glimpsed it for the first time at Combray. At the most I was a trifle jealous when I saw her so often disappear into vast rooms above, reached by an interior staircase. Obligated myself to remain in the drawing-room, like a man in love with an actress who is confined to his stall and wonders anxiously what is going on behind the scenes, in the green-room, I put to Swann some artfully veiled questions with regard to this other part of the house, but in a tone from which I could not succeed in banishing a slight uneasiness. He explained to me that the room to which Gilberte had gone was

the linen-room, offered to show it to me himself, and promised me that whenever Gilberte had occasion to go there again he would insist on her taking me with her. By these last words and the relief which they brought me, Swann at once abolished for me one of those terrifying inner perspectives at the end of which a woman with whom we are in love appears so remote. At that moment I felt for him an affection which I believed to be deeper than my affection for Gilberte. For he, his daughter's master, was giving her to me, whereas she withheld herself at times; I had not the same direct control over her as I had indirectly through Swann. Besides, it was she whom I loved and whom I could not therefore see without that anxiety, without that desire for something more, which destroys in us, in the presence of the person we love, the sensation of loving.

As a rule, however, we did not stay indoors but went out. Sometimes, before going to dress, Mme Swann would sit down at the piano. Her lovely hands emerging from the pink, or white, or, often, vividly coloured sleeves of her *crêpe-de-Chine* housecoat, drooped over the keys with that same melancholy which was in her eyes but was not in her heart. It was on one of those days that she happened to play for me the passage in Vinteuil's sonata that contained the little phrase of which Swann had been so fond. But often one hears nothing when one listens for the first time to a piece of music that is at all complicated. And yet when, later on, this sonata had been played to me two or three times I found that I knew it perfectly well. And so it is not wrong to speak of hearing a thing for the first time. If one had indeed, as one supposes, received no impression from the first hearing, the second, the third would be equally "first hearings" and there would be no reason why one should understand it any better after the tenth. Probably what is wanting, the first time, is not comprehension but memory. For our memory, relative to the complexity of the impressions which it has to face while we are listening, is infinitesimal, as brief as the memory of a man who in his sleep thinks of a thousand things and at once forgets them, or as that of a man in his second childhood who cannot recall a minute afterwards what one has just said to him. Of these multiple impressions our memory is not capable of furnishing us with an immediate picture. But that picture gradually takes shape in the memory, and, with regard to works we have heard more than once, we are like the schoolboy who has read several times over before going to sleep a lesson which he supposed himself not to know, and finds that he can repeat it by heart next morning. But I had not, until then, heard a note of the sonata, and where Swann and his wife could make out a distinct phrase, it was as far beyond the range of my perception as a name which one endeavours to recall and in place of which one discovers only a void, a void from which, an hour later, when one is not thinking about them, will spring of their own accord, at one bound, the syllables that one has solicited in vain. And not only does one not grasp at once and remember works that are truly rare, but even within those works (as happened to me in the case of Vinteuil's sonata) it is the least precious parts that one at first perceives. So much so that I was mistaken not only in thinking that this work held nothing further in store for me (so that for a long time I made no effort to hear it again) from the moment Mme Swann had played me its most famous passage (I was in this respect as stupid as people are who expect to feel no astonishment when they stand in Venice before the façade of Saint Mark's, because photography has already acquainted them with the outline of its domes); far more than that, even when I had heard the sonata from beginning to end, it remained almost wholly invisible to me, like a monument of which distance or a haze allows us to catch but a faint and fragmentary glimpse. Hence the melancholy inseparable from one's knowledge of such works, as of everything that takes place in time. When the least obvious beauties of Vinteuil's sonata were revealed to me, already, borne by the force of habit beyond the grasp of my sensibility, those that I had from the first distinguished and preferred in it were beginning to escape, to elude me. Since I was able to enjoy everything that this sonata had to give me only in a succession of hearings, I never possessed it in its entirety: it was like life itself. But, less disappointing than life, great works of art do not begin by giving us the best of themselves. In a work such as Vinteuil's sonata the beauties that one discovers soonest are also those of which one tires most quickly, and for the same reason, no doubt—namely, that they are less different from what one already knows. But when those first impressions have receded, there remains for our enjoyment some passage whose structure, too new and strange to offer anything but confusion to our mind, had made it indistinguishable and so preserved intact; and this, which we had passed every day without knowing it, which had held itself in reserve for us, which by the sheer power of its beauty had become invisible and remained unknown, this comes to us last of all. But we shall also relinquish it last. And we shall love it longer than the rest because we have taken longer to get to love it. The time, moreover, that a person requires—as I required in the case of this sonata—to penetrate a work of any depth is merely an epitome, a symbol, one might say, of the years, the centuries even, that must elapse before the public can begin to cherish a masterpiece that is really new. So that the man of genius, to spare himself the ignorant contempt of the world, may say to himself that, since one's contemporaries are incapable of the necessary detachment, works written for posterity should be read by posterity alone, like certain pictures which one cannot appreciate when one stands too close to them. But in reality any such cowardly precaution to avoid false judgments is doomed to failure; they are unavoidable. The reason why a work of genius is not easily admired from the first is that the man who has created it is extraordinary, that few other men resemble him. It is his work itself that, by fertilising the rare minds capable of understanding it, will make them increase and multiply. It was Beethoven's quartets themselves (the Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth) that devoted half a century to forming, fashioning and enlarging the audience for Beethoven's quartets, thus marking, like every great work of art, an advance if not in the quality of artists at least in the community of minds, largely composed today of what was not to be found when the work first appeared, that is to say of persons capable of appreciating it. What is called posterity is the posterity of the work of art. It is essential that the work (leaving out of account, for simplicity's sake, the contingency that several men of genius may at the same time be working along parallel

lines to create a more instructed public in the future, from which other men of genius will benefit) should create its own posterity. For if the work were held in reserve, were revealed only to posterity, that audience, for that particular work, would be not posterity but a group of contemporaries who were merely living half-a-century later in time. And so it is essential that the artist (and this is what Vinteuil had done), if he wishes his work to be free to follow its own course, should launch it, there where there is sufficient depth, boldly into the distant future. And yet, if leaving out of account this time to come, the true perspective in which to appreciate a work of art, is the mistake made by bad judges, taking it into account is at times a dangerous precaution of good ones. No doubt it is easy to imagine, by an illusion similar to that which makes everything on the horizon appear equidistant, that all the revolutions which have hitherto occurred in painting or in music did at least respect certain rules, whereas that which immediately confronts us, be it Impressionism, the pursuit of dissonance, an exclusive use of the Chinese scale, Cubism, Futurism or what you will, differs outrageously from all that has occurred before. This is because everything that went before we are apt to regard as a whole, forgetting that a long process of assimilation has converted it into a substance that is varied of course but, taken as a whole, homogeneous, in which Hugo is juxtaposed with Molière. Let us try to imagine the shocking disparities we should find, if we did not take account of the future and the changes that it must bring, in a horoscope of our own riper years cast for us in our youth. Only horoscopes are not always accurate, and the necessity, when judging a work of art, of including the temporal factor in the sum total of its beauty introduces into our judgment something as conjectural, and consequently as barren of interest, as any prophecy the non-fulfilment of which will in no way imply any inadequacy on the prophet's part, for the power to summon possibilities into existence or to exclude them from it is not necessarily within the competence of genius; one may have had genius and yet not have believed in the future of railways or of flight, or, although a brilliant psychologist, in the infidelity of a mistress or of a friend whose treachery persons far less gifted would have foreseen.

If I did not understand the sonata, I was enchanted to hear Mme Swann play. Her touch appeared to me (like her wrapper, like the scent of her staircase, like her coats, like her chrysanthemums) to form part of an individual and mysterious whole, in a world infinitely superior to that in which reason is capable of analysing talent. "Isn't it beautiful, that Vinteuil sonata?" Swann asked me. "The moment when night is falling among the trees, when the arpeggios of the violin call down a cooling dew upon the earth. You must admit it's lovely; it shows all the static side of moonlight, which is the essential part. It's not surprising that a course of radiant heat such as my wife is taking should act on the muscles, since moonlight can prevent the leaves from stirring. That's what is expressed so well in that little phrase, the Bois de Boulogne plunged in a cataleptic trance. By the sea it's even more striking, because you have there the faint response of the waves, which, of course, you can hear quite distinctly since nothing else can move. In Paris it's the other way round: at most, you may notice unfamiliar lights among the old buildings, the sky lit up as though by a colourless and harmless conflagration, a sort of vast news item of which you get a hint here and there. But in Vinteuil's little phrase, and in the whole sonata for that matter, it's not like that; the scene is laid in the Bois; in the *gruppetto* you can distinctly hear a voice saying: 'I can almost see to read the paper!'"

These words of Swann's might have distorted, later on, my impression of the sonata, music being too little exclusive to dismiss absolutely what other people suggest that we should find in it. But I understood from other remarks he made that this nocturnal foliage was simply that beneath whose shade, in many a restaurant on the outskirts of Paris, he had listened on so many evenings to the little phrase. In place of the profound meaning that he had so often sought in it, what it now recalled to Swann were the leafy boughs, ordered, wreathed, painted round about it (which it gave him the desire to see again because it seemed to him to be their inner, their hidden self, as it were their soul), was the whole of one spring season which he had not been able to enjoy at the time, not having had—feverish and sad as he then was—the requisite physical and mental well-being, and which (as one puts by for an invalid the dainties that he has not been able to eat) it had kept for him. The charm that he had been made to feel by certain evenings in the Bois, a charm of which Vinteuil's sonata served to remind him, he could not have recaptured by questioning Odette, although she, as well as the little phrase, had been his companion there. But Odette had been merely by his side, not (as the phrase had been) within him, and so had seen nothing—nor would have, had she been a thousand times as comprehending—of that vision which for none of us (or at least I was long under the impression that this rule admitted of no exception) can be externalised.

"It's rather a charming thought, don't you think," Swann continued, "that sound can reflect, like water, like a mirror. And it's curious, too, that Vinteuil's phrase now shows me only the things to which I paid no attention then. Of my troubles, my loves of those days, it recalls nothing, it has swapped things around." "Charles, I don't think that's very polite to me, what you're saying." "Not polite? Really, you women are superb! I was simply trying to explain to this young man that what the music shows—to me, at least—is not 'the triumph of the Will' or 'In Tune with the Infinite,' but shall we say old Verdun in his frock-coat in the palmhouse in the Zoological Gardens. Hundreds of times, without my leaving this room, the little phrase has carried me off to dine with it at Armenonville. Good God, it's less boring, anyhow, than having to go there with Mme de Cambremer."

Mme Swann laughed. "That is a lady who's supposed to have been very much in love with Charles," she explained, in the same tone in which, shortly before, when we were speaking of Vermeer of Delft, of whose existence I had been surprised to find her informed, she had replied to me: "I ought to explain that Monsieur Swann was very much taken up with that painter at the time he was courting me. Isn't that so, Charles dear?" "You're not to start saying things about Mme de Cambremer," Swann checked her, secretly flattered. "But I'm

only repeating what I've been told. Besides, it seems that she's extremely clever; I don't know her myself. I believe she's very *pushing*, which surprises me rather in a clever woman. But everyone says that she was quite mad about you; there's nothing hurtful in that." Swann remained silent as a deaf-mute, which was a sort of confirmation, and a proof of his self-complacency.

"Since what I'm playing reminds you of the Zoo," his wife went on, with a playful pretence of being offended, "we might drive this boy there this afternoon if it would amuse him. The weather's lovely now, and you can recapture your fond impressions! Which reminds me, talking of the Zoo, do you know, this young man thought that we were devotedly attached to a person whom I cut as a matter of fact whenever I possibly can, Mme Blatin. I think it's rather humiliating for us that she should be taken for a friend of ours. Just fancy, dear Dr Cottard, who never says a harsh word about anyone, declares that she's positively repellent." "A frightful woman! The one thing to be said for her is that she's exactly like Savonarola. She's the very image of that portrait of Savonarola by Fra Bartolommeo."

This mania of Swann's for finding likenesses to people in pictures was defensible, for even what we call individual expression is—as we so painfully discover when we are in love and would like to believe in the unique reality of the beloved—something diffused and general, which can be found existing at different periods. But if one had listened to Swann, the retinues of the Magi, already so anachronistic when Benozzo Gozzoli introduced in their midst various Medicis, would have been even more so, since they would have included the portraits of a whole crowd of men, contemporaries not of Gozzoli but of Swann, subsequent, that is to say, not only by fifteen centuries to the Nativity but by four to the painter himself. There was not missing from those cortèges, according to Swann, a single living Parisian of note, any more than there was from that act in one of Sardou's plays, in which, out of friendship for the author and for the leading lady, and also because it was the fashion, all the notabilities of Paris, famous doctors, politicians, barristers, amused themselves, each on a different evening, by "walking on."

"But what has she got to do with the Zoo?" "Everything!" "What? You don't suggest that she's got a sky-blue behind, like the monkeys?" "Charles, you really are too dreadful! I was thinking of what the Singhalese said to her. Do tell him, Charles, it really is a gem." "Oh, it's too silly. You know Mme Blatin loves accosting people, in a tone which she thinks friendly, but which is really condescending." "What our good friends on the Thames call *patronising*," interrupted Odette. "Exactly. Well, she went the other day to the Zoo, where they have some black-amoores—Singhalese I think I heard my wife say—she is much better at ethnology than I am." "Now, Charles, don't mock." "I'm not mocking at all. Well, to continue, she went up to one of these black fellows with 'Good morning, nigger? ...' " "She's a nothing!" Mme Swann interjected. "Anyhow, this classification seems to have displeased the black. 'Me nigger,' he said angrily to Mme Blatin, 'me nigger; you old cow!' " "I do think that's so delightful! I adore that story. Don't you think it's a good one. Can't you see old Blatin standing there?: 'Me nigger; you old cow!'"

I expressed an intense desire to go there and see these Singhalese, one of whom had called Mme Blatin an old cow. They did not interest me in the least. But I reflected that on the way to the Zoo, and again on our way home, we should pass through the Allée des Acacias in which I used to gaze so admiringly at Mme Swann, and that perhaps Coquelin's mulatto friend, to whom I had never managed to exhibit myself in the act of saluting her, would see me there, seated at her side, as the victoria swept by.

During those minutes in which Gilberte, having gone to get ready, was not in the room with us, M. and Mme Swann would take delight in revealing to me all the rare virtues of their child. And everything that I myself observed seemed to prove the truth of what they said. I remarked that, as her mother had told me, she had not only for her friends but for the servants, for the poor, the most delicate attentions, carefully thought out, a desire to give pleasure, a fear of causing displeasure, expressed in all sorts of little things over which she often took a great deal of trouble. She had done a piece of needlework for our stall-keeper in the Champs-Élysées, and went out in the snow to give it to her with her own hands, so as not to lose a day. "You have no idea how kind-hearted she is, since she never lets it be seen," her father assured me. Young as she was, she appeared far more sensible already than her parents. When Swann boasted of his wife's grand friends Gilberte would turn away and remain silent, but without any appearance of reproaching him, for it seemed inconceivable to her that her father could be the object of the slightest criticism. One day, when I had spoken to her of Mlle Vinteuil, she said to me:

"I never want to know her, for a very good reason, and that is that she was not nice to her father, from what one hears, and made him very unhappy. You can't understand that any more than I, can you? I'm sure you could no more live without your papa than I could, which is quite natural after all. How can one ever forget a person one has loved all one's life?"

And once when she was being particularly loving with Swann, and I mentioned this to her when he was out of the room:

"Yes, poor Papa, it's the anniversary of his father's death round about now. You can understand what he must be feeling. You do understand, don't you—you and I feel the same about things like that. So I just try to be a little less naughty than usual." "But he doesn't ever think you naughty. He thinks you're quite perfect." "Poor Papa, that's because he's far too good himself."

But her parents were not content with singing the praises of Gilberte—that same Gilberte who, even before I had set eyes on her, used to appear to me standing in front of a church, in a landscape of the Ile-de-France, and later, awakening in me not dreams now but memories, was embowered always in a hedge of pink hawthorn, in the little lane that I took when I was going the Méséglise way. Once when I had asked Mme Swann (making an effort to assume the indifferent tone of a friend of the family, curious to know the

preferences of a child) which among all her playmates Gilberte liked the best, Mme Swann replied: "But you ought to know a great deal better than I do, since you're in her confidence, the great favourite, the *crack*, as the English say."

Doubtless, in such perfect coincidences as this, when reality folds back and overlays what we have long dreamed of, it completely hides it from us, merges with it, like two equal superimposed figures which appear to be one, whereas, to give our happiness its full meaning, we would rather preserve for all those separate points of our desire, at the very moment in which we succeed in touching them—and to be quite certain that it is indeed they—the distinction of being intangible. And our thoughts cannot even reconstruct the old state in order to compare it with the new, for it has no longer a clear field: the acquaintance we have made, the memory of those first, un hoped-for moments, the talk we have heard, are there now to block the passage of our consciousness, and as they control the outlets of our memory far more than those of our imagination, they react more forcibly upon our past, which we are no longer able to visualise without taking them into account, than upon the form, still unshaped, of our future. For years I had believed that the notion of going to Mme Swann's was a vague, chimerical dream to which I should never attain; after I had spent a quarter of an hour in her drawing-room, it was the time when I did not yet know her that had become chimerical and vague like a possibility which the realisation of an alternative possibility has destroyed. How could I ever dream again of her dining-room as of an inconceivable place, when I could not make the least movement in my mind without crossing the path of that inextinguishable ray cast backwards ad infinitum, into my own most distant past, by the lobster à l'Américaine which I had just been eating. And Swann must have observed in his own case a similar phenomenon: for this house in which he now entertained me might be regarded as the place into which had flowed, to merge and coincide, not only the ideal dwelling that my imagination had constructed, but another still, which his jealous love, as inventive as any fantasy of mine, had so often depicted to him, that dwelling common to Odette and himself which had appeared to him so inaccessible once, on an evening when Odette had taken him home with Forcheville to drink orangeade with her; and what had flowed in to be absorbed, for him, in the walls and furniture of the dining-room in which we now sat down to lunch was that un hoped-for paradise in which, in the old days, he could not without a pang imagine that he would one day be saying to *their* butler the very words, "Is Madame ready yet?" which I now heard him utter with a touch of impatience mingled with self-satisfaction. No more, probably, than Swann himself could I succeed in knowing my own happiness, and when Gilberte herself once broke out: "Who would ever have said that the little girl you watched playing prisoner's base, without daring to speak to her, would one day be your greatest friend whose home you could go to whenever you liked?", she spoke of a change which I could verify only by observing it from without, finding no trace of it within myself, for it was composed of two separate states which I could not, without their ceasing to be distinct from one another, succeed in imagining at one and the same time.

And yet this house, because it had been so passionately desired by Swann, must have kept for him some of its sweetness, if I was to judge by myself for whom it had not lost all its mystery. That singular charm in which I had for so long supposed the life of the Swanns to be bathed had not been entirely exorcised from their house on my being admitted to it: I had made it draw back, overwhelmed as it was by the sight of the stranger, the pariah that I had been, to whom now Mme Swann graciously pushed forward an exquisite, hostile and scandalised armchair for him to sit in; but all around me in my memory, I can perceive it still. Is it because, on the days when M. and Mme Swann invited me to lunch, to go out afterwards with them and Gilberte, I imprinted with my gaze—while I sat waiting for them alone—on the carpet, the sofas, the tables, the screens, the pictures, the idea engraved upon my mind that Mme Swann, or her husband, or Gilberte was about to enter? Is it because those objects have dwelt ever since in my memory side by side with the Swanns, and have gradually acquired something of their identity? Is it because, knowing that they spent their existence among these things, I made of them all as it were emblems of the life and habits of the Swanns from which I had too long been excluded for them not to continue to appear strange to me, even when I was allowed the privilege of sharing in them? However it may be, whenever I think of that drawing-room which Swann (not that the criticism implied on his part any intention to find fault with his wife's taste) found so amorphous—because, while it was still conceived in the style, half conservatory half studio, which had been that of the rooms in which he had first known Odette, she had none the less begun to replace in this jumble a number of the Chinese ornaments which she now felt to be rather sham, a trifle dowdy, by a swarm of little chairs and stools and things draped in old Louis XVI silks; not to mention the works of art brought by Swann himself from his house on the Quai d'Orléans—it has kept in my memory, that composite, heterogeneous room, a cohesion, a unity, an individual charm that are not to be found even in the most complete, the least spoiled of the collections that the past has bequeathed to us, or the most modern, alive and stamped with the imprint of a living personality; for we alone, by our belief that they have an existence of their own, can give to certain things we see a soul which they afterwards keep and which they develop in our minds. All the ideas that I had formed of the hours, different from those that exist for other men, passed by the Swanns in that house which was to their everyday life what the body is to the soul, and whose singularity it must have expressed, all those ideas were distributed, amalgamated—equally disturbing and indefinable throughout—in the arrangement of the furniture, the thickness of the carpets, the position of the windows, the ministrations of the servants. When, after lunch, we went to drink our coffee in the sunshine of the great bay window of the drawing-room, as Mme Swann was asking me how many lumps of sugar I took, it was not only the silk-covered stool which she pushed towards me that exuded, together with the agonising charm that I had long ago discerned—first among the pink hawthorn and then beside the clump of laurels—in the name of Gilberte, the hostility that her



parents had shown to me and which this little piece of furniture seemed to have so well understood and shared that I felt myself unworthy and found myself almost reluctant to set my feet on its defenceless cushion; a personality, a soul was latent there which linked it secretly to the afternoon light, so different from any other light in the gulf which spread beneath our feet its sparkling tide of gold out of which the bluish sofas and vaporous tapestries emerged like enchanted islands; and there was nothing, not even the painting by Rubens that hung above the chimney-piece, that was not endowed with the same quality and almost the same intensity of charm as the laced boots of M. Swann and the hooded cape the like of which I had so dearly longed to wear, whereas Odette would now beg her husband to go and put on another, so as to appear smarter, whenever I did them the honour of driving out with them. She too went away to dress—not heeding my protestations that no “outdoor” clothes could be nearly so becoming as the marvellous garment of *crêpe-de-Chine* or silk, old rose, cherry-coloured, Tiepolo pink, white, mauve, green, red or yellow, plain or patterned, in which Mme Swann had sat down to lunch and which she was now going to take off. When I told her that she ought to go out in that costume, she laughed, either in mockery of my ignorance or from delight in my compliment. She apologised for having so many housecoats, explaining that they were the only kind of dress in which she felt comfortable, and left us to go and array herself in one of those regal toilettes which imposed their majesty on all beholders, and yet among which I was sometimes summoned to decide which I would prefer her to put on.

In the Zoo, how proud I was, when we had left the carriage, to be walking by the side of Mme Swann! As she strolled negligently along, letting her cloak stream in the air behind her, I kept eyeing her with an admiring gaze to which she coquettishly responded in a lingering smile. And now, were we to meet one or other of Gilberte’s friends, boy or girl, who greeted us from afar, it was my turn to be looked upon by them as one of those happy creatures whose lot I had envied, one of those friends of Gilberte who knew her family and had a share in that other part of her life, the part which was not spent in the Champs-Élysées.

Often upon the paths of the Bois or the Zoo we would be greeted by some distinguished lady who was a friend of Swann’s, whom sometimes he had not at first seen and who would be pointed out to him by his wife: “Charles! Don’t you see Mme de Montmorency?” And Swann, with that amicable smile bred of a long and intimate friendship, would none the less doff his hat with a sweeping gesture, and with a grace peculiarly his own. Sometimes the lady would stop, glad of an opportunity to show Mme Swann a courtesy which would set no tiresome precedent, of which they all knew that she would never take advantage, so thoroughly had Swann trained her in reserve. She had even so acquired all the manners of polite society, and however elegant, however stately the lady might be, Mme Swann was invariably a match for her; halting for a moment before the friend whom her husband had recognised and was addressing, she would introduce us, Gilberte and myself, with so much ease of manner, would remain so free, so relaxed in her affability, that it would have been hard to say, looking at them both, which of the two was the aristocrat.

The day on which we went to inspect the Singhalese, on our way home we saw coming in our direction, and followed by two others who seemed to be acting as her escort, an elderly but still handsome lady enveloped in a dark overcoat and wearing a little bonnet tied beneath her chin with a pair of ribbons. “Ah! here’s someone who will interest you!” said Swann. The old lady, who was now within a few yards of us, smiled at us with a caressing sweetness. Swann doffed his hat. Mme Swann swept to the ground in a curtsy and made as if to kiss the hand of the lady, who, standing there like a Winterhalter portrait, drew her up again and kissed her cheek. “Come, come, will you put your hat on, you!” she scolded Swann in a thick and almost growling voice, speaking like an old and familiar friend. “I’m going to present you to Her Imperial Highness,” Mme Swann whispered.

Swann drew me aside for a moment while his wife talked to the Princess about the weather and the animals recently added to the Zoo. “That is the Princesse Mathilde,” he told me, “you know who I mean, the friend of Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, Dumas. Just fancy, she’s the niece of Napoleon I. She had offers of marriage from Napoleon III and the Emperor of Russia. Isn’t that interesting? Talk to her a little. But I hope she won’t keep us standing here for an hour! ... I met Taine the other day,” he went on, addressing the Princess, “and he told me Your Highness was vexed with him.” “He’s behaved like a perfect peeg!” she said gruffly, pronouncing the word *cochon* as though she referred to Joan of Arc’s contemporary, Bishop Cauchon. “After his article on the Emperor I left my card on him with p. p. c. on it.”<sup>6</sup>

I felt the surprise that one feels on opening the correspondence of that Duchesse d’Orléans who was by birth a Princess Palatine. And indeed Princesse Mathilde, animated by sentiments so entirely French, expressed them with a straightforward bluntness that recalled the Germany of an older generation, and was inherited, doubtless, from her Württemberger mother. This somewhat rough and almost masculine frankness she softened, as soon as she began to smile, with an Italian languor. And the whole person was clothed in an outfit so typically Second Empire that—for all that the Princess wore it simply and solely, no doubt, from attachment to the fashions that she had loved when she was young—she seemed to have deliberately planned to avoid the slightest discrepancy in historic colour, and to be satisfying the expectations of those who looked to her to evoke the memory of another age. I whispered to Swann to ask her whether she had known Musset. “Very slightly, Monsieur,” was the answer, given in a tone which seemed to feign annoyance at the question, and of course it was by way of a joke that she called Swann Monsieur, since they were intimate friends. “I had him to dine once. I had invited him for seven o’clock. At half-past seven, as he had not appeared, we sat down to dinner. He arrived at eight, bowed to me, took his seat, never opened his lips, and went off after dinner without letting me hear the sound of his voice. Of course he was dead drunk. That hardly encouraged me to make another attempt.” We were standing a little way off, Swann and I. “I hope this little audience is not going

to last much longer," he muttered, "the soles of my feet are hurting. I can't think why my wife keeps on making conversation. When we get home it will be she who complains of being tired, and she knows I simply cannot go on standing like this."

For Mme Swann, who had had the news from Mme Bontemps, was in the process of telling the Princess that the Government, having at last begun to realise the depth of its shoddiness, had decided to send her an invitation to be present on the platform in a few days' time, when the Tsar Nicholas was to visit the Invalides. But the Princess who, in spite of appearances, in spite of the character of her entourage, which consisted mainly of artists and literary people, had remained at heart and showed herself, whenever she had to take action, the niece of Napoleon, replied: "Yes, Madame, I received it this morning and I sent it back to the Minister, who must have had it by now. I told him that I had no need of an invitation to go to the Invalides. If the Government desires my presence there, it will not be on the platform but in our vault, where the Emperor's tomb is. I have no need of a card to admit me there. I have my own keys. I go in and out when I choose. The Government has only to let me know whether it wishes me to be present or not. But if I do go to the Invalides, it will be down below or nowhere at all."

At that moment we were saluted, Mme Swann and I, by a young man who greeted her without stopping, and whom I was not aware that she knew; it was Bloch. When I asked her about him, she told me that he had been introduced to her by Mme Bontemps, and that he was employed in the Minister's secretariat, which was news to me. At all events, she could not have seen him often—or perhaps she had not cared to utter the name Bloch, hardly "smart" enough for her liking, for she told me that he was called M. Moreul. I assured her that she was mistaken, that his name was Bloch.

The Princess gathered up the train that flowed out behind her, and Mme Swann gazed at it with admiring eyes. "Yes, as it happens, it's a fur that the Emperor of Russia sent me," she explained, "and as I've just been to see him I put it on to show him that I'd managed to have it made up as a coat." "I hear that Prince Louis has joined the Russian Army; the Princess will be very sad at losing him," went on Mme Swann, not noticing her husband's signs of impatience. "He *would* go and do that! As I said to him, 'Just because there's been a soldier in the family there's no need to follow suit,' " replied the Princess, alluding with this abrupt simplicity to Napoleon the Great.

But Swann could hold out no longer: "Ma'am, it is I that am going to play the Royal Highness and ask your permission to retire; but you see, my wife hasn't been too well, and I don't like her to stand around for too long." Mme Swann curtsied again, and the Princess conferred upon us all a celestial smile, which she seemed to have summoned out of the past, from among the graces of her girlhood, from the evenings at Compiègne, a smile which stole, sweet and unbroken, over her hitherto surly face. Then she went on her way, followed by the two ladies in waiting, who had confined themselves, in the manner of interpreters, of children's or invalids' nurses, to punctuating our conversation with meaningless remarks and superfluous explanations. "You should go and write your name in her book one day this week," Mme Swann counselled me. "One doesn't leave cards upon these 'Royalties,' as the English call them, but she will invite you to her house if you put your name down."

Sometimes in those last days of winter, before proceeding on our expedition we would go into one of the small picture-shows that were beginning to open and where Swann, as a collector of note, was greeted with special deference by the dealers in whose galleries they were held. And in that still wintry weather the old longing to set out for the South of France and Venice would be reawakened in me by those rooms in which a springtime, already well advanced, and a blazing sun cast violet shadows upon the roseate Alpilles and gave the intense transparency of emeralds to the Grand Canal. If the weather was bad, we would go to a concert or a theatre, and afterwards to one of the fashionable tea-rooms. There, whenever Mme Swann had anything to say to me which she did not wish the people at the next table or even the waiters who brought our tea to understand, she would say it in English, as though that had been a secret language known to our two selves alone. As it happened everyone in the place knew English—I alone had not yet learned the language, and was obliged to say so to Mme Swann in order that she might cease to make, about the people who were drinking tea or serving us with it, remarks which I guessed to be uncomplimentary without either my understanding or the person referred to missing a single word.

Once, in connexion with a *matinée* at the theatre, Gilberte gave me a great surprise. It was precisely the day of which she had spoken to me in advance, on which fell the anniversary of her grandfather's death. We were to go, she and I, with her governess, to hear selections from an opera, and Gilberte had dressed with a view to attending this performance, wearing the air of indifference with which she was in the habit of treating whatever we might be going to do, saying that it might be anything in the world, no matter what, provided that it amused me and had her parents' approval. Before lunch, her mother drew us aside to tell her that her father was vexed at the thought of our going to a concert on that particular day. This seemed to be only natural. Gilberte remained impassive, but grew pale with an anger which she was unable to conceal, and uttered not a word. When M. Swann joined us his wife took him to the other end of the room and said something in his ear. He called Gilberte, and they went together into the next room. We could hear their raised voices. Yet I could not bring myself to believe that Gilberte, so submissive, so loving, so thoughtful, would resist her father's appeal, on such a day and for so trifling a matter. At length Swann reappeared with her, saying: "You heard what I said. Now do as you like."

Gilberte's features remained contracted in a frown throughout luncheon, after which she retired to her room. Then suddenly, without hesitating and as though she had never at any point hesitated over her course

of action: "Two o'clock!" she exclaimed, "You know the concert begins at half-past." And she told her governess to make haste.

"But," I reminded her, "won't your father be cross with you?"

"Not the least little bit!"

"Surely he was afraid it would look odd, because of the anniversary."

"What do I care what people think? I think it's perfectly absurd to worry about other people in matters of sentiment. We feel things for ourselves, not for the public. Mademoiselle has very few pleasures, and she's been looking forward to going to this concert. I'm not going to deprive her of it just to satisfy public opinion."

"But, Gilberte," I protested, taking her by the arm, "it's not to satisfy public opinion, it's to please your father."

"You're not going to start scolding me, I hope," she said sharply, plucking her arm away.

A favour still more precious than their taking me with them to the Zoo or a concert, the Swanns did not exclude me even from their friendship with Bergotte, which had been at the root of the attraction that I had found in them when, before I had even seen Gilberte, I reflected that her intimacy with that godlike elder would have made her, for me, the most enthralling of friends, had not the disdain that I was bound to inspire in her forbidden me to hope that she would ever take me, in his company, to visit the towns that he loved. And then, one day, Mme Swann invited me to a big luncheon-party. I did not know who the guests were to be. On my arrival I was disconcerted, as I crossed the hall, by an alarming incident. Mme Swann seldom missed an opportunity of adopting any of those customs which are thought fashionable for a season, and then, failing to catch on, are presently abandoned (as, for instance, many years before, she had had her *hansom cab*, or had printed in English upon a card inviting people to luncheon the words *To meet*, followed by the name of some more or less important personage). Often enough these usages implied nothing mysterious and required no initiation. For instance, a minor innovation of those days, imported from England: Odette had made her husband have some visiting cards printed on which the name Charles Swann was preceded by "Mr." After the first visit that I paid her, Mme Swann had left at my door one of these "pasteboards," as she called them. No one had ever left a card on me before, and I felt at once so much pride, emotion and gratitude that, scraping together all the money I possessed, I ordered a superb basket of camellias and sent it round to Mme Swann. I implored my father to go and leave a card on her, but first, quickly, to have some printed on which his name should bear the prefix "Mr." He complied with neither of my requests. I was in despair for some days, and then asked myself whether he might not after all have been right. But this use of "Mr.," if it meant nothing, was at least intelligible. Not so with another that was revealed to me on the occasion of this luncheon-party, but revealed without any indication of its purport. At the moment when I was about to step from the hall into the drawing-room, the butler handed me a thin, oblong envelope upon which my name was inscribed. In my surprise I thanked him; but I eyed the envelope with misgivings. I no more knew what I was expected to do with it than a foreigner knows what to do with one of those little utensils that they lay in his place at a Chinese banquet. Noticing that it was gummed down, I was afraid of appearing indiscreet were I to open it then and there, and so I thrust it into my pocket with a knowing air. Mme Swann had written to me a few days before, asking me to come to "a small, informal luncheon." There were, however, sixteen people, among whom I never suspected for a moment that I was to find Bergotte. Mme Swann, who had already "named" me, as she called it, to several of her guests, suddenly, after my name, in the same tone that she had used in uttering it (and as though we were merely two of the guests at her luncheon who ought to each feel equally flattered on meeting the other), pronounced that of the gentle Bard with the snowy locks. The name Bergotte made me start, like the sound of a revolver fired at me point blank, but instinctively, to keep my countenance, I bowed: there, in front of me, like one of those conjurers whom we see standing whole and unharmed, in their frock-coats, in the smoke of a pistol shot out of which a pigeon had just fluttered, my greeting was returned by a youngish, uncouth, thickset and myopic little man, with a red nose curled like a snail-shell and a goatee beard. I was cruelly disappointed, for what had just vanished in the dust of the explosion was not only the languorous old man, of whom no vestige now remained, but also the beauty of an immense work which I had contrived to enshrine in the frail and hallowed organism that I had constructed, like a temple, expressly for it, but for which no room was to be found in the squat figure, packed tight with blood-vessels, bones, glands, sinews, of the little man with the snub nose and black beard who stood before me. The whole of the Bergotte whom I had slowly and delicately elaborated for myself, drop by drop, like a stalactite, out of the transparent beauty of his books, ceased (I could see at once) to be of any possible use, the moment I was obliged to include in him the snail-shell nose and to utilise the goatee beard—just as we must reject as worthless the solution we have found for a problem the terms of which we had not read in full and so failed to observe that the total must amount to a specified figure. The nose and beard were elements similarly ineluctable, and all the more aggravating in that, while forcing me to reconstruct entirely the personage of Bergotte, they seemed further to imply, to produce, to secrete incessantly a certain quality of mind, alert and self-satisfied, which was not fair, for such a mind had no connexion whatever with the sort of intelligence that was diffused throughout those books, so intimately familiar to me, which were permeated by a gentle and godlike wisdom. Starting from them, I should never have arrived at that snail-shell nose; but starting from the nose, which did not appear to be in the slightest degree ashamed of itself, but stood out alone there like a grotesque ornament fastened on his face, I found myself proceeding in a totally different direction from the work of Bergotte, and must arrive, it would seem, at the mentality of a busy and preoccupied engineer, of the sort who when you

accost them in the street think it correct to say: "Thanks, and you?" before you have actually inquired of them how they are, or else, if you assure them that you have been delighted to make their acquaintance, respond with an abbreviation which they imagine to be smart, intelligent and up-to-date, inasmuch as it avoids any waste of precious time on vain formalities: "Same here!" Names, no doubt, are whimsical draughtsmen, giving us of people as well as of places sketches so unlike the reality that we often experience a kind of stupor when we have before our eyes, in place of the imagined, the visible world (which, for that matter, is not the real world, our senses being little more endowed than our imagination with the art of portraiture—so little, indeed, that the final and approximately lifelike pictures which we manage to obtain of reality are at least as different from the visible world as that was from the imagined). But in Bergotte's case, my preconceived idea of him from his name troubled me far less than my familiarity with his work, to which I was obliged to attach, as to the cord of a balloon, the man with the goatee beard, without knowing whether it would still have the strength to raise him from the ground. It seemed clear, however, that it really was he who had written the books that I had so loved, for Mme Swann having thought it incumbent upon her to tell him of my admiration for one of these, he showed no surprise that she should have mentioned this to him rather than to any other guest, and did not seem to regard it as due to a misapprehension, but, swelling out the frock-coat which he had put on in honour of all these distinguished guests with a body avid for the coming meal, while his mind was completely occupied by other, more important realities, it was only as at some finished episode in his life, and as though one had alluded to a costume as the Duc de Guise which he had worn, one season, at a fancy dress ball, that he smiled as he bore his mind back to the idea of his books; which at once began to fall in my estimation (bringing down with them the whole value of Beauty, of the world, of life itself), until they seemed to have been merely the casual recreation of a man with a goatee beard. I told myself that he must have taken pains over them, but that, if he had lived on an island surrounded by beds of pearl-oysters, he would instead have devoted himself with equal success to the pearling trade. His work no longer appeared to me so inevitable. And then I asked myself whether originality did indeed prove that great writers are gods, ruling each over a kingdom that is his alone, or whether there is not an element of sham in it all, whether the differences between one man's books and another's were not the result of their respective labours rather than the expression of a radical and essential difference between diverse personalities.

Meanwhile we had taken our places at table. By the side of my plate I found a carnation, the stalk of which was wrapped in silver paper. It embarrassed me less than the envelope that had been handed to me in the hall, which, however, I had completely forgotten. Its use, strange as it was to me, seemed to me more intelligible when I saw all the male guests take up the similar carnations that were lying by their plates and slip them into their buttonholes. I did as they had done, with the air of naturalness that a free-thinker assumes in church when he is not familiar with the mass but rises when everyone else rises and kneels a moment after everyone else is on his knees. Another usage, equally strange to me but less ephemeral, disquieted me more. On the other side of my plate was a smaller plate, on which was heaped a blackish substance which I did not then know to be caviare. I was ignorant of what was to be done with it but firmly determined not to let it enter my mouth.

Bergotte was sitting not far from me and I could hear quite clearly everything that he said. I understood then the impression that M. de Norpois had formed of him. He had indeed a peculiar "organ"; there is nothing that so alters the material qualities of the voice as the presence of thought behind what is being said: the resonance of the diphthongs, the energy of the labials are profoundly affected—as is the diction. His seemed to me to differ entirely from his way of writing, and even the things that he said from those with which he filled his books. But the voice issues from a mask behind which it is not powerful enough to make us recognise at first sight a face which we have seen uncovered in the speaker's literary style. At certain points in the conversation when Bergotte was in the habit of talking in a manner which not only M. de Norpois would have thought affected or unpleasant, it was a long time before I discovered an exact correspondence with the parts of his books in which his form became so poetic and so musical. At those points he could see in what he was saying a plastic beauty independent of whatever his sentences might mean, and as human speech reflects the human soul, though without expressing it as does literary style, Bergotte appeared almost to be talking nonsense, intoning certain words and, if he were pursuing, beneath them, a single image, stringing them together uninterruptedly on one continuous note, with a wearisome monotony. So that a pretentious, turgid and monotonous delivery was a sign of the rare aesthetic value of what he was saying, and an effect, in his conversation, of the same power which, in his books, produced that harmonious flow of imagery. I had had all the more difficulty in discovering this at first since what he said at such moments, precisely because it was the authentic utterance of Bergotte, did not appear to be typical Bergotte. It was a profusion of precise ideas, not included in that "Bergotte manner" which so many essayists had appropriated to themselves; and this dissimilarity was probably but another aspect—seen in a blurred way through the stream of conversation, like an image seen through smoked glass—of the fact that when one read a page of Bergotte it was never what would have been written by any of those lifeless imitators who, nevertheless, in newspapers and in books, adorned their prose with so many "Bergottish" images and ideas. This difference in style arose from the fact that what was meant by "Bergottism" was, first and foremost, a priceless element of truth hidden in the heart of each thing, whence it was extracted by that great writer by virtue of his genius, and that this extraction, rather than the perpetration of "Bergottisms," was the aim of the gentle Bard. Though, it must be added, he continued to perpetrate them in spite of himself because he was Bergotte, and so in this sense every fresh beauty in his work was the little drop of Bergotte buried at the heart of a thing and which he had distilled from it. But if, for that reason, each of those beauties was related to all the rest and recognisable, yet each

remained separate and individual, as was the act of discovery that had brought it to the light of day; new, and consequently different from what was known as the Bergotte manner, which was a loose synthesis of all the "Bergottisms" already thought up and written down by him, with no indication by which men who lacked genius might foresee what would be his next discovery. So it is with all great writers: the beauty of their sentences is as unforeseeable as is that of a woman whom we have never seen; it is creative, because it is applied to an external object which they have thought of—as opposed to thinking about themselves—and to which they have not yet given expression. An author of memoirs of our time, wishing to write without too obviously seeming to be writing like Saint-Simon, might at a pinch give us the first line of his portrait of Villars: "He was a rather tall man, dark ... with an alert, open, expressive physiognomy," but what law of determinism could bring him to the discovery of Saint-Simon's next line, which begins with "and, to tell the truth, a trifle mad"? The true variety is in this abundance of real and unexpected elements, in the branch loaded with blue flowers which shoots up, against all reason, from the spring hedgerow that seemed already overcharged with blossoms, whereas the purely formal imitation of variety (and one might advance the same argument for all the other qualities of style) is but a barren uniformity, that is to say the very antithesis of variety, and cannot, in the work of imitators, give the illusion or recall the memory of it save to a reader who has not acquired the sense of it from the masters themselves.

And so—just as Bergotte's way of speaking would no doubt have charmed the listener if he himself had been merely an amateur reciting imitation Bergotte, whereas it was attached to the thought of Bergotte, at work and in action, by vital links which the ear did not at once distinguish—so it was because Bergotte applied that thought with precision to the reality which pleased him that his language had in it something down-to-earth, something over-nourishing, which disappointed those who expected to hear him speak only of the "eternal torrent of forms" and of the "mysterious tremors of beauty." Moreover the quality, always rare and new, of what he wrote was expressed in his conversation by so subtle a manner of approaching a question, ignoring every aspect of it that was already familiar, that he appeared to be seizing hold of an unimportant detail, to be off the point, to be indulging in paradox, so that his ideas seemed as often as not to be confused, for each of us sees clarity only in those ideas which have the same degree of confusion as his own. Besides, as all novelty depends upon the prior elimination of the stereotyped attitude to which we had grown accustomed, and which seemed to us to be reality itself, any new form of conversation, like all original painting and music, must always appear complicated and exhausting. It is based on figures of speech with which we are not familiar, the speaker appears to us to be talking entirely in metaphors; and this wearies us, and gives us the impression of a want of truth. (After all, the old forms of speech must also in their time have been images difficult to follow, when the listener was not yet cognisant of the universe which they depicted. But for a long time it has been taken to be the real universe, and is instinctively relied upon.) So when Bergotte—and his figures appear simple enough today—said of Cottard that he was a mannikin in a bottle, trying to find his balance, and of Brichot that "for him even more than for Mme Swann the arrangement of his hair was a matter for anxious deliberation, because, in his twofold preoccupation with his profile and his reputation, he had always to make sure that it was so brushed as to give him the air at once of a lion and of a philosopher," people immediately felt the strain, and sought a foothold upon something which they called more concrete, meaning by that more usual. It was indeed to the writer whom I admired that the unrecognisable words issuing from the mask I had before my eyes must be attributed, and yet they could not have been inserted among his books like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, they were on another plane and required a transposition by means of which, one day, when I was repeating to myself certain phrases that I had heard Bergotte use, I discovered in them the whole framework of his written style, the different elements of which I was able to recognise and to name in this spoken discourse which had struck me as being so different.

From a more subsidiary point of view the special way, a little too meticulous, too intense, that he had of pronouncing certain words, certain adjectives which constantly recurred in his conversation and which he never uttered without a certain emphasis, giving to each of their syllables a separate force and intoning the last (as for instance the word *visage* which he always used in preference to *figure* and enriched with a number of superfluous v's and s's and g's, which seemed all to explode from his outstretched palm at such moments), corresponded exactly to the fine passages where, in his prose, he brought out those favourite words, preceded by a sort of pause and composed in such a way in the metrical whole of the sentence that the reader was obliged, if he was not to make a false quantity, to give to each of them its full value. And yet one did not find in Bergotte's speech a certain luminosity which in his books, as in those of some other writers, often modified in the written sentence the appearance of its words. This was doubtless because that light issues from so profound a depth that its rays do not penetrate to our spoken words in the hours in which, thrown open to others by the act of conversation, we are to a certain extent closed to ourselves. In this respect, there was more modulation, more stress in his books than in his talk: stress independent of beauty of style, which the author himself has possibly not perceived, since it is not separable from his most intimate personality. It was this stress which, at the moments when, in his books, Bergotte was entirely natural, gave a rhythm to the words—often at such times quite insignificant—that he wrote. This stress is not marked on the printed page, there is nothing there to indicate it, and yet it imposes itself of its own accord on the writer's sentences, one cannot pronounce them in any other way, it is what was most ephemeral and at the same time most profound in the writer, and it is what will bear witness to his true nature, what will ultimately say whether, despite all the asperities he expressed, he was gentle, or despite all his sensualities, sentimental.

Certain peculiarities of elocution, faint traces of which were to be found in Bergotte's conversation, were not exclusively his own; for when, later on, I came to know his brothers and sisters I found those peculiarities

much more pronounced in them. There was something abrupt and harsh in the closing words of a cheerful sentence, something faint and dying at the end of a sad one. Swann, who had known the Master as a boy, told me that in those days one used to hear on his lips, just as much as on his brothers' and sisters', those family inflexions, shouts of violent merriment interspersed with murmurings of a long-drawn melancholy, and that in the room in which they all played together he used to perform his part, better than any of them, in their symphonies, alternately deafening and subdued. However characteristic it may be, the sound that escapes from a person's lips is fugitive and does not survive him. But it was not so with the pronunciation of the Bergotte family. For if it is difficult ever to understand, even in the *Meistersinger*, how an artist can invent music by listening to the twittering of birds, yet Bergotte had transposed and perpetuated in his prose that manner of dwelling on words which repeat themselves in shouts of joy or fall drop by drop in melancholy sighs. There are in his books just such closing phrases where the accumulated sonorities are prolonged (as in the last chords of the overture of an opera which cannot bring itself to a close and repeats several times over its final cadence before the conductor finally lays down his baton), in which, later on, I was to find a musical equivalent for those phonetic "brasses" of the Bergotte family. But in his own case, from the moment when he transferred them to his books, he ceased instinctively to make use of them in his speech. From the day on which he had begun to write—and thus all the more markedly later, when I first knew him—his voice had abandoned this orchestration for ever.

These young Bergottes—the future writer and his brothers and sisters—were doubtless in no way superior, far from it, to other young people, more refined, more intellectual than themselves, who found the Bergottes rather noisy, not to say a trifle vulgar, irritating in their witticisms which characterised the tone, at once pretentious and asinine, of the household. But genius, and even great talent, springs less from seeds of intellect and social refinement superior to those of other people than from the faculty of transforming and transposing them. To heat a liquid with an electric lamp requires not the strongest lamp possible, but one of which the current can cease to illuminate, can be diverted so as to give heat instead of light. To mount the skies it is not necessary to have the most powerful of motors, one must have a motor which, instead of continuing to run along the earth's surface, intersecting with a vertical line the horizontal which it began by following, is capable of converting its speed into lifting power. Similarly, the men who produce works of genius are not those who live in the most delicate atmosphere, whose conversation is the most brilliant or their culture the most extensive, but those who have had the power, ceasing suddenly to live only for themselves, to transform their personality into a sort of mirror, in such a way that their life, however mediocre it may be socially and even, in a sense, intellectually, is reflected by it, genius consisting in reflecting power and not in the intrinsic quality of the scene reflected. The day on which the young Bergotte succeeded in showing to the world of his readers the tasteless household in which he had spent his childhood, and the not very amusing conversations between himself and his brothers, was the day on which he rose above the friends of his family, more intellectual and more distinguished than himself; they in their fine Rolls-Royces might return home expressing due contempt for the vulgarity of the Bergottes; but he, in his modest machine which had at last "taken off," soared above their heads.

There were other characteristics of his elocution which he shared not with the members of his family, but with certain contemporary writers. Younger men who were beginning to repudiate him and disclaimed any intellectual affinity with him nevertheless displayed it willy-nilly by employing the same adverbs, the same prepositions that he incessantly repeated, by constructing their sentences in the same way, speaking in the same quiescent, subdued tone, in reaction against the eloquent and facile language of an earlier generation. Perhaps these young men—we shall come across some of whom this may be said—had never known Bergotte. But his way of thinking, inoculated into them, had led them to those alterations of syntax and accentuation which bear a necessary relation to originality of mind. A relation which, incidentally, requires to be traced. Thus Bergotte, if he owed nothing to anyone in his manner of writing, derived his manner of speaking from one of his early associates, a marvellous talker to whose spell he had succumbed, whom he imitated unwillingly in his conversation, but who himself, being less gifted, had never written any really outstanding book. So that if one had been in quest of originality in speech, Bergotte must have been labelled a disciple, a second-hand writer, whereas, influenced by his friend only in the domain of conversation, he had been original and creative in his writings. Doubtless again to distinguish himself from the previous generation, too fond as it had been of abstractions, of weighty commonplaces, when Bergotte wished to speak favourably of a book, what he would emphasise, what he would quote with approval would always be some scene that furnished the reader with an image, some picture that had no rational meaning. "Ah, yes!" he would exclaim, "it's good! There's a little girl in an orange shawl. It's excellent!" or again, "Oh yes, there's a passage in which there's a regiment marching along the street; yes, it's good!" As for style, he was not altogether of his time (and remained quite exclusively French, abominating Tolstoy, George Eliot, Ibsen and Dostoevsky), for the word that always came to his lips when he wished to praise the style of any writer was "mellow." "Yes, you know I like Chateaubriand better in *Atala* than in *Rancé*; it seems to me to be mellower." He said the word like a doctor who, when his patient assures him that milk will give him indigestion, answers, "But, you know, it's quite mellow." And it is true that there was in Bergotte's style a kind of harmony similar to that for which the ancients used to praise certain of their orators in terms which we now find hard to understand, accustomed as we are to our own modern tongues in which effects of that kind are not sought.

He would say also, with a shy smile, of pages of his own for which someone had expressed admiration: "I think it's more or less true, more or less accurate; it may be of some value perhaps," but he would say this simply from modesty, as a woman to whom one has said that her dress or her daughter is beautiful replies,



"It's comfortable," or "She's a good girl." But the instinct of the maker, the builder, was too deeply implanted in Bergotte for him not to be aware that the sole proof that he had built both usefully and truthfully lay in the pleasure that his work had given, to himself first of all and afterwards to his readers. Only, many years later, when he no longer had any talent, whenever he wrote anything with which he was not satisfied, in order not to have to suppress it, as he ought to have done, in order to be able to publish it, he would repeat, but to himself this time: "After all, it's more or less accurate, it must be of some value to my country." So that the phrase murmured long ago among his admirers by the crafty voice of modesty came in the end to be whispered in the secrecy of his heart by the uneasy tongue of pride. And the same words which had served Bergotte as a superfluous excuse for the excellence of his early works became as it were an ineffective consolation to him for the mediocrity of the last.

A kind of austerity of taste which he had, a kind of determination to write nothing of which he could not say that it was "mellow," which had made people for so many years regard him as a sterile and precious artist, a chiseller of trifles, was on the contrary the secret of his strength, for habit forms the style of the writer just as much as the character of the man, and the author who has more than once been content to attain, in the expression of his thoughts, to a certain kind of attractiveness, in so doing lays down unalterably the boundaries of his talent, just as, in succumbing too often to pleasure, to laziness, to the fear of being put to trouble, one traces for oneself, on a character which it will finally be impossible to retouch, the lineaments of one's vices and the limits of one's virtue.

If, however, despite all the similarities which I was to perceive later on between the writer and the man, I had not at first sight, in Mme Swann's drawing-room, believed that this could be Bergotte, the author of so many divine books, who stood before me, perhaps I was not altogether wrong, for he himself did not, in the strict sense of the word, "believe" it either. He did not believe it since he showed some alacrity in ingratiating himself with fashionable people (though he was not a snob), and with literary men and journalists who were vastly inferior to himself. Of course he had long since learned, from the suffrage of his readers, that he had genius, compared to which social position and official rank were as nothing. He had learned that he had genius, but he did not believe it since he continued to simulate deference towards mediocre writers in order to succeed, shortly, in becoming an Academician, when the Academy and the Faubourg Saint-Germain have no more to do with that part of the Eternal Mind which is the author of the works of Bergotte than with the law of causality or the idea of God. That also he knew, but as a kleptomaniac knows, without profiting by the knowledge, that it is wrong to steal. And the man with the goatee beard and snail-shell nose knew and used all the tricks of the gentleman who pockets your spoons, in his efforts to reach the coveted academic chair, or some duchess or other who could command several votes at the election, but to do so in a way that ensured that no one who would consider the pursuit of such a goal a vice in him would see what he was doing. He was only half-successful; one could hear, alternating with the speech of the true Bergotte, that of the other, selfish and ambitious Bergotte who talked only of his powerful, rich or noble friends in order to enhance himself, he who in his books, when he was really himself, had so well portrayed the charm, pure as a mountain spring, of the poor.

As for those other vices to which M. de Norpois had alluded, that almost incestuous love affair, which was made still worse, people said, by a want of delicacy in the matter of money, if they contradicted in a shocking manner the trend of his latest novels, filled with such a painfully scrupulous concern for what was right and good that the most innocent pleasures of their heroes were poisoned by it, and that even for the reader himself it exhaled a sense of anguish in the light of which even the quietest of lives seemed scarcely bearable, those vices did not necessarily prove, supposing that they were fairly imputed to Bergotte, that his literature was a lie and all his sensitiveness mere play-acting. Just as in pathology certain conditions similar in appearance are due, some to an excess, others to an insufficiency of blood pressure, of glandular secretion and so forth, there may be vice arising from hypersensitiveness just as much as from the lack of it. Perhaps it is only in really vicious lives that the problem of morality can arise in all its disquieting strength. And to this problem the artist offers a solution in the terms not of his own personal life but of what is for him his true life, a general, a literary solution. As the great Doctors of the Church began often, while remaining good, by experiencing the sins of all mankind, out of which they drew their own personal sanctity, so great artists often, while being wicked, make use of their vices in order to arrive at a conception of the moral law that is binding upon us all. It is the vices (or merely the weaknesses and follies) of the circle in which they live, the meaningless conversation, the frivolous or shocking lives of their daughters, the infidelity of their wives, or their own misdeeds that writers have most often castigated in their books, without, however, thinking to alter their way of life or improve the tone of their household. But this contrast had never before been so striking as it was in Bergotte's time, because, on the one hand, in proportion as society grew more corrupt, notions of morality became increasingly refined, and on the other hand the public became a great deal more conversant than it had ever been before with the private lives of literary men; and on certain evenings in the theatre people would point out the author whom I had so greatly admired at Combray, sitting at the back of a box the very composition of which seemed an oddly humorous or poignant comment on, an impudent denial of, the thesis which he had just been maintaining in his latest book. Nothing that this or that casual informant might tell me was of much use in helping me to settle the question of the goodness or wickedness of Bergotte. An intimate friend would furnish proofs of his hardheartedness; then a stranger would cite some instance (touching, since it had evidently been destined to remain hidden) of his real depth of feeling. He had behaved cruelly to his wife. But, in a village inn where he had gone to spend the night, he had sat up with a poor woman who had tried to drown herself, and when he was obliged to go had left a large sum of money with the

landlord, so that he should not turn the poor creature out but see that she got proper attention. Perhaps the more the great writer developed in Bergotte at the expense of the little man with the beard, the more his own personal life was drowned in the flood of all the lives that he imagined, until he no longer felt himself obliged to perform certain practical duties, for which he had substituted the duty of imagining those other lives. But at the same time, because he imagined the feelings of others as completely as if they had been his own, whenever the occasion arose for him to have to deal with an unfortunate person, at least in a transitory way, he would do so not from his own personal standpoint but from that of the sufferer himself, a standpoint from which he would have been horrified by the language of those who continue to think of their own petty concerns in the presence of another's grief. With the result that he gave rise everywhere to justifiable rancour and to undying gratitude.

Above all, he was a man who in his heart of hearts only really loved certain images and (like a miniature set in the floor of a casket) composing and painting them in words. For a trifle that someone had sent him, if that trifle gave him the opportunity of weaving a few images round it, he would be prodigal in the expression of his gratitude, while showing none whatever for an expensive present. And if he had had to plead before a tribunal, he would inevitably have chosen his words not for the effect that they might have on the judge but with an eye to certain images which the judge would certainly never have perceived.

That first day on which I met him with Gilberte's parents, I mentioned to Bergotte that I had recently been to see Berma in *Phèdre*; and he told me that in the scene in which she stood with her arm raised to the level of her shoulders—one of those very scenes that had been greeted with such applause—she had managed to suggest with great nobility of art certain classical figures which quite possibly she had never even seen, a Hesperid carved in the same attitude upon a metope at Olympia, and also the beautiful primitive virgins on the Erechtheum.

"It may be sheer divination, and yet I fancy that she goes to museums. It would be interesting to 'log' that." ("Log" was one of those regular Bergotte expressions, and one which various young men who had never met him had caught from him, speaking like him by some sort of telepathic suggestion.)

"Do you mean the Caryatids?" asked Swann.

"No, no," said Bergotte, "except in the scene where she confesses her passion to Oenone, where she moves her hand exactly like Hegeso on the stele in the Ceramicus, it's a far more primitive art that she evokes. I was referring to the Korai of the old Erechtheum, and I admit that there is perhaps nothing quite so remote from the art of Racine, but there are so many things already in *Phèdre* ... that one more ... Oh, and then, yes, she's really charming, that little sixth-century Phaedra, the rigidity of the arm, the lock of hair 'frozen into marble,' yes, you know, it's wonderful of her to have discovered all that. There is a great deal more antiquity in it than in most of the books they're labelling 'antique' this year."

Since Bergotte had in one of his books addressed a famous invocation to these archaic statues, the words that he was now uttering were quite intelligible to me, and gave me a fresh reason for taking an interest in Berma's acting. I tried to picture her again in my mind, as she had looked in that scene in which I remembered that she had raised her arm to the level of her shoulder. And I said to myself: "There we have the Hesperid of Olympia; there we have the sister of those adorable suppliants on the Acropolis; there indeed is nobility in art!" But in order for these thoughts to enhance for me the beauty of Berma's gesture, Bergotte would have had to put them into my head before the performance. Then, while that attitude of the actress actually existed in flesh and blood before my eyes, at that moment when the thing that is happening still has the plenitude of reality, I might have tried to extract from it the idea of archaic sculpture. But all that I retained of Berma in that scene was a memory which was no longer susceptible of modification; as meagre as an image devoid of those deep layers of the present in which one can delve and genuinely discover something new, an image on which one cannot retrospectively impose an interpretation that is not subject to verification and objective sanction.

At this point Mme Swann chipped into the conversation, asking me whether Gilberte had remembered to give me what Bergotte had written about *Phèdre*, and adding, "My daughter is such a scatterbrain!" Bergotte smiled modestly and protested that they were only a few pages of no importance. "But it's absolutely delightful, that little booklet, that little 'tract' of yours," Mme Swann assured him, to show that she was a good hostess, to give the impression that she had read Bergotte's essay, and also because she liked not merely to flatter Bergotte, but to pick and choose from what he wrote, to influence him. And it must be admitted that she did inspire him, though not in the way that she supposed. But when all is said there are, between what constituted the elegance of Mme Swann's drawing-room and a whole aspect of Bergotte's work, connexions such that each of them may serve, among elderly men today, as a commentary upon the other.

I let myself go in telling him what my impressions had been. Often Bergotte disagreed, but he allowed me to go on talking. I told him that I had liked the green light which was turned on when *Phèdre* raised her arm. "Ah! the designer will be glad to hear that; he's a real artist, and I shall tell him you liked it, because he is very proud of that effect. I must say, myself, that I don't care for it much, it bathes everything in a sort of sea-green glow, little *Phèdre* standing there looks too like a branch of coral on the floor of an aquarium. You will tell me, of course, that it brings out the cosmic aspect of the play. That's quite true. All the same, it would be more appropriate if the scene were laid in the Court of Neptune. Oh yes, I know the Vengeance of Neptune does come into the play. I don't suggest for a moment that we should think only of Port-Royal, but after all Racine isn't telling us a story about love among the sea-urchins. Still, it's what my friend wanted, and it's very well done, right or wrong, and really quite pretty. Yes, so you liked it, did you; you understood what he was after. We feel the same about it, don't we, really: it's a bit crazy, what he's done, you agree with me, but on the

whole it's very clever." And when Bergotte's opinion was thus contrary to mine, he in no way reduced me to silence, to the impossibility of framing any reply, as M. de Norpois would have done. This does not prove that Bergotte's opinions were less valid than the Ambassador's; far from it. A powerful idea communicates some of its power to the man who contradicts it. Partaking of the universal community of minds, it infiltrates, grafts itself on to, the mind of him whom it refutes, among other contiguous ideas, with the aid of which, counter-attacking, he complements and corrects it; so that the final verdict is always to some extent the work of both parties to a discussion. It is to ideas which are not, strictly speaking, ideas at all, to ideas which, based on nothing, can find no foothold, no fraternal echo in the mind of the adversary, that the latter, grappling as it were with thin air, can find no word to say in answer. The arguments of M. de Norpois (in the matter of art) were unanswerable simply because they were devoid of reality.

Since Bergotte did not sweep aside my objections, I confessed to him that they had been treated with contempt by M. de Norpois. "But he's an old goose!" was the answer. "He keeps on pecking at you because he imagines all the time that you're a piece of cake, or a slice of cuttle-fish." "What, you know Norpois?" asked Swann. "He's as dull as a wet Sunday," interrupted his wife, who had great faith in Bergotte's judgment, and was no doubt afraid that M. de Norpois might have spoken ill of her to us. "I tried to make him talk after dinner; I don't know if it's his age or his digestion, but I found him too sticky for words. I really thought I should have to 'dope' him." "Yes, isn't he?" Bergotte chimed in. "You see, he has to keep his mouth shut half the time so as not to use up all the stock of inanities that keep his shirt-front starched and his waistcoat white."

"I think that Bergotte and my wife are both very hard on him," came from Swann, who took the "line," in his own house, of being a plain, sensible man. "I quite see that Norpois cannot interest you very much, but from another point of view," (for Swann made a hobby of collecting scraps of "real life") "he is quite remarkable, quite a remarkable instance of a 'lover.' When he was Counsellor in Rome," he went on, after making sure that Gilberte could not hear him, "he had a mistress here in Paris with whom he was madly in love, and he found time to make the double journey twice a week to see her for a couple of hours. She was, as it happens, a most intelligent woman, and remarkably beautiful then; she's a dowager now. And he has had any number of others since. I'm sure I should have gone stark mad if the woman I was in love with lived in Paris and I had to be in Rome. Highly strung people ought always to love, as the lower orders say, 'beneath' them, so that their women have a material inducement to be at their disposal."

As he spoke, Swann realised that I might be applying this maxim to himself and Odette, and as, even among superior people, at the moment when they seem to be soaring with you above the plane of life, their personal pride is still basely human, he was overcome with profound irritation towards me. But it manifested itself only in the uneasiness of his glance. He said nothing to me at the time. Not that this need surprise us. When Racine (according to a story that is in fact apocryphal though its substance may be found recurring every day in Parisian life) made an allusion to Scarron in front of Louis XIV, the most powerful monarch on earth said nothing to the poet that evening. It was on the following day that he fell from grace.

But since a theory requires to be stated as a whole, Swann, after this momentary irritation, and after wiping his eyeglass, completed his thought in these words, words which were to assume later on in my memory the importance of a prophetic warning which I had not had the sense to heed: "The danger of that kind of love, however, is that the woman's subjection calms the man's jealousy for a time but also makes it more exacting. After a while he will force his mistress to live like one of those prisoners whose cells are kept lighted day and night to prevent their escaping. And that generally ends in trouble."

I reverted to M. de Norpois. "You must never trust him; he has the most wicked tongue," said Mme Swann in a tone which seemed to me to indicate that M. de Norpois had spoken ill of her, especially as Swann looked across at his wife with an air of rebuke, as though to stop her before she went too far.

Meanwhile Gilberte, who had twice been told to go and get ready to go out, remained listening to our conversation, sitting between her mother and her father, her head resting affectionately against the latter's shoulder. Nothing, at first sight, could be in greater contrast to Mme Swann, who was dark, than this child with her red hair and golden skin. But after a while one saw in Gilberte many of the features—for instance, the nose cut short with a sharp, unerring decision by the invisible sculptor whose chisel repeats its work upon successive generations—the expression, the movements of her mother; to take an illustration from another art, she recalled a portrait that was as yet a poor likeness of Mme Swann, whom the painter, from some colourist's whim, had posed in a partial disguise, dressed to go out to a party in Venetian "character." And since not only was she wearing a fair wig, but every atom of darkness had been evicted from her flesh which, stripped of its brown veils, seemed more naked, covered simply in rays shed by an internal sun, this "make-up" was not just superficial but incarnate: Gilberte had the air of embodying some fabulous animal or of having assumed a mythological fancy dress. This reddish skin was so exactly that of her father that nature seemed to have had, when Gilberte was being created, to solve the problem of how to reconstruct Mme Swann piecemeal, without any material at its disposal save the skin of M. Swann. And nature had utilised this to perfection, like a master carver who makes a point of leaving the grain, the knots of his wood in evidence. On Gilberte's face, at the corner of a perfect reproduction of Odette's nose, the skin was raised so as to preserve intact M. Swann's two moles. It was a new variety of Mme Swann that was thus obtained, growing there by her side like a white lilac-tree beside a purple. At the same time it would be wrong to imagine the line of demarcation between these two likenesses as absolutely clear-cut. Now and then, when Gilberte smiled, one could distinguish the oval of her father's cheek upon her mother's face, as though they had been put together to see what would result from the blend; this oval took shape as an embryo forms; it lengthened obliquely, swelled, and a moment later had

disappeared. In Gilberte's eyes there was the frank and honest gaze of her father; this was how she had looked at me when she gave me the agate marble and said "Keep it as a souvenir of our friendship." But were one to question Gilberte about what she had been doing, then one saw in those same eyes the embarrassment, the uncertainty, the prevarication, the misery that Odette used in the old days to betray, when Swann asked her where she had been and she gave him one of those lying answers which in those days drove the lover to despair and now made him abruptly change the conversation as an incurious and prudent husband. Often, in the Champs-Élysées, I was disturbed to see this look in Gilberte's eyes. But as a rule my fears were unfounded. For in her, a purely physical survival of her mother, this look (if no other) had ceased to have any meaning. It was when she had been to her classes, when she must go home for some lesson, that Gilberte's pupils executed that movement which, in the past, in Odette's eyes, had been caused by the fear of disclosing that she had opened the door that day to one of her lovers, or was at that moment in a hurry to get to some assignation. Thus did one see the two natures of M. and Mme Swann ripple and flow and overlap one upon the other in the body of this Mélusine.

It is, of course, common knowledge that a child takes after both its father and its mother. And yet the distribution of the qualities and defects which it inherits is so oddly planned that, of two good qualities which seemed inseparable in one of the parents, only one will be found in the child, and allied to the very fault in the other parent which seemed most irreconcilable with it. Indeed, the embodiment of a good moral quality in an incompatible physical blemish is often one of the laws of filial resemblance. Of two sisters, one will combine with the proud bearing of her father the mean little soul of her mother; the other, abundantly endowed with the paternal intelligence, will present it to the world in the aspect which her mother has made familiar; her mother's shapeless nose and puckered belly and even her voice have become the bodily vestment of gifts which one had learned to recognise beneath a superb presence. With the result that of each of the sisters one can say with equal justification that it is she who takes more after one or other of her parents. It is true that Gilberte was an only child, but there were, at the least, two Gilbertes. The two natures, her father's and her mother's, did more than just blend themselves in her; they disputed the possession of her—and even that would be not entirely accurate since it would give the impression that a third Gilberte was in the meantime suffering from being the prey of the two others. Whereas Gilberte was alternately one and then the other, and at any given moment only one of the two, that is to say incapable, when she was not being good, of suffering accordingly, the better Gilberte being unable at the time, on account of her momentary absence, to detect the other's lapse from virtue. And so the less good of the two was free to enjoy pleasures of an ignoble kind. When the other spoke to you with her father's heart she held broad and generous views, and you would have liked to engage with her upon a fine and beneficent enterprise; you told her so, but, just as your arrangements were being completed, her mother's heart would already have claimed its turn, and hers was the voice that answered; and you would be disappointed and vexed—almost baffled, as though by the substitution of one person for another—by a mean remark, a sly snigger, in which Gilberte would take delight, since they sprang from what she herself at that moment was. Indeed, the disparity was at times so great between the two Gilbertes that you asked yourself, though without finding an answer, what on earth you could have said or done to her to find her now so different. When she herself had suggested meeting you somewhere, not only would she fail to appear and would offer no excuse afterwards, but, whatever the influence might have been that had made her change her mind, she would appear so different that you might well have supposed that, taken in by a resemblance such as forms the plot of the *Menaechmi*, you were now talking to a different person from the one who had so sweetly expressed a desire to see you, had she not shown signs of an ill-humour which revealed that she felt herself to be in the wrong and wished to avoid entering into explanations.

"Now then, run along and get ready; you're keeping us waiting," her mother reminded her.

"I'm so happy here with my little Papa; I want to stay just for a minute," replied Gilberte, burying her head beneath the arm of her father, who passed his fingers lovingly through her fair hair.

Swann was one of those men who, having lived for a long time amid the illusions of love, have seen the blessings they have brought to a number of women increase the happiness of those women without exciting in them any gratitude, any tenderness towards their benefactors; but who believe that in their children they can feel an affection which, being incarnate in their own name, will enable them to survive after their death. When there should no longer be any Charles Swann, there would still be a Mlle Swann, or a Mme X, *née* Swann, who would continue to love the vanished father. Indeed, to love him too well perhaps, Swann may have been thinking, for he acknowledged Gilberte's caress with a "You're a good girl," in the tone softened by uneasiness to which, when we think of the future, we are prompted by the too passionate affection of a person who is destined to survive us. To conceal his emotion, he joined in our talk about Berma. He pointed out to me, but in a detached, bored tone, as though he wished to remain somehow detached from what he was saying, with what intelligence, with what an astonishing fitness the actress said to Oenone, "You knew it!" He was right. That intonation at least had a validity that was really intelligible, and might thereby have satisfied my desire to find incontestable reasons for admiring Berma. But it was because of its very clarity that it did not in the least satisfy me. Her intonation was so ingenious, so definite in intention and meaning, that it seemed to exist by itself, so that any intelligent actress might have acquired it. It was a fine idea; but whoever else might express it as fully must possess it equally. It remained to Berma's credit that she had discovered it, but can one use the word "discover" when the object in question is something that would not be different if one had been given it, something that does not belong essentially to one's own nature since someone else may afterwards reproduce it?

"Upon my soul, your presence among us does raise the tone of the conversation!" Swann observed to me, as though to excuse himself to Bergotte; for he had formed the habit, in the Guermantes set, of entertaining great artists as if they were just ordinary friends whom one seeks only to provide with the opportunity to eat the dishes or play the games they like, or, in the country, indulge in whatever form of sport they please. "It seems to me that we're talking a great deal about *art*," he went on. "But it's so nice, I do love it!" said Mme Swann, throwing me a look of gratitude, from good nature as well as because she had not abandoned her old aspirations towards intellectual conversation. After this it was to others of the party, and principally to Gilberte, that Bergotte addressed himself. I had told him everything that I felt with a freedom which had astonished me and which was due to the fact that, having acquired with him, years before (in the course of all those hours of solitary reading, in which he was to me merely the better part of myself), the habit of sincerity, of frankness, of confidence, I found him less intimidating than a person with whom I was talking for the first time. And yet, for the same reason, I was very uneasy about the impression that I must have been making on him, the contempt that I had supposed he would feel for my ideas dating not from that afternoon but from the already distant time in which I had begun to read his books in our garden at Combray. I ought perhaps to have reminded myself nevertheless that since it was in all sincerity, abandoning myself to the train of my thoughts, that I had felt on the one hand so intensely in sympathy with the work of Bergotte and on the other hand, in the theatre, a disappointment the reasons for which I did not know, those two instinctive impulses could not be so very different from one another, but must be obedient to the same laws; and that that mind of Bergotte's which I had loved in his books could not be entirely alien and hostile to my disappointment and to my inability to express it. For my intelligence must be one—perhaps indeed there exists but a single intelligence of which everyone is a co-tenant, an intelligence towards which each of us from out of his own separate body turns his eyes, as in a theatre where, if everyone has his own separate seat, there is on the other hand but a single stage. Doubtless the ideas which I was tempted to seek to disentangle were not those which Bergotte usually explored in his books. But if it was one and the same intelligence which we had, he and I, at our disposal, he must, when he heard me express those ideas, be reminded of them, cherish them, smile upon them, keeping probably, in spite of what I supposed, before his mind's eye, quite a different part of his intelligence than that of which an excerpt had passed into his books, an excerpt upon which I had based my notion of his whole mental universe. Just as priests, having the widest experience of the human heart, are best able to pardon the sins which they do not themselves commit, so genius, having the widest experience of the human intelligence, can best understand the ideas most directly in opposition to those which form the foundation of its own works. I ought to have told myself all this (though in fact it is none too consoling a thought, for the benevolent condescension of great minds has as a corollary the incomprehension and hostility of small; and one derives far less happiness from the amiability of a great writer, which one can find after all in his books, than suffering from the hostility of a woman whom one did not choose for her intelligence but cannot help loving). I ought to have told myself all this, but I did not; I was convinced that I had appeared a fool to Bergotte, when Gilberte whispered in my ear:

"You can't think how overjoyed I am, because you've made a conquest of my great friend Bergotte. He's been telling Mamma that he found you extremely intelligent."

"Where are we going?" I asked her.

"Oh, wherever you like. You know it's all the same to me."

But since the incident that had occurred on the anniversary of her grandfather's death I had begun to wonder whether Gilberte's character was not other than I had supposed, whether that indifference to what was to be done, that docility, that calm, that gentle and constant submissiveness did not indeed conceal passionate longings which her pride would not allow her to reveal and which she disclosed only by her sudden resistance whenever by any chance they were thwarted.

As Bergotte lived in the same neighbourhood as my parents, we left the house together. In the carriage he spoke to me of my health: "Our friends were telling me that you had been ill. I'm very sorry. And yet, after all, I'm not too sorry, because I can see quite well that you are able to enjoy the pleasures of the mind, and they are probably what means most to you, as to everyone who has known them."

Alas, how little I felt that what he was saying applied to me, whom all reasoning, however exalted it might be, left cold, who was happy only in moments of pure idleness, when I was comfortable and well. I felt how purely material was everything that I desired in life, and how easily I could dispense with the intellect. As I made no distinction among my pleasures between those that came to me from different sources, of varying depth and permanence, I thought, when the moment came to answer him, that I should have liked an existence in which I was on intimate terms with the Duchesse de Guermantes and often came across, as in the old toll-house in the Champs-Élysées, a fusty coolness that would remind me of Combray. And in this ideal existence which I dared not confide to him, the pleasures of the mind found no place.

"No, Monsieur, the pleasures of the mind count for very little with me; it is not them that I seek after; indeed I don't even know that I have ever tasted them."

"You really think not?" he replied. "Well, you know, after all, that must be what you like best—at least that's my guess, that's what I think."

He did not convince me, of course, and yet I already felt happier, less constricted. After what M. de Norpois had said to me, I had regarded my moments of day-dreaming, of enthusiasm, of self-confidence as purely subjective and false. But according to Bergotte, who appeared to understand my case, it seemed that it was quite the contrary, that the symptom I ought to disregard was, in fact, my doubts, my disgust with myself.

Moreover, what he had said about M. de Norpois took most of the sting out of a sentence from which I had supposed that no appeal was possible.

"Are you being properly looked after?" Bergotte asked me. "Who is treating you?" I told him that I had seen, and should probably go on seeing, Cottard. "But that's not at all the sort of man you want!" he told me. "I know nothing about him as a doctor. But I've met him at Mme Swann's. The man's an imbecile. Even supposing that that doesn't prevent his being a good doctor, which I hesitate to believe, it does prevent his being a good doctor for artists, for intelligent people. People like you must have suitable doctors, I would almost go so far as to say treatment and medicines specially adapted to themselves. Cottard will bore you, and that alone will prevent his treatment from having any effect. Besides, the proper course of treatment cannot possibly be the same for you as for any Tom, Dick or Harry. Nine tenths of the ills from which intelligent people suffer spring from their intellect. They need at least a doctor who understands *that* disease. How do you expect Cottard to be able to treat you? He has made allowances for the difficulty of digesting sauces, for gastric trouble, but he has made no allowance for the effect of reading Shakespeare. So that his calculations are inaccurate in your case, the balance is upset; you see, always the little bottle-imp bobbing up again. He will find that you have a distended stomach; he has no need to examine you for it, since he has it already in his eye. You can see it there, reflected in his glasses."

This manner of speaking tired me greatly. I said to myself with the stupidity of common sense: "There's no more a distended stomach reflected in Professor Cottard's glasses than there are inanities stored behind M. de Norpois's white waistcoat."

"I should recommend you, instead," went on Bergotte, "to consult Dr du Boulbon, who is an extremely intelligent man." "He's a great admirer of your books," I replied.

I saw that Bergotte knew this, and I concluded that kindred spirits soon come together, that one has few really "unknown friends." What Bergotte had said to me with respect to Cottard impressed me, while running contrary to everything that I myself believed. I was in no way disturbed at finding my doctor a bore; what I expected of him was that, thanks to an art whose laws escaped me, he should pronounce on the subject of my health an infallible oracle after consultation of my entrails. And I did not at all require that, with the aid of an intelligence in which I could compete with him, he should seek to understand mine, which I pictured to myself merely as a means, of no importance in itself, of trying to attain to certain external verities. I very much doubted whether intelligent people required a different form of hygiene from imbeciles, and I was quite prepared to submit myself to the latter.

"I'll tell you who does need a good doctor, and that's our friend Swann," said Bergotte. And on my asking whether he was ill, "Well, don't you see, he's typical of the man who has married a whore, and has to pocket a dozen insults a day from women who refuse to meet his wife or men who have slept with her. Just look, one day when you're there, at the way he lifts his eyebrows when he comes in, to see who's in the room."

The malice with which Bergotte spoke thus to a stranger of the friends in whose house he had for so long been received as a welcome guest was as new to me as the almost tender tone he invariably adopted towards them in their presence. Certainly a person like my great-aunt, for instance, would have been incapable of treating any of us to the blandishments which I had heard Bergotte lavishing upon Swann. Even to the people whom she liked, she enjoyed saying disagreeable things. But behind their backs she would never have uttered a word to which they might not have listened. There was nothing less like the social world than our society at Combray. The Swanns' was already a step on the way to it, towards its inconstant waters. If they had not yet reached the open sea, they were certainly in the estuary. "This is all between ourselves," said Bergotte as he left me outside my own door. A few years later I should have answered: "I never repeat things." That is the ritual phrase of society people, from which the slanderer always derives a false reassurance. It is what I would have said then and there to Bergotte—for one does not invent everything one says, especially when one is acting merely as a social being—but I did not yet know the formula. What my great-aunt, on the other hand, would have said on a similar occasion was: "If you don't wish it to be repeated, why do you say it?" That is the answer of the unsociable, of the dissenter. I was nothing of that sort: I bowed my head in silence.

Men of letters who were in my eyes persons of considerable importance had to intrigue for years before they succeeded in forming with Bergotte relations which remained always dimly literary and never emerged beyond the four walls of his study, whereas I had now been installed among the friends of the great writer, straight off and without any effort, like someone who, instead of standing in a queue for hours in order to secure a bad seat in a theatre, is shown in at once to the best, having entered by a door that is closed to the public. If Swann had thus opened such a door to me, it was doubtless because, just as a king finds himself naturally inviting his children's friends into the royal box, or on board the royal yacht, so Gilberte's parents received their daughter's friends among all the precious things that they had in their house and the even more precious intimacies that were enshrined there. But at the time I thought, and perhaps was right in thinking, that this friendliness on Swann's part was aimed indirectly at my parents. I seemed to remember having heard once at Combray that he had suggested to them that, in view of my admiration for Bergotte, he should take me to dine with him, and that my parents had declined, saying that I was too young and too highly strung to "go out." My parents doubtless represented to certain other people (precisely those who seemed to me the most wonderful) something quite different from what they were to me, so that, just as when the lady in pink had paid my father a tribute of which he had shown himself so unworthy, I should have wished them to understand what an inestimable present I had just received and, to show their gratitude to that generous and courteous Swann who had offered it to me, or to them rather, without seeming any more conscious of its



value than the charming Mage with the arched nose and fair hair in Luini's fresco, to whom, it was said, Swann had at one time been thought to bear a striking resemblance.

Unfortunately, this favour that Swann had done me, which, on returning home, before I had even taken off my greatcoat, I reported to my parents in the hope that it would awaken in their hearts an emotion equal to my own and would determine them upon some immense and decisive gesture towards the Swanns, did not appear to be greatly appreciated by them. "Swann introduced you to Bergotte? An excellent acquaintance, a charming relationship!" exclaimed my father sarcastically: "That really does crown it all!" Alas, when I went on to say that Bergotte was by no means inclined to admire M. de Norpois:

"I dare say!" retorted my father. "That simply proves that he's a false and malevolent fellow. My poor boy, you never had much common sense, but I'm sorry to see that you've fallen among people who will send you off the rails altogether."

Already the mere fact of my associating with the Swanns had far from delighted my parents. This introduction to Bergotte seemed to them a fatal but natural consequence of an original mistake, namely their own weakness, which my grandfather would have called a "want of circumspection." I felt that in order to put the finishing touch to their ill humour, it only remained for me to tell them that this perverse fellow who did not appreciate M. de Norpois had found me extremely intelligent. For I had observed that whenever my father decided that anyone, one of my school friends for instance, was going astray—as I was at that moment—if that person had the approval of somebody whom my father did not respect, he would see in this testimony the confirmation of his own stern judgment. The evil merely seemed to him the greater. Already I could hear him exclaiming, "Of course, it all hangs together," an expression that terrified me by the vagueness and vastness of the reforms the introduction of which into my quiet life it seemed to threaten. But since, even if I did not tell them what Bergotte had said of me, nothing could anyhow efface the impression my parents had already formed, that it should be made slightly worse mattered little. Besides, they seemed to me so unfair, so completely mistaken, that not only had I no hope, I had scarcely any desire to bring them to a more equitable point of view. However, sensing, as the words were passing my lips, how alarmed my parents would be at the thought that I had found favour in the sight of a person who dismissed clever men as fools, who had earned the contempt of all decent people, and praise from whom, since it seemed to me a thing to be desired, would only encourage me in wrongdoing, it was in faltering tones and with a slightly shamefaced air that I reached the coda: "He told the Swanns that he had found me extremely intelligent." Just as a poisoned dog in a field flings itself without knowing why at the grass which is precisely the antidote to the toxin that it has swallowed, so I, without in the least suspecting it, had said the one thing in the world that was capable of overcoming in my parents this prejudice with respect to Bergotte, a prejudice which all the best arguments that I could have put forward, all the tributes that I could have paid him, must have proved powerless to defeat. Instantly the situation changed.

"Oh! he said that he found you intelligent," repeated my mother. "I'm glad to hear that, because he's a man of talent."

"What! he said that, did he?" my father joined in ... "I don't for a moment deny his literary distinction, before which the whole world bows; only it's a pity that he should lead that disreputable existence to which old Norpois made a guarded allusion," he went on, not seeing that against the sovereign virtue of the magic words which I had just pronounced, the depravity of Bergotte's morals was scarcely more capable of holding out any longer than the falsity of his judgment.

"But, my dear," Mamma interrupted, "we've no proof that it's true. People say all sorts of things. Besides, M. de Norpois may have the most perfect manners in the world, but he's not always very good-natured, especially about people who are not exactly his sort."

"That's quite true; I've noticed it myself," my father admitted.

"And then, too, a great deal ought to be forgiven Bergotte since he thinks well of my little son," Mamma went on, stroking my hair and fastening upon me a long and pensive gaze.

My mother had not in fact awaited this verdict from Bergotte before telling me that I might ask Gilberte to tea whenever I had friends coming. But I dared not do so for two reasons. The first was that at Gilberte's nothing else but tea was ever served. Whereas at home Mamma insisted on there being hot chocolate as well. I was afraid that Gilberte might regard this as common and so conceive a great contempt for us. The other reason was a formal difficulty, a question of procedure which I could never succeed in settling. When I arrived at Mme Swann's she used to ask me: "And how is your mother?"

I had made several overtures to Mamma to find out whether she would do the same when Gilberte came to us, a point which seemed to me more serious than, at the Court of Louis XIV, the use of "Monseigneur." But Mamma would not hear of it for a moment.

"Certainly not. I do not know Mme Swann."

"But neither does she know you."

"I never said she did, but we're not obliged to behave in exactly the same way about everything. I shall find other ways of being nice to Gilberte than Mme Swann does with you."

But I remained unconvinced, and preferred not to invite Gilberte.

Leaving my parents, I went upstairs to change my clothes and on emptying my pockets came suddenly upon the envelope which the Swann's butler had handed me before showing me into the drawing-room. I was now alone. I opened it; inside was a card on which was indicated the name of the lady whom I ought to have taken in to luncheon.

It was about this period that Bloch overthrew my conception of the world and opened for me fresh possibilities of happiness (which, as it happened, were to change later on into possibilities of suffering), by assuring me that, contrary to all that I had believed at the time of my walks along the Méséglise way, women never asked for anything better than to make love. He added to this service a second, the value of which I was not to appreciate until much later: it was he who took me for the first time into a house of assignation. He had indeed told me that there were any number of pretty women whom one might enjoy. But I could see them only in a vague outline for which those houses were to enable me to substitute actual human features. So that if I owed to Bloch—for his “good tidings” that happiness and the enjoyment of beauty were not inaccessible things that we have made a meaningless sacrifice in renouncing for ever—a debt of gratitude of the same kind as that we owe to an optimistic physician or philosopher who has given us reason to hope for longevity in this world and not to be entirely cut off from it when we shall have passed into another, the houses of assignation which I frequented some years later—by furnishing me with samples of happiness, by allowing me to add to the beauty of women that element which we are powerless to invent, which is something more than a mere summary of former beauties, that present indeed divine, the only one that we cannot bestow upon ourselves, before which all the logical creations of our intellect pale, and which we can seek from reality alone: an individual charm—deserved to be ranked by me with those other benefactors more recent in origin but of comparable utility (before finding which we used to imagine without any warmth the seductive charms of Mantegna, of Wagner, of Siena, on the basis of our knowledge of other painters, other composers, other cities): namely illustrated editions of the Old Masters, symphony concerts, and guidebooks to historic towns. But the house to which Bloch took me (and which he himself in fact had long ceased to visit) was of too inferior a grade and its personnel too mediocre and too little varied to be able to satisfy my old or to stimulate new curiosities. The mistress of this house knew none of the women with whom one asked her to negotiate, and was always suggesting others whom one did not want. She boasted to me of one in particular, of whom, with a smile full of promise (as though this was a great rarity and a special treat), she would say: “She’s Jewish. How about that?” (It was doubtless for this reason that she called her Rachel.) And with an inane affectation of excitement which she hoped would prove contagious, and which ended in a hoarse gurgle, almost of sensual satisfaction: “Think of that, my boy, a Jewess! Wouldn’t that be thrilling? Rrrr!” This Rachel, of whom I caught a glimpse without her seeing me, was dark, not pretty, but intelligent-looking, and would pass the tip of her tongue over her lips as she smiled with a look of boundless impertinence at the customers who were introduced to her and whom I could hear making conversation. Her thin and narrow face was framed with curly black hair, irregular as though outlined in pen-strokes upon a wash-drawing in Indian ink. Every evening I promised the madame, who offered her to me with a special insistence, boasting of her superior intelligence and her education, that I would not fail to come some day on purpose to make the acquaintance of Rachel, whom I had nicknamed “Rachel when from the Lord.”<sup>7</sup> But the first evening I had heard her say to the madame as she was leaving the house: “That’s settled then. I shall be free tomorrow, so if you have anyone you won’t forget to send for me.”

And these words had prevented me from recognising her as a person because they had made me classify her at once in a general category of women whose habit, common to all of them, was to come there in the evening to see whether there might not be a louis or two to be earned. She would simply vary her formula, saying indifferently: “If you need me” or “If you need anybody.”

The madame, who was not familiar with Halévy’s opera, did not know why I always called the girl “Rachel when from the Lord.” But failure to understand a joke has never yet made anyone find it less amusing, and it was always with a wholehearted laugh that she would say to me:

“Then there’s nothing doing tonight? When am I going to fix you up with ‘Rachel when from the Lord’? How do you say that: ‘Rachel when from the Lord’? Oh, that’s a nice one, that is. I’m going to make a match of you two. You won’t regret it, you’ll see.”

Once I nearly made up my mind, but she had “gone to press,” another time she was in the hands of the “hair-dresser,” an old gentleman who never did anything to the women except pour oil on their loosened hair and then comb it. And I grew tired of waiting, even though several of the humbler denizens of the place (so-called working girls, though they always seemed to be out of work) had come to make tea for me and to hold long conversations to which, despite the gravity of the subjects discussed, the partial or total nudity of my interlocutors gave an attractive simplicity. I ceased moreover to go to this house because, anxious to present a token of my good-will to the woman who kept it and was in need of furniture, I had given her a few pieces—notably a big sofa—which I had inherited from my aunt Léonie. I used never to see them, for want of space had prevented my parents from taking them in at home, and they were stored in a warehouse. But as soon as I saw them again in the house where these women were putting them to their own uses, all the virtues that pervaded my aunt’s room at Combray at once appeared to me, tortured by the cruel contact to which I had abandoned them in their defencelessness! Had I outraged the dead, I would not have suffered such remorse. I returned no more to visit their new mistress, for they seemed to me to be alive and to be appealing to me, like those apparently inanimate objects in a Persian fairy-tale, in which imprisoned human souls are undergoing martyrdom and pleading for deliverance. Besides, as our memory does not as a rule present things to us in their chronological sequence but as it were by a reflection in which the order of the parts is reversed, I remembered only long afterwards that it was upon that same sofa that, many years before, I had tasted for the first time the delights of love with one of my girl cousins, with whom I had not known where to go until she somewhat rashly suggested our taking advantage of a moment in which aunt Léonie had left her room.

A whole lot more of my aunt Léonie's things, and notably a magnificent set of old silver plate, I sold, against my parents' advice, so as to have more money to spend, and to be able to send more flowers to Mme Swann who would greet me, after receiving an immense basket of orchids, with: "If I were your father, I should have you up before the magistrate for this." How could I suppose that one day I might particularly regret the loss of my silver plate, and rank certain other pleasures more highly than that (which might perhaps have shrunk to nothing) of paying courtesies to Gilberte's parents. Similarly, it was with Gilberte in my mind, and in order not to be separated from her, that I had decided not to enter upon a career of diplomacy abroad. It is always thus, impelled by a state of mind which is destined not to last, that we make our irrevocable decisions. I could scarcely imagine that that strange substance which was housed in Gilberte, and which radiated from her parents and her home, leaving me indifferent to all things else, could be liberated, could migrate into another person. Unquestionably the same substance, and yet one that would have a wholly different effect on me. For the same sickness evolves; and a delicious poison can no longer be taken with the same impunity when, with the passing of the years, the heart's resistance has diminished.

My parents meanwhile would have liked to see the intelligence that Bergotte had discerned in me made manifest in some outstanding piece of work. When I still did not know the Swanns I thought that I was prevented from working by the state of agitation into which I was thrown by the impossibility of seeing Gilberte when I chose. But now that their door stood open to me, scarcely had I sat down at my desk than I would get up and hurry round to them. And after I had left them and was back at home, my isolation was apparent only, my mind was powerless to swim against the stream of words on which I had allowed myself mechanically to be borne for hours on end. Sitting alone, I continued to fashion remarks such as might have pleased or amused the Swanns, and to make this pastime more entertaining I myself took the parts of those absent players, putting to myself fictitious questions so chosen that my brilliant epigrams served simply as apt repartee. Though conducted in silence, this exercise was none the less a conversation and not a meditation, my solitude a mental social round in which it was not I myself but imaginary interlocutors who controlled my choice of words, and in which, as I formulated, instead of the thoughts that I believed to be true, those that came easily to my mind and involved no retrogression from the outside inwards, I experienced the sort of pleasure, entirely passive, which sitting still affords to anyone who is burdened with a sluggish digestion.

Had I been less firmly resolved upon settling down definitively to work, I should perhaps have made an effort to begin at once. But since my resolution was explicit, since within twenty-four hours, in the empty frame of the following day where everything was so well arranged because I myself was not yet in it, my good intentions would be realised without difficulty, it was better not to start on an evening when I felt ill-prepared. The following days were not, alas, to prove more propitious. But I was reasonable. It would have been puerile, on the part of one who had waited now for years, not to put up with a postponement of two or three days. Confident that by the day after tomorrow I should have written several pages, I said not a word more to my parents of my decision; I preferred to remain patient for a few hours and then to bring to a convinced and comforted grandmother a sample of work that was already under way. Unfortunately the next day was not that vast, extraneous expanse of time to which I had feverishly looked forward. When it drew to a close, my laziness and my painful struggle to overcome certain internal obstacles had simply lasted twenty-four hours longer. And at the end of several days, my plans not having matured, I had no longer the same hope that they would be realised at once, and hence no longer the heart to subordinate everything else to their realisation: I began again to stay up late, having no longer, to oblige me to go to bed early one evening, the certain hope of seeing my work begun next morning. I needed, before I could recover my creative energy, a few days of relaxation, and the only time my grandmother ventured, in a gentle and disillusioned tone, to frame the reproach: "Well, this famous work, don't we even speak about it any more?", I resented her intrusion, convinced that in her inability to see that my decision was irrevocably made, she had further and perhaps for a long time postponed its execution by the shock which her denial of justice had administered to my nerves and under the impact of which I should be disinclined to begin my work. She felt that her scepticism had stumbled blindly against a genuine intention. She apologised, kissing me: "I'm sorry, I shan't say another word," and, so that I should not be discouraged, assured me that as soon as I was quite well again, the work would come of its own accord to boot.

Besides, I said to myself, in spending all my time with the Swanns, am I not doing exactly what Bergotte does? To my parents it seemed almost as though, idle as I was, I was leading, since it was spent in the same salon as a great writer, the life most favourable to the growth of talent. And yet the assumption that anyone can be dispensed from having to create that talent for himself, from within himself, and can acquire it from someone else, is as erroneous as to suppose that a man can keep himself in good health (in spite of neglecting all the rules of hygiene and of indulging in the worst excesses) merely by dining out often in the company of a physician. The person, incidentally, who was most completely taken in by this illusion which misled me as well as my parents, was Mme Swann. When I explained to her that I was unable to come, that I must stay at home and work, she looked as though she felt that I was making a great fuss about nothing, that I was being rather stupidly pretentious:

"After all, Bergotte's coming. Do you mean you don't think what he writes is any good? It will be even better very soon," she went on, "because he's sharper and pithier in newspaper articles than in his books, where he's apt to pad a bit. I've arranged that in future he's to do the *leaders* in the *Figaro*. He'll be distinctly the *right man in the right place* there." And finally she added: "Do come! He'll tell you better than anyone what you ought to do."

And so, just as one invites a gentleman ranker with his colonel, it was in the interests of my career, and as though masterpieces arose out of "getting to know" people, that she told me not to fail to come to dinner next day with Bergotte.

Thus, no more from the Swanns than from my parents, that is to say from those who, at different times, had seemed bound to resist it, was there any further opposition to that delectable existence in which I might see Gilberte as often as I chose, with enchantment if not with peace of mind. There can be no peace of mind in love, since what one has obtained is never anything but a new starting-point for further desires. So long as I had been unable to go to her house, with my eyes fixed upon that inaccessible happiness, I could not even imagine the fresh grounds for anxiety that lay in wait for me there. Once the resistance of her parents was broken, and the problem solved at last, it began to set itself anew, each time in different terms. In this sense it was indeed a new friendship that began each day. Each evening, on arriving home, I reminded myself that I had things to say to Gilberte of prime importance, things upon which our whole friendship hung, and these things were never the same. But at least I was happy, and no further threat arose to endanger my happiness. One was to appear, alas, from a quarter in which I had never detected any peril, namely from Gilberte and myself. And yet I should have been tormented by what, on the contrary, reassured me, by what I mistook for happiness. We are, when we love, in an abnormal state, capable of giving at once to the most apparently simple accident, an accident which may at any moment occur, a seriousness which in itself it would not entail. What makes us so happy is the presence in our hearts of an unstable element which we contrive perpetually to maintain and of which we cease almost to be aware so long as it is not displaced. In reality, there is in love a permanent strain of suffering which happiness neutralises, makes potential only, postpones, but which may at any moment become, what it would long since have been had we not obtained what we wanted, excruciating.

On several occasions I sensed that Gilberte was anxious to put off my visits. It is true that when I was at all anxious to see her I had only to get myself invited by her parents who were increasingly persuaded of my excellent influence over her. "Thanks to them," I thought, "my love is in no danger; seeing that I have them on my side, I can set my mind at rest since they have complete authority over Gilberte." Until, alas, detecting certain signs of impatience which she betrayed when her father asked me to the house almost against her will, I wondered whether what I had regarded as a protection for my happiness was not in fact the secret reason why that happiness could not last.

The last time I came to see Gilberte, it was raining; she had been asked to a dancing lesson in the house of some people whom she knew too slightly to be able to take me there with her. In view of the dampness of the air I had taken rather more caffeine than usual. Perhaps on account of the weather, perhaps because she had some objection to the house in which this party was being given, Mme Swann, as her daughter was about to leave, called her back in the sharpest of tones: "Gilberte!" and pointed to me, to indicate that I had come there to see her and that she ought to stay with me. This "Gilberte!" had been uttered, or shouted rather, with the best of intentions towards myself, but from the way in which Gilberte shrugged her shoulders as she took off her outdoor clothes I divined that her mother had unwillingly hastened a process, which until then it might perhaps have been possible to arrest, which was gradually drawing my beloved away from me. "One doesn't have to go out dancing every day," Odette told her daughter, with a sagacity acquired no doubt in earlier days from Swann. Then, becoming once more Odette, she began to speak to her daughter in English. At once it was as though a wall had sprung up to hide from me a part of Gilberte's life, as though an evil genius had spirited her far away. In a language that we know, we have substituted for the opacity of sounds the transparency of ideas. But a language which we do not know is a fortress sealed, within whose walls the one we love is free to play us false, while we, standing outside, desperately keyed up in our impotence, can see, can prevent nothing. So this conversation in English, at which a month earlier I should merely have smiled, interspersed with a few proper names in French which served only to intensify and pinpoint my anxieties, and conducted within a few feet of me by two motionless persons, was as painful to me, left me as much abandoned and alone, as the forcible abduction of my companion. At length Mme Swann left us. That day, perhaps from resentment against me, the involuntary cause of her not going out to enjoy herself, perhaps also because, guessing her to be angry with me, I was pre-emptively colder than usual with her, Gilberte's face, divested of every sign of joy, bleak, bare, ravaged, seemed all afternoon to be harbouring a melancholy regret for the *pas-de-quatre* which my arrival had prevented her from going to dance, and to be defying every living creature, beginning with myself, to understand the subtle reasons that had induced in her a sentimental attachment to the boston. She confined herself to exchanging with me now and again, on the weather, the increasing violence of the rain, the fastness of the clock, a conversation punctuated with silences and monosyllables, in which I myself persisted, with a sort of desperate rage, in destroying those moments which we might have devoted to friendship and happiness. And on each of our remarks a sort of transcendent harshness was conferred by the paroxysm of their stupefying insignificance, which at the same time consoled me, for it prevented Gilberte from being taken in by the banality of my observations and the indifference of my tone. In vain did I say: "I thought the other day that the clock was slow, if anything," she clearly understood me to mean: "How nasty you are!" Obstinate as I might protract, over the whole length of that rain-sodden afternoon, the dull cloud of words through which no fitful ray shone, I knew that my coldness was not so unalterably fixed as I pretended, and that Gilberte must be fully aware that if, after already saying it to her three times, I had hazarded a fourth repetition of the statement that the evenings were drawing in, I should have had difficulty in restraining myself from bursting into tears. When she was like this, when no smile filled her eyes or opened up her face, I cannot describe the devastating monotony that stamped her melancholy eyes and sullen features. Her face,

grown almost ugly, reminded me then of those dreary beaches where the sea, ebbing far out, wearies one with its faint shimmering, everywhere the same, encircled by an immutable low horizon. At length, seeing no sign in Gilberte of the happy change for which I had been waiting now for some hours, I told her that she was not being nice. "It's you who are not being nice," was her answer. "Yes I am!" I wondered what I could have done, and, finding no answer, put the question to her. "Naturally, you think yourself nice!" she said to me with a laugh, and went on laughing. Whereupon I felt how agonising it was for me not to be able to attain to that other, more elusive plane of her mind which her laughter reflected. It seemed, that laughter, to mean: "No, no, I'm not going to be taken in by anything that you say, I know you're mad about me, but that leaves me neither hot nor cold, for I don't care a rap for you." But I told myself that, after all, laughter was not a language so well defined that I could be certain of understanding what this laugh really meant. And Gilberte's words were affectionate. "But how am I not being nice," I asked her, "tell me—I'll do anything you want." "No; that wouldn't be any good. I can't explain." For a moment I was afraid that she thought that I did not love her, and this was for me a fresh agony, no less acute, but one that required a different dialectic. "If you knew how much you were hurting me you would tell me." But this pain which, had she doubted my love, must have rejoiced her, seemed instead to irritate her the more. Then, realising my mistake, making up my mind to pay no more attention to what she had said, letting her (without believing her) assure me: "I really did love you; you'll see one day" (that day on which the guilty are convinced that their innocence will be made clear, and which, for some mysterious reason, never happens to be the day on which their evidence is taken), I suddenly had the courage to resolve never to see her again, and without telling her yet since she would not have believed me.

Grief that is caused by a person one loves can be bitter, even when it is interspersed with preoccupations, occupations, pleasures in which that person is not involved and from which our attention is diverted only now and again to return to the beloved. But when such a grief has its birth—as was the case with mine—at a moment when the happiness of seeing that person fills us to the exclusion of all else, the sharp depression that then affects our spirits, hitherto sunny, sustained and calm, lets loose in us a raging storm against which we feel we may not be capable of struggling to the end. The storm that was blowing in my heart was so violent that I made my way home battered and bruised, feeling that I could recover my breath only by retracing my steps, by returning, upon whatever pretext, into Gilberte's presence. But she would have said to herself: "Back again! Evidently I can do what I like with him: he'll come back every time, and the more wretched he is when he leaves me the more docile he'll be." Besides, I was irresistibly drawn towards her by my thoughts, and those alternative orientations, that wild spinning of my inner compass, persisted after I had reached home, and expressed themselves in the mutually contradictory letters to Gilberte which I began to draft.

I was about to pass through one of those difficult crises which we generally find that we have to face at various stages in life, and which, for all that there has been no change in our character, in our nature (that nature which itself creates our loves, and almost creates the women we love, down to their very faults), we do not face in the same way on each occasion, that is to say at every age. At such moments our life is divided, and so to speak distributed over a pair of scales, in two counterpoised pans which between them contain it all. In one there is our desire not to displease, not to appear too humble to the person whom we love without being able to understand, but whom we find it more astute at times to appear almost to disregard, so that she shall not have that sense of her own indispensability which may turn her from us; in the other scale there is a feeling of pain—and one that is not localised and partial only—which cannot be assuaged unless, abandoning every thought of pleasing the woman and of making her believe that we can do without her, we go to her at once. If we withdraw from the pan that holds our pride a small quantity of the will-power which we have weakly allowed to wither with age, if we add to the pan that holds our suffering a physical pain which we have acquired and have allowed to get worse, then, instead of the brave solution that would have carried the day at twenty, it is the other, grown too heavy and insufficiently counter-balanced, that pulls us down at fifty. All the more because situations, while repeating themselves, tend to alter, and there is every likelihood that, in middle life or in old age, we shall have had the fatal self-indulgence of complicating our love by an intrusion of habit which adolescence, detained by too many other duties, less free to choose, knows nothing of.

I had just written Gilberte a letter in which I allowed my fury to thunder, not however without throwing her the lifebuoy of a few words disposed as though by accident on the page, by clinging to which my beloved might be brought to a reconciliation. A moment later, the wind having changed, they were phrases full of love that I addressed to her, chosen for the sweetness of certain forlorn expressions, those "nevermores" so touching to those who pen them, so wearisome to her who will have to read them, whether she believes them to be false and translates "nevermore" by "this very evening, if you want me," or believes them to be true and so to be breaking the news to her of one of those final separations to which we are so utterly indifferent when the person concerned is one with whom we are not in love. But since we are incapable, while we are in love, of acting as fit predecessors of the person whom we shall presently have become and who will be in love no longer, how are we to imagine the actual state of mind of a woman whom, even when we are conscious that we are of no account to her, we have perpetually represented in our musings as uttering, in order to lull us into a happy dream or to console us for a great sorrow, the same words that she would use if she loved us. Faced with the thoughts, the actions of a woman whom we love, we are as completely at a loss as the world's first natural philosophers must have been, face to face with the phenomena of nature, before their science had been elaborated and had cast a ray of light over the unknown. Or, worse still, we are like a person in whose mind the law of causality barely exists, a person who would be incapable, therefore, of establishing a

connexion between one phenomenon and another and to whose eyes the spectacle of the world would appear as unstable as a dream. Of course I made efforts to emerge from this incoherence, to find reasons for things. I tried even to be "objective" and, to that end, to bear in mind the disproportion that existed between the importance which Gilberte had in my eyes and that, not only which I had in hers, but which she herself had in the eyes of other people, a disproportion which, had I failed to remark it, might have caused me to mistake mere friendliness on her part for a passionate avowal, and a grotesque and debasing display on mine for the simple and amiable impulse that directs us towards a pretty face. But I was afraid also of falling into the opposite excess, whereby I should have seen in Gilberte's unpunctuality in keeping an appointment, merely on a bad-tempered impulse, an irremediable hostility. I tried to discover between these two perspectives, equally distorting, a third which would enable me to see things as they really were; the calculations I was obliged to make with that object helped to take my mind off my sufferings; and whether in obedience to the laws of arithmetic or because I had made them give me the answer that I desired, I made up my mind to go round to the Swanns' next day, happy, but happy in the same way as people who, having long been tormented by the thought of a journey which they have not wished to make, go no further than the station and then return home to unpack their boxes. And since, while one is hesitating, the mere idea of a possible decision (unless one has rendered that idea sterile by deciding that one will make no decision) develops, like a seed in the ground, the lineaments, the minutiae, of the emotions that would spring from the performance of the action, I told myself that it had been quite absurd of me to go to as much trouble, in planning never to see Gilberte again, as if I had really had to put this plan into effect and that since, on the contrary, I was to end by returning to her side, I might have spared myself all those painful velleities and acceptances.

But this resumption of friendly relations lasted only so long as it took me to reach the Swanns'; not because their butler, who was really fond of me, told me that Gilberte had gone out (a statement the truth of which was confirmed to me, as it happened, the same evening, by people who had seen her somewhere), but because of the manner in which he said it: "Sir, the young lady is not at home; I can assure you, sir, that I am speaking the truth. If you wish to make any inquiries I can fetch the young lady's maid. You know very well, sir, that I would do everything in my power to oblige you, and that if the young lady was at home I would take you to her at once." These words being of the only kind that is really important, that is to say involuntary, the kind that gives us a sort of X-ray photograph of the unimaginable reality which would be wholly concealed beneath a prepared speech, proved that in Gilberte's household there was an impression that she found me importunate; and so, scarcely had the man uttered them than they had aroused in me a hatred of which I preferred to make him rather than Gilberte the victim; he drew upon his own head all the angry feelings that I might have had for my beloved; relieved of them thanks to his words, my love subsisted alone; but his words had at the same time shown me that I must cease for the present to attempt to see Gilberte. She would be certain to write to me to apologise. In spite of which, I should not return at once to see her, so as to prove to her that I was capable of living without her. Besides, once I had received her letter, Gilberte's society was a thing with which I could more easily dispense for a time, since I should be certain of finding her ready to receive me whenever I chose. All that I needed in order to support less gloomily the pain of a voluntary separation was to feel that my heart was rid of the terrible uncertainty as to whether we were not irreconcilably sundered, whether she had not become engaged, left Paris, been taken away by force. The days that followed resembled the first week of that previous New Year which I had had to spend without Gilberte. But when that week had dragged to its end, for one thing my beloved would be coming again to the Champs-Élysées, I should be seeing her as before, of that I had been sure; for another thing, I had known with no less certainty that so long as the New Year holidays lasted there was no point in my going to the Champs-Élysées, which meant that during that miserable week, which was already ancient history, I had endured my wretchedness with a quiet mind because it was mixed with neither fear nor hope. Now, on the other hand, it was the latter of these which, almost as much as fear, made my suffering intolerable.

Not having had a letter from Gilberte that evening, I had attributed this to her negligence, to her other occupations, and I did not doubt that I should find one from her in the morning's post. This I awaited, every day, with a throbbing of the heart that subsided, leaving me utterly prostrate, when I found in it only letters from people who were not Gilberte, or else nothing at all, which was no worse, the proofs of another's friendship making all the more cruel those of her indifference. I transferred my hopes to the afternoon post. Even between the times at which letters were delivered I dared not leave the house, for she might be sending hers by a messenger. Then, the time coming at last when neither the postman nor a footman from the Swanns' could possibly appear that night, I had to postpone till the morrow my hope of being reassured, and thus, because I believed that my sufferings were not destined to last, I was obliged, so to speak, incessantly to renew them. My disappointment was perhaps the same, but instead of just uniformly prolonging, as formerly it had, an initial emotion, it began again several times daily, starting each time with an emotion so frequently renewed that it ended—it, so purely physical, so instantaneous a state—by becoming stabilised, so that the strain of waiting having hardly time to subside before a fresh reason for waiting supervened, there was no longer a single minute in the day during which I was not in that state of anxiety which it is so difficult to bear even for an hour. Thus my suffering was infinitely more cruel than in those former New Year holidays, because this time there was in me, instead of the acceptance, pure and simple, of that suffering, the hope, at every moment, of seeing it come to an end.

And yet I did ultimately arrive at this acceptance: then I realised that it must be final, and I renounced Gilberte for ever, in the interests of my love itself and because I hoped above all that she would not retain a contemptuous memory of me. Indeed, from that moment, so that she should not be led to suppose any sort of



lover's spite on my part, when she made appointments for me to see her I used often to accept them and then, at the last moment, write to her to say that I could not come, but with the same protestations of disappointment as I should have made to someone whom I had not wished to see. These expressions of regret, which we reserve as a rule for people who do not matter, would do more, I imagined, to persuade Gilberte of my indifference than would the tone of indifference which we affect only towards those we love. When, better than by mere words, by a course of action indefinitely repeated, I should have proved to her that I had no inclination to see her, perhaps she would discover once again an inclination to see me. Alas! I was doomed to failure; to attempt, by ceasing to see her, to reawaken in her that inclination to see me was to lose her for ever; first of all because, when it began to revive, if I wished it to last I must not give way to it at once; besides, the most agonising hours would then have passed; it was at this very moment that she was indispensable to me, and I should have liked to be able to warn her that what presently she would assuage, by seeing me again, would be a grief so far diminished as to be no longer (as now it would still be), in order to put an end to it, a motive for surrender, reconciliation and further meetings. And later on, when I should at last be able safely to confess to Gilberte (so much would her feeling for me have regained its strength) my feeling for her, the latter, not having been able to resist the strain of so long a separation, would have ceased to exist; I should have become indifferent to Gilberte. I knew this, but I could not explain it to her; she would have assumed that if I was claiming that I would cease to love her if I remained for too long without seeing her, that was solely to persuade her to summon me back to her at once. In the meantime, what made it easier for me to sentence myself to this separation was the fact that (in order to make it quite clear to her that despite my protestations to the contrary it was my own free will and not any extraneous obstacle, not the state of my health, that prevented me from seeing her), whenever I knew beforehand that Gilberte would not be in the house, was going out somewhere with a friend and would not be home for dinner, I went to see Mme Swann, who had once more become to me what she had been at the time when I had such difficulty in seeing her daughter and (on days when the latter was not coming to the Champs-Élysées) used to repair to the Allée des Acacias. In this way I should hear about Gilberte, and could be certain that she would in due course hear about me, and in terms which would show her that I was not hankering after her. And I found, as all those who suffer find, that my melancholy situation might have been worse. For, being free at any time to enter the house in which Gilberte lived, I constantly reminded myself, for all that I was firmly resolved to make no use of that privilege, that if ever my pain grew too sharp there was a way of making it cease. I was not unhappy, except one day at a time. And even that is an exaggeration. How many times an hour (but now without that anxious expectancy which had strained my every nerve in the first weeks after our quarrel, before I had gone again to the Swanns') did I not recite to myself the words of the letter which, one day soon, Gilberte would surely send, would perhaps even bring to me herself! The perpetual vision of that imagined happiness helped me to endure the destruction of my real happiness. With women who do not love us, as with the "dear departed," the knowledge that there is no hope left does not prevent us from continuing to wait. We live in expectancy, constantly on the alert; the mother whose son has gone to sea on some perilous voyage of discovery sees him in imagination every moment, long after the fact of his having perished has been established, striding into the room, saved by a miracle and in the best of health. And this expectancy, according to the strength of her memory and the resistance of her bodily organs, either helps her on her journey through the years, at the end of which she will be able to endure the knowledge that her son is no more, to forget gradually and to survive his loss—or else it kills her.

At the same time, my grief found consolation in the idea that my love must profit by it. Every visit that I paid to Mme Swann without seeing Gilberte was painful to me, but I felt that it correspondingly enhanced the idea that Gilberte had of me. Besides, if I always took care, before going to see Mme Swann, to ensure that her daughter was absent, this arose not only from my determination to break with her, but no less perhaps from the hope of reconciliation which overlay my intention to renounce her (very few of such intentions are absolute, at least in a continuous form, in this human soul of ours, one of whose laws, confirmed by the unlooked-for wealth of illustration that memory supplies, is intermittence), and hid from me something of its cruelty. I knew how chimerical was this hope. I was like a pauper who moistens his dry crust with fewer tears if he assures himself that at any moment a total stranger is perhaps going to leave him his entire fortune. We are all of us obliged, if we are to make reality endurable, to nurse a few little follies in ourselves. And my hope remained more intact—while at the same time our separation became more ineluctable—if I refrained from meeting Gilberte. If I had found myself face to face with her in her mother's drawing room, we might perhaps have exchanged irrevocable words which would have rendered our breach final, killed my hope and, at the same time, by creating a fresh anxiety, reawakened my love and made resignation harder.

Long before my break with her daughter, Mme Swann had said to me: "It's all very well your coming to see Gilberte but I should like you to come sometimes for my sake, not to my 'do's,' which would bore you because there's such a crowd, but on the other days, when you will always find me at home if you come fairly late." So that I might be thought, when I came to see her, to be belatedly complying with a wish that she had expressed in the past. And very late in the afternoon, when it was already dark, almost at the hour at which my parents would be sitting down to dinner, I would set out to pay Mme Swann a visit during the course of which I knew that I should not see Gilberte and yet should be thinking only of her. In that quarter, then looked upon as remote, of a Paris darker than it is today, where even in the centre there was no electric light in the public thoroughfares and very little in private houses, the lamps of a drawing-room situated on the ground floor or a low mezzanine (as were the rooms in which Mme Swann generally received her visitors) were enough to lighten the street and to make the passer-by raise his eyes and connect with the glow from the windows, as

with its apparent though veiled cause, the presence outside the door of a string of smart broughams. This passer-by was led to believe, not without a certain excitement, that a modification had been effected in this mysterious cause, when he saw one of the carriages begin to move; but it was merely a coachman who, afraid that his horses might catch cold, started them now and again on a brisk walk, all the more impressive because the rubber-tired wheels gave the sound of their hooves a background of silence from which it stood out more distinct and more explicit.

The "winter-garden," of which in those days the passer-by generally caught a glimpse, in whatever street he might be walking, if the apartment did not stand too high above the pavement, is to be seen today only in photogravures in the gift-books of P. J. Stahl, where, in contrast to the infrequent floral decorations of the Louis XVI drawing-rooms now in fashion—a single rose or a Japanese iris in a long-necked vase of crystal into which it would be impossible to squeeze a second—it seems, because of the profusion of indoor plants which people had then, and of the absolute lack of stylisation in their arrangement, as though it must have responded in the ladies whose houses it adorned to some lively and delightful passion for botany rather than to any cold concern for lifeless decoration. It suggested to one, only on a larger scale, in the houses of those days, those tiny, portable hothouses laid out on New Year's morning beneath the lighted lamp—for the children were always too impatient to wait for daylight—among all the other New Year presents but the loveliest of them all, consoling them, with its real plants which they could tend as they grew, for the bareness of the winter soil; and even more than those little houses themselves, those winter gardens were like the hothouse that the children could see there at the same time, portrayed in a delightful book, another New Year present and one which, for all that it was given not to them but to Mlle Lili, the heroine of the story, enchanted them to such a pitch that even now, when they are almost old men and women, they ask themselves whether, in those fortunate years, winter was not the loveliest of the seasons. And finally, beyond the winter-garden, through the various kinds of arborescence which from the street made the lighted window appear like the glass front of one of those children's playthings, pictured or real, the passer-by, drawing himself up on tiptoe, would generally observe a man in a frock-coat, a gardenia or a carnation in his buttonhole, standing before a seated lady, both vaguely outlined like two intaglios cut in a topaz, in the depths of the drawing-room atmosphere clouded by the samovar—then a recent importation—with steam which may escape from it still today, but to which, if it does, we have grown so accustomed now that no one notices it. Mme Swann attached great importance to her "tea"; she thought that she showed her originality and expressed her charm when she said to a man: "You'll find me at home any day, fairly late; come to tea," and so would accompany with a sweet and subtle smile these words which she pronounced with a fleeting trace of an English accent, and which her listener duly noted, bowing solemnly in acknowledgment, as though the invitation had been something important and uncommon which commanded deference and required attention. There was another reason, apart from those given already, for the flowers' having more than a merely ornamental significance in Mme Swann's drawing-room, and this reason pertained not to the period but, in some degree, to the life that Odette had formerly led. A great courtesan, such as she had been, lives largely for her lovers, that is to say at home, which means that she comes in time to live for her home. The things that one sees in the house of a respectable woman, things which may of course appear to her also to be of importance, are those which are in any event of the utmost importance to the courtesan. The culminating point of her day is not the moment in which she dresses herself for society, but that in which she undresses herself for a man. She must be as elegant in her dressing-gown, in her night-dress, as in her outdoor attire. Other women display their jewels, but she lives in the intimacy of her pearls. This kind of existence imposes on her the obligation, and ends by giving her the taste, for a luxury which is secret, that is to say which comes near to being disinterested. Mme Swann extended this to include her flowers. There was always beside her chair an immense crystal bowl filled to the brim with Parma violets or with long white daisy-petals floating in the water, which seemed to testify, in the eyes of the arriving guest, to some favourite occupation now interrupted, as would also have been the cup of tea which Mme Swann might have been drinking there alone for her own pleasure; an occupation more intimate still and more mysterious, so much so that one wanted to apologise on seeing the flowers exposed there by her side, as one would have apologised for looking at the title of the still open book which would have revealed to one Odette's recent reading and hence perhaps her present thoughts. And even more than the book, the flowers were living things; one was embarrassed, when one entered the room to pay Mme Swann a visit, to discover that she was not alone, or if one came home with her, not to find the room empty, so enigmatic a place, intimately associated with hours in the life of their mistress of which one knew nothing, did those flowers assume, those flowers which had not been arranged for Odette's visitors but, as it were forgotten there by her, had held and would hold with her again intimate talks which one was afraid of disturbing, the secret of which one tried in vain to read by staring at the washed-out, liquid, mauve and dissolute colour of the Parma violets. From the end of October Odette would begin to come home with the utmost punctuality for tea (which was still known at that time as "five-o'clock tea") having once heard it said, and being fond of repeating, that if Mme Verdurin had been able to form a salon it was because people were always certain of finding her at home at the same hour. She imagined that she herself had one also, of the same kind, but freer, *senza rigore* as she liked to say. She saw herself figuring thus as a sort of Lespinasse, and believed that she had founded a rival salon by taking from the du Deffand of the little group several of her most attractive men, notably Swann himself, who had followed her in her secession and into her retirement, according to a version for which one can understand that she had succeeded in gaining credit among newcomers who were ignorant of the past, though without convincing herself. But certain favourite roles are played by us so often before the public and rehearsed so carefully when we are alone that we find it easier to

refer to their fictitious testimony than to that of a reality which we have almost entirely forgotten. On days when Mme Swann had not left the house, one found her in a crêpe-de-Chine dressing-gown, white as the first snows of winter, or, it might be, in one of those long pleated chiffon garments, which looked like nothing so much as a shower of pink or white petals, and would be regarded today as highly inappropriate for winter—though quite wrongly, for these light fabrics and soft colours gave to a woman—in the stifling warmth of the drawing-rooms of those days, with their heavily curtained doors, rooms of which the most elegant thing that the society novelists of the time could find to say was that they were “cosily padded”—the same air of coolness that they gave to the roses which were able to stay in the room there beside her, despite the winter, in the glowing flesh tints of their nudity, as though it were already spring. Because of the muffling of all sound by the carpets, and of her withdrawal into a recess, the lady of the house, not being apprised of your entry as she is today, would continue to read almost until you were standing before her chair, which enhanced still further that sense of the romantic, that charm as of detecting a secret, which we can recapture today in the memory of those gowns, already out of fashion even then, which Mme Swann was perhaps alone in not having discarded, and which give us the feeling that the woman who wore them must have been the heroine of a novel because most of us have scarcely set eyes on them outside the pages of certain of Henry Gréville's novels. Odette had now in her drawing-room, at the beginning of winter, chrysanthemums of enormous size and of a variety of colours such as Swann, in the old days, certainly never saw in her drawing-room in the Rue La Pérouse. My admiration for them—when I went to pay Mme Swann one of those melancholy visits during which, prompted by my sorrow, I discovered in her all the mysterious poetry of her character as the mother of that Gilberte to whom she would say next day: “Your friend came to see me yesterday”—sprang, no doubt, from my sense that, pale pink like the Louis XV silk that covered her chairs, snow-white like her crêpe-de-Chine dressing-gown, or of a metallic red like her samovar, they superimposed upon the decoration of the room another, a supplementary scheme of decoration, as rich and as delicate in its colouring, but one that was alive and would last for a few days only. But I was touched to find that these chrysanthemums appeared not so much ephemeral as relatively durable compared with the tones, equally pink or equally coppery, which the setting sun so gorgeously displays amid the mists of a November afternoon, and which, after seeing them fading from the sky before I had entered the house, I found again inside, prolonged, transposed in the flaming palette of the flowers. Like the fires caught and fixed by a great colourist from the impermanence of the atmosphere and the sun, so that they should enter and adorn a human dwelling, they invited me, those chrysanthemums, to put away all my sorrows and to taste with a greedy rapture during that tea-time hour the all-too-fleeting pleasures of November, whose intimate and mysterious splendour they set ablaze all around me. Alas, it was not in the conversations which I heard that I could hope to attain to that splendour; they had little in common with it. Even with Mme Cottard, and although it was growing late, Mme Swann would assume her most caressing manner to say: “Oh, no, it's quite early really; you mustn't look at the clock; that's not the right time; it's stopped; you can't possibly have anything very urgent to do,” as she pressed a final tartlet upon the Professor's wife, who was gripping her card-case in readiness for flight.

“One simply can't tear oneself away from this house,” observed Mme Bontemps to Mme Swann, while Mme Cottard, in her astonishment at hearing her own thought put into words, exclaimed: “Why, that's just what I always say to myself, in my common-sensical little way, in my heart of hearts!” winning the approval of the gentlemen from the Jockey Club, who had been profuse in their salutations, as though overwhelmed by such an honour, when Mme Swann had introduced them to this graceless little bourgeois woman, who, when confronted with Odette's brilliant friends, remained on her guard, if not on what she herself called “the defensive,” for she always used stately language to describe the simplest things.

“I should never have suspected it,” was Mme Swann's comment, “three Wednesdays running you've let me down.” “That's quite true, Odette; it's *simply ages*, it's *an eternity* since I saw you last. You see I plead guilty; but I must tell you,” she went on with a vague and prudish air (for although a doctor's wife she would never have dared to speak without periphrasis of rheumatism or of a chill on the kidneys), “that I have a lot of little *troubles*. As we all have, I dare say. And besides that I've had a crisis among my masculine staff. Without being more imbued than most with a sense of my own authority, I've been obliged, just to make an example you know, to give my Vatel notice;<sup>8</sup> I believe he was looking out anyhow for a more remunerative place. But his departure nearly brought about the resignation of the entire Ministry. My own maid refused to stay in the house a moment longer; oh, we have had some Homeric scenes. However, I held fast to the helm through thick and thin; the whole affair's been a perfect object lesson, which won't be lost on me, I can tell you. I'm afraid I'm boring you with all these stories about servants, but you know as well as I do what a business it is when one is obliged to set about rearranging one's household.”

“Aren't we to see anything of your delicious daughter?” she wound up. “No, my delicious daughter is dining with a friend,” replied Mme Swann, and then, turning to me: “I believe she's written to you, asking you to come and see her tomorrow. And your *babies*?” she went on to Mme Cottard.

I breathed a sigh of relief. These words of Mme Swann's, which proved to me that I could see Gilberte whenever I chose, gave me precisely the comfort which I had come to seek, and which at that time made my visits to Mme Swann so necessary. “No, I shall write her a note this evening. Besides, Gilberte and I can no longer see one another,” I added, pretending to attribute our separation to some mysterious cause, which gave me a further illusion of love, sustained as well by the affectionate way in which I spoke of Gilberte and she of me.

“You know she's simply devoted to you,” said Mme Swann. “Really, you won't come tomorrow?”

Suddenly I was filled with elation; the thought had just struck me—"After all, why not, since it's her own mother who suggests it?" But at once I relapsed into my gloom. I was afraid lest Gilberte, on seeing me, might think that my indifference of late had been feigned, and it seemed wiser to prolong our separation. During these asides Mme Bontemps had been complaining of the insufferable dullness of politicians' wives, for she affected to find everyone too deady or too stupid for words, and to deplore her husband's official position.

"Do you mean to say you can shake hands with fifty doctors' wives, like that, one after the other?" she exclaimed to Mme Cottard, who, on the contrary, was full of benevolence towards everybody, and determined to do her duty in every respect. "Ah! you're a woman of virtue! As for me, at the Ministry, of course I have my obligations. Well, it's more than I can stand. You know what those officials' wives are like, it's all I can do not to put my tongue out at them. And my niece Albertine is just like me. You've no idea how insolent she is, that child. Last week, during my 'at home,' I had the wife of the Under Secretary of State for Finance, who told us that she knew nothing at all about cooking. 'But surely, ma'am,' my niece chipped in with her most winning smile, 'you ought to know all about it, since your father was a scullion.' "

"Oh, I do love that story; I think it's simply exquisite!" cried Mme Swann. "But certainly for the Doctor's consultation days you should make a point of having a little *home*, with your flowers and books and all your pretty things," she urged Mme Cottard.

"Straight out like that! Slap-bang, right in the face! She made no bones about it, I can tell you! And she didn't give me a word of warning, the little minx; she's as cunning as a monkey. You're lucky to be able to hold yourself back; I do envy people who can hide what's in their minds." "But I've no need to do that, Mme Bontemps, I'm not so hard to please," Mme Cottard gently expostulated. "For one thing, I'm not in such a privileged position as you," she went on, slightly raising her voice as was her custom, as though to underline the remark, whenever she slipped into the conversation one of those delicate courtesies, those skilful flatteries which won her the admiration and assisted the career of her husband. "And besides I'm only too glad to do anything that can be of use to the Professor."

"But Madame, it's what one is able to do! I expect you're not highly strung. Do you know, whenever I see the War Minister's wife grimacing, I start imitating her at once. It's a dreadful thing to have a temperament like mine."

"Ah, yes," said Mme Cottard, "I've heard that she had a twitch. My husband knows someone else who occupies a very high position, and it's only natural, when these gentlemen get talking together ..."

"And then you know, it's just the same with the Head of Protocol, who's a hunchback. He has only to be in my house five minutes before my fingers are itching to stroke his hump. I can't help it. My husband says I'll cost him his place. What if I do! Pooh to the Ministry! Yes, pooh to the Ministry! I should like to have that printed as a motto on my notepaper. I can see I'm shocking you; you're so good, but I must say there's nothing amuses me like a little devilry now and then. Life would be dreadfully monotonous without it."

And she went on talking about the Ministry all the time, as though it had been Mount Olympus. To change the subject, Mme Swann turned to Mme Cottard: "But you're looking very elegant today. Redfern *fecit*?"

"No, you know I always swear by Raudnitz. Besides, it's only an old thing I've had done up."

"Well, well! it's really smart!"

"Guess how much ... No, change the first figure!"

"You don't say so! Why, it's dirt cheap, it's a gift! Three times that at least, I was told."

"That's how history comes to be written," concluded the doctor's wife. And pointing to a neck-ribbon which had been a present from Mme Swann: "Look, Odette! Do you recognise it?"

Through the gap between a pair of curtains a head peeped with ceremonious deference, making a playful pretence of being afraid of disturbing the party: it was Swann. "Odette, the Prince d'Agrigente is with me in my study and wants to know if he may pay his respects to you. What am I to tell him?" "Why, that I shall be delighted," Odette replied, secretly flattered but without losing anything of the composure which came to her all the more easily since she had always, even as a cocotte, been accustomed to entertain men of fashion. Swann disappeared to deliver the message, to return presently with the Prince, unless in the meantime Mme Verdurin had arrived.

When he married Odette Swann had insisted on her ceasing to frequent the little clan. (He had several good reasons for this stipulation, and even if he had had none, would have made it none the less in obedience to a law of ingratitude which admits of no exception and proves that every go-between is either lacking in foresight or else singularly disinterested.) He had conceded only that Odette might exchange visits with Mme Verdurin once a year, and even this seemed excessive to some of the "faithful," indignant at the insult offered to the Mistress who for so many years had treated Odette and even Swann himself as the spoiled children of her house. For if it contained false brethren who defaulted on certain evenings in order that they might secretly accept an invitation from Odette, ready, in the event of discovery, with the excuse that they were curious to meet Bergotte (although the Mistress assured them that he never went to the Swanns' and was totally devoid of talent—in spite of which she made the most strenuous efforts, to quote one of her favourite expressions, to "attract" him), the little group had its "diehards" too. And these—though ignorant of those refinements of convention which often dissuade people from the extreme attitude one would like to see them adopt in order to annoy someone else—would have wished Mme Verdurin but had never managed to prevail upon her to sever all relations with Odette and thus deprive her of the satisfaction of saying with a laugh: "We seldom go to the Mistress's now, since the Schism. It was all very well while my husband was still a bachelor, but when one is married, you know, it isn't always so easy ... If you must know, M. Swann can't abide old Ma Verdurin, and he wouldn't much like the idea of my going there regularly as I used to. And I, dutiful spouse

..." Swann would accompany his wife to their annual evening there but would take care not to be in the room when Mme Verdurin came to call on Odette. And so, if the Mistress was in the drawing-room, the Prince d'Agrigente would enter it alone. Alone, too, he was presented to her by Odette, who preferred that Mme Verdurin should be left in ignorance of the names of her humbler guests and, seeing more than one strange face in the room, might be led to believe that she was mixing with the cream of the aristocracy, a device which proved so successful that Mme Verdurin said to her husband that evening with profound contempt: "Charming people, her friends! I met all the flower of Reaction!"

Odette was living, with respect to Mme Verdurin, under a converse illusion. Not that the latter's salon had even begun, at that time, to develop into what we shall one day see it become. Mme Verdurin had not yet reached the period of incubation in which one dispenses with the big parties where the few brilliant specimens recently acquired would be lost in the crowd, and prefers to wait until the generative force of the ten just men whom one has succeeded in attracting shall have multiplied those ten seventy-fold. As Odette was not to be long now in doing, Mme Verdurin did indeed entertain the idea of "society" as her final objective, but her zone of attack was as yet so restricted, and moreover so remote from that by way of which Odette stood some chance of arriving at an identical goal, of breaking through, that the latter remained in total ignorance of the strategic plans which the Mistress was elaborating. And it was with the most perfect sincerity that Odette, when anyone spoke to her of Mme Verdurin as a snob, would answer, laughing: "Oh, no, quite the opposite! For one thing, she hasn't the basis for it: she doesn't know anyone. And then, to do her justice, I must say that she seems quite content with things as they are. No, what she likes are her Wednesdays, good talkers." And in her heart of hearts she envied Mme Verdurin (for all that she did not despair of having herself, in so eminent a school, succeeded in acquiring them) those arts to which the Mistress attached such paramount importance, although they did no more than discriminate between shades of the non-existent, sculpture the void, and were, strictly speaking, the Arts of Nonentity: to wit those, in the lady of a house, of knowing how to "bring people together," how to "group," to "draw out," to "keep in the background," to act as a "connecting link."

At all events Mme Swann's friends were impressed when they saw in her house a lady of whom they were accustomed to think only as in her own, in an inseparable setting of guests, in the midst of her little group which they were astonished to behold thus evoked, summarised, compressed into a single armchair in the bodily form of the Mistress, the hostess turned visitor, muffled in her cloak with its grebe trimming, as fluffy as the white furs that carpeted that drawing-room, embowered in which Mme Verdurin was a drawing-room in herself. The more timid among the women thought it prudent to retire, and using the plural, as people do when they mean to hint to the rest of the room that it is wiser not to tire a convalescent who is out of bed for the first time, "Odette," they murmured, "we're going to leave you." They envied Mme Cottard, whom the Mistress called by her Christian name.

"Can I drop you anywhere?" Mme Verdurin asked her, unable to bear the thought that one of the faithful was going to remain behind instead of following her from the room.

"Oh, but this lady has been so very kind as to say she'll take me," replied Mme Cottard, not wishing to appear to be forgetting, when approached by a more illustrious personage, that she had accepted the offer which Mme Bontemps had made to drive her home behind her cockaded coachman. "I must say that I'm always specially grateful to the friends who are so kind as to take me with them in their vehicles. It's a regular godsend to me who have no charioteer."

"Especially," broke in the Mistress, hardly daring to say anything, since she knew Mme Bontemps slightly and had just invited her to her Wednesdays, "as at Mme de Cr  cy's house you're not very near home. Oh, good gracious, I shall never get into the habit of saying Mme Swann!" It was a recognised joke in the little clan, among those who were not over-endowed with wit, to pretend that they could never grow used to saying "Mme Swann": "I've been so accustomed to saying Mme de Cr  cy that I nearly went wrong again!" Only Mme Verdurin, when she spoke to Odette, was not content with the nearly, but went wrong on purpose.

"Don't you feel afraid, Odette, living out in the wilds like this? I'm sure I shouldn't feel at all comfortable, coming home after dark. Besides, it's so damp. It can't be at all good for your husband's eczema. You haven't rats in the house, I hope!" "Oh, dear no. What a horrid idea!" "That's a good thing; I was told you had. I'm glad to know it's not true, because I have a perfect horror of the creatures, and I should never have come to see you again. Good-bye, my dear child, we shall meet again soon; you know what a pleasure it is to me to see you. You don't know how to arrange chrysanthemums," she added as she prepared to leave the room, Mme Swann having risen to escort her. "They are Japanese flowers; you must arrange them the same way as the Japanese."

"I do not agree with Mme Verdurin, although she is the fount of wisdom to me in all things! There's no one like you, Odette, for finding such lovely chrysanthemums, or chrysanthema rather, for it seems that's what we ought to call them now," declared Mme Cottard as soon as the Mistress had shut the door behind her.

"Dear Mme Verdurin is not always very kind about other people's flowers," said Odette sweetly. "Whom do you go to, Odette," asked Mme Cottard, to forestall any further criticism of the Mistress. "Lema  tre? I must confess, the other day in Lema  tre's window I saw a lovely pink shrub which made me commit the wildest extravagance." But modesty forbade her to give any more precise details as to the price of the shrub, and she said merely that the Professor, "and you know, he's not at all a quick-tempered man," had "flown off the handle" and told her that she "didn't know the value of money."

"No, no, I've no regular florist except Debac." "Me too," said Mme Cottard, "but I confess that I forsake him now and then for Lachaume." "Oh, you're unfaithful to him with Lachaume, are you? I must tell him that,"

replied Odette, always anxious to show her wit, and to lead the conversation in her own house, where she felt more at her ease than in the little clan. "Besides, Lachaume is really becoming too dear; his prices are quite excessive, don't you know; I find his prices indecent!" she added, laughing.

Meanwhile Mme Bontemps, who had been heard a hundred times to declare that nothing would induce her to go to the Verdurins', delighted at being asked to the famous Wednesdays, was working out how she could manage to attend as many of them as possible. She was not aware that Mme Verdurin liked people not to miss a single one; moreover she was one of those people whose company is but little sought after who, when a hostess invites them to a series of "at homes," instead of going to her house without more ado—like those who know that it is always a pleasure to see them—whenever they have a moment to spare and feel inclined to go out, deny themselves for example the first evening and the third, imagining that their absence will be noticed, and save themselves up for the second and fourth, unless it should happen that, having heard from a trustworthy source that the third is to be a particularly brilliant party, they reverse the original order, assuring their hostess that "most unfortunately, we had another engagement last week." So Mme Bontemps was calculating how many Wednesdays there could still be left before Easter, and by what means she might manage to secure an extra one and yet not appear to be thrusting herself upon her hostess. She relied upon Mme Cottard, whom she would have with her in the carriage going home, to give her a few hints.

"Oh, Mme Bontemps, I see you getting up to go; it's very bad of you to give the signal for flight like that! You owe me some compensation for not turning up last Thursday ... Come, sit down again, just for a minute. You can't possibly be going anywhere else before dinner. Really, you won't let yourself be tempted?" went on Mme Swann, and, as she held out a plate of cakes, "You know, they're not at all bad, these little horrors. They may not be much to look at, but just you taste one and you'll see."

"On the contrary, they look quite delicious," broke in Mme Cottard. "In your house, Odette, one is never short of victuals. I have no need to ask to see the trade-mark; I know you get everything from Rebattet. I must say that I am more eclectic. For sweets and cakes and so forth I repair, as often as not, to Bourbonneux. But I agree that they simply don't know what an ice means. Rebattet for everything iced, and syrups and sorbets; they're past masters. As my husband would say, they're the *ne plus ultra*."

"Oh, but these are home-made. You won't, really?" "I shan't be able to eat a scrap of dinner," pleaded Mme Bontemps, "but I'll sit down again for a moment. You know, I adore talking to a clever woman like you."

"You'll think me highly indiscreet, Odette, but I should so like to know what you thought of the hat Mme Trombert had on. I know, of course, that big hats are the fashion just now. All the same, wasn't it just the least little bit exaggerated? And compared to the hat she came to see me in the other day, the one she was wearing just now was microscopic!" "Oh no, I'm not at all clever," said Odette, thinking that this sounded well. "I am a perfect simpleton, I believe everything people say, and worry myself to death over the least thing." And she insinuated that she had, just at first, suffered terribly from having married a man like Swann who had a separate life of his own and was unfaithful to her.

Meanwhile the Prince d'Agrigente, having caught the words "I'm not at all clever," thought it incumbent on him to protest, but unfortunately lacked the gift of repartee. "Fiddlesticks!" cried Mme Bontemps, "not clever, you!" "That's just what I was saying to myself—'What do I hear?'," the Prince clutched at this straw. "My ears must have played me false!"

"No, I assure you," went on Odette, "I'm really just an ordinary woman, very easily shocked, full of prejudices, living in my own little groove and dreadfully ignorant." And then, in case he had any news of the Baron de Charlus, "Have you seen our dear Baronet?" she asked him.

"You, ignorant!" cried Mme Bontemps. "Then I wonder what you'd say of the official world, all those wives of Excellencies who can talk of nothing but their frocks ... Just imagine, not more than a week ago I happened to mention *Lohengrin* to the Education Minister's wife. She stared at me and said '*Lohengrin*? Oh, yes, the new review at the Folies-Bergère. I hear it's a perfect scream!' Well, I ask you! When people say things like that it makes your blood boil. I could have hit her. Because I have a bit of a temper of my own. What do you say, Monsieur," she added, turning to me, "was I not right?"

"But still," said Mme Cottard, "it's forgivable to be a little off the mark when you're asked a thing like that point blank, without any warning. I know something about it, because Mme Verdurin also has a habit of putting a pistol to your head."

"Speaking of Mme Verdurin," Mme Bontemps asked Mme Cottard, "do you know who will be there on Wednesday? Oh, I've just remembered that we've accepted an invitation for next Wednesday. You wouldn't care to dine with us on Wednesday week? We could go on together to Mme Verdurin's. I should never dare to go there by myself. I don't know why it is, that great lady always terrifies me."

"I'll tell you what it is," replied Mme Cottard, "that frightens you about Mme Verdurin: it's her voice. But you see everyone can't have such a charming voice as Mme Swann. Once you've found your tongue, as the Mistress says, the ice will soon be broken. For she's a very easy person, really, to get on with. But I can quite understand what you feel; it's never pleasant to find oneself for the first time in strange surroundings."

"Won't you dine with us, too?" said Mme Bontemps to Mme Swann. "After dinner we could all go to the Verdurins' together, 'do a Verdurin'; and even if it means that the Mistress will glare at me and never ask me to the house again, once we are there we'll just sit by ourselves and have a quiet talk, I'm sure that's what I should like best." But this assertion can hardly have been quite truthful, for Mme Bontemps went on to ask: "Who do you think will be there on Wednesday week? What will be happening? There won't be too big a crowd, I hope!"



"I certainly shan't be there," said Odette. "We'll just put in a brief appearance on the last Wednesday of all. If you don't mind waiting till then ...". But Mme Bontemps did not appear to be tempted by the proposal.

Granted that the intellectual distinction of a salon and its elegance are generally in inverse rather than direct ratio, one must suppose, since Swann found Mme Bontemps agreeable, that any forfeiture of position once accepted has the consequence of making people less particular with regard to those among whom they have resigned themselves to move, less particular with regard to their intelligence as to everything else about them. And if this is true, men, like nations, must see their culture and even their language disappear with their independence. One of the effects of this indulgence is to aggravate the tendency people have after a certain age to derive pleasure from words that are a homage to their own turn of mind, to their weaknesses, and an encouragement to them to yield to them; that is the age at which a great artist prefers to the company of original minds that of pupils who have nothing in common with him save the letter of his doctrine, who listen to him and offer incense; at which a man or woman of distinction who lives exclusively for love will think the most intelligent person in a gathering the one who, however inferior, has shown by some remark that he can understand and approve an existence devoted to gallantry, and has thus pleasantly flattered the voluptuous instincts of the lover or mistress; it was the age, too, at which Swann, inasmuch as he had become the husband of Odette, enjoyed hearing Mme Bontemps say how silly it was to have nobody in one's house but duchesses (concluding from that, contrary to what he would have done in the old days at the Verdurins', that she was a good creature, extremely witty and not at all a snob) and telling her stories which made her "die laughing," because she had not heard them before and moreover "saw the point" of them at once, since she enjoyed flattering and exchanging jokes.

"So the Doctor is not mad about flowers, like you?" Mme Swann asked Mme Cottard.

"Oh, well, you know, my husband is a sage; he practises moderation in all things. Wait, though, he does have one passion."

Her eye aflame with malice, joy, curiosity, "And what is that, pray?" inquired Mme Bontemps.

Artlessly Mme Cottard replied: "Reading." "Oh, that's a very restful passion in a husband!" cried Mme Bontemps, suppressing a diabolical laugh.

"When the Doctor gets a book in his hands, you know!"

"Well, that needn't alarm you much ..."

"But it does, for his eyesight. I must go now and look after him, Odette, and I shall come back at the very first opportunity and knock at your door. Talking of eyesight, have you heard that the new house Mme Verdurin has just bought is to be lighted by electricity? I didn't get that from my own little secret service, you know, but from quite a different source; it was the electrician himself, Mildé, who told me. You see, I quote my authorities! Even the bedrooms, he says, are to have electric lamps with shades which will filter the light. It's obviously a charming luxury for those who can afford it. But it seems that our contemporaries must absolutely have the newest thing if it's the only one of its kind in the world. Just fancy, the sister-in-law of a friend of mine has had the telephone installed in her house! She can order things from tradesmen without having to go out! I confess that I've indulged in the most bare-faced intrigues to get permission to go there one day, just to speak into the instrument. It's very tempting, but rather in a friend's house than at home. I don't think I should like to have the telephone in my establishment. Once the first excitement is over, it must be a real headache. Now, Odette, I must be off; you're not to keep Mme Bontemps any longer, she's looking after me. I must absolutely tear myself away: a nice way you're making me behave—I shall be getting home after my husband!"

And for myself also it was time to return home, before I had tasted those wintry delights of which the chrysanthemums had seemed to me to be the brilliant envelope. These pleasures had not appeared, and yet Mme Swann did not look as though she expected anything more. She allowed the servants to carry away the tea-things, as who should say "Time, please, gentlemen!" And finally she said to me: "Really, must you go? Well then, *good-bye!*" I felt that I might have stayed there without encountering those unknown pleasures, and that my sadness was not the only cause of my having to forgo them. Were they to be found, then, situated not upon that beaten track of hours which leads one always so rapidly to the moment of departure, but rather upon some unknown by-road along which I ought to have digressed? At least the object of my visit had been attained; Gilberte would know that I had come to her parents' house when she was not at home, and that I had, as Mme Cottard had incessantly assured me, "made a complete conquest, first shot, of Mme Verdurin" (whom, she added, she had never seen "make so much" of anyone: "You and she must be soulmates"). She would know that I had spoken of her as was fitting, with affection, but that I had not that incapacity for living without our seeing one another which I believed to be at the root of the boredom that she had shown at our last meetings. I had told Mme Swann that I could not be with Gilberte any more. I had said this as though I had finally decided not to see her again. And the letter which I was going to send Gilberte would be framed on those lines. Only to myself, to fortify my courage, I proposed no more than a final, concentrated effort, lasting a few days only. I said to myself: "This is the last time that I shall refuse an invitation to meet her; I shall accept the next one." To make our separation less difficult to realise, I did not picture it to myself as final. But I knew very well that it would be.

The first of January was exceptionally painful to me that winter. So, no doubt, is everything that marks a date and an anniversary, when we are unhappy. But if our unhappiness is due to the loss of someone dear to us, our suffering consists merely in an unusually vivid comparison of the present with the past. Added to this, in my case, was the unformulated hope that Gilberte, having wished to leave me to take the first steps towards a reconciliation, and discovering that I had not taken them, had been waiting only for the excuse of New

Year's Day to write to me, saying: "What is the matter? I'm mad about you, so come and have it out frankly, I can't live without seeing you." As the last days of the old year went by, such a letter began to seem probable. It was, perhaps, nothing of the sort, but to make us believe that such a thing is probable the desire, the need that we have for it suffices. The soldier is convinced that a certain interval of time, capable of being indefinitely prolonged, will be allowed him before the bullet finds him, the thief before he is caught, men in general before they have to die. That is the amulet which preserves people—and sometimes peoples—not from danger but from the fear of danger, in reality from the belief in danger, which in certain cases allows them to brave it without actually needing to be brave. It is confidence of this sort, and with as little foundation, that sustains the lover who is counting on a reconciliation, on a letter. For me to cease to expect a reconciliation, it would have sufficed that I should have ceased to wish for one. However indifferent to us we may know the beloved to be, we attribute to her a series of thoughts (though their sum-total be indifference), the intention to express those thoughts, a complication of her inner life in which one is the object of her antipathy, perhaps, but also of her constant attention. But to imagine what was going on in Gilberte's mind I should have required simply the power to anticipate on that New Year's Day what I should feel on the first day of any of the following years, when the attention or the silence or the affection or the coldness of Gilberte would pass almost unnoticed by me and I should not dream, should not even be able to dream, of seeking a solution to problems which would have ceased to perplex me. When we are in love, our love is too big a thing for us to be able altogether to contain it within ourselves. It radiates towards the loved one, finds there a surface which arrests it, forcing it to return to its starting-point, and it is this repercussion of our own feeling which we call the other's feelings and which charms us more than on its outward journey because we do not recognise it as having originated in ourselves.

New Year's Day went by, hour after hour, without bringing me that letter from Gilberte. And as I received a few others containing greetings belated or retarded by the congestion of the mails at that season, on the third and fourth of January I still hoped, but more and more faintly. On the days that followed, I wept a great deal. True, this was due to the fact that, having been less sincere than I thought in my renunciation of Gilberte, I had clung to the hope of a letter from her in the New Year. And seeing that hope exhausted before I had had time to shelter myself behind another, I suffered like an invalid who has emptied his phial of morphia without having another within his reach. But perhaps also in my case—and these two explanations are not mutually exclusive, for a single feeling is often made up of contrary elements—the hope that I entertained of ultimately receiving a letter had brought to my mind's eye once again the image of Gilberte, had reawakened the emotions which the expectation of finding myself in her presence, the sight of her, her behaviour towards me, had aroused in me before. The immediate possibility of a reconciliation had suppressed in me that faculty the immense importance of which we are apt to overlook: the faculty of resignation. Neurasthenics find it impossible to believe the friends who assure them that they will gradually recover their peace of mind if they will stay in bed and receive no letters, read no newspapers. They imagine that such a regime will only exasperate their twitching nerves. And similarly lovers, contemplating it from within a contrary state of mind, not having yet begun to put it to the test, are unable to believe in the healing power of renunciation.

Because of the violence of my heart-beats, my doses of caffeine were reduced; the palpitations ceased. Whereupon I asked myself whether it was not to some extent the drug that had been responsible for the anguish I had felt when I had fallen out with Gilberte, an anguish which I had attributed, whenever it recurred, to the pain of not seeing her any more or of running the risk of seeing her only when she was a prey to the same ill-humour. But if this drug had been at the root of the sufferings which my imagination must in that case have interpreted wrongly (not that there would be anything extraordinary in that, seeing that, for lovers, the most acute mental suffering often has its origin in the physical presence of the woman with whom they are living), it had been, in that sense, like the philtre which, long after they have absorbed it, continues to bind Tristan to Isolde. For the physical improvement which the reduction of my caffeine effected almost at once did not arrest the evolution of that grief which my absorption of the toxin had perhaps, if not created, at any rate contrived to render more acute.

Only, as the middle of the month of January approached, once my hopes of a New Year letter had been disappointed, once the additional pang that had come with their disappointment had been assuaged, it was my old sorrow, that of "before the holidays," which began again. What was perhaps the most cruel thing about it was that I myself was its architect, unconscious, wilful, merciless and patient. The one thing that mattered to me was my relationship with Gilberte, and it was I who was labouring to make it impossible by gradually creating out of this prolonged separation from my beloved, not indeed her indifference, but what would come to the same thing in the end, my own. It was to a slow and painful suicide of that self which loved Gilberte that I was goading myself with untiring energy, with a clear sense not only of what I was doing in the present but of what must result from it in the future: I knew not only that after a certain time I should cease to love Gilberte, but also that she herself would regret it and that the attempts which she would then make to see me would be as vain as those that she was making now, no longer because I loved her too much but because I should certainly be in love with some other woman whom I should continue to desire, to wait for, through hours of which I should not dare to divert a single particle of a second to Gilberte who would be nothing to me then. And no doubt at that very moment in which (since I was determined not to see her again, barring a formal request for a reconciliation, a complete declaration of love on her part, neither of which was in the least degree likely to be forthcoming) I had already lost Gilberte, and loved her more than ever since I could feel all that she was to me better than in the previous year when, spending all my afternoons in her company, or as many as I chose, I believed that no peril threatened our friendship—no doubt at that moment the idea

that I should one day entertain identical feelings for another was odious to me, for that idea deprived me, not only of Gilberte, but of my love and my suffering: my love, my suffering, in which through my tears I was attempting to grasp precisely what Gilberte was, and yet was obliged to recognise that they did not pertain exclusively to her but would, sooner or later, be some other woman's fate. So that—or such, at least, was my way of thinking then—we are always detached from our fellow-creatures: when we love, we sense that our love does not bear a name, that it may spring up again in the future, could have sprung up already in the past, for another person rather than this one; and during the time when we are not in love, if we resign ourselves philosophically to love's inconsistencies and contradictions, it is because we do not at that moment feel the love which we speak about so freely, and hence do not know it, knowledge in these matters being intermittent and not outlasting the actual presence of the sentiment. Of course there would still have been time to warn Gilberte that that future in which I should no longer love her, which my suffering helped me to divine although my imagination was not yet able to form a clear picture of it, would gradually take shape, that its coming was, if not imminent, at least inevitable, if she herself did not come to my rescue and nip my future indifference in the bud. How often was I not on the point of writing, or of going to Gilberte to tell her: "Take care. My mind is made up. This is my final attempt. I am seeing you now for the last time. Soon I shall love you no longer!" But to what end? By what right could I reproach her for an indifference which, without considering myself guilty on that account, I myself manifested towards everything that was not Gilberte? The last time! To me, that appeared as something of immense significance, because I loved Gilberte. On her it would doubtless have made just as much impression as those letters in which our friends ask whether they may pay us a visit before they finally leave the country, requests which, like those made by tiresome women who are in love with us, we decline because we have pleasures of our own in prospect. The time which we have at our disposal every day is elastic; the passions that we feel expand it, those that we inspire contract it; and habit fills up what remains.

Besides, what good would it have done if I had spoken to Gilberte? She would not have heard me. We imagine always when we speak that it is our own ears, our own mind, that are listening. My words would have come to her only in a distorted form, as though they had had to pass through the moving curtain of a waterfall before they reached my beloved, unrecognisable, sounding false and absurd, having no longer any kind of meaning. The truth which one puts into one's words does not carve out a direct path for itself, is not irresistibly self-evident. A considerable time must elapse before a truth of the same order can take shape in them. Then the political opponent who, despite every argument, every proof, condemns the votary of the rival doctrine as a traitor, himself comes to share the hated conviction, in which he who once sought in vain to disseminate it no longer believes. Then the masterpiece of literature whose excellence seemed self-evident to the admirers who read it aloud, while to those who listened it presented only a senseless or commonplace image, will by those too be proclaimed a masterpiece, but too late for the author to learn of their conversion. Similarly, in love, the barriers, do what he may, cannot be broken down from without by the despairing lover; it is when he no longer cares about them that suddenly, as the result of an effort directed from elsewhere, accomplished within the heart of the one who did not love, those barriers which he has charged in vain will fall to no avail. If I had come to Gilberte to tell her of my future indifference and the means of preventing it, she would have assumed that my love for her, the need that I had of her, were even greater than she had supposed, and her reluctance to see me would thereby have been increased. And it is all too true, moreover, that it was that love for her which helped me, by the disparate states of mind which it successively produced in me, to foresee, more clearly than she herself could, the end of that love. And yet some such warning I might perhaps have addressed, by letter or by word of mouth, to Gilberte, after a long enough interval, which would render her, it is true, less indispensable to me, but might also have proved to her that she was not so indispensable. Unfortunately certain well or ill intentioned persons spoke of me to her in a fashion which must have led her to think that they were doing so at my request. Whenever I thus learned that Cottard, my own mother, even M. de Norpois had by a few ill-chosen words nullified the whole sacrifice that I had just been making, wasted all the advantage of my reserve by wrongly making me appear to have emerged from it, I had a double grievance. In the first place I now had to date from that day only my laborious and fruitful abstention which these tiresome people had, unknown to me, interrupted and consequently brought to nothing. But in addition I should now have less pleasure in seeing Gilberte, who would think of me no longer as containing myself in dignified resignation, but as plotting in the dark for an interview which she had scorned to grant me. I cursed all this idle chatter of people who so often, without any intention either of hurting us or of doing us a service, for no reason, for talking's sake, sometimes because we ourselves have not been able to refrain from talking in their presence and because they are indiscreet (as we ourselves are), do us, at a crucial moment, so much harm. It is true that in the baleful task of destroying our love they are far from playing a part comparable to that played by two persons who are in the habit, one from excess of goodwill and the other from excess of ill-will, of undoing everything at the moment when everything is on the point of being settled. But against these two persons we bear no such grudge as against the inopportune Cottards of this world, for one of them is the person whom we love and the other is ourself.

Meanwhile, since almost every time I went to see her Mme Swann would invite me to come to tea with her daughter and tell me to reply to the latter direct, I was constantly writing to Gilberte, and in this correspondence I did not choose the expressions which might, I felt, have won her over, but sought only to carve out the easiest channel for the flow of my tears. For regret, like desire, seeks not to analyse but to gratify itself. When one begins to love, one spends one's time, not in getting to know what one's love really is, but in arranging for tomorrow's rendezvous. When one renounces love one seeks not to know one's grief but to offer

to the person who is its cause the expression of it which seems most moving. One says the things which one feels the need to say, and which the other will not understand: one speaks for oneself alone. I wrote: "I had thought that it would not be possible. Alas, I see now that it is not so difficult." I said also: "I shall probably never see you again," and said it while continuing to avoid showing a coldness which she might think feigned, and the words, as I wrote them, made me weep because I felt that they expressed not what I should have liked to believe but what was probably going to happen. For at the next request for a meeting which she would convey to me I should have again, as I had now, the courage not to yield, and, with one refusal after another, I should gradually come to the moment when, by virtue of not having seen her again, I should no longer wish to see her. I wept, but I found courage enough to sacrifice, I savoured the melancholy pleasure of sacrificing, the happiness of being with her to the possibility of being pleasing in her eyes one day—a day, alas, when being pleasing in her eyes would be immaterial to me. Even the supposition, improbable though it was, that at this moment, as she had claimed during the last visit that I had paid her, she loved me, that what I took for the boredom which one feels in the company of a person of whom one has grown tired had been due only to a jealous susceptibility, to a feigned indifference analogous to my own, only rendered my decision less painful. It seemed to me that in years to come, when we had forgotten one another, when I should be able to look back and tell her that this letter which I was now in the course of writing to her had not been for one moment sincere, she would answer: "What, you really did love me, did you? If you only knew how I waited for that letter, how I longed for us to meet, how I cried when I read it." The thought, while I was writing it, immediately on my return from her mother's house, that I was perhaps consummating that very misunderstanding, that thought, by its very sadness, by the pleasure of imagining that I was loved by Gilberte, gave me the impulse to continue my letter.

If, at the moment of leaving Mme Swann, when her tea-party ended, I was thinking of what I was going to write to her daughter, Mme Cottard, as she departed, had been filled with thoughts of a wholly different kind. On her little "tour of inspection" she had not failed to congratulate Mme Swann on the new furnishings, the recent "acquisitions" which caught the eye in her drawing-room. She could also see among them some, though only a very few, of the things that Odette had had in the old days in the Rue La Pérouse, for instance her animals carved in precious stones, her mascots.

For since Mme Swann had picked up from a friend whose opinion she valued the word "trashy"—which had opened to her new horizons because it denoted precisely those things which a few years earlier she had considered "smart"—all those things had, one after another, followed into retirement the gilded trellis that had served as background to her chrysanthemums, innumerable bonbonnières from Giroux's, and the coroneted note-paper (not to mention the coins of gilt pasteboard littered about on the mantelpieces, which, even before she had come to know Swann, a man of taste had advised her to jettison). Moreover in the artistic disorder, the studio-like jumble of the rooms, whose walls were still painted in sombre colours which made them as different as possible from the white-enamelled drawing-rooms Mme Swann was to favour a little later, the Far East was retreating more and more before the invading forces of the eighteenth century; and the cushions which, to make me "comfortable," Mme Swann heaped up and buffeted into position behind my back were sprinkled with Louis XV garlands and not, as of old, with Chinese dragons. In the room in which she was usually to be found, and of which she would say, "Yes, I like this room; I use it a great deal. I couldn't live with a lot of hostile, pompous things; this is where I do my work" (though she never stated precisely at what she was working, whether a picture, or perhaps a book, for the hobby of writing was beginning to become common among women who liked to do something, not to be quite useless), she was surrounded by Dresden pieces (having a fancy for that sort of porcelain, which she pronounced with an English accent, saying in any connexion: "How pretty that is; it reminds me of Dresden flowers"), and dreaded for them even more than in the old days for her grotesque figures and her vases the ignorant handling of her servants who were made to expiate the anxiety that they had caused her by submitting to outbursts of rage at which Swann, the most courteous and considerate of masters, looked on without being shocked. Not that the clear perception of certain weaknesses in those we love in any way diminishes our affection for them; rather that affection makes us find those weaknesses charming. Nowadays it was rarely in Japanese kimonos that Odette received her intimates, but rather in the bright and billowing silk of a Watteau housecoat whose flowering foam she would make as though to rub gently over her bosom, and in which she basked, lolled, disported herself with such an air of well-being, of cool freshness, taking such deep breaths, that she seemed to look on these garments not as something decorative, a mere setting for herself, but as necessary, in the same way as her "tub" or her daily "constitutional," to satisfy the requirements of her physiognomy and the niceties of hygiene. She used often to say that she would go without bread rather than give up art and cleanliness, and that the burning of the "Gioconda" would distress her infinitely more than the destruction, by the same element, of the "fulltitudes" of people she knew. Theories which seemed paradoxical to her friends, but made them regard her as a superior woman, and earned her a weekly visit from the Belgian Minister, so that in the little world of which she was the sun everyone would have been greatly astonished to learn that elsewhere—at the Verdurins', for instance—she was reckoned a fool. It was this vivacity of mind that made Mme Swann prefer men's society to women's. But when she criticised the latter it was always from the courtesan's standpoint, singling out the blemishes that might lower them in the esteem of men, thick ankles, a bad complexion, inability to spell, hairy legs, foul breath, pencilled eyebrows. But towards a woman who had shown her kindness or indulgence in the past she was more lenient, especially if this woman was now in trouble. She would defend her warmly, saying: "People are not fair to her. I assure you, she's quite a nice woman really."

It was not only the furniture of Odette's drawing-room, it was Odette herself whom Mme Cottard and all those who had frequented the society of Mme de Crécy would have found it difficult, if they had not seen her for some little time, to recognise. She seemed to be so much younger. No doubt this was partly because she had put on a little weight, was in better health, seemed at once calmer, cooler, more restful, and also because the new way in which she braided her hair gave more breadth to a face which was animated by an application of pink powder, and into which her eyes and profile, formerly too prominent, seemed now to have been reabsorbed. But another reason for this change lay in the fact that, having reached the turning-point of life, Odette had at length discovered, or invented, a physiognomy of her own, an unalterable "character," a "style of beauty," and on her uncoordinated features—which for so long, exposed to the dangerous and futile vagaries of the flesh, putting on momentarily years, a sort of fleeting old age, as a result of the slightest fatigue, had composed for her somehow or other, according to her mood and her state of health, a dishevelled, changeable, formless, charming face—had now set this fixed type, as it were an immortal youthfulness.

Swann had in his room, instead of the handsome photographs that were now taken of his wife, in all of which the same enigmatic and winning expression enabled one to recognise, whatever dress and hat she was wearing, her triumphant face and figure, a little daguerreotype of her, quite plain, taken long before the appearance of this new type, from which the youthfulness and beauty of Odette, which she had not yet discovered when it was taken, appeared to be missing. But doubtless Swann, having remained constant, or having reverted, to a different conception of her, enjoyed in the frail young woman with pensive eyes and tired features, caught in a pose between stillness and motion, a more Botticellian charm. For he still liked to see his wife as a Botticelli figure. Odette, who on the contrary sought not to bring out but to compensate for, to cover and conceal the points about her looks that did not please her, what might perhaps to an artist

express her "character" but in her woman's eyes were blemishes, would not have that painter mentioned in her presence. Swann had a wonderful scarf of oriental silk, blue and pink, which he had bought because it was exactly that worn by the Virgin in the *Magnificat*. But Mme Swann refused to wear it. Once only she allowed her husband to order her a dress covered all over with daisies, cornflowers, forget-me-nots and bluebells, like that of the Primavera. And sometimes in the evening, when she was tired, he would quietly draw my attention to the way in which she was giving, quite unconsciously, to her pensive hands the uncontrolled, almost distraught movement of the Virgin who dips her pen into the inkpot that the angel holds out to her, before writing upon the sacred page on which is already traced the word "*Magnificat*." But he added: "Whatever you do, don't say anything about it to her; if she knew she was doing it, she would change her pose at once."

Except at these moments of involuntary relaxation in which Swann sought to recapture the melancholy Botticellian droop, Odette's body seemed now to be cut out in a single silhouette wholly confined within a "line" which, following the contours of the woman, had abandoned the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the reticulations, the elaborate dispersions of the fashions of former days, but also, where it was her anatomy that went wrong by making unnecessary digressions within or without the ideal form traced for it, was able to rectify, by a bold stroke, the errors of nature, to make good, along a whole section of its course, the lapses of the flesh as well as of the material. The pads, the preposterous "bustle" had disappeared, as well as those tailed bodices which, overlapping the skirt and stiffened by rods of whalebone, had so long amplified Odette with an artificial stomach and had given her the appearance of being composed of several disparate pieces which there was no individuality to bind together. The vertical fall of the fringes, the curve of the ruches had made way for the inflexion of a body which made silk palpitate as a siren stirs the waves and gave to cambric a human expression, now that it had been liberated, like an organic and living form, from the long chaos and nebulous envelopment of fashions at last dethroned. But Mme Swann had chosen, had contrived to preserve some vestiges of certain of these, in the very midst of those that had supplanted them. When, in the evening, finding myself unable to work and knowing that Gilberte had gone to the theatre with friends, I paid a surprise visit to her parents, I used often to find Mme Swann in an elegant dishabille the skirt of which, of one of those rich dark colours, blood-red or orange, which seemed to have a special meaning because they were no longer in fashion, was crossed diagonally, though not concealed, by a broad band of black lace which recalled the flounces of an earlier day. When, on a still chilly afternoon in spring, she had taken me (before my break with her daughter) to the Zoo, under her jacket, which she opened or buttoned up according as the exercise made her feel warm, the dog-toothed edging of her blouse suggested a glimpse of the lapel of some non-existent waistcoat such as she had been accustomed to wear some years earlier, when she had liked their edges to have the same slight indentations; and her scarf—of that same "tartan" to which she had remained faithful, but whose tones she had so far softened, red becoming pink and blue lilac, that one might almost have taken it for one of those pigeon's-breast taffetas which were the latest novelty—was knotted in such a way under her chin, without one's being able to make out where it was fastened, that one was irresistibly reminded of those bonnet-strings which were now no longer worn. She need only "hold out" like this for a little longer and young men attempting to understand her theory of dress would say: "Mme Swann is quite a period in herself, isn't she?" As in a fine literary style which superimposes different forms but is strengthened by a tradition that lies concealed behind them, so in Mme Swann's attire those half-tinted memories of waistcoats or of ringlets, sometimes a tendency, at once repressed, towards the "all aboard," or even a distant and vague allusion to the "follow-me-lad," kept alive beneath the concrete form the unfinished likeness of other, older forms which one would not have been able to find effectively reproduced by the milliner or the dressmaker, but about which one's thoughts incessantly hovered, and enveloped Mme Swann in a sort of nobility—perhaps because the very uselessness of these fripperies made them seem designed to serve some more than utilitarian purpose, perhaps because of the traces they preserved of vanished years, or else because of a vestimentary personality peculiar to this woman, which gave to the most dissimilar of her costumes a distinct family likeness. One felt that she did not dress simply for the comfort or the adornment of her body; she was surrounded by her garments as by the delicate and spiritualised machinery of a whole civilisation.

When Gilberte, who, as a rule, gave her tea-parties on the days when her mother was "at home," had for some reason to go out and I was therefore free to attend Mme Swann's "do," I would find her dressed in one or other of her beautiful dresses, some of which were of taffeta, others of grosgrain, or of velvet, or of crêpe-de-Chine, or satin or silk, dresses which, not being loose like the gowns she generally wore in the house but pulled together as though she were just going out in them, gave to her stay-at-home laziness on those afternoons something alert and energetic. And no doubt the bold simplicity of their cut was singularly appropriate to her figure and to her movements, which her sleeves appeared to be symbolising in colours that varied from day to day: one felt that there was a sudden determination in the blue velvet, an easy-going good humour in the white taffeta, and that a sort of supreme discretion full of dignity in her way of holding out her arm had, in order to become visible, put on the appearance, dazzling with the smile of one who had made great sacrifices, of the black crêpe-de-Chine. But at the same time, to these animated dresses the complication of their trimmings, none of which had any practical utility or served any visible purpose, added something detached, pensive, secret, in harmony with the melancholy which Mme Swann still retained, at least in the shadows under her eyes and the drooping arches of her hands. Beneath the profusion of sapphire charms, enamelled four-leaf clovers, silver medals, gold medallions, turquoise amulets, ruby chains and topaz chestnuts there would be on the dress itself some design carried out in colour which pursued across the surface of an inserted panel a preconceived existence of its own, some row of little satin buttons which buttoned nothing and could not be unbuttoned, a strip of braid that sought to please the eye with the



minuteness, the discretion of a delicate reminder; and these, as well as the jewels, gave the impression—having otherwise no possible justification—of disclosing a secret intention, being a pledge of affection, keeping a secret, ministering to a superstition, commemorating a recovery from sickness, a granted wish, a love affair or a philopena. And now and then in the blue velvet of the bodice a hint of “slashes,” in the Henri II style, or in the gown of black satin a slight swelling which, if it was in the sleeves, just below the shoulders, made one think of the “leg of mutton” sleeves of 1830, or if, on the other hand, it was beneath the skirt, of Louis XV “panniers,” gave the dress a just perceptible air of being a “fancy dress” costume and at all events, by insinuating beneath the life of the present day a vague reminiscence of the past, blended with the person of Mme Swann the charm of certain heroines of history or romance. And if I were to draw her attention to this: “I don’t play golf,” she would answer, “like so many of my friends. So I should have no excuse for going about in *sweaters* as they do.”

In the confusion of her drawing-room, on her way from showing out one visitor, or with a plateful of cakes to tempt another, Mme Swann as she passed by me would take me aside for a moment: “I’ve been specially charged by Gilberte to invite you to luncheon the day after tomorrow. As I wasn’t sure of seeing you here, I was going to write to you if you hadn’t come.” I continued to resist. And this resistance was costing me gradually less and less, because, however much we may love the poison that is destroying us, when necessity has deprived us of it for some time past, we cannot help attaching a certain value to the peace of mind which we had ceased to know, to the absence of emotion and suffering. If we are not altogether sincere in telling ourselves that we never wish to see the one we love again, we would not be a whit more sincere in saying that we do. For no doubt we can endure her absence only by promising ourselves that it will not be for long, and thinking of the day when we shall see her again, but at the same time we feel how much less painful are those daily recurring dreams of an imminent and constantly postponed meeting than would be an interview which might be followed by a spasm of jealousy, with the result that the news that we are shortly to see her would create a disagreeable turmoil in our mind. What we now put off from day to day is no longer the end of the intolerable anxiety caused by separation, it is the dreaded renewal of emotions which can lead to nothing. How infinitely we prefer to any such interview the docile memory which we can supplement at will with dreams in which she who in reality does not love us seems, on the contrary, to be making protestations of her love, when we are all alone! How infinitely we prefer that memory which, by blending gradually with it a great deal of what we desire, we can contrive to make as sweet as we choose, to the deferred interview in which we would have to deal with a person to whom we could no longer dictate at will the words that we want to hear on her lips, but from whom we can expect to meet with new coldness, unforeseen aggressions! We know, all of us, when we no longer love, that forgetfulness, or even a vague memory, does not cause us so much suffering as an ill-starred love. It was the reposeful tranquillity of such forgetfulness that in anticipation I preferred, without acknowledging it to myself.

Moreover, however painful such a course of psychological detachment and isolation may be, it grows steadily less so for another reason, namely that it weakens while it is in process of healing that fixed obsession which is a state of love. Mine was still strong enough for me to wish to recapture my old position in Gilberte’s estimation, which in view of my voluntary abstention must, it seemed to me, be steadily increasing, so that each of those calm and melancholy days on which I did not see her, coming one after the other without interruption, continuing too without prescription (unless some busy-body were to meddle in my affairs), was a day not lost but gained. Gained to no purpose, perhaps, for presently I might be pronounced cured. Resignation, modulating our habits, allows certain elements of our strength to be indefinitely increased. Those—so wretchedly inadequate—that I had had to support my grief, on the first evening of my rupture with Gilberte, had since multiplied to an incalculable power. Only, the tendency of everything that exists to prolong its own existence is sometimes interrupted by sudden impulses to which we allow ourselves to surrender with all the fewer qualms because we know for how many days, for how many months even, we have been able, and might still be able to abstain. And often it is when the purse in which we hoard our savings is nearly full that we suddenly empty it, it is without waiting for the result of our treatment and when we have succeeded in growing accustomed to it that we abandon it. And so, one day, when Mme Swann repeated her familiar words about the pleasure it would be to Gilberte to see me, thus putting the happiness of which I had now for so long been depriving myself as it were within arm’s reach, I was stupefied by the realisation that it was still possible for me to enjoy it; and I could hardly wait until next day; for I had made up my mind to pay a surprise visit to Gilberte before her dinner.

What helped me to remain patient throughout the long day that followed was a little plan that I made. As soon as everything was forgotten, as soon as I was reconciled with Gilberte, I no longer wished to visit her except as a lover. Every day she would receive from me the finest flowers that grew. And if Mme Swann, although she had no right to be too severe a mother, should forbid my making a daily offering of flowers, I should find other gifts, more precious and less frequent. My parents did not give me enough money for me to be able to buy expensive things. I thought of a big vase of old Chinese porcelain which had been left to me by aunt Léonie, and of which Mamma prophesied daily that Françoise would come to her and say “Oh, it’s all come to pieces!” and that would be the end of it. Would it not be wiser, in that case, to part with it, to sell it so as to be able to give Gilberte all the pleasure I could. I felt sure that I could easily get a thousand francs for it. I had it wrapped up; I had grown so used to it that I had ceased altogether to notice it: parting with it had at least the advantage of making me realise what it was like. I took it with me on my way to the Swanns’, and, giving the driver their address, told him to go by the Champs-Élysées, at one end of which was the shop of a big dealer in oriental objects whom my father knew. Greatly to my surprise he offered me there and then

not one thousand but ten thousand francs for the vase. I took the notes with rapture: every day, for a whole year, I could smother Gilberte in roses and lilac. When I left the shop and got back into the carriage the driver (naturally enough, since the Swanns lived out by the Bois) instead of taking the ordinary way began to drive along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. He had just passed the corner of the Rue de Berri when, in the failing light, I thought I saw, close to the Swanns' house but going in the other direction, away from it, Gilberte, who was walking slowly, though with a firm step, by the side of a young man with whom she was conversing and whose face I could not distinguish. I stood up in the cab, meaning to tell the driver to stop; then hesitated. The strolling couple were already some way away, and the two parallel lines which their leisurely progress was quietly drawing were on the verge of disappearing in the Elysian gloom. A moment later, I had reached Gilberte's door. I was received by Mme Swann. "Oh! she will be sorry!" was my greeting, "I can't think why she isn't in. But she was complaining of the heat just now after a lesson, and said she might go out for a breath of fresh air with one of her girl friends." "I thought I saw her in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées." "Oh, I don't think it can have been her. Anyhow, don't mention it to her father; he doesn't approve of her going out at this time of night. Must you go? *Good-bye.*" I left her, told my driver to go back the same way, but found no trace of the two walkers. Where had they been? What were they saying to one another in the darkness with that confidential air?

I returned home, despairingly clutching my windfall of ten thousand francs, which would have enabled me to arrange so many pleasant surprises for that Gilberte whom now I had made up my mind never to see again. No doubt my call at the dealer's had brought me happiness by allowing me to hope that in future, whenever I saw my beloved, she would be pleased with me and grateful. But if I had not called there, if the carriage had not taken the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, I should not have seen Gilberte with that young man. Thus a single action may have two contradictory effects, and the misfortune that it engenders cancel the good fortune it had brought one. What had happened to me was the opposite of what so frequently occurs. We desire some pleasure, and the material means of obtaining it are lacking. "It is sad," La Bruyère tells us, "to love without an ample fortune." There is nothing for it but to try to eradicate little by little our desire for that pleasure. In my case, however, the material means had been forthcoming, but at the same moment, if not by a logical effect, at any rate as a fortuitous consequence of that initial success, my pleasure had been snatched from me. As, for that matter, it seems as though it must always be. As a rule, however, not on the same evening as we have acquired what makes it possible. Usually, we continue to struggle and hope for a little longer. But happiness can never be achieved. If we succeed in overcoming the force of circumstances, nature at once shifts the battle-ground, placing it within ourselves, and effects a gradual change in our hearts until they desire something other than what they are about to possess. And if the change of fortune has been so rapid that our hearts have not had time to change, nature does not on that account despair of conquering us, in a manner more gradual, it is true, more subtle, but no less efficacious. It is then at the last moment that the possession of our happiness is wrested from us, or rather it is that very possession which nature, with diabolical cunning, uses to destroy our happiness. Having failed in everything related to the sphere of life and action, it is a final impossibility, the psychological impossibility of happiness, that nature creates. The phenomenon of happiness either fails to appear, or at once gives rise to the bitterest reactions.

I put my ten thousand francs in a drawer. But they were no longer of any use to me. I ran through them, as it happened, even more rapidly than if I had sent flowers every day to Gilberte, for when evening came I was always too wretched to stay at home and went to drown my sorrows in the arms of women whom I did not love. As for seeking to give any sort of pleasure to Gilberte, I no longer thought of that; to visit her house again now could only give me pain. Even the sight of Gilberte, which would have been so exquisite a pleasure only yesterday, would no longer have sufficed me. For I should have been anxious all the time that I was not actually with her. That is how a woman, by every fresh torture that she inflicts on us, often quite unwillingly, increases her power over us and at the same time our demands upon her. With each injury that she does us, she encircles us more and more completely, redoubles our chains, but also those which hitherto we had thought adequate to bind her in order to keep our minds at rest. Only yesterday, had I not been afraid of annoying Gilberte, I should have been content to ask for no more than occasional meetings, which now would no longer have sufficed me and for which I should now have substituted quite different terms. For in this respect love is not like war; after each battle we renew the fight with keener ardour, which we never cease to intensify the more thoroughly we are defeated, provided always that we are still in a position to give battle. This was not my case with regard to Gilberte. Hence I preferred at first not to return to her mother's house. I continued, it is true, to assure myself that Gilberte did not love me, that I had known this for some time, that I could see her again if I chose, and, if I did not choose, forget her in the long run. But these ideas, like a remedy which has no effect upon certain complaints, had no power whatsoever to obliterate those two parallel lines which I kept on seeing, traced by Gilberte and the young man as they slowly disappeared along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. This was a new malady, which like the rest would gradually lose its force, a fresh image which would one day present itself to my mind's eye completely purged of every noxious element that it now contained, like those deadly poisons which one can handle without danger, or like a crumb of dynamite which one can use to light one's cigarette without fear of an explosion. Meanwhile there was in me another force which strove with all its might to overpower that unwholesome force which still showed me, without alteration, the figure of Gilberte walking in the dusk: to meet and to break the shock of the renewed assaults of memory, I had, toiling effectively in the opposite direction, imagination. The first of these two forces did indeed continue to show me that couple walking in the Champs-Élysées, and offered me other disagreeable pictures drawn from the past, as for instance Gilberte shrugging her shoulders when her mother

asked her to stay and entertain me. But the second force, working upon the canvas of my hopes, outlined a future far more attractively developed than this meagre past which was on the whole so restricted. For one minute in which I saw Gilberte's sullen face, how many were there in which I devised steps she might take with a view to our reconciliation, perhaps even to our engagement! It is true that this force, which my imagination was focusing upon the future, it drew, after all, from the past. As my vexation at Gilberte's having shrugged her shoulders gradually faded, the memory of her charm, a memory that made me wish for her to return to me, would diminish too. But I was still a long way from such a death of the past. I was still in love with her, even though I believed that I detested her. Whenever anyone told me that I was looking well, or was nicely dressed, I wished that she could have been there to see me. I was irritated by the desire that many people showed about this time to ask me to their houses, and refused all their invitations. There was a scene at home because I did not accompany my father to an official dinner at which the Bontemps were to be present with their niece Albertine, a young girl still hardly more than a child. So it is that the different periods of our lives overlap one another. We scornfully decline, because of one whom we love and who will some day be of so little account, to see another who is of no account today, whom we shall love tomorrow, whom we might perhaps, had we consented to see her now, have loved a little sooner and who would thus have put an end to our present sufferings, bringing others, it is true, in their place. Mine were steadily growing less. I was amazed to observe deep down inside me, one sentiment one day, another the next, generally inspired by some hope or some fear relative to Gilberte. To the Gilberte whom I carried within me. I ought to have reminded myself that the other, the real Gilberte, was perhaps entirely different from mine, knew nothing of the regrets that I ascribed to her, thought probably much less about me, not merely than I thought about her but than I made her think about me when I was closeted alone with my fictitious Gilberte, wondering what really were her feelings towards me, and imagining her thus, her attention as constantly directed towards myself.

During those periods in which grief and bitterness of spirit, though steadily diminishing, still persist, a distinction must be drawn between the pain which comes to us from the constant thought of the beloved herself and that which is revived by certain memories, some cruel remark, some verb used in a letter that we have had from her. Pending the description, in the context of another and later love affair, of the various forms that pain can assume, suffice it to say that, of these two kinds, the former is infinitely the less cruel. That is because our conception of the person, still living within us, is there adorned with the halo with which we are bound before long to invest her, and is imprinted if not with the frequent solace of hope, at any rate with the tranquillity of a permanent sadness. (It must also be observed that the image of a person who makes us suffer counts for little in those complications which aggravate the unhappiness of love, prolong it and prevent our recovery, just as in certain maladies the cause is out of proportion to the fever which follows it and the slowness of the process of convalescence.) But if the idea of the person we love is reflected in the light of an intelligence that is on the whole optimistic, the same is not true of those particular memories, those cruel remarks, that hostile letter (I received only one that could be so described from Gilberte); it is as though the person herself dwelt in those fragments, however limited, multiplied to a power which she is far from possessing in the habitual image we form of her as a whole. Because the letter has not—as the image of the loved one has—been contemplated by us in the melancholy calm of regret; we have read it, devoured it in the fearful anguish with which we were wrung by an unforeseen misfortune. Sorrows of this sort come to us in another way—from without—and it is by way of the most cruel suffering that they have penetrated to our hearts. The picture of the beloved in our minds which we believe to be old, original, authentic, has in reality been refashioned by us many times over. The cruel memory, on the other hand, is not contemporaneous with the restored picture, it is of another age, it is one of the rare witnesses to a monstrous past. But inasmuch as this past continues to exist, save in ourselves who have been pleased to substitute for it a miraculous golden age, a paradise in which all mankind shall be reconciled, those memories, those letters carry us back to reality, and cannot but make us feel, by the sudden pang they give us, what a long way we have been borne from that reality by the baseless hopes engendered by our daily expectation. Not that the said reality is bound always to remain the same, though that does indeed happen at times. There are in our lives any number of women whom we have never sought to see again, and who have quite naturally responded to our in no way calculated silence with a silence as profound. Only in their case, since we never loved them, we have never counted the years spent apart from them, and this instance, which would invalidate our whole argument, we are inclined to forget when we consider the healing effect of isolation, just as people who believe in presentiments forget all the occasions on which their own have not come true.

But after a time, absence may prove efficacious. The desire, the appetite for seeing us again may after all be reborn in the heart which at present contemns us. Only, we must allow time. But our demands as far as time is concerned are no less exorbitant than those which the heart requires in order to change. For one thing, time is the very thing that we are least willing to allow, for our suffering is acute and we are anxious to see it brought to an end. And then, too, the time which the other heart will need in order to change will have been spent by our own heart in changing itself too, so that when the goal we had set ourselves becomes attainable it will have ceased to be our goal. Besides, the very idea that it will be attainable, that there is no happiness that, when it has ceased to be a happiness for us, we cannot ultimately attain, contains an element, but only an element, of truth. It falls to us when we have grown indifferent to it. But the very fact of our indifference will have made us less exacting, and enabled us in retrospect to feel convinced that it would have delighted us had it come at a time when perhaps it would have seemed to us miserably inadequate. One is not very particular, nor a very good judge, about things which no longer matter to one. The friendly overtures of a

person whom we no longer love, overtures which in our indifference strike us as excessive, would perhaps have fallen a long way short of satisfying our love. Those tender words, that offer to meet us, we think only of the pleasure which they would have given us, and not of all those other words and meetings by which we should have wished to see them immediately followed, and which by this greed of ours we might perhaps have prevented from ever happening. So that we can never be certain that the happiness which comes to us too late, when we can no longer enjoy it, when we are no longer in love, is altogether the same as that same happiness the lack of which made us at one time so unhappy. There is only one person who could decide this—our then self; it is no longer with us, and were it to reappear, no doubt our happiness—identical or not—would vanish.

Pending these belated fulfilments of a dream about which I should by then have ceased to care, by dint of inventing, as in the days when I still hardly knew Gilberte, words or letters in which she implored my forgiveness, swore that she had never loved anyone but myself and besought me to marry her, a series of pleasant images incessantly renewed came by degrees to hold a larger place in my mind than the vision of Gilberte and the young man, which had nothing now to feed upon. At this point I should perhaps have resumed my visits to Mme Swann but for a dream I had in which one of my friends, who was not, however, one that I could identify, behaved with the utmost treachery towards me and appeared to believe that I had been treacherous to him. Abruptly awakened by the pain which this dream had caused me, and finding that it persisted after I was awake, I turned my thoughts back to the dream, racked my brains to remember who the friend was that I had seen in my sleep and whose name—a Spanish name—was no longer distinct. Combining Joseph's part with Pharaoh's, I set to work to interpret my dream. I knew that in many cases it is a mistake to pay too much attention to the appearance of the people one saw in one's dream, who may perhaps have been disguised or have exchanged faces, like those mutilated saints in cathedrals which ignorant archaeologists have restored, fitting the head of one to the body of another and jumbling all their attributes and names. Those that people bear in a dream are apt to mislead us. The person whom we love is to be recognised only by the intensity of the pain that we suffer. From mine I learned that, transformed while I was asleep into a young man, the person whose recent betrayal still hurt me was Gilberte. I remembered then that, the last time I had seen her, on the day when her mother had forbidden her to go out to a dancing lesson, she had, whether in sincerity or in pretence, declined, laughing in a strange manner, to believe in the genuineness of my feelings for her. And by association this memory brought back to me another. Long before that, it was Swann who had not wished to believe in my sincerity, or that I was a suitable friend for Gilberte. In vain had I written to him, Gilberte had brought back my letter and had returned it to me with the same incomprehensible laugh. She had not returned it to me at once: I remembered now the whole of that scene behind the clump of laurels. One becomes moral as soon as one is unhappy. Gilberte's present antipathy for me seemed to me a punishment meted out to me by life for my conduct that afternoon. One thinks one can escape such punishments because one is careful when crossing the street, and avoids obvious dangers. But there are others that take effect within us. The accident comes from the direction one least expected, from inside, from the heart. Gilberte's words: "If you like, we might go on wrestling," made me shudder. I imagined her behaving like that, at home perhaps, in the linen-room, with the young man whom I had seen escorting her along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. And so, just as much as to believe (as I had a little time back) that I was calmly established in a state of happiness, it had been foolish in me, now that I had abandoned all thought of happiness, to take it for granted that at least I had become and would be able to remain calm. For, so long as our heart keeps enshrined with any permanence the image of another person, it is not only our happiness that may at any moment be destroyed; when that happiness has vanished, when we have suffered and then succeeded in anaesthetising our sufferings, the thing then that is as elusive, as precarious as ever our happiness was, is calm. Mine returned to me in the end, for the cloud which, affecting one's spirits, one's desires, has entered one's mind under cover of a dream, will also in course of time dissolve: permanence and stability being assured to nothing in this world, not even to grief. Besides, those who suffer through love are, as we say of certain invalids, their own physicians. Since consolation can come to them only from the person who is the cause of their grief, and since their grief is an emanation from that person, it is in their grief itself that they must in the end find a remedy: which it will disclose to them at a given moment, for as long as they turn it over in their minds, this grief will continue to show them fresh aspects of the loved, the regretted person, at one moment so intensely hateful that one has no longer the slightest desire to see her since before finding enjoyment in her company one would have to make her suffer, at another so sweet and gentle that one gives her credit for the virtue one attributes to her, and finds in it a fresh reason for hope. But even though the anguish that had re-awakened in me did at length subside, I no longer wished—except rarely—to visit Mme Swann. In the first place because, in those who love and have been forsaken, the state of incessant—even if unconfessed—expectancy in which they live undergoes a spontaneous transformation, and, while to all appearances unchanged, substitutes for its original state a second that is precisely the opposite. The first was the consequence, the reflection of the painful incidents which had upset us. Expectation of what may happen is mingled with fear, all the more since we desire at that moment, should we hear nothing new from the loved one, to act ourselves, and are none too confident of the success of a step which, once we have taken it, we may find it impossible to follow up. But presently, without our having noticed any change, expectation, which still endures, is sustained, we discover, no longer by our recollection of the painful past but by anticipation of an imaginary future. From then on, it is almost pleasant. Besides, the first state, by continuing for some time, has accustomed us to living in expectation. The pain we felt during those last meetings survives in us still, but is already lulled to sleep. We are in no hurry to arouse it, especially as we do not see very clearly what to ask

for now. The possession of a little more of the woman we love would only make more necessary to us the part that we do not possess, which would inevitably remain, in spite of everything, since our requirements are begotten of our satisfactions, an irreducible quantity.

Another, final reason came later on to reinforce this, and to make me discontinue altogether my visits to Mme Swann. This reason, slow in revealing itself, was not that I had yet forgotten Gilberte but that I must make every effort to forget her as speedily as possible. No doubt, now that the keen edge of my suffering was dulled, my visits to Mme Swann had become once again, for the residue of my sadness, the sedative and distraction which had been so precious to me at first. But the reason for the efficacy of the former was the drawback of the latter, namely that with these visits the memory of Gilberte was intimately blended. The distraction would be of no avail to me unless it set up, in opposition to a feeling no longer nourished by Gilberte's presence, thoughts, interests, passions in which Gilberte had no part. These states of consciousness to which the person whom we love remains a stranger then occupy a place which, however small it may be at first, is always that much reconquered from the love that had been in unchallenged possession of our whole soul. We must seek to encourage these thoughts, to make them grow, while the sentiment which is no more now than a memory dwindles, so that the new elements introduced into the mind contest with that sentiment, wrest from it an ever-increasing portion of our soul, until at last the victory is complete. I realised that this was the only way in which my love could be killed, and I was still young enough and brave enough to undertake the attempt, to subject myself to that most cruel grief which springs from the certainty that, however long it may take us, we shall succeed in the end. The reason I now gave in my letters to Gilberte for refusing to see her was an allusion to some mysterious misunderstanding, wholly fictitious, which was supposed to have arisen between her and myself, and as to which I had hoped at first that Gilberte would demand an explanation. But, in fact, never, even in the most insignificant relations in life, does a request for enlightenment come from a correspondent who knows that an obscure, untruthful, incriminating sentence has been introduced on purpose, so that he shall protest against it; he is only too happy to feel thereby that he possesses—and to keep in his own hands—the initiative in the matter. All the more so is this true in our more tender relations, in which love is endowed with so much eloquence, indifference with so little curiosity. Gilberte never having questioned or sought to learn about this misunderstanding, it became for me a real entity, to which I referred anew in every letter. And there is in these baseless situations, in the affectation of coldness, a sort of fascination which tempts one to persevere in them. By dint of writing: "Now that our hearts are sundered," so that Gilberte might answer: "But they're not. Do let's talk it over," I had gradually come to believe that they were. By constantly repeating, "Life may have changed for us, but it will never destroy the feeling that we had for one another," in the hope of at last hearing the answer: "But there has been no change, the feeling is stronger now than it ever was," I was living with the idea that life had indeed changed, that we should keep the memory of the feeling which no longer existed, as certain neurotics, from having at first pretended to be ill, end by becoming chronic invalids. Now, whenever I had to write to Gilberte, I brought my mind back to this imagined change, which, being now tacitly admitted by the silence which she preserved with regard to it in her replies, would in future subsist between us. Then Gilberte ceased to confine herself to preterition. She too adopted my point of view; and, as in the speeches at official banquets, when the Head of State who is being entertained adopts more or less the same expressions as have just been used by the Head of State who is entertaining him, whenever I wrote to Gilberte: "Life may have parted us, but the memory of the days when we knew one another will endure," she never failed to respond: "Life may have parted us, but it cannot make us forget those happy hours which will always be dear to us both" (though we should have found it hard to say why or how "Life" had parted us, or what change had occurred). My sufferings were no longer excessive. And yet, one day when I was telling her in a letter that I had heard of the death of our old barley-sugar woman in the Champs-Élysées, as I wrote the words: "I felt that this would grieve you; in me it awakened a host of memories," I could not restrain myself from bursting into tears when I saw that I was speaking in the past tense, as though it were of some dead friend, now almost forgotten, of that love of which in spite of myself I had never ceased to think as something still alive, or at least capable of reviving. Nothing could have been more tender than this correspondence between friends who did not wish to see one another any more. Gilberte's letters to me had all the delicacy of those which I used to write to people who did not matter to me, and showed me the same apparent marks of affection, which it was so soothing for me to receive from her.

But, little by little, every refusal to see her grieved me less. And as she became less dear to me, my painful memories were no longer strong enough to destroy by their incessant return the growing pleasure which I found in thinking of Florence or of Venice. I regretted, at such moments, that I had abandoned the idea of diplomacy and had condemned myself to a sedentary existence, in order not to be separated from a girl whom I should never see again and had already almost forgotten. We construct our lives for one person, and when at length it is ready to receive her that person does not come; presently she is dead to us, and we live on, prisoners within the walls which were intended only for her. If Venice seemed to my parents to be too far away and its climate too treacherous for me, it would be at least quite easy and not too tiring to go and settle down at Balbec. But to do that I should have had to leave Paris, to forgo those visits thanks to which, infrequent as they were, I might sometimes hear Mme Swann talk to me about her daughter. Besides, I was beginning to find in them various pleasures in which Gilberte had no part.

When spring arrived, and with it the cold weather, during an icy Lent and the hailstorms of Holy Week, as Mme Swann declared that it was freezing in her house, I used often to see her entertaining her guests in her furs, her shivering hands and shoulders buried beneath the gleaming white carpets of an immense rectangular muff and a cape, both of ermine, which she had not taken off on coming in from her drive, and which

suggested the last patches of the snows of winter, more persistent than the rest, which neither the heat of the fire nor the advancing season had succeeded in melting. And the all-embracing truth about these glacial but already flowering weeks was suggested to me in this drawing-room, which soon I should be entering no more, by other more intoxicating forms of whiteness, that for example of the guelder-roses clustering, at the summits of their tall bare stalks, like the rectilinear trees in pre-Raphaelite paintings, their balls of blossom, divided yet composite, white as announcing angels and exhaling a fragrance as of lemons. For the mistress of Tansonville knew that April, even an ice-bound April, is not barren of flowers, that winter, spring, summer are not held apart by barriers as hermetic as might be supposed by the town-dweller who, until the first hot day, imagines the world as containing nothing but houses that stand naked in the rain. That Mme Swann was content with the consignments furnished by her Combray gardener, that she did not, through the medium of her own "regular" florist, fill the gaps in an inadequate display with borrowings from a precocious Mediterranean shore, I do not for a moment suggest, nor did it worry me at the time. It was enough to fill me with longing for country scenes that, overhanging the loose snowdrifts of the muff in which Mme Swann kept her hands, the guelder-rose snow-balls (which served very possibly in the mind of my hostess no other purpose than to compose, on the advice of Bergotte, a "Symphony in White" with her furniture and her garments) should remind me that the Good Friday music in *Parsifal* symbolises a natural miracle which one could see performed every year if one had the sense to look for it, and, assisted by the acid and heady perfume of other kinds of blossom which, although their names were unknown to me, had brought me so often to a standstill on my walks round Combray, should make Mme Swann's drawing-room as virginal, as candidly in blossom without the least trace of verdure, as overlaid with genuine scents of flowers, as was the little lane by Tansonville.

But it was still too much for me that these memories should be revived. There was a risk of their fostering what little remained of my love for Gilberte. And so, though I no longer felt the least distress during these visits to Mme Swann, I spaced them out even more and endeavoured to see as little of her as possible. At most, since I continued not to go out of Paris, I allowed myself an occasional walk with her. The fine weather had come at last, and the sun was hot. As I knew that before luncheon Mme Swann used to go out every day for an hour's stroll in the Avenue du Bois, near the Etoile—a spot which at that time, because of the people who used to collect there to gaze at the "swells" whom they knew only by name, was known as the "Down-and-outs Club"—I persuaded my parents, on Sunday (for on weekdays I was busy all morning) to let me postpone my lunch until long after theirs, until a quarter past one, and go for a walk before it. During that month of May I never missed a Sunday, Gilberte having gone to stay with friends in the country. I used to arrive at the Arc-de-Triomphe about noon. I kept watch at the entrance to the Avenue, never taking my eyes off the corner of the side-street along which Mme Swann, who had only a few yards to walk, would come from her house. Since by this time many of the people who had been strolling there were going home to lunch, those who remained were few in number and, for the most part, fashionably dressed. Suddenly, on the gravelled path, unhurrying, cool, luxuriant, Mme Swann would appear, blossoming out in a costume which was never twice the same but which I remember as being typically mauve; then she would hoist and unfurl at the end of its long stalk, just at the moment when her radiance was at its zenith, the silken banner of a wide parasol of a shade that matched the showering petals of her dress. A whole troop of people escorted her; Swann himself, four or five clubmen who had been to call upon her that morning or whom she had met in the street; and their black or grey agglomeration, obedient to her every gesture, performing the almost mechanical movements of a lifeless setting in which Odette was framed, gave to this woman, in whose eyes alone was there any intensity, the air of looking out in front of her, from among all those men, as from a window behind which she had taken her stand, and made her loom there, frail but fearless, in the nudity of her delicate colours, like the apparition of a creature of a different species, of an unknown race, and of almost martial power, by virtue of which she seemed by herself a match for all her multiple escort. Smiling, rejoicing in the fine weather, in the sunshine which had not yet become trying, with the air of a calm assurance of a creator who has accomplished his task and takes no thought for anything besides, certain that her clothes—even though the vulgar herd should fail to appreciate them—were the most elegant of all, wearing them for herself and for her friends, naturally, without exaggerated attention to them but also without absolute detachment, not preventing the little bows of ribbon on her bodice and skirt from floating buoyantly upon the air before her like creatures of whose presence she was not unaware and whom she indulgently permitted to disport themselves in accordance with their own rhythm, provided that they followed where she led, and even upon her mauve parasol, which, as often as not, she still held closed when she appeared on the scene, letting fall now and then, as though upon a bunch of Parma violets, her happy gaze, so kindly that, when it was fastened no longer upon her friends but on some inanimate object, it still seemed to smile. She thus reserved, kept open for her wardrobe, this interval of elegance of which the men with whom she was on the most familiar terms respected both the extent and the necessity, not without a certain deference, as of profane visitors to a shrine, an admission of their own ignorance, and over which they acknowledged (as to an invalid over the special precautions that he has to take, or a mother over the bringing up of her children) their friend's competence and jurisdiction. No less than by the court which encircled her and seemed not to observe the passers-by, Mme Swann, by the belatedness of her appearance, evoked those rooms in which she had spent so long, so leisurely a morning and to which she must presently return for luncheon; she seemed to indicate their proximity by the sauntering ease of her progress, like the stroll one takes up and down one's own garden; of those rooms one would have said that she carried about her still the cool, the indoor shade. But for that very reason the sight of her made me feel the more strongly a sensation of open air and warmth—all the



more so because, already persuaded as I was that, by virtue of the liturgy and ritual in which Mme Swann was so profoundly versed, her clothes were connected with the season and the hour by a bond both necessary and unique, the flowers on the flexible straw brim of her hat, the ribbons on her dress, seemed to me to spring from the month of May even more naturally than the flowers of garden or woodland; and to learn what latest change there was in weather or season, I did not raise my eyes higher than to her parasol, open and outstretched like another, a nearer sky, round, clement, mobile and blue. For these rites, sovereign though they were, subjugated their glory (and, consequently, Mme Swann her own) in condescending obedience to the day, the spring, the sun, none of which struck me as being sufficiently flattered that so elegant a woman had deigned not to ignore their existence, and had chosen on their account a dress of a brighter, thinner fabric, suggesting to me, by a splaying at the collar and sleeves, the moist warmth of the throat and wrists that they exposed—in a word, had taken for them all the pains of a great lady who, having gaily condescended to pay a visit to common folk in the country, and whom everyone, even the most plebeian, knows, yet makes a point of donning for the occasion suitably pastoral attire. On her arrival I would greet Mme Swann, and she would stop me and say (in English) “*Good morning*” with a smile. We would walk a little way together. And I realised that it was for herself that she obeyed these canons in accordance with which she dressed, as though yielding to a superior wisdom of which she herself was the high priestess: for if it should happen that, feeling too warm, she threw open or even took off altogether and gave me to carry the jacket which she had intended to keep buttoned up, I would discover in the blouse beneath it a thousand details of execution which had had every chance of remaining unobserved, like those parts of an orchestral score to which the composer has devoted infinite labour although they may never reach the ears of the public: or, in the sleeves of the jacket that lay folded across my arm I would see, and would lengthily gaze at, for my own pleasure or from affection for its wearer, some exquisite detail, a deliciously tinted strap, a lining of mauve satinette which, ordinarily concealed from every eye, was yet just as delicately fashioned as the outer parts, like those Gothic carvings on a cathedral, hidden on the inside of a balustrade eighty feet from the ground, as perfect as the bas-reliefs over the main porch, and yet never seen by any living man until, happening to pass that way upon his travels, an artist obtains leave to climb up there among them, to stroll in the open air, overlooking the whole town, between the soaring towers.

What enhanced this impression that Mme Swann walked in the Avenue du Bois as though along the paths of her own garden, was—for people ignorant of her habit of taking a “constitutional”—the fact that she had come there on foot, without any carriage following, she whom, once May had begun, they were accustomed to see, behind the most brilliant “turn-out,” the smartest liveries in Paris, indolently and majestically seated, like a goddess, in the balmy open air of an immense victoria on eight springs. On foot, Mme Swann had the appearance—especially when her step was slowed by the heat of the sun—of having yielded to curiosity, of committing an elegant breach of the rules of protocol, like those crowned heads who, without consulting anyone, accompanied by the slightly scandalised admiration of a suite which dares not venture any criticism, step out of their boxes during a gala performance and visit the lobby of the theatre, mingling for a moment or two with the rest of the audience. So between Mme Swann and themselves the crowd felt that there existed those barriers of a certain kind of opulence which seem to them the most insurmountable of all. The Faubourg Saint-Germain may have its barriers too, but these are less telling to the eyes and imagination of the “down-and-out.” These latter, in the presence of an aristocratic lady who is simpler, more easily mistaken for an ordinary middle-class woman, less remote from the people, will not feel the same sense of inequality, almost of unworthiness, as they do before a Mme Swann. Of course women of this sort are not themselves dazed, as the crowd are, by the splendour in which they are surrounded; they have ceased to pay any attention to it, but only because they have grown used to it, that is to say have come to look upon it more and more as natural and necessary, to judge their fellow creatures according as they are more or less initiated into these luxurious ways: so that (the grandeur which they allow themselves to display or discover in others being wholly material, easily verified, slowly acquired, the lack of it hard to compensate) if such women place a passer-by in the lowest rank, it is by the same process that has made them appear to him as in the highest, that is to say instinctively, at first sight, and without possibility of appeal. Perhaps that social class which included in those days women like Lady Israels, who mixed with the women of the aristocracy, and Mme Swann, who was to get to know them later on, that intermediate class, inferior to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, since it courted the latter, but superior to everything that was not of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, possessing this peculiarity that, while already detached from the world of the merely rich, it was riches still that it represented, but riches that had become ductile, obedient to a conscious artistic purpose, malleable gold, chased with a poetic design and taught to smile; perhaps that class—in the same form, at least, and with the same charm—exists no longer. In any event, the women who were its members would not satisfy today what was the primary condition on which they reigned, since with advancing age they have lost—almost all of them—their beauty. Whereas it was from the glorious zenith of her ripe and still so fragrant summer as much as from the pinnacle of her noble wealth that Mme Swann, majestic, smiling, benign, advancing along the Avenue du Bois, saw, like Hypatia, worlds revolving beneath the slow tread of her feet. Young men as they passed looked at her anxiously, not knowing whether their vague acquaintance with her (especially since, having been introduced only once, at the most, to Swann, they were afraid that he might not remember them) was sufficient excuse for their venturing to doff their hats. And they trembled to think of the consequences as they made up their minds to do so, wondering whether this audaciously provocative and sacrilegious gesture, challenging the inviolable supremacy of a caste, would not let loose the catastrophic forces of nature or bring down upon them the vengeance of a jealous god. It provoked only, like the winding of a piece of clockwork, a

series of gesticulations from little, bowing figures, who were none other than Odette's escort, beginning with Swann himself, who raised his tall hat lined in green leather with a smiling courtesy which he had acquired in the Faubourg Saint-Germain but to which was no longer wedded the indifference that he would at one time have shown. Its place was now taken (for he had been to some extent permeated by Odette's prejudices) at once by irritation at having to acknowledge the salute of a person who was none too well dressed and by satisfaction at his wife's knowing so many people, a mixed sensation to which he gave expression by saying to the smart friends who walked by his side: "What, another one! Upon my word, I can't imagine where my wife picks all these fellows up!" Meanwhile, having acknowledged with a nod the greeting of some terrified young man who had already passed out of sight though his heart was still beating furiously, Mme Swann turned to me: "Then it's all over?" she said. "You aren't ever coming to see Gilberte again? I'm glad you make an exception of me, and are not going to *drop* me completely. I like seeing you, but I also liked the influence you had over my daughter. I'm sure she's very sorry about it, too. However, I mustn't bully you, or you'll make up your mind at once that you never want to set eyes on me again." "Odette, there's Sagan saying good-day to you," Swann pointed out to his wife. And there indeed was the Prince, as in some grand finale at the theatre or the circus or in an old painting, wheeling his horse round so as to face her, and doffing his hat with a sweeping theatrical and, as it were, allegorical flourish in which he displayed all the chivalrous courtesy of the great nobleman bowing in token of respect for Womanhood, even if it was embodied in a woman whom it was impossible for his mother or his sister to know. And in fact at every turn, recognised in the depths of the liquid transparency and of the luminous glaze of the shadow which her parasol cast over her, Mme Swann received the salutations of the last belated horsemen, who passed as though filmed at the gallop in the blinding glare of the Avenue, clubmen whose names, those of celebrities for the public—Antoine de Castellane, Adalbert de Montmorency and the rest—were for Mme Swann the familiar names of friends. And as the average span of life, the relative longevity of our memories of poetical sensations is much greater than that of our memories of what the heart has suffered, now that the sorrows that I once felt on Gilberte's account have long since faded and vanished, there has survived them the pleasure that I still derive—whenever I close my eyes and read, as it were upon the face of a sundial, the minutes that are recorded between a quarter past twelve and one o'clock in the month of May—from seeing myself once again strolling and talking thus with Mme Swann, beneath her parasol, as though in the coloured shade of a wistaria bower.

## PLACE-NAMES · THE PLACE

I had arrived at a state of almost complete indifference to Gilberte when, two years later, I went with my grandmother to Balbec. When I succumbed to the attraction of a new face, when it was with the help of some other girl that I hoped to discover the Gothic cathedrals, the palaces and gardens of Italy, I said to myself sadly that this love of ours, in so far as it is a love for one particular creature, is not perhaps a very real thing, since, though associations of pleasant or painful musings can attach it for a time to a woman to the extent of making us believe that it has been inspired by her in a logically necessary way, if on the other hand we detach ourselves deliberately or unconsciously from those associations, this love, as though it were in fact spontaneous and sprang from ourselves alone, will revive in order to bestow itself on another woman. At the time, however, of my departure for Balbec, and during the earlier part of my stay there, my indifference was still only intermittent. Often, our life being so careless of chronology, interpolating so many anachronisms into the sequence of our days, I found myself living in those—far older days than yesterday or last week—when I still loved Gilberte. And then no longer seeing her became suddenly painful, as it would have been at that time. The self that had loved her, which another self had already almost entirely supplanted, would reappear, stimulated far more often by a trivial than by an important event. For instance, if I may anticipate for a moment my arrival in Normandy, I heard someone who passed me on the sea-front at Balbec refer to “the head of the Ministry of Posts and his family.” Now, since I as yet knew nothing of the influence which that family was to have on my life, this remark ought to have passed unheeded; instead, it gave me at once an acute twinge, which a self that had for the most part long since been outgrown in me felt at being parted from Gilberte. For I had never given another thought to a conversation which Gilberte had had with her father in my hearing, in which allusion was made to the Secretary to the Ministry of Posts and his family. Now the memories of love are no exception to the general laws of memory, which in turn are governed by the still more general laws of Habit. And as Habit weakens everything, what best reminds us of a person is precisely what we had forgotten (because it was of no importance, and we therefore left it in full possession of its strength). That is why the better part of our memories exists outside us, in a blatter of rain, in the smell of an unaired room or of the first crackling brushwood fire in a cold grate: wherever, in short, we happen upon what our mind, having no use for it, had rejected, the last treasure that the past has in store, the richest, that which, when all our flow of tears seems to have dried at the source, can make us weep again. Outside us? Within us, rather, but hidden from our eyes in an oblivion more or less prolonged. It is thanks to this oblivion alone that we can from time to time recover the person that we were, place ourselves in relation to things as he was placed, suffer anew because we are no longer ourselves but he, and because he loved what now leaves us indifferent. In the broad daylight of our habitual memory the images of the past turn gradually pale and fade out of sight, nothing remains of them, we shall never recapture it. Or rather we should never recapture it had not a few words (such as this “head of the Ministry of Posts”) been carefully locked away in oblivion, just as an author deposits in the National Library a copy of a book which might otherwise become unobtainable.

But this pain and this recrudescence of my love for Gilberte lasted no longer than such things last in a dream, and this time, on the contrary, because at Balbec the old Habit was no longer there to keep them alive. And if these effects of Habit appear to be incompatible, that is because Habit is bound by a diversity of laws. In Paris I had grown more and more indifferent to Gilberte, thanks to Habit. The change of habit, that is to say the temporary cessation of Habit, completed Habit’s work when I set out for Balbec. It weakens, but it stabilises; it leads to disintegration but it makes the scattered elements last indefinitely. Day after day, for years past, I had modelled my state of mind as best I could upon that of the day before. At Balbec a strange bed, to the side of which a tray was brought in the morning that differed from my Paris breakfast tray, could no longer sustain the thoughts upon which my love for Gilberte had fed: there are cases (fairly rare, it is true) where, one’s days being paralysed by a sedentary life, the best way to gain time is to change one’s place of residence. My journey to Balbec was like the first outing of a convalescent who needed only that to convince him that he was cured.

The journey was one that would now no doubt be made by motor-car, with a view to making it more agreeable. We shall see that, accomplished in such a way, it would even be in a sense more real, since one would be following more closely, in a more intimate contiguity, the various gradations by which the surface of the earth is diversified. But after all the specific attraction of a journey lies not in our being able to alight at places on the way and to stop altogether as soon as we grow tired, but in its making the difference between departure and arrival not as imperceptible but as intense as possible, so that we are conscious of it in its totality, intact, as it existed in us when our imagination bore us from the place in which we were living right to the very heart of a place we longed to see, in a single sweep which seemed miraculous to us not so much because it covered a certain distance as because it united two distinct individualities of the world, took us from one name to another name, and which is schematised (better than in a form of locomotion in which, since one can disembark where one chooses, there can scarcely be said to be any point of arrival) by the mysterious operation performed in those peculiar places, railway stations, which scarcely form part of the surrounding town but contain the essence of its personality just as upon their sign-boards they bear its painted name.

But in this respect as in every other, our age is infected with a mania for showing things only in the environment that properly belongs to them, thereby suppressing the essential thing, the act of the mind which isolated them from that environment. A picture is nowadays “presented” in the midst of furniture, ornaments, hangings of the same period, stale settings which the hostess who but yesterday was so crassly ignorant but who now spends her time in archives and libraries excels at composing in the houses of today, and in the midst of which the masterpiece we contemplate as we dine does not give us the exhilarating delight that we can expect from it only in a public gallery, which symbolises far better, by its bareness and by the absence of all irritating detail, those innermost spaces into which the artist withdrew to create it.

Unhappily those marvellous places, railway stations, from which one sets out for a remote destination, are tragic places also, for if in them the miracle is accomplished whereby scenes which hitherto have had no existence save in our minds are about to become the scenes among which we shall be living, for that very reason we must, as we emerge from the waiting-room, abandon any thought of presently finding ourselves once more in the familiar room which but a moment ago still housed us. We must lay aside all hope of going home to sleep in our own bed, once we have decided to penetrate into the pestiferous cavern through which we gain access to the mystery, into one of those vast, glass-roofed sheds, like that of Saint-Lazare into which I went to find the train for Balbec, and which extended over the eviscerated city one of those bleak and boundless skies, heavy with an accumulation of dramatic menace, like certain skies painted with an almost Parisian modernity by Mantegna or Veronese, beneath which only some terrible and solemn act could be in process, such as a departure by train or the erection of the Cross.

So long as I had been content to look out from the warmth of my own bed in Paris at the Persian church of Balbec, shrouded in driving sleet, no sort of objection to this journey had been offered by my body. Its objections began only when it realised that it would be of the party, and that on the evening of my arrival I should be shown to “my” room which would be unknown to it. Its revolt was all the more profound in that on the very eve of my departure I learned that my mother would not be coming with us, my father, who would be kept busy at the Ministry until it was time for him to set off for Spain with M. de Norpois, having preferred to take a house in the neighbourhood of Paris. On the other hand, the contemplation of Balbec seemed to me none the less desirable because I must purchase it at the price of a discomfort which, on the contrary, seemed to me to symbolise and to guarantee the reality of the impression which I was going there to seek, an impression which no allegedly equivalent spectacle, no “panorama” which I might have gone to see without being thereby precluded from returning home to sleep in my own bed, could possibly have replaced. It was not for the first time that I felt that those who love and those who enjoy are not always the same. I believed that I hankered after Balbec just as much as the doctor who was treating me and who said to me on the morning of our departure, surprised to see me looking so unhappy: “I don’t mind telling you that if I could only manage a week to go down and get a blow by the sea, I shouldn’t have to be asked twice. You’ll be having races, regattas, it will be delightful.” But I had already learned the lesson—long before I was taken to see Berma—that, whatever it might be that I loved, it would never be attained, save at the end of a long and painful pursuit, in the course of which I should have first to sacrifice my pleasure to that paramount good instead of seeking it therein.

My grandmother, naturally enough, looked upon our exodus from a somewhat different point of view, and (anxious as ever that the presents which were made me should take some artistic form) had planned, in order to offer me a “print” of this journey that was old in part, for us to repeat, partly by rail and partly by road, the itinerary that Mme de Sévigné had followed when she went from Paris to “L’Orient” by way of Chaulnes and “the Pont-Audemer.” But my grandmother had been obliged to abandon this project at the instance of my father, who knew, whenever she organised any expedition with a view to extracting from it the utmost intellectual benefit that it was capable of yielding, what could be anticipated in missed trains, lost luggage, sore throats and broken rules. She was free at least to rejoice in the thought that never, when the time came for us to sally forth to the beach, would we be exposed to the risk of being kept indoors by the sudden appearance of what her beloved Sévigné calls a “beast of a coachload,” since we should know not a soul at Balbec, Legrandin having refrained from offering us a letter of introduction to his sister. (This abstention had not been so well appreciated by my aunts Céline and Flora, who, having known that lady as a girl and always hitherto referred to her, to commemorate this early intimacy, as “Renée de Cambremer,” and still possessing a number of gifts from her, the kind which continue to ornament a room or a conversation but to which the present reality no longer corresponds, imagined themselves to be avenging the insult by never uttering the name of her daughter again, when they called upon Mme Legrandin senior, confining themselves to mutual congratulations, once they were safely out of the house, such as: “I made no reference to you know whom. I think it went home!”)

And so we were simply to leave Paris by that 1.22 train which I had too often beguiled myself by looking up in the railway time-table, where it never failed to give me the emotion, almost the illusion of departure, not to feel that I already knew it. As the delineation in our minds of the features of any form of happiness depends more on the nature of the longings that it inspires in us than on the accuracy of the information which we have about it, I felt that I already knew this happiness in all its details, and had no doubt that I should feel in my compartment a special delight as the day began to cool, should contemplate this or that view as the train approached one or another station; so much so that this train, which always brought to my mind’s eye the images of the same towns which I swathed in the light of those afternoon hours through which it sped, seemed to me to be different from every other train; and I had ended—as we are apt to do with a person whom we have never seen but whose friendship we like to believe that we have won—by giving a distinct and

unalterable cast of countenance to the fair, artistic traveller who would thus have taken me with him upon his journey, and to whom I should bid farewell beneath the Cathedral of Saint-Lô before he disappeared towards the setting sun.

As my grandmother could not bring herself to go "purely and simply" to Balbec, she was to break the journey half-way, staying the night with one of her friends, from whose house I was to proceed the same evening, so as not to be in the way there and also in order that I might arrive by daylight and see Balbec church, which, we had learned, was at some distance from Balbec-Plage, and which I might not have a chance to visit later on, when I had begun my course of bathing. And perhaps it was less painful for me to feel that the admirable goal of my journey stood between me and that cruel first night on which I should have to enter a new habitation and consent to dwell there. But I had had first to leave the old; my mother had arranged to move in that very afternoon at Saint-Cloud, and had made, or pretended to make, all the arrangements for going there directly after she had seen us off at the station, without having to call again at our own house, to which she was afraid that I might otherwise feel impelled to return with her at the last moment, instead of going to Balbec. In fact, on the pretext of having so much to see to in the house which she had just taken and of being pressed for time, but in reality so as to spare me the cruel ordeal of a long-drawn parting, she had decided not to wait with us until the moment of the train's departure when, concealed amidst comings and goings and preparations that involve no final commitment, a separation suddenly looms up, impossible to endure when it is no longer possible to avoid, concentrated in its entirety in one enormous instant of impotent and supreme lucidity.

For the first time I began to feel that it was possible that my mother might live another kind of life, without me, otherwise than for me. She was going to live on her own with my father, whose existence it may have seemed to her that my ill-health, my nervous excitability, made somewhat complicated and gloomy. This separation made me all the more wretched because I told myself that for my mother it was probably the outcome of the successive disappointments which I had caused her, of which she had never said a word to me but which had made her realise the difficulty of our taking our holidays together; and perhaps also a preliminary trial for a form of existence to which she was beginning, now, to resign herself for the future, as the years crept on for my father and herself, an existence in which I should see less of her, in which (a thing that not even in my nightmares had yet been revealed to me) she would already have become something of a stranger to me, a lady who might be seen going home by herself to a house in which I should not be, asking the concierge whether there was a letter for her from me.

I could scarcely answer the porter who offered to take my bag. My mother tried to comfort me by the methods which seemed to her most efficacious. Thinking it useless to appear not to notice my unhappiness, she gently teased me about it: "Well, and what would Balbec church say if it knew that people pulled long faces like that when they were going to see it? Surely this is not the enraptured traveller Ruskin speaks of. In any case I shall know if you have risen to the occasion, even when we're miles apart I shall still be with my little man. You shall have a letter tomorrow from your Mamma."

"My dear," said my grandmother, "I picture you like Mme de Sévigné, your eyes glued to the map, and never losing sight of us for an instant."

Then Mamma sought to distract me by asking what I thought of having for dinner and drawing my attention to Françoise, whom she complimented on a hat and coat which she did not recognise, although they had horrified her long ago when she first saw them, new, upon my great-aunt, the one with an immense bird towering over it, the other decorated with a hideous pattern and jet beads. But the cloak having grown too shabby to wear, Françoise had had it turned, exposing an "inside" of plain cloth and quite a good colour. As for the bird, it had long since come to grief and been discarded. And just as it is disturbing, sometimes, to find the effects which the most conscious artists have to strive for in a folk-song or on the wall of some peasant's cottage where above the door, at precisely the right spot in the composition, blooms a white or yellow rose—so with the velvet band, the loop of ribbon that would have delighted one in a portrait by Chardin or Whistler, which Françoise had set with simple but unerring taste upon the hat, which was now charming.

To take a parallel from an earlier age, the modesty and integrity which often gave an air of nobility to the face of our old servant having extended also to the clothes which, as a discreet but by no means servile woman, who knew how to hold her own and to keep her place, she had put on for the journey so as to be fit to be seen in our company without at the same time seeming or wishing to make herself conspicuous, Françoise, in the faded cherry-coloured cloth of her coat and the discreet nap of her fur collar, brought to mind one of those miniatures of Anne of Brittany painted in Books of Hours by an old master, in which everything is so exactly in the right place, the sense of the whole is so evenly distributed throughout the parts, that the rich and obsolete singularity of the costume expresses the same pious gravity as the eyes, the lips and the hands.

Of thought, in relation to Françoise, one could hardly speak. She knew nothing, in that absolute sense in which to know nothing means to understand nothing, except the rare truths to which the heart is capable of directly attaining. The vast world of ideas did not exist for her. But when one studied the clearness of her gaze, the delicate lines of the nose and the lips, all those signs lacking from so many cultivated people in whom they would have signified a supreme distinction, the noble detachment of a rare mind, one was disquieted, as one is by the frank, intelligent eyes of a dog, to which nevertheless one knows that all our human conceptions are alien, and one might have been led to wonder whether there may not be, among those other humbler brethren, the peasants, individuals who are as it were the élite of the world of the simple-

mind, or rather who, condemned by an unjust fate to live among the simple-minded, deprived of enlightenment and yet more naturally, more essentially akin to the chosen spirits than most educated people, are members as it were, dispersed, strayed, robbed of their heritage of reason, of the sacred family, kinsfolk, left behind in infancy, of the loftiest minds, in whom—as is apparent from the unmistakable light in their eyes, although it is applied to nothing—there has been lacking, to endow them with talent, only the gift of knowledge.

My mother, seeing that I was having difficulty in keeping back my tears, said to me: “Regulus was in the habit, when things looked grave ...’ Besides, it isn’t very nice for your Mamma! What does Mme de Sévigné say? Your grandmother will tell you: ‘I shall be obliged to draw upon all the courage that you lack.’” And remembering that affection for another distracts one’s attention from selfish griefs, she endeavoured to beguile me by telling me that she expected the removal to Saint-Cloud to go without a hitch, that she was pleased with the cab, which she had kept waiting, that the driver seemed civil and the seats comfortable. I made an effort to smile at these trifles, and bowed my head with an air of acquiescence and contentment. But they helped me only to picture to myself the more accurately Mamma’s imminent departure, and it was with a heavy heart that I gazed at her as though she were already torn from me, beneath that wide-brimmed straw hat which she had bought to wear in the country, in a flimsy dress which she had put on in view of the long drive through the sweltering midday heat; hat and dress making her someone else, someone who belonged already to the Villa Montretout, in which I should not see her.

To prevent the suffocating fits which the journey might bring on, the doctor had advised me to take a stiff dose of beer or brandy at the moment of departure, so as to begin the journey in a state of what he called “euphoria,” in which the nervous system is for a time less vulnerable. I had not yet made up my mind whether to do this, but I wished at least that my grandmother should acknowledge that, if I did so decide, I should have wisdom and authority on my side. I spoke about it therefore as if my hesitation were concerned only with where I should go for my drink, to the platform buffet or to the bar on the train. But immediately, at the air of reproach which my grandmother’s face assumed, an air of not wishing even to entertain such an idea for a moment, “What!” I cried, suddenly resolving upon this action of going to get a drink, the performance of which became necessary as a proof of my independence since the verbal announcement of it had not succeeded in passing unchallenged, “What! You know how ill I am, you know what the doctor ordered, yet look at the advice you give me!”

When I had explained to my grandmother how unwell I felt, her distress, her kindness were so apparent as she replied, “Run along then, quickly; get yourself some beer or a liqueur if it will do you good,” that I flung myself upon her and smothered her with kisses. And if after that I went and drank a great deal too much in the bar of the train it was because I felt that otherwise I should have too violent an attack, which was what would distress her most. When at the first stop I clambered back into our compartment I told my grandmother how pleased I was to be going to Balbec, that I felt that everything would go off splendidly, that after all I should soon grow used to being without Mamma, that the train was most comfortable, the barman and the attendants so friendly that I should like to make the journey often so as to have the opportunity of seeing them again. My grandmother, however, did not appear to be quite so overjoyed at all these good tidings. She answered, without looking me in the face: “Why don’t you try to get a little sleep?” and turned her eyes to the window, the blind of which, though we had lowered it, did not completely cover the glass, so that the sun could shed on the polished oak of the door and the cloth of the seat (like a far more persuasive advertisement for a life shared with nature than those hung high up on the wall of the compartment by the railway company, representing landscapes whose names I could not make out from where I sat) the same warm and slumbrous light which drowsed in the forest glades.

But when my grandmother thought that my eyes were shut I could see her now and again, from behind her spotted veil, steal a glance at me, then withdraw it, then look back again, like a person trying to make himself perform some exercise that hurts him in order to get into the habit.

Thereupon I spoke to her, but that did not seem to please her. And yet to myself the sound of my own voice was agreeable, as were the most imperceptible, the innermost movements of my body. And so I endeavoured to prolong them. I allowed each of my inflexions to linger lazily upon the words, I felt each glance from my eyes pause pleasurably on the spot where it came to rest and remain there beyond its normal time. “Now, now, sit still and rest,” said my grandmother. “If you can’t manage to sleep, read something.” And she handed me a volume of Mme de Sévigné which I opened, while she buried herself in the *Mémoires de Madame de Beauséjour*.<sup>9</sup> She never travelled anywhere without a volume of each. They were her two favourite authors. Unwilling to move my head for the moment, and experiencing the greatest pleasure from maintaining a position once I was in it, I sat holding the volume of Mme de Sévigné without looking at it, without even lowering my eyes, which were confronted with nothing but the blue window-blind. But the contemplation of this blind appeared to me an admirable thing, and I should not have troubled to answer anyone who might have sought to distract me from contemplating it. The blue of this blind seemed to me, not perhaps by its beauty but by its intense vividness, to efface so completely all the colours that had passed before my eyes from the day of my birth up to the moment when I had gulped down the last of my drink and it had begun to take effect, that compared with this blue they were as drab, as null, as the darkness in which he has lived must be in retrospect to a man born blind whom a subsequent operation has at length enabled to see and to distinguish colours. An old ticket-collector came to ask for our tickets. I was charmed by the silvery gleam that shone from the metal buttons of his tunic. I wanted to ask him to sit down beside us. But he passed on to the next carriage, and I thought with longing of the life led by railwaymen for whom, since they spent all their



time on the line, hardly a day could pass without their seeing this old collector. The pleasure that I found in staring at the blind, and in feeling that my mouth was half-open, began at length to diminish. I became more mobile; I shifted in my seat; I opened the book that my grandmother had given me and turned its pages casually, reading whatever caught my eye. And as I read I felt my admiration for Mme de Sévigné grow.

One must not be taken in by purely formal characteristics, idioms of the period or social conventions, the effect of which is that certain people believe that they have caught the Sévigné manner when they have said: "Acquaint me, my dear," or "That count struck me as being a man of parts," or "Haymaking is the sweetest thing in the world." Mme de Simiane imagines already that she resembles her grandmother because she can write: "M. de la Boulie is flourishing, sir, and in perfect condition to hear the news of his death," or "Oh, my dear Marquis, how your letter enchanted me! What can I do but answer it?" or "Meseems, sir, that you owe me a letter, and I owe you some boxes of bergamot. I discharge my debt to the number of eight; others shall follow ... Never has the soil borne so many—evidently for your gratification." And she writes in this style also her letter on bleeding, on lemons and so forth, supposing it to be typical of the letters of Mme de Sévigné. But my grandmother, who had come to the latter from within, from love of her family and of nature, had taught me to enjoy the real beauties of her correspondence, which are altogether different. They were soon to strike me all the more forcibly inasmuch as Mme de Sévigné is a great artist of the same family as a painter whom I was to meet at Balbec and who had such a profound influence on my way of seeing things: Elstir. I realised at Balbec that it was in the same way as he that she presented things to her readers, in the order of our perception of them, instead of first explaining them in relation to their several causes. But already that afternoon in the railway carriage, on re-reading that letter in which the moonlight appears—"I could not resist the temptation: I put on all my bonnets and cloaks, though there is no need of them, I walk along this mall, where the air is as sweet as that of my chamber; I find a thousand phantasms, *monks white and black, nuns grey and white, linen cast here and there on the ground, men enshrouded upright against the tree-trunks*"—I was enraptured by what, a little later, I should have described (for does not she draw landscapes in the same way as he draws characters?) as the Dostoievsky side of Mme de Sévigné's Letters.

When, that evening, after having accompanied my grandmother to her destination and spent some hours in her friend's house, I had returned by myself to the train, at any rate I found nothing to distress me in the night which followed; this was because I did not have to spend it imprisoned in a room whose somnolence would have kept me awake; I was surrounded by the soothing activity of all those movements of the train which kept me company, offered to stay and talk to me if I could not sleep, lulled me with their sounds which I combined—like the chime of the Combray bells—now in one rhythm, now in another (hearing as the whim took me first four equal semi-quavers, then one semi-quaver furiously dashing against a crotchet); they neutralised the centrifugal force of my insomnia by exerting on it contrary pressures which kept me in equilibrium and on which my immobility and presently my drowsiness seemed to be borne with the same sense of relaxation that I should have felt had I been resting under the protecting vigilance of powerful forces in the heart of nature and of life, had I been able for a moment to metamorphose myself into a fish that sleeps in the sea, carried along in its slumber by the currents and the waves, or an eagle outstretched upon the buoyant air of the storm.

Sunrise is a necessary concomitant of long railway journeys, like hard-boiled eggs, illustrated papers, packs of cards, rivers upon which boats strain but make no progress. At a certain moment, when I was counting over the thoughts that had filled my mind during the preceding minutes, so as to discover whether I had just been asleep or not (and when the very uncertainty which made me ask myself the question was about to furnish me with an affirmative answer), in the pale square of the window, above a small black wood, I saw some ragged clouds whose fleecy edges were of a fixed, dead pink, not liable to change, like the colour that dyes the feathers of a wing that has assimilated it or a pastel on which it has been deposited by the artist's whim. But I felt that, unlike them, this colour was neither inertia nor caprice, but necessity and life. Presently there gathered behind it reserves of light. It brightened; the sky turned to a glowing pink which I strove, glueing my eyes to the window, to see more clearly, for I felt that it was related somehow to the most intimate life of Nature, but, the course of the line altering, the train turned, the morning scene gave place in the frame of the window to a nocturnal village, its roofs still blue with moonlight, its pond encrusted with the opalescent sheen of night, beneath a firmament still spangled with all its stars, and I was lamenting the loss of my strip of pink sky when I caught sight of it anew, but red this time, in the opposite window which it left at a second bend in the line; so that I spent my time running from one window to the other to reassemble, to collect on a single canvas the intermittent, antipodean fragments of my fine, scarlet, ever-changing morning, and to obtain a comprehensive view and a continuous picture of it.

The scenery became hilly and steep, and the train stopped at a little station between two mountains. Far down the gorge, on the edge of a hurrying stream, one could see only a solitary watch-house, embedded in the water which ran past on a level with its windows. If a person can be the product of a soil to the extent of embodying for us the quintessence of its peculiar charm, more even than the peasant girl whom I had so desperately longed to see appear when I wandered by myself along the Méséglise way, in the woods of Roussainville, such a person must have been the tall girl whom I now saw emerge from the house and, climbing a path lighted by the first slanting rays of the sun, come towards the station carrying a jar of milk. In her valley from which the rest of the world was hidden by these heights, she must never see anyone save in these trains which stopped for a moment only. She passed down the line of windows, offering coffee and milk to a few awakened passengers. Flushed with the glow of morning, her face was rosier than the sky. I felt on seeing her that desire to live which is reborn in us whenever we become conscious anew of beauty and of

happiness. We invariably forget that these are individual qualities, and, mentally substituting for them a conventional type at which we arrive by striking a sort of mean among the different faces that have taken our fancy, among the pleasures we have known, we are left with mere abstract images which are lifeless and insipid because they lack precisely that element of novelty, different from anything we have known, that element which is peculiar to beauty and to happiness. And we deliver on life a pessimistic judgment which we suppose to be accurate, for we believed that we were taking happiness and beauty into account, whereas in fact we left them out and replaced them by syntheses in which there is not a single atom of either. So it is that a well-read man will at once begin to yawn with boredom when one speaks to him of a new "good book," because he imagines a sort of composite of all the good books that he has read, whereas a good book is something special, something unforeseeable, and is made up not of the sum of all previous masterpieces but of something which the most thorough assimilation of every one of them would not enable him to discover, since it exists not in their sum but beyond it. Once he has become acquainted with this new work, the well-read man, however jaded his palate, feels his interest awaken in the reality which it depicts. So, completely unrelated to the models of beauty which I was wont to conjure up in my mind when I was by myself, this handsome girl gave me at once the taste for a certain happiness (the sole form, always different, in which we may acquire a taste for happiness), for a happiness that would be realised by my staying and living there by her side. But in this again the temporary cessation of Habit played a great part. I was giving the milk-girl the benefit of the fact that it was the whole of my being, fit to taste the keenest joys, which confronted her. As a rule it is with our being reduced to a minimum that we live; most of our faculties lie dormant because they can rely upon Habit, which knows what there is to be done and has no need of their services. But on this morning of travel, the interruption of the routine of my existence, the unfamiliar place and time, had made their presence indispensable. My habits, which were sedentary and not matutinal, for once were missing, and all my faculties came hurrying to take their place, vying with one another in their zeal, rising, each of them, like waves, to the same unaccustomed level, from the basest to the most exalted, from breath, appetite, the circulation of my blood to receptivity and imagination. I cannot say whether, in making me believe that this girl was unlike the rest of women, the rugged charm of the locality added to her own, but she was equal to it. Life would have seemed an exquisite thing to me if only I had been free to spend it, hour after hour, with her, to go with her to the stream, to the cow, to the train, to be always at her side, to feel that I was known to her, had my place in her thoughts. She would have initiated me into the delights of country life and of early hours of the day. I signalled to her to bring me some of her coffee. I felt the need to be noticed by her. She did not see me; I called to her. Above her tall figure, the complexion of her face was so burnished and so glowing that it was as if one were seeing her through a lighted window. She retraced her steps. I could not take my eyes from her face which grew larger as she approached, like a sun which it was somehow possible to stare at and which was coming nearer and nearer, letting itself be seen at close quarters, dazzling you with its blaze of red and gold. She fastened on me her penetrating gaze, but doors were being closed and the train had begun to move. I saw her leave the station and go down the hill to her home; it was broad daylight now; I was speeding away from the dawn. Whether my exaltation had been produced by this girl or had on the other hand been responsible for most of the pleasure that I had found in her presence, in either event she was so closely associated with it that my desire to see her again was above all a mental desire not to allow this state of excitement to perish utterly, not to be separated for ever from the person who, however unwillingly, had participated in it. It was not only that this state was a pleasant one. It was above all that (just as increased tension upon a string or the accelerated vibration of a nerve produces a different sound or colour) it gave another tonality to all that I saw, introduced me as an actor upon the stage of an unknown and infinitely more interesting universe; that handsome girl whom I still could see, as the train gathered speed, was like part of a life other than the life I knew, separated from it by a clear boundary, in which the sensations aroused in me by things were no longer the same, from which to emerge now would be, as it were, to die to myself. To have the consolation of feeling that I had at least an attachment to this new life, it would suffice that I should live near enough to the little station to be able to come to it every morning for a cup of coffee from the girl. But alas, she must be for ever absent from the other life towards which I was being borne with ever increasing speed, a life which I could resign myself to accept only by weaving plans that would enable me to take the same train again some day and to stop at the same station, a project which had the further advantage of providing food for the selfish, active, practical, mechanical, indolent, centrifugal tendency which is that of the human mind, for it turns all too readily aside from the effort which is required to analyse and probe, in a general and disinterested manner, an agreeable impression which we have received. And since, at the same time, we wish to continue to think of that impression, the mind prefers to imagine it in the future tense, to continue to bring about the circumstances which may make it recur—which, while giving us no clue as to the real nature of the thing, saves us the trouble of re-creating it within ourselves and allows us to hope that we may receive it afresh from without.

Certain names of towns, Vézelay or Chartres, Bourges or Beauvais, serve to designate, by abbreviation, their principal churches. This partial acceptance comes at length—if the names in question are those of places that we do not yet know—to mould the name as a whole which henceforth, whenever we wish to introduce into it the idea of the town—the town which we have never seen—will impose on it the same carved outlines, in the same style, will make of it a sort of vast cathedral. It was, however, in a railway-station, above the door of a refreshment-room in white letters on a blue panel, that I read the name—almost Persian in style—of Balbec. I strode buoyantly through the station and across the avenue that led up to it, and asked the way to the shore, so as to see nothing in the place but its church and the sea. People seemed not to understand what I meant.

Old Balbec, Balbec-en-Terre, at which I had arrived, had neither beach nor harbour. True, it was indeed in the sea that the fishermen, according to the legend, had found the miraculous Christ, a discovery recorded in a window in the church a few yards away from me; it was indeed from cliffs battered by the waves that the stone of its nave and towers had been quarried. But this sea, which for those reasons I had imagined as coming to expire at the foot of the window, was twelve miles away and more, at Balbec-Plage, and, rising beside its cupola, that steeple which, because I had read that it was itself a rugged Norman cliff round which the winds howled and the sea-birds wheeled, I had always pictured to myself as receiving at its base the last dying foam of the uplifted waves, stood on a square which was the junction of two tramway routes, opposite a café which bore, in letters of gold, the legend "Billiards," against a background of houses with the roofs of which no upstanding mast was blended. And the church—impinging on my attention at the same time as the café, the passing stranger of whom I had had to ask my way, the station to which presently I should have to return—merged with all the rest, seemed an accident, a by-product of this summer afternoon, in which the mellow and distended dome against the sky was like a fruit of which the same light that bathed the chimneys of the houses ripened the pink, glowing, luscious skin. But I wished only to consider the eternal significance of the carvings when I recognised the Apostles, of which I had seen casts in the Trocadéro museum, and which on either side of the Virgin, before the deep bay of the porch, were awaiting me as though to do me honour. With their benign, blunt, mild faces and bowed shoulders they seemed to be advancing upon me with an air of welcome, singing the Alleluia of a fine day. But it was evident that their expression was as unchanging as that of a corpse, and altered only if one walked round them. I said to myself: "Here I am: this is the Church of Balbec. This square, which looks as though it were conscious of its glory, is the only place in the world that possesses Balbec church. All that I have seen so far have been photographs of this church—and of these famous Apostles, this Virgin of the Porch, mere casts only. Now it is the church itself, the statue itself, they, the only ones—this is something far greater."

It was also something less, perhaps. As a young man on the day of an examination or of a duel feels the question that he has been asked, the shot that he has fired, to be very insignificant when he thinks of the reserves of knowledge and of valour that he would like to have displayed, so my mind, which had lifted the Virgin of the Porch far above the reproductions that I had had before my eyes, invulnerable to the vicissitudes which might threaten them, intact even if they were destroyed, ideal, endowed with a universal value, was astonished to see the statue which it had carved a thousand times, reduced now to its own stone semblance, occupying, in relation to the reach of my arm, a place in which it had for rivals an election poster and the point of my stick, fettered to the square, inseparable from the opening of the main street, powerless to hide from the gaze of the café and of the omnibus office, receiving on its face half of the ray of the setting sun (and presently, in a few hours' time, of the light of the street lamp) of which the savings bank received the other half, invaded simultaneously with that branch office of a loan society by the smells from the pastry-cook's oven, subjected to the tyranny of the Particular to such a point that, if I had chosen to scribble my name upon that stone, it was she, the illustrious Virgin whom until then I had endowed with a general existence and an intangible beauty, the Virgin of Balbec, the unique (which meant, alas, the only one), who, on her body coated with the same soot as defiled the neighbouring houses, would have displayed—powerless to rid herself of them—to all the admiring strangers come there to gaze upon her, the marks of my piece of chalk and the letters of my name, and it was she, finally, the immortal work of art so long desired, whom I found transformed, as was the church itself, into a little old woman in stone whose height I could measure and whose wrinkles I could count. But time was passing; I must return to the station, where I was to wait for my grandmother and Françoise, so that we should all go on to Balbec-Plage together. I reminded myself of what I had read about Balbec, of Swann's saying: "It's exquisite; as beautiful as Siena." And casting the blame for my disappointment upon various accidental causes, such as the state of my health, my exhaustion after the journey, my incapacity for looking at things properly, I endeavoured to console myself with the thought that other towns still remained intact for me, that I might soon, perhaps, be making my way, as into a shower of pearls, into the cool babbling murmur of watery Quimperlé, or traversing the roseate glow in which verdant Pont-Aven was bathed; but as for Balbec, no sooner had I set foot in it than it was as though I had broken open a name which ought to have been kept hermetically closed, and into which, seizing at once the opportunity that I had imprudently given them, expelling all the images that had lived in it until then, a tramway, a café, people crossing the square, the branch of the savings bank, irresistibly propelled by some external pressure, by a pneumatic force, had come surging into the interior of those two syllables which, closing over them, now let them frame the porch of the Persian church and would henceforth never cease to contain them.

I found my grandmother in the little train of the local railway which was to take us to Balbec-Plage, but found her alone—for she had had the idea of sending Françoise on ahead of her, so that everything should be ready before we arrived, but having given her the wrong instructions, had succeeded only in sending her off in the wrong direction, so that Françoise at that moment was being carried down all unsuspectingly at full speed to Nantes, and would probably wake up next morning at Bordeaux. No sooner had I taken my seat in the carriage, which was filled with the fleeting light of sunset and with the lingering heat of the afternoon (the former enabling me, alas, to see written clearly upon my grandmother's face how much the latter had tired her), than she began: "Well, and Balbec?" with a smile so brightly illuminated by her expectation of the great pleasure which she supposed me to have experienced that I dared not at once confess to her my disappointment. Besides, the impression which my mind had been seeking occupied it steadily less as the place to which my body would have to become accustomed drew nearer. At the end—still more than an hour

away—of this journey I was trying to form a picture of the manager of the hotel at Balbec, for whom I, at that moment, did not exist, and I should have liked to be presenting myself to him in more impressive company than that of my grandmother, who would be certain to ask for a reduction of his terms. He appeared to me to be endowed with an indubitable haughtiness, but its contours were very vague.

Every few minutes the little train brought us to a standstill at one of the stations which came before Balbec-Plage, stations the mere names of which (Incarville, Marcouville, Douville, Pont-à-Coulevre, Arambouville, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux, Hermonville, Maineville) seemed to me outlandish, whereas if I had come upon them in a book I should at once have been struck by their affinity to the names of certain places in the neighbourhood of Combray. But to the ear of a musician two themes, substantially composed of the same notes, will present no similarity whatever if they differ in the colour of their harmony and orchestration. In the same way, nothing could have reminded me less than these dreary names, redolent of sand, of space too airy and empty, and of salt, out of which the suffix “ville” emerged like “fly” in “butterfly”—nothing could have reminded me less of those other names, Roussainville or Martinville, which, because I had heard them pronounced so often by my great-aunt at table, in the dining-room, had acquired a certain sombre charm in which were blended perhaps extracts of the flavour of preserves, the smell of the log fire and of the pages of one of Bergotte’s books, or the colour of the sandstone front of the house opposite, and which even today, when they rise like a gaseous bubble from the depths of my memory, preserve their own specific virtue through all the successive layers of different environments which they must traverse before reaching the surface.

Overlooking the distant sea from the crests of their dunes or already settling down for the night at the foot of hills of a harsh green and a disagreeable shape, like that of the sofa in one’s bedroom in an hotel at which one has just arrived, each composed of a cluster of villas whose line was extended to include a tennis court and occasionally a casino over which a flag flapped in the freshening, hollow, uneasy wind, they were a series of little watering-places which now showed me for the first time their denizens, but showed them only through their habitual exterior—tennis players in white hats, the station-master living there on the spot among his tamarisks and roses, a lady in a straw “boater” who, following the everyday routine of an existence which I should never know, was calling to her dog which had stopped to examine something in the road before going in to her bungalow where the lamp was already lighted—and which with these strangely ordinary and disdainfully familiar sights cruelly stung my unconsidered eyes and stabbed my homesick heart. But how much more were my sufferings increased when we had finally landed in the hall of the Grand Hotel at Balbec, and I stood there in front of the monumental staircase of imitation marble, while my grandmother, regardless of the growing hostility and contempt of the strangers among whom we were about to live, discussed “terms” with the manager, a pot-bellied figure with a face and a voice alike covered with scars (left by the excision of countless pustules from the one, and from the other of the divers accents acquired from an alien ancestry and a cosmopolitan upbringing), a smart dinner-jacket, and the air of a psychologist who, whenever the “omnibus” discharged a fresh load, invariably took the grantees for haggling skinflints and the flashy crooks for grantees! Forgetting, doubtless, that he himself was not drawing five hundred francs a month, he had a profound contempt for people to whom five hundred francs—or, as he preferred to put it, “twenty-five louis”—was “a lot of money,” and regarded them as belonging to a race of pariahs for whom the Grand Hotel was certainly not intended. It is true that even within its walls there were people who did not pay very much and yet had not forfeited the manager’s esteem, provided that he was assured that they were watching their expenditure not from poverty so much as from avarice. For this could in no way lower their standing, since it is a vice and may consequently be found at every grade in the social hierarchy. Social position was the one thing by which the manager was impressed—social position, or rather the signs which seemed to him to imply that it was exalted, such as not taking one’s hat off when one came into the hall, wearing knickerbockers or an overcoat with a waist, and taking a cigar with a band of purple and gold out of a crushed morocco case—to none of which advantages could I, alas, lay claim. He would also adorn his business conversation with choice expressions, to which, as a rule, he gave the wrong meaning.

While I heard my grandmother, who betrayed no sign of annoyance at his listening to her with his hat on his head and whistling through his teeth, ask him in an artificial tone of voice “And what are ... your charges? ... Oh! far too high for my little budget,” waiting on a bench, I took refuge in the innermost depths of my being, strove to migrate to a plane of eternal thoughts, to leave nothing of myself, nothing living, on the surface of my body—anaesthetised like those of certain animals, which, by inhibition, feign death when they are wounded—so as not to suffer too keenly in this place, my total unfamiliarity with which was impressed upon me all the more forcibly by the familiarity with it that seemed to be evinced at the same moment by a smartly dressed lady to whom the manager showed his respect by taking liberties with the little dog that followed her across the hall, the young dandy with a feather in his hat who came in asking if there were “any letters,” all these people for whom climbing those imitation marble stairs meant going home. And at the same time the triple stare of Minos, Aeacus and Rhadamanthus (into which I plunged my naked soul as into an unknown element where there was nothing now to protect it) was bent sternly upon me by a group of gentlemen who, though little versed perhaps in the art of receiving, yet bore the title “reception clerks,” while beyond them again, behind a glass partition, were people sitting in a reading-room for the description of which I should have had to borrow from Dante alternately the colours in which he paints Paradise and Hell, according as I was thinking of the happiness of the elect who had the right to sit and read there undisturbed, or of the terror which my grandmother would have inspired in me if, in her insensibility to this sort of impression, she had asked me to go in there.

My sense of loneliness was further increased a moment later. When I had confessed to my grandmother that I did not feel well, that I thought that we should be obliged to return to Paris, she had offered no protest, saying merely that she was going out to buy a few things which would be equally useful whether we left or stayed (and which, I afterwards learned, were all intended for me, Françoise having gone off with certain articles which I might need). While I waited for her I had taken a turn through the streets, which were packed with a crowd of people who imparted to them a sort of indoor warmth, and in which the hairdresser's shop and the pastry-cook's were still open, the latter filled with customers eating ices opposite the statue of Duguay-Trouin. This crowd gave me just about as much pleasure as a photograph of it in one of the "illustrateds" might give a patient who was turning its pages in the surgeon's waiting-room. I was astonished to find that there were people so different from myself that this stroll through the town had actually been recommended to me by the manager as a diversion, and also that the torture chamber which a new place of residence is could appear to some people a "delightful abode," to quote the hotel prospectus, which might perhaps exaggerate but was none the less addressed to a whole army of clients to whose tastes it must appeal. True, it invoked, to make them come to the Grand Hotel, Balbec, not only the "exquisite fare" and the "magical view across the Casino gardens," but also the "ordinances of Her Majesty Queen Fashion, which no one may violate with impunity without being taken for a philistine, a charge that no well-bred man would willingly incur."

The need that I now felt for my grandmother was enhanced by my fear that I had shattered another of her illusions. She must be feeling discouraged, feeling that if I could not stand the fatigue of this journey there was no hope that any change of air could ever do me good. I decided to return to the hotel and to wait for her there; the manager himself came forward and pressed a button, whereupon a personage whose acquaintance I had not yet made, known as "lift" (who at the highest point in the building, where the skylight would be in a Norman church, was installed like a photographer behind his curtain or an organist in his loft) began to descend towards me with the agility of a domestic, industrious and captive squirrel. Then, gliding upwards again along a steel pillar, he bore me aloft in his wake towards the dome of this temple of Mammon. On each floor, on either side of a narrow communicating stair, a range of shadowy galleries opened out fanwise, along one of which came a chambermaid carrying a bolster. I applied to her face, which was blurred in the twilight, the mask of my most impassioned dreams, but read in her eyes as they turned towards me the horror of my own nonentity. Meanwhile, to dissipate, in the course of this interminable ascent, the mortal anguish which I felt in traversing in silence the mystery of this chiaroscuro so devoid of poetry, lighted by a single vertical line of little windows which were those of the solitary water-closet on each landing, I addressed a few words to the young organist, artificer of my journey and my partner in captivity, who continued to manipulate the registers of his instrument and to finger the stops. I apologised for taking up so much room, for giving him so much trouble, and asked whether I was not obstructing him in the practice of an art in regard to which, in order to flatter the virtuoso, more than displaying curiosity, I confessed my strong attachment. But he vouchsafed no answer, whether from astonishment at my words, preoccupation with his work, regard for etiquette, hardness of hearing, respect for holy ground, fear of danger, slowness of understanding, or the manager's orders.

There is perhaps nothing that gives us so strong an impression of the reality of the external world as the difference in the position, relative to ourselves, of even a quite unimportant person before we have met him and after. I was the same man who had taken, that afternoon, the little train from Balbec to the coast; I carried in my body the same consciousness. But on that consciousness, in the place where at six o'clock there had been, together with the impossibility of forming any idea of the manager, the Grand Hotel or its staff, a vague and timorous anticipation of the moment at which I should reach my destination, were to be found now the pustules excised from the face of the cosmopolitan manager (he was, in fact, a naturalised Monegasque, although—as he himself put it, for he was always using expressions which he thought distinguished without noticing that they were incorrect—"of Romanian originality"), his action in ringing for the lift, the lift-boy himself, a whole frieze of puppet-show characters issuing from that Pandora's box which was the Grand Hotel, undeniable, irremovable, and, like everything that is realised, jejune. But at least this change which I had done nothing to bring about proved to me that something had happened which was external to myself—however devoid of interest that thing might be in itself—and I was like a traveller who, having had the sun in his face when he started, concludes that he has been for so many hours on the road when he finds the sun behind him. I was half dead with exhaustion, I was burning with fever; I would gladly have gone to bed, but I had no night-things. I should have liked at least to lie down for a little while on the bed, but to what purpose, since I should not have been able to procure any rest for that mass of sensations which is for each of us his conscious if not his physical body, and since the unfamiliar objects which encircled that body, forcing it to place its perceptions on the permanent footing of a vigilant defensive, would have kept my sight, my hearing, all my senses in a position as cramped and uncomfortable (even if I had stretched out my legs) as that of Cardinal La Balue in the cage in which he could neither stand nor sit? It is our noticing them that puts things in a room, our growing used to them that takes them away again and clears a space for us. Space there was none for me in my bedroom (mine in name only) at Balbec; it was full of things which did not know me, which flung back at me the distrustful glance I cast at them, and, without taking any heed of my existence, showed that I was interrupting the humdrum course of theirs. The clock—whereas at home I heard mine tick only a few seconds in a week, when I was coming out of some profound meditation—continued without a moment's interruption to utter, in an unknown tongue, a series of observations which must have been most uncomplimentary to myself, for the violet curtains listened to them without replying, but in an attitude such

as people adopt who shrug their shoulders to indicate that the sight of a third person irritates them. They gave to this room with its lofty ceiling a quasi-historical character which might have made it a suitable place for the assassination of the Duc de Guise, and afterwards for parties of tourists personally conducted by one of Thomas Cook's guides, but for me to sleep in—no. I was tormented by the presence of some little bookcases with glass fronts which ran along the walls, but especially by a large cheval-glass which stood across one corner and before the departure of which I felt there could be no possibility of rest for me there. I kept raising my eyes—which the things in my room in Paris disturbed no more than did my eyelids themselves, for they were merely extensions of my organs, an enlargement of myself—towards the high ceiling of this belvedere planted upon the summit of the hotel which my grandmother had chosen for me; and deep down in that region more intimate than that in which we see and hear, in that region where we experience the quality of smells, almost in the very heart of my inmost self, the scent of flowering grasses next launched its offensive against my last feeble line of trenches, an offensive against which I opposed, not without exhausting myself still further, the futile and unremitting riposte of an alarmed sniffing. Having no world, no room, no body now that was not menaced by the enemies thronging round me, penetrated to the very bones by fever, I was alone, and longed to die. Then my grandmother came in, and to the expansion of my constricted heart there opened at once an infinity of space.

She was wearing a loose cambric dressing-gown which she put on at home whenever any of us was ill (because she felt more comfortable in it, she used to say, for she always ascribed selfish motives to her actions), and which was, for tending us, for watching by our beds, her servant's smock, her nurse's uniform, her nun's habit. But whereas the attentions of servants, nurses and nuns, their kindness to us, the merits we find in them and the gratitude we owe them, increase the impression we have of being, in their eyes, someone else, of feeling that we are alone, keeping in our own hands the control over our thoughts, our will to live, I knew, when I was with my grandmother, that however great the misery that there was in me, it would be received by her with a pity still more vast, that everything that was mine, my cares, my wishes, would be buttressed, in my grandmother, by a desire to preserve and enhance my life that was altogether stronger than was my own; and my thoughts were continued and extended in her without undergoing the slightest deflection, since they passed from my mind into hers without any change of atmosphere or of personality. And—like a man who tries to fasten his tie in front of a glass and forgets that the end which he sees reflected is not on the side to which he raises his hand, or like a dog that chases along the ground the dancing shadow of an insect in the air—misled by her appearance in the body as we are apt to be in this world where we have no direct perception of people's souls, I threw myself into the arms of my grandmother and pressed my lips to her face as though I were thus gaining access to that immense heart which she opened to me. And when I felt my mouth glued to her cheeks, to her brow, I drew from them something so beneficial, so nourishing, that I remained as motionless, as solemn, as calmly gluttonous as a babe at the breast.

Afterwards I gazed inexhaustibly at her large face, outlined like a beautiful cloud, glowing and serene, behind which I could discern the radiance of her tender love. And everything that received, in however slight a degree, any share of her sensations, everything that could be said to belong in any way to her was at once so spiritualised, so sanctified that with outstretched hands I smoothed her beautiful hair, still hardly grey, with as much respect, precaution and gentleness as if I had actually been caressing her goodness. She found such pleasure in taking any trouble that saved me one, and in a moment of immobility and rest for my weary limbs something so exquisite, that when, having seen that she wished to help me undress and go to bed, I made as though to stop her and to undress myself, with an imploring gaze she arrested my hands as they fumbled with the top buttons of my jacket and my boots.

"Oh, do let me!" she begged. "It's such a joy for your Granny. And be sure you knock on the wall if you want anything in the night. My bed is just on the other side, and the partition is quite thin. Just give a knock now, as soon as you're in bed, so that we shall know where we are."

And, sure enough, that evening I gave three knocks—a signal which, a week later, when I was ill, I repeated every morning for several days, because my grandmother wanted me to have some milk early. Then, when I thought that I could hear her stirring—so that she should not be kept waiting but might, the moment she had brought me the milk, go to sleep again—I would venture three little taps, timidly, faintly, but for all that distinctly, for if I was afraid of disturbing her in case I had been mistaken and she was still asleep, neither did I wish her to lie awake listening for a summons which she had not at once caught and which I should not have the heart to repeat. And scarcely had I given my taps than I heard three others, in a different tone from mine, stamped with a calm authority, repeated twice over so that there should be no mistake, and saying to me plainly: "Don't get agitated; I've heard you; I shall be with you in a minute!" and shortly afterwards my grandmother would appear. I would explain to her that I had been afraid she would not hear me, or might think that it was someone in the room beyond who was tapping; at which she would smile: "Mistake my poor pet's knocking for anyone else's! Why, Granny could tell it a mile away! Do you suppose there's anyone else in the world who's such a silly-billy, with such febrile little knuckles, so afraid of waking me up and of not making me understand? Even if it just gave the tiniest scratch, Granny could tell her mouse's sound at once, especially such a poor miserable little mouse as mine is. I could hear it just now, trying to make up its mind, and rustling the bedclothes, and going through all its tricks."

She would push open the shutters, and where a wing of the hotel jutted out at right angles to my window, the sun would already have settled on the roof, like a slater who is up betimes, and starts early and works quietly so as not to rouse the sleeping town whose stillness makes him seem more agile. She would tell me what time it was, what sort of day it would be, that it was not worth while my getting up and coming to the



window, that there was a mist over the sea, whether the baker's shop had opened yet, what the vehicle was that I could hear passing—that whole trifling curtain-raiser, that insignificant *introit* of a new day which no one attends, a little scrap of life which was only for our two selves, but which I should have no hesitation in evoking, later on, to Françoise or even to strangers, speaking of the fog “which you could have cut with a knife” at six o'clock that morning, with the ostentation of one who was boasting not of a piece of knowledge that he had acquired but of a mark of affection shown to himself alone; sweet morning moment which opened like a symphony with the rhythmical dialogue of my three taps, to which the thin wall of my bedroom, steeped in love and joy, grown melodious, incorporeal, singing like the angelic choir, responded with three other taps, eagerly awaited, repeated once and again, in which it contrived to waft to me the soul of my grandmother, whole and perfect, and the promise of her coming, with the swiftness of an annunciation and a musical fidelity. But on this first night after our arrival, when my grandmother had left me, I began again to suffer as I had suffered the day before, in Paris, at the moment of leaving home. Perhaps this fear that I had—and that is shared by so many others—of sleeping in a strange room, perhaps this fear is only the most humble, obscure, organic, almost unconscious form of that great and desperate resistance put up by the things that constitute the better part of our present life against our mentally acknowledging the possibility of a future in which they are to have no part; a resistance which was at the root of the horror that I had so often been made to feel by the thought that my parents would die some day, that the stern necessity of life might oblige me to live far from Gilberte, or simply to settle permanently in a place where I should never see any of my old friends; a resistance which was also at the root of the difficulty that I found in imagining my own death, or a survival such as Bergotte used to promise to mankind in his books, a survival in which I should not be allowed to take with me my memories, my frailties, my character, which did not easily resign themselves to the idea of ceasing to be, and desired for me neither extinction nor an eternity in which they would have no part.

When Swann had said to me in Paris one day when I felt particularly unwell: “You ought to go off to one of those glorious islands in the Pacific; you'd never come back again if you did,” I should have liked to answer: “But then I shall never see your daughter again, I shall be living among people and things she has never seen.” And yet my reason, my better judgment whispered: “What difference can that make, since you won't be distressed by it? When M. Swann tells you that you won't come back he means by that that you won't want to come back, and if you don't want to that is because you'll be happier out there.” For my reason was aware that Habit—Habit which was even now setting to work to make me like this unfamiliar lodging, to change the position of the mirror, the shade of the curtains, to stop the clock—undertakes as well to make dear to us the companions whom at first we disliked, to give another appearance to their faces, to make the sound of their voices attractive, to modify the inclinations of their hearts. It is true that these new friendships for places and people are based upon forgetfulness of the old; my reason precisely thought that I could envisage without dread the prospect of a life in which I should be for ever separated from people all memory of whom I should lose, and it was by way of consolation that it offered my heart a promise of oblivion which in fact succeeded only in sharpening the edge of its despair. Not that the heart, too, is not bound in time, when separation is complete, to feel the analgesic effect of habit; but until then it will continue to suffer. And our dread of a future in which we must forgo the sight of faces and the sound of voices which we love and from which today we derive our dearest joy, this dread, far from being dissipated, is intensified, if to the pain of such a privation we feel that there will be added what seems to us now in anticipation more painful still: not to feel it as a pain at all—to remain indifferent; for then our old self would have changed, it would then be not merely the charm of our family, our mistress, our friends that had ceased to environ us, but our affection for them would have been so completely eradicated from our hearts, of which today it is so conspicuous an element, that we should be able to enjoy a life apart from them, the very thought of which today makes us recoil in horror; so that it would be in a real sense the death of the self, a death followed, it is true, by resurrection, but in a different self, to the love of which the elements of the old self that are condemned to die cannot bring themselves to aspire. It is they—even the meanest of them, such as our obscure attachments to the dimensions, to the atmosphere of a bedroom—that take fright and refuse, in acts of rebellion which we must recognise to be a secret, partial, tangible and true aspect of our resistance to death, of the long, desperate, daily resistance to the fragmentary and continuous death that insinuates itself throughout the whole course of our life, detaching from us at each moment a shred of ourself, dead matter on which new cells will multiply and grow. And for a neurotic nature such as mine—one, that is to say, in which the intermediaries, the nerves, perform their functions badly, fail to arrest on its way to the consciousness, allow indeed to reach it, distinct, exhausting, innumerable and distressing, the complaints of the most humble elements of the self which are about to disappear—the anxiety and alarm which I felt as I lay beneath that strange and too lofty ceiling were but the protest of an affection that survived in me for a ceiling that was familiar and low. Doubtless this affection too would disappear, another having taken its place (when death, and then another life, had, in the guise of Habit, performed their double task); but until its annihilation, every night it would suffer afresh, and on this first night especially, confronted with an irreversible future in which there would no longer be any place for it, it rose in revolt, it tortured me with the sound of its lamentations whenever my straining eyes, powerless to turn from what was wounding them, endeavoured to fasten themselves upon that inaccessible ceiling.

But next morning!—after a servant had come to call me and to bring me hot water, and while I was washing and dressing myself and trying in vain to find the things that I needed in my trunk, from which I extracted, pell-mell, only a lot of things that were of no use whatever, what a joy it was to me, thinking already of the pleasure of lunch and a walk along the shore, to see in the window, and in all the glass fronts of the

bookcases, as in the portholes of a ship's cabin, the open sea, naked, unshadowed, and yet with half of its expanse in shadow, bounded by a thin, fluctuating line, and to follow with my eyes the waves that leapt up one behind another like jumpers on a trampoline. Every other moment, holding in my hand the stiff starched towel with the name of the hotel printed upon it, with which I was making futile efforts to dry myself, I returned to the window to have another look at that vast, dazzling, mountainous amphitheatre, and at the snowy crests of its emerald waves, here and there polished and translucent, which with a placid violence and a leonine frown, to which the sun added a faceless smile, allowed their crumbling slopes to topple down at last. It was at this window that I was later to take up my position every morning, as at the window of a stagecoach in which one has slept, to see whether, during the night, a longed-for mountain range has come nearer or receded—only here it was those hills of the sea which, before they come dancing back towards us, are apt to withdraw so far that often it was only at the end of a long, sandy plain that I would distinguish, far off, their first undulations in a transparent, vaporous, bluish distance, like the glaciers that one sees in the backgrounds of the Tuscan Primitives. On other mornings it was quite close at hand that the sun laughed upon those waters of a green as tender as that preserved in Alpine pastures (among mountains on which the sun displays himself here and there like a giant who may at any moment come leaping gaily down their craggy sides) less by the moisture of the soil than by the liquid mobility of the light. Moreover, in that breach which the shore and the waves open up in the midst of the rest of the world for the passage or the accumulation of light, it is above all the light, according to the direction from which it comes and along which our eyes follow it, it is the light that displaces and situates the undulations of the sea. Diversity of lighting modifies no less the orientation of a place, erects no less before our eyes new goals which it inspires in us the yearning to attain, than would a distance in space actually traversed in the course of a long journey. When, in the morning, the sun came from behind the hotel, disclosing to me the sands bathed in light as far as the first bastions of the sea, it seemed to be showing me another side of the picture, and to be inviting me to pursue, along the winding path of its rays, a motionless but varied journey amid all the fairest scenes of the diversified landscape of the hours. And on this first morning, it pointed out to me far off, with a jovial finger, those blue peaks of the sea which bear no name on any map, until, dizzy with its sublime excursion over the thundering and chaotic surface of their crests and avalanches, it came to take shelter from the wind in my bedroom, lolling across the unmade bed and scattering its riches over the splashed surface of the basin-stand and into my open trunk, where, by its very splendour and misplaced luxury, it added still further to the general impression of disorder. Alas for that sea-wind: an hour later, in the big dining-room—while we were having lunch, and from the leathern gourd of a lemon were sprinkling a few golden drops on to a pair of soles which presently left on our plates the plumes of their picked skeletons, curled like stiff feathers and resonant as citherns—it seemed to my grand-mother a cruel deprivation not to be able to feel its life-giving breath on her cheek, on account of the glass partition, transparent but closed, which, like the front of a glass case in a museum, separated us from the beach while allowing us to look out upon its whole expanse, and into which the sky fitted so completely that its azure had the effect of being the colour of the windows and its white clouds so many flaws in the glass. Imagining that I was “sitting on the mole” or at rest in the “boudoir” of which Baudelaire speaks, I wondered whether his “sun’s rays upon the sea” were not—a very different thing from the evening ray, simple and superficial as a tremulous golden shaft—just what at that moment was scorching the sea topaz-yellow, fermenting it, turning it pale and milky like beer, frothy like milk, while now and then there hovered over it great blue shadows which, for his own amusement, some god seemed to be shifting to and fro by moving a mirror in the sky. Unfortunately, it was not only in its outlook that this dining-room at Balbec—bare-walled, filled with a sunlight green as the water in a pond, while a few feet away from it the high tide and broad daylight erected as though before the gates of the heavenly city an indestructible and mobile rampart of emerald and gold—differed from our dining-room at Combray which gave on to the houses across the street. At Combray, since we were known to everyone, I took heed of no one. In seaside life one does not know one’s neighbours. I was not yet old enough, and was still too sensitive to have outgrown the desire to find favour in the sight of other people and to possess their hearts. Nor had I acquired the more noble indifference which a man of the world would have felt towards the people who were eating in the dining-room or the boys and girls who strolled past the window, with whom I was pained by the thought that I should never be allowed to go on expeditions, though not so pained as if my grandmother, contemptuous of social formalities and concerned only with my health, had gone to them with the request, humiliating for me, that they should consent to allow me to accompany them. Whether they were returning to some villa beyond my ken, or had emerged from one, racquet in hand, on their way to a tennis court, or were riding horses whose hooves trampled my heart, I gazed at them with a passionate curiosity, in that blinding light of the beach by which social distinctions are altered, I followed all their movements through the transparency of that great bay of glass which allowed so much light to flood the room. But it intercepted the wind, and this was a defect in the eyes of my grandmother, who, unable to endure the thought that I was losing the benefit of an hour in the open air, surreptitiously opened a pane and at once sent flying, together with the menus, the newspapers, veils and hats of all the people at the other tables, while she herself, fortified by the celestial draught, remained calm and smiling like Saint Blandina amid the torrent of invective which, increasing my sense of isolation and misery, those contemptuous, dishevelled, furious visitors combined to pour on us.

To a certain extent—and this, at Balbec, gave to the population, as a rule monotonously rich and cosmopolitan, of that sort of “grand” hotel a quite distinctive local character—they were composed of eminent persons from the departmental capitals of that region of France, a senior judge from Caen, a president of the Cherbourg bar, a notary public from Le Mans, who annually, when the holidays came round, starting from the

various points over which, throughout the working year, they were scattered like snipers on a battlefield or draughtsmen upon a board, concentrated their forces in this hotel. They always reserved the same rooms, and with their wives, who had pretensions to aristocracy, formed a little group which was joined by a leading barrister and a leading doctor from Paris, who on the day of their departure would say to the others: "Oh, yes, of course; you don't go by our train. You're privileged, you'll be home in time for lunch."

"Privileged, you say? You who live in the capital, in Paris, while I have to live in a wretched county town of a hundred thousand souls (it's true we managed to muster a hundred and two thousand at the last census, but what is that compared to your two and a half millions?), going back, too, to asphalt streets and all the glamour of Paris life."

They said this with a rustic burring of their "r"s, without acrimony, for they were leading lights each in his own province, who could like others have gone to Paris had they chosen—the senior judge from Caen had several times been offered a seat on the Court of Appeal—but had preferred to stay where they were, from love of their native towns, or of obscurity, or of fame, or because they were reactionaries, and enjoyed being on friendly terms with the country houses of the neighbourhood. Besides, several of them were not going back at once to their county towns.

For—inasmuch as the Bay of Balbec was a little world apart in the midst of the great, a basketful of the seasons in which good days and bad, and the successive months, were clustered in a ring, so that not only on days when one could make out Rivebelle, which was a sign of storm, could one see the sunlight on the houses there while Balbec was plunged in darkness, but later on, when the cold weather had reached Balbec, one could be certain of finding on that opposite shore two or three supplementary months of warmth—those of the regular visitors to the Grand Hotel whose holidays began late or lasted long gave orders, when the rains and the mists came and autumn was in the air, for their boxes to be packed and loaded on to a boat, and set sail across the bay to find the summer again at Rivebelle or Costedor. This little group in the Balbec hotel looked at each new arrival with suspicion, and, while affecting to take not the least interest in him, hastened, all of them, to interrogate their friend the head waiter about him. For it was the same head waiter—Aimé—who returned every year for the season, and kept their tables for them; and their lady-wives, having heard that his wife was expecting a baby, would sit after meals each working on a part of the layette, while weighing up through their lorgnettes my grandmother and myself because we were eating hard-boiled eggs in salad, which was considered common and was not done in the best society of Alençon. They affected an attitude of contemptuous irony with regard to a Frenchman who was called "His Majesty" and who had indeed proclaimed himself king of a small island in the South Seas peopled only by a few savages. He was staying in the hotel with his pretty mistress, whom, as she crossed the beach to bathe, the little boys would greet with "Long live the Queen!" because she would reward them with a shower of small silver. The judge and the president went so far as to pretend not to see her, and if any of their friends happened to look at her, felt bound to warn him that she was only a little shop-girl.

"But I was told that at Ostend they used the royal bathing-hut."

"Well, and why not? It's on hire for twenty francs. You can take it yourself, if you care for that sort of thing. Anyhow, I know for a fact that the fellow asked for an audience with the King, who sent back word that he wasn't interested in pantomime princes."

"Really, that's interesting! What queer people there are in the world, to be sure!"

And no doubt all this was true; but it was also from resentment of the thought that, to many of their fellow-visitors, they were themselves simply solid middle-class citizens who did not know this king and queen who were so prodigal with their small change, that the notary, the judge, the president, when what they were pleased to call the "Carnival" went by, felt so much annoyance and expressed aloud an indignation that was quite understood by their friend the head waiter who, obliged to show proper civility to these generous if not authentic sovereigns, would nevertheless, as he took their orders, glance across the room at his old patrons and give them a meaningful wink. Perhaps there was also something of the same resentment at being erroneously supposed to be less "smart" and unable to explain that they were more, at the bottom of the "Fine specimen!" with which they referred to a young toff, the consumptive and dissipated son of an industrial magnate, who appeared every day in a new suit of clothes with an orchid in his buttonhole, drank champagne at luncheon, and then went off to the Casino, pale, impassive, a smile of complete indifference on his lips, to throw away at the baccarat table enormous sums "which he could ill afford to lose," as the notary said with a knowing air to the senior judge, whose wife had it "on good authority" that this "decadent" young man was bringing his parents' grey hair in sorrow to the grave.

Furthermore, the president and his friends were inexhaustibly sarcastic on the subject of a wealthy old lady of title, because she never moved anywhere without taking her whole household with her. Whenever the wives of the notary and the judge saw her in the dining-room at meal-times, they put up their lorgnettes and gave her an insolent scrutiny, as meticulous and distrustful as if she had been some dish with a pretentious name but a suspicious appearance which, after the adverse result of a systematic study, is sent away with a lofty wave of the hand and a grimace of disgust.

No doubt by this behaviour they meant only to show that, if there were things in the world which they themselves lacked—in this instance, certain prerogatives which the old lady enjoyed, and the privilege of her acquaintance—it was not because they could not, but because they did not choose to acquire them. But they had ended up by convincing themselves that this really was what they felt; and the suppression of all desire for, of all curiosity about, ways of life which are unfamiliar, of all hope of endearing oneself to new people, for which, in these women, had been substituted a feigned contempt, a spurious jubilation, had the

disagreeable effect of obliging them to label their discontent satisfaction and to lie ever-lastingly to themselves, two reasons why they were unhappy. But everyone else in the hotel was no doubt behaving in a similar fashion, though under different forms, and sacrificing, if not to self-esteem, at any rate to certain inculcated principles or mental habits, the disturbing thrill of being involved in an unfamiliar way of life. Of course the microcosm in which the old lady isolated herself was not poisoned with virulent rancour, as was the group in which the wives of the notary and the judge sat sneering with rage. It was indeed embalmed with a delicate and old-world fragrance which, however, was no less artificial. For at heart the old lady would probably have discovered, in attracting, in attaching to herself (and, in doing so, renewing herself) the mysterious sympathy of new people, a charm which is altogether lacking from the pleasure that is to be derived from mixing only with the people of one's own world, and reminding oneself that, this being the best of all possible worlds, the ill-informed contempt of others may be disregarded. Perhaps she felt that if she arrived incognito at the Grand Hotel, Balbec, she would, in her black woollen dress and old-fashioned bonnet, bring a smile to the lips of some old reprobate, who from the depths of his rocking chair would glance up and murmur, "What a scarecrow!" or, still worse, to those of some worthy man who had, like the judge, kept between his pepper-and-salt whiskers a fresh complexion and a pair of sparkling eyes such as she liked to see, and who would at once bring the magnifying lens of the conjugal glasses to bear upon so quaint a phenomenon; and perhaps it was in unconscious apprehension of those first few minutes which one knows will be brief but which are none the less dreaded—like one's first header into the sea—that this lady sent a servant down in advance to inform the hotel of the personality and habits of his mistress, and, cutting short the manager's greetings with an abruptness in which there was more shyness than pride, made straight for her room, where her own curtains, replacing those that draped the hotel windows, her own screens and photographs, set up so effectively between her and the outside world, to which otherwise she would have had to adapt herself, the barrier of her private life and habits, that it was her home (in the cocoon of which she had remained) that travelled rather than herself.

Thenceforward, having placed, between herself on the one hand and the hotel staff and the tradesmen on the other, her own servants who bore instead of her the shock of contact with all this strange humanity and kept up the familiar atmosphere around their mistress, having set her prejudices between herself and the other visitors, indifferent whether or not she gave offence to people whom her friends would not have had in their houses, it was in her own world that she continued to live, by correspondence with her friends, by memories, by her intimate awareness of her own position, the quality of her manners, the adroitness of her courtesy. And every day, when she came downstairs to go for a drive in her own carriage, the lady's-maid who came after her carrying her wraps, and the footman who preceded her, seemed like sentries who, at the gate of an embassy, flying the flag of the country to which she belonged, assured to her upon foreign soil the privilege of extra-territoriality. She did not leave her room until the middle of the afternoon on the day after our arrival, so that we did not see her in the dining-room, into which the manager, since we were newcomers, conducted us at the lunch hour, taking us under his wing, as a corporal takes a squad of recruits to the master-tailor to have them fitted; we did however see a moment later a country squire and his daughter, of an obscure but very ancient Breton family, M. and Mlle de Stermaria, whose table had been allotted to us in the belief that they had gone out and would not be back until the evening. Having come to Balbec only to see various owners of manors whom they knew in that neighbourhood, they spent in the hotel dining-room, what with the invitations they accepted and the visits they paid, only such time as was strictly unavoidable. It was their haughtiness that preserved them intact from all human sympathy, from arousing the least interest in the strangers seated round about them, among whom M. de Stermaria kept up the glacial, preoccupied, distant, stiff, touchy and ill-intentioned air that we assume in a railway refreshment-room in the midst of fellow-passengers whom we have never seen before and will never see again, and with whom we can conceive of no other relations than to defend from their onslaught our cold chicken and our corner seat in the train. No sooner had we begun our lunch than we were asked to leave the table on the instructions of M. de Stermaria who had just arrived and, without the faintest attempt at an apology to us, requested the head waiter in our hearing to see that such a mistake did not occur again, for it was repugnant to him that "people whom he did not know" should have taken his table.

And certainly the feeling which impelled a young actress (better known in fact for her smart clothes, her wit, her collection of German porcelain, than for the occasional parts that she had played at the Odéon), her lover, an immensely rich young man for whose sake she had acquired her culture, and two sprigs of the aristocracy at that time much in the public eye, to form an exclusive group, to travel only together, to come down to luncheon—when at Balbec—very late, after everyone else had finished, to spend the whole day in their sitting-room playing cards, reflected no sort of ill-will towards the rest of us but simply the requirements of the taste that they had formed for a certain type of witty conversation, for certain refinements of good living, which made them find pleasure in spending their time, in taking their meals, only by themselves, and would have rendered intolerable a life in common with people who had not been initiated. Even at a dinner-table or a card table, each of them had to be certain that in the diner or partner who sat opposite to him there were, latent and in abeyance, a certain brand of knowledge which would enable him to identify the rubbish which so many houses in Paris boast of as genuine mediaeval or Renaissance "pieces" and, whatever the subject of discussion, criteria common to them all wherewith to distinguish the good from the bad. No doubt by now, at such moments, it was merely by some rare and amusing interjection flung into the general silence of meal or game, or by the new and charming frock which the young actress had put on for lunch or for poker, that the special kind of existence in which these four friends desired everywhere to remain plunged

was made apparent. But by engulfing them thus in a system of habits which they knew by heart it sufficed to protect them from the mystery of the life that was going on all round them. All the long afternoon, the sea was suspended there before their eyes only as a canvas of attractive colouring might hang on the wall of a wealthy bachelor's flat, and it was only in the intervals between hands that one of the players, finding nothing better to do, raised his eyes to it to seek some indication of the weather or the time, and to remind the others that tea was ready. And at night they did not dine in the hotel, where, hidden springs of electricity flooding the great dining-room with light, it became as it were an immense and wonderful aquarium against whose glass wall the working population of Balbec, the fishermen and also the tradesmen's families, clustering invisibly in the outer darkness, pressed their faces to watch the luxurious life of its occupants gently floating upon the golden eddies within, a thing as extraordinary to the poor as the life of strange fishes or molluscs (an important social question, this: whether the glass wall will always protect the banquets of these weird and wonderful creatures, or whether the obscure folk who watch them hungrily out of the night will not break in some day to gather them from their aquarium and devour them). Meanwhile, perhaps, amid the dumbfounded stationary crowd out there in the dark, there may have been some writer, some student of human ichthyology, who, as he watched the jaws of old feminine monstrosities close over a mouthful of submerged food, was amusing himself by classifying them by race, by innate characteristics, as well as by those acquired characteristics which bring it about that an old Serbian lady whose buccal appendage is that of a great sea-fish, because from her earliest years she has moved in the fresh waters of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, eats her salad for all the world like a La Rochefoucauld.

At that hour the three young men in dinner-jackets could be observed waiting for the young woman, who was as usual late but presently, wearing a dress that was almost always different and one of a series of scarves chosen to gratify some special taste in her lover, after having rung for the lift from her landing, would emerge from it like a doll coming out of its box. And then all four, finding that the international phenomenon of the "de luxe" hotel, having taken root at Balbec, had blossomed there in material luxury rather than in food that was fit to eat, climbed into a carriage and went off to dine a mile away in a little restaurant of repute where they held endless discussions with the cook about the composition of the menu and the cooking of its various dishes. During their drive, the road bordered with apple-trees that led out of Balbec was no more to them than the distance that must be traversed—barely distinguishable in the darkness from that which separated their homes in Paris from the Café Anglais or the Tour d'Argent—before they arrived at the fashionable little restaurant where, while the rich young man's friends envied him because he had such a smartly dressed mistress, the latter's scarves hung before the little company a sort of fragrant, flowing veil, but one that kept it apart from the outer world.

Alas for my peace of mind, I had none of the detachment that all these people showed. To many of them I gave constant thought; I should have liked not to pass unobserved by a man with a receding forehead and eyes that dodged between the blinkers of his prejudices and his upbringing, the grandee of the district, who was none other than the brother-in-law of Legrandin. He came every now and then to see somebody at Balbec, and on Sundays, by reason of the weekly garden-party that his wife and he gave, robbed the hotel of a large number of its occupants, because one or two of them were invited to these entertainments and the others, so as not to appear not to have been invited, chose that day for an expedition to some distant spot. He had had, as it happened, an exceedingly bad reception at the hotel on the first day of the season, when the staff, freshly imported from the Riviera, did not yet know who or what he was. Not only was he not wearing white flannels, but, with old-fashioned French courtesy and in his ignorance of the ways of grand hotels, on coming into the hall in which there were ladies sitting, he had taken off his hat at the door, with the result that the manager had not so much as raised a finger to his own in acknowledgment, concluding that this must be someone of the most humble extraction, what he called "sprung from the ordinary." The notary's wife alone had felt attracted to the stranger, who exhaled all the starched vulgarity of the really respectable, and she had declared, with the unerring discernment and the indisputable authority of a person for whom the highest society of Le Mans held no secrets, that one could see at a glance that one was in the presence of a gentleman of great distinction, of perfect breeding, a striking contrast to the sort of people one usually saw at Balbec, whom she condemned as impossible to know so long as she did not know them. This favourable judgment which she had pronounced on Legrandin's brother-in-law was based perhaps on the lacklustre appearance of a man about whom there was nothing to intimidate anyone; perhaps also she had recognised in this gentleman farmer with the look of a sacristan the Masonic signs of her own clericalism.

Even though I knew that the young men who went past the hotel every day on horseback were the sons of the shady proprietor of a fancy goods shop whom my father would never have dreamed of knowing, the glamour of "seaside life" exalted them in my eyes to equestrian statues of demi-gods, and the best thing that I could hope for was that they would never allow their proud gaze to fall upon the wretched boy who was myself, who left the hotel dining-room only to sit upon the sands. I should have been glad to arouse some response even from the adventurer who had been king of a desert island in the South Seas, even from the young consumptive, of whom I liked to think that he concealed beneath his insolent exterior a shy and tender heart, which might perhaps have lavished on me, and on me alone, the treasures of its affection. Besides (contrary to what is usually said about travelling acquaintances) since being seen in certain company can invest us, in a watering-place to which we shall return another year, with a coefficient that has no equivalent in real social life, there is nothing that, far from keeping resolutely at a distance, we cultivate with such assiduity after our return to Paris as the friendships that we have formed by the sea. I was concerned about the impression I might make on all these temporary or local celebrities whom my tendency to put myself in

the place of other people and to re-create their state of mind made me place not in their true rank, that which they would have occupied in Paris for instance and which would have been quite low, but in that which they must imagine to be theirs and which indeed was theirs at Balbec, where the want of a common denominator gave them a sort of relative superiority and unwonted interest. Alas, none of these people's contempt was so painful to me as that of M. de Stermaria.

For I had noticed his daughter the moment she came into the room, her pretty face, her pallid, almost bluish complexion, the distinctiveness in the carriage of her tall figure, in her gait, which suggested to me, with reason, her heredity, her aristocratic upbringing, all the more vividly because I knew her name—like those expressive themes invented by musicians of genius which paint in splendid colours the glow of fire, the rush of water, the peace of fields and woods, to audiences who, having glanced through the programme in advance, have their imaginations trained in the right direction. “Pedigree,” by adding to Mlle de Stermaria’s charms the idea of their origin, made them more intelligible, more complete. It made them more desirable also, advertising their inaccessibility as a high price enhances the value of a thing that has already taken our fancy. And its stock of heredity gave to her complexion, in which so many selected juices had been blended, the savour of an exotic fruit or of a famous vintage.

Now, chance had suddenly put into our hands, my grandmother’s and mine, the means of acquiring instantaneous prestige in the eyes of all the other occupants of the hotel. For on that first afternoon, at the moment when the old lady came downstairs from her room, producing, thanks to the footman who preceded her and the maid who came running after her with a book and a rug that she had forgotten, a marked effect upon all who beheld her and arousing in each of them a curiosity from which it was evident that none was so little immune as M. de Stermaria, the manager leaned across to my grandmother and out of kindness (as one might point out the Shah or Queen Ranavalona to an obscure onlooker who could obviously have no sort of connexion with such mighty potentates, but might all the same be interested to know that he had been standing within a few feet of one) whispered in her ear, “The Marquise de Villeparisis!” while at the same moment the old lady, catching sight of my grandmother, could not repress a start of pleased surprise.

It may be imagined that the sudden appearance, in the guise of a little old woman, of the most powerful of fairies would not have given me more pleasure, destitute as I was of any means of access to Mlle de Stermaria, in a strange place where I knew no one: no one, that is to say, for any practical purpose. Aesthetically, the number of human types is so restricted that we must constantly, wherever we may be, have the pleasure of seeing people we know, even without looking for them in the works of the old masters, like Swann. Thus it happened that in the first few days of our visit to Balbec I had succeeded in encountering Legrandin, Swann’s hall porter, and Mme Swann herself, transformed respectively into a waiter, a foreign visitor whom I never saw again, and a bathing superintendent. And a sort of magnetisation attracts and retains so inseparably, one beside another, certain characteristics of physiognomy and mentality, that when Nature thus introduces a person into a new body she does not mutilate him unduly. Legrandin turned waiter kept intact his stature, the outline of his nose, part of his chin; Mme Swann, in the masculine gender and the calling of a bathing superintendent, had been accompanied not only by her familiar features but even by certain mannerisms of speech. Only she could be of little if any more use to me, standing upon the beach there in the red sash of her office, and hoisting at the first gust of wind the flag which forbade us to bathe (for these superintendents are prudent men, seldom knowing how to swim), than she would have been in that fresco of the *Life of Moses* in which Swann had long ago identified her in the person of Jethro’s daughter. Whereas this Mme de Villeparisis was her real self; she had not been the victim of a magic spell which had robbed her of her power, but was capable, on the contrary, of putting at the disposal of mine a spell which would multiply it a hundredfold, and thanks to which, as though I had been swept through the air on the wings of a fabulous bird, I was about to cross in a few moments the infinitely wide social gulf which separated me—at least at Balbec—from Mlle de Stermaria.

Unfortunately, if there was one person who, more than anyone else, lived shut up in a world of her own, it was my grandmother. She would not even have despised me, she would simply not have understood what I meant, if she had known that I attached importance to the opinions, that I felt an interest in the persons, of people the very existence of whom she never noticed and of whom, when the time came to leave Balbec, she would not remember the names. I dared not confess to her that if these same people had seen her talking to Mme de Villeparisis, I should have been immensely gratified, because I felt that the Marquise enjoyed some prestige in the hotel and that her friendship would have given us status in the eyes of Mlle de Stermaria. Not that my grandmother’s friend represented to me, in any sense of the word, a member of the aristocracy: I was too accustomed to her name, which had been familiar to my ears before my mind had begun to consider it, when as a child I had heard it uttered in conversation at home; while her title added to it only a touch of quaintness, as some uncommon Christian name would have done, or as in the names of streets, among which we can see nothing more noble in the Rue Lord Byron, in the plebeian and even squalid Rue Rochechouart, or in the Rue de Gramont than in the Rue Léonce-Reynaud or the Rue Hippolyte-Lebas. Mme de Villeparisis no more made me think of a person who belonged to a special social world than did her cousin MacMahon, whom I did not clearly distinguish from M. Carnot, likewise President of the Republic, or from Raspail, whose photograph Françoise had bought with that of Pius IX. It was one of my grandmother’s principles that, when away from home, one should cease to have any social intercourse, that one did not go to the seaside to meet people, having plenty of time for that sort of thing in Paris, that they would make one waste in polite exchanges, in pointless conversation, the precious time which ought all to be spent in the open air, beside the waves; and finding it convenient to assume that this view was shared by everyone else, and that it authorised,

between old friends whom chance brought face to face in the same hotel, the fiction of a mutual incognito, on hearing her friend's name from the manager she merely looked the other way and pretended not to see Mme de Villeparisis, who, realising that my grandmother did not want to be recognised, likewise gazed into space. She went past, and I was left in my isolation like a shipwrecked mariner who has seen a vessel apparently approaching, which has then vanished under the horizon.

She, too, had her meals in the dining-room, but at the other end of it. She knew none of the people who were staying in the hotel or who came there to call, not even M. de Cambremer; indeed, I noticed that he gave her no greeting one day when, with his wife, he had accepted an invitation to lunch with the president, who, intoxicated with the honour of having the nobleman at his table, avoided his habitual friends and confined himself to a distant twitch of the eyelid, so as to draw their attention to this historic event but so discreetly that his signal could not be interpreted as an invitation to join the party.

"Well, I hope you've done yourself proud, I hope you feel smart enough," the judge's wife said to him that evening.

"Smart? Why should I?" asked the president, concealing his rapture in an exaggerated astonishment. "Because of my guests, do you mean?" he went on, feeling that it was impossible to keep up the farce any longer. "But what is there smart about having a few friends to lunch? After all, they must feed somewhere!"

"Of course it's smart! They were the de Cambremers, weren't they? I recognised them at once. She's a Marquise. And quite genuine, too. Not through the females."

"Oh, she's a very simple soul, she's charming, no standoffishness about her. I thought you were coming to join us. I was making signals to you ... I would have introduced you!" he asserted, tempering with a hint of irony the vast generosity of the offer, like Ahasuerus when he says to Esther: "Of all my Kingdom must I give you half?"

"No, no, no, no! We lie hidden, like the modest violet."

"But you were quite wrong, I assure you," replied the president emboldened now that the danger point was passed. "They weren't going to eat you. I say, aren't we going to have our little game of bezique?"

"Why, of course! We didn't dare suggest it, now that you go about entertaining marquises."

"Oh, get along with you; there's nothing so very wonderful about them. Why, I'm dining there tomorrow. Would you care to go instead of me? I mean it. Honestly, I'd just as soon stay here."

"No, no! I should be removed from the bench as a reactionary," cried the senior judge, laughing till the tears came to his eyes at his own joke. "But you go to Féterne too, don't you?" he went on, turning to the notary.

"Oh, I go there on Sundays—in one door and out the other. But they don't come and have lunch with me as they do with the president."

M. de Stermaria was not at Balbec that day, to the president's great regret. But he managed to say a word in season to the head waiter:

"Aimé, you can tell M. de Stermaria that he's not the only nobleman you've had in here. You saw the gentleman who was with me today at lunch? Eh? A small moustache, looked like a military man. Well, that was the Marquis de Cambremer!"

"Was it indeed? I'm not surprised to hear it."

"That will show him that he's not the only man who's got a title. That'll teach him! It's not a bad thing to take 'em down a peg or two, those noblemen. I say, Aimé, don't say anything to him unless you want to. I mean to say, it's no business of mine; besides, they know each other already."

And next day M. de Stermaria, who remembered that the president had once represented one of his friends, came up and introduced himself.

"Our friends in common, the de Cambremers, were anxious that we should meet, the days didn't fit—I don't know quite what went wrong," said the president who, like most liars, imagined that other people do not take the trouble to investigate an unimportant detail which, for all that, may be sufficient (if chance puts you in possession of the humble facts of the case, and they contradict it) to show the liar in his true colours and to inspire a lasting mistrust.

As usual, but more easily now that her father had left her to talk to the president I was gazing at Mlle de Stermaria. No less than the bold and always graceful distinctiveness of her attitudes, as when, leaning her elbows on the table, she raised her glass in both hands over her forearms, the dry flame of a glance at once extinguished, the ingrained, congenital hardness that one could sense, ill-concealed by her own personal inflexions, in the depths of her voice, and that had shocked my grandmother, a sort of atavistic ratchet to which she returned as soon as, in a glance or an intonation, she had finished expressing her own thoughts—all this brought the thoughts of the observer back to the long line of ancestors who had bequeathed to her that inadequacy of human sympathy, those gaps in her sensibility, a lack of fullness in the stuff of which she was made. But from a certain look which flooded for a moment the wells—instantly dry again—of her eyes, a look in which one sensed that almost humble docility which the predominance of a taste for sensual pleasures gives to the proudest of women, who will soon come to recognise but one form of personal magic, that which any man will enjoy in her eyes who can make her feel those pleasures, an actor or a mountebank for whom, perhaps, she will one day leave her husband, and from a certain pink tinge, warm and sensual, which flushed her pallid cheeks, like the colour that stained the hearts of the white water-lilies in the Vivonne, I thought I could discern that she might readily have consented to my coming to seek in her the savour of that life of poetry and romance which she led in Brittany, a life to which, whether from over-familiarity or from innate superiority, or from disgust at the penury or the avarice of her family, she seemed to attach no great value,



but which, for all that, she held enclosed in her body. In the meagre stock of will-power that had been transmitted to her, and gave her expression a hint of weakness, she would not perhaps have found the strength to resist. And, crowned by a feather that was a trifle old-fashioned and pretentious, the grey felt hat which she invariably wore at meals made her all the more attractive to me, not because it was in harmony with her silver and rose complexion, but because, by making me suppose her to be poor, it brought her closer to me. Obligated by her father's presence to adopt a conventional attitude, but already bringing to the perception and classification of the people who passed before her eyes other principles than his, perhaps she saw in me not my humble rank, but the right sex and age. If one day M. de Stermaria had gone out leaving her behind, if, above all, Mme de Villeparisis, by coming to sit at our table, had given her an opinion of me which might have emboldened me to approach her, perhaps then we might have contrived to exchange a few words, to arrange a meeting, to form a closer tie. And for a whole month during which she would be left alone without her parents in her romantic Breton castle, we should perhaps have been able to wander by ourselves at evening, she and I together in the twilight through which the pink flowers of the bell heather would glow more softly above the darkening water, beneath oak trees beaten and stunted by the pounding of the waves. Together we should have roamed that island impregnated with so intense a charm for me because it had enclosed the everyday life of Mlle de Stermaria and was reflected in the memory of her eyes. For it seemed to me that I should truly have possessed her only there, when I had traversed those regions which enveloped her in so many memories—a veil which my desire longed to tear aside, one of those veils which nature interposes between woman and her pursuers (with the same intention as when, for all of us, she places the act of reproduction between ourselves and our keenest pleasure, and for insects, places before the nectar the pollen which they must carry away with them) in order that, tricked by the illusion of possessing her thus more completely, they may be forced to occupy first the scenes among which she lives and which, of more service to their imagination than sensual pleasure can be, yet would not without that pleasure have sufficed to attract them.

But I was obliged to take my eyes from Mlle de Stermaria, for already, considering no doubt that making the acquaintance of an important person was an odd, brief act which was sufficient in itself and, to bring out all the interest that was latent in it, required only a handshake and a penetrating stare, without either immediate conversation or any subsequent relations, her father had taken leave of the president and returned to sit down facing her, rubbing his hands like a man who has just made a valuable acquisition. As for the president, once the first emotion of this interview had subsided, he could be heard, as on other days, addressing the head waiter every other minute: "But I'm not a king, Aimé; go and attend to the king! I say, Chief, those little trout don't look at all bad, do they? We must ask Aimé to let us have some. Aimé, that little fish you have over there looks to me highly commendable: will you bring us some, please, Aimé, and don't be sparing with it."

He repeated the name "Aimé" all the time, with the result that when he had anyone to dinner the guest would remark "I can see you're quite at home in this place," and would feel himself obliged to keep on saying "Aimé" also, from that tendency, combining elements of timidity, vulgarity and silliness, which many people have, to believe that it is smart and witty to imitate slavishly the people in whose company they happen to be. The president repeated the name incessantly, but with a smile, for he wanted to exhibit at one and the same time his good relations with the head waiter and his own superior station. And the head waiter, whenever he caught the sound of his own name, smiled too, as though touched and at the same time proud, showing that he was conscious of the honour and could appreciate the joke.

Intimidating as I always found these meals, in that vast restaurant, generally full, of the Grand Hotel, they became even more so when there arrived for a few days the proprietor (or he may have been the general manager, appointed by a board of directors) not only of this palace but of seven or eight more besides, situated at all the four corners of France, in each of which, shuttling from one to the other, he would spend a week now and again. Then, just after dinner had begun, there appeared every evening at the entrance to the dining-room this small man with the white hair and a red nose, astonishingly neat and impassive, who was known, it appeared, as well in London as at Monte Carlo, as one of the leading hoteliers in Europe. Once when I had gone out for a moment at the beginning of dinner, as I came in again I passed close by him, and he bowed to me, no doubt to acknowledge that he was my host, but with a coldness in which I could not distinguish whether it was attributable to the reserve of a man who could never forget what he was, or to his contempt for a customer of so little importance. To those, on the other hand, whose importance was considerable, the general manager would bow with quite as much coldness but more deeply, lowering his eyelids with a sort of bashful respect, as though he had found himself confronted, at a funeral, with the father of the deceased or with the Blessed Sacrament. Except for these icy and infrequent salutations, he made not the slightest movement, as if to show that his glittering eyes, which appeared to be starting out of his head, saw everything, controlled everything, ensured for the "Dinner at the Grand Hotel" perfection in every detail as well as an overall harmony. He felt, evidently, that he was more than the producer, more than the conductor, nothing less than the generalissimo. Having decided that a contemplation raised to the maximum degree of intensity would suffice to assure him that everything was in readiness, that no mistake had been made which could lead to disaster, and enable him at last to assume his responsibilities, he abstained not merely from any gesture but even from moving his eyes, which, petrified by the intensity of their gaze, took in and directed operations as a whole. I felt that even the movements of my spoon did not escape him, and were he to vanish after the soup, for the whole of dinner, the inspection he had held would have taken away my appetite. His own was exceedingly good, as one could see at luncheon, which he took like an ordinary guest of the hotel at the same hour as everyone else in the public dining-room. His table had this peculiarity only, that

by his side, while he was eating, the other manager, the resident one, remained standing all the time making conversation. For, being subordinate to the general manager, he was anxious to please a man of whom he lived in constant fear. My own fear of him diminished during these luncheons, for being then lost in the crowd of visitors he would exercise the discretion of a general sitting in a restaurant where there are also private soldiers, in not seeming to take any notice of them. Nevertheless when the porter, from the midst of his cluster of bell-hops, announced to me: "He leaves tomorrow morning for Dinard. Then he's going down to Biarritz, and after that to Cannes," I began to breathe more freely.

My life in the hotel was rendered not only gloomy because I had made no friends there but uncomfortable because Françoise had made many. It might be thought that they would have made things easier for us in various respects. Quite the contrary. The proletariat, if they succeeded only with great difficulty in being treated as people she knew by Françoise, and could not succeed at all unless they fulfilled certain exacting conditions of politeness towards her, were, on the other hand, once they had reached that point, the only people who mattered to her. Her time-honoured code taught her that she was in no way beholden to the friends of her employers, that she might, if she was busy, shut the door without ceremony in the face of a lady who had come to call on my grandmother. But towards her own acquaintance, that is to say the select handful of the lower orders whom she admitted to her fastidious friendship, her actions were regulated by the most subtle and most stringent of protocols. Thus Françoise, having made the acquaintance of the man in the coffee-shop and of a young lady's-maid who did dressmaking for a Belgian lady, no longer went upstairs immediately after lunch to get my grandmother's things ready, but came an hour later, because the coffee-man had wanted to make her a cup of coffee or a tisane in his shop, or the maid had invited her to go and watch her sew, and to refuse either of them would have been impossible, one of those things that were not done. Moreover, particular regard was due to the little sewing-maid, who was an orphan and had been brought up by strangers to whom she still went occasionally for a few days' holiday. Her situation aroused Françoise's pity, and also her benevolent contempt. She who had a family, a little house that had come to her from her parents, with a field in which her brother kept a few cows, could not regard so uprooted a creature as her equal. And since this girl hoped, on Assumption Day, to be allowed to pay her benefactors a visit, Françoise kept on repeating: "She does make me laugh! She says, 'I hope to be going home for the Assumption.' Home, says she! It isn't just that it's not her own place, it's people as took her in from nowhere, and the creature says 'home' just as if it really was her home. Poor thing! What a misery it must be, not to know what it is to have a home." Still, if Françoise had associated only with the ladies'-maids brought to the hotel by other visitors, who fed with her in the "service" quarters and, seeing her grand lace cap and her fine profile, took her perhaps for some lady of noble birth, whom reduced circumstances or a personal attachment had driven to serve as companion to my grandmother, if in a word Françoise had known only people who did not belong to the hotel, no great harm would have been done, since she could not have prevented them from being of some service to us, for the simple reason that in no circumstances, even without her knowledge, would it have been possible for them to be of service to us at all. But she had formed connexions also with one of the wine waiters, with a man in the kitchen, and with the head chamber-maid of our landing. And the result of this in our everyday life was that Françoise—who on the day of her arrival, when she still did not know anyone, would set all the bells jangling for the slightest thing, at hours when my grandmother and I would never have dared to ring, and if we offered some gentle admonition would answer: "Well, we're paying enough for it, aren't we?" as though it were she herself that would have to pay—now that she had made friends with a personage in the kitchen, which had appeared to us to augur well for our future comfort, were my grandmother or I to complain of cold feet, Françoise, even at an hour that was quite normal, dared not ring, assuring us that it would give offence because they would have to relight the boilers, or because it would interrupt the servants' dinner and they would be annoyed. And she ended with a formula that, in spite of the dubious way in which she pronounced it, was none the less clear and put us plainly in the wrong: "The fact is ..." We did not insist, for fear of bringing upon ourselves another, far more serious: "It's a bit much ...!" So that what it amounted to was that we could no longer have any hot water because Françoise had become a friend of the person who heated it.

In the end we too made a social connexion, in spite of but through my grandmother, for she and Mme de Villeparisis collided one morning in a doorway and were obliged to accost each other, not without having first exchanged gestures of surprise and hesitation, performed movements of withdrawal and uncertainty, and finally broken into protestations of joy and greeting, as in certain scenes in Molière where two actors who have been delivering long soliloquies each on his own account, a few feet apart, are supposed not yet to have seen each other, and then suddenly catching sight of each other, cannot believe their eyes, break off what they are saying, and then simultaneously find their tongues again (the chorus meanwhile having kept the dialogue going) and fall into each other's arms. Mme de Villeparisis tactfully made as if to leave my grandmother to herself after the first greetings, but my grandmother insisted on staying to talk to her until lunch-time, being anxious to discover how her friend managed to get her letters earlier than we got ours, and to get such nice grilled dishes (for Mme de Villeparisis, who took a keen interest in her food, had the poorest opinion of the hotel kitchen which served us with meals that my grandmother, still quoting Mme de Sévigné, described as "of a sumptuousness to make you die of hunger"). And the Marquise formed the habit of coming every day, while waiting to be served, to sit down for a moment at our table in the dining-room, insisting that we should not rise from our chairs or in any way put ourselves out. At the most we would occasionally linger, after finishing our lunch, to chat to her, at that sordid moment when the knives are left littering the tablecloth among crumpled napkins. For my own part, in order to preserve (so that I might be able to enjoy Balbec) the idea

that I was on the uttermost promontory of the earth, I compelled myself to look further afield, to notice only the sea, to seek in it the effects described by Baudelaire and to let my gaze fall upon our table only on days when there was set on it some gigantic fish, some marine monster, which unlike the knives and forks was contemporary with the primitive epochs in which the Ocean first began to teem with life, at the time of the Cimmerians, a fish whose body with its numberless vertebrae, its blue and pink veins, had been constructed by nature, but according to an architectural plan, like a polychrome cathedral of the deep.

As a barber, seeing an officer whom he is accustomed to shave with special deference and care recognise a customer who has just entered the shop and stop for a moment to talk to him, rejoices in the thought that these are two men of the same social order, and cannot help smiling as he goes to fetch the bowl of soap, for he knows that in his establishment, to the vulgar routine of a mere barber's-shop are being added social, not to say aristocratic pleasures, so Aimé, seeing that Mme de Villeparisis had found in us old friends, went to fetch our finger-bowls with the proudly modest and knowingly discreet smile of a hostess who knows when to leave her guests to themselves. He suggested also a pleased and loving father who watches silently over the happy pair who have plighted their troth at his hospitable board. Besides, it was enough merely to utter the name of a person of title for Aimé to appear pleased, unlike Françoise, in whose presence you could not mention Count So-and-so without her face darkening and her speech becoming dry and curt, which meant that she cherished the aristocracy not less than Aimé but more. But then Françoise had that quality which in others she condemned as the worst possible fault: she was proud. She was not of that amenable and good-natured race to which Aimé belonged. They feel and they exhibit an intense delight when you tell them a piece of news which may be more or less sensational but is at any rate new, and not to be found in the papers. Françoise would refuse to appear surprised. You might have announced in her hearing that the Archduke Rudolf—not that she had the least suspicion of his having ever existed—was not, as was generally supposed, dead, but alive and kicking, and she would have answered only “Yes,” as though she had known it all the time. It may, however, have been that if, even from our own lips, from us whom she so meekly called her masters and who had so nearly succeeded in taming her, she could not hear the name of a nobleman without having to restrain an impulse of anger, this was because the family from which she had sprung occupied in its own village a comfortable and independent position, unlikely to be disturbed in the consideration which it enjoyed save by those same nobles in whose households, meanwhile, from his boyhood, an Aimé would have been domiciled as a servant, if not actually brought up by their charity. Hence, for Françoise, Mme de Villeparisis had to make amends for being noble. But (in France, at any rate) that is precisely the talent, in fact the sole occupation of the aristocracy. Françoise, following the common tendency of servants, who pick up incessantly from the conversation of their masters with other people fragmentary observations from which they are apt to draw erroneous conclusions—as humans do with respect to the habits of animals—was constantly discovering that somebody had slighted us, a conclusion to which she was easily led not so much, perhaps, by her extravagant love for us as by the delight that she took in being disagreeable to us. But having once established, without possibility of error, the endless consideration and kindness shown to us, and shown to herself also, by Mme de Villeparisis, Françoise forgave her for being a marquise, and, as she had never ceased to admire her for being one, preferred her thenceforward to all our other friends. It must be added that no one else took the trouble to be so continually nice to us. Whenever my grandmother remarked on a book that Mme de Villeparisis was reading, or said she had been admiring the fruit which someone had just sent to our friend, within an hour the footman would come to our rooms with book or fruit. And the next time we saw her, in response to our thanks she would simply say, as though trying to find an excuse for her present in some special use to which it might be put: “It’s nothing wonderful, but the newspapers come so late here; one must have something to read,” or “It’s always wiser to have fruit one can be quite certain of, at the seaside.”

“But I don’t believe I’ve ever seen you eating oysters,” she said to us one day (increasing the sense of disgust which I felt at that moment, for the living flesh of oysters revolted me even more than the viscosity of the stranded jelly-fish defiled the Balbec beach for me). “They’re quite delicious down here! Oh, let me tell my maid to fetch your letters when she goes for mine. What, your daughter writes to you *every day*? But what on earth can you find to say to each other?”

My grandmother was silent, but it may be assumed that her silence was due to disdain, for she used to repeat, when she wrote to Mamma, the words of Mme de Sévigné: “As soon as I have received a letter, I want another at once; I sigh for nothing else. There are few who are worthy to understand what I feel.” And I was afraid that she might apply to Mme de Villeparisis the conclusion: “I seek out those who are of this chosen few, and I avoid the rest.” She fell back upon praise of the fruit which Mme de Villeparisis had sent us the day before. And it had indeed been so fine that the manager, in spite of the jealousy aroused by our neglect of his official offerings, had said to me: “I am like you; I am sweeter for fruit than any other kind of dessert.” My grandmother told her friend that she had enjoyed them all the more because the fruit which we got in the hotel was generally horrid. “I cannot,” she went on, “say with Mme de Sévigné that if we should take a sudden fancy for bad fruit we should be obliged to order it from Paris.” “Oh yes, of course, you read Mme de Sévigné. I’ve seen you with her letters ever since the day you came.” (She forgot that she had never officially seen my grandmother in the hotel before meeting her in that doorway.) “Don’t you find it rather exaggerated, her constant anxiety about her daughter? She refers to it too often to be really sincere. She’s not very natural.” My grandmother felt that any discussion would be futile, and so as not to be obliged to speak of the things she loved to a person incapable of understanding them, concealed the *Mémoires de Madame de Beausergent* by laying her bag upon them.

Were she to encounter Françoise at the moment (which Françoise called “the noon”) when, wearing her fine cap and surrounded with every mark of respect, she was coming downstairs to “feed with the service,” Mme Villeparisis would stop her to ask after us. And Françoise, when transmitting to us the Marquise’s message: “She said to me, ‘You’ll be sure and bid them good day,’ she said,” would counterfeit the voice of Mme de Villeparisis, whose exact words she imagined herself to be quoting textually, whereas in fact she was distorting them no less than Plato distorts the words of Socrates or St John the words of Jesus. Françoise was naturally deeply touched by these attentions. Only she did not believe my grandmother, but supposed that she must be lying in the interests of class (the rich always supporting one another) when she assured us that Mme de Villeparisis had been lovely as a young woman. It was true that of this loveliness only the faintest trace remained, from which no one—unless he happened to be a great deal more of an artist than Françoise—would have been able to reconstitute her ruined beauty. For in order to understand how beautiful an elderly woman may once have been one must not only study but translate every line of her face.

“I must remember some time to ask her whether I’m not right, after all, in thinking that there’s some connexion with the Guermantes,” said my grandmother, to my great indignation. How could I be expected to believe in a common origin uniting two names which had entered my consciousness, one through the low and shameful gate of experience, the other by the golden gate of imagination?

We had several times, in the last few days, seen driving past us in a stately equipage, tall, red-haired, handsome, with a rather prominent nose, the Princesse de Luxembourg, who was staying in the neighbourhood for a few weeks. Her carriage had stopped outside the hotel, a footman had come in and spoken to the manager, had gone back to the carriage and had reappeared with the most amazing armful of fruit (which combined a variety of seasons in a single basket, like the bay itself) with a card: “La Princesse de Luxembourg,” on which were scrawled a few words in pencil. For what princely traveller, sojourning here incognito, could they be intended, those plums, glaucous, luminous and spherical as was at that moment the circumfluent sea, those transparent grapes clustering on the shrivelled wood, like a fine day in autumn, those pears of a heavenly ultramarine? For it could not be on my grandmother’s friend that the Princess had meant to pay a call. And yet on the following evening Mme de Villeparisis sent us the bunch of grapes, cool, liquid, golden, and plums and pears which we remembered too, though the plums had changed, like the sea at our dinner-hour, to a dull purple, and in the ultramarine of the pears there floated the shapes of a few pink clouds.

A few days later we met Mme de Villeparisis as we came away from the symphony concert that was given every morning on the beach. Convinced that the music that I heard there (the Prelude to *Lohengrin*, the Overture to *Tannhäuser* and suchlike) expressed the loftiest of truths, I tried to raise myself in so far as I could in order to reach and grasp them, I drew from myself, in order to understand them, and put back into them all that was best and most profound in my own nature at that time. But, as we came out of the concert, and, on our way back to the hotel, had stopped for a moment on the front, my grandmother and I, to exchange a few words with Mme de Villeparisis who told us that she had ordered some *croque-monsieurs* and a dish of creamed eggs for us at the hotel, I saw, in the distance, coming in our direction, the Princesse de Luxembourg, half leaning upon a parasol in such a way as to impart to her tall and wonderful form that slight inclination, to make it trace that arabesque, so dear to the women who had been beautiful under the Empire and knew how, with drooping shoulders, arched backs, concave hips and taut legs, to make their bodies float as softly as a silken scarf about the rigid armature of an invisible shaft which might be supposed to have transfixed it. She went out every morning for a stroll on the beach almost at the time when everyone else, after bathing, was coming home to lunch, and as hers was not until half past one she did not return to her villa until long after the hungry bathers had left the scorching beach a desert. Mme de Villeparisis introduced my grandmother and was about to introduce me, but had first to ask me my name, which she could not remember. She had perhaps never known it, or if she had must have forgotten years ago to whom my grandmother had married her daughter. The name appeared to make a sharp impression on Mme de Villeparisis. Meanwhile the Princesse de Luxembourg had offered us her hand and from time to time, while she chatted to the Marquise, turned to bestow a kindly glance on my grandmother and myself, with that embryonic kiss which we put into our smiles when they are addressed to a baby out with its “Nana.” Indeed, in her anxiety not to appear to be enthroned in a higher sphere than ours, she had probably miscalculated the distance, for by an error in adjustment her eyes became infused with such benevolence that I foresaw the moment when she would put out her hand and stroke us like two lovable beasts who had poked our heads out at her through the bars of our cage in the Zoo. And immediately, as it happened, this idea of caged animals and the Bois de Boulogne received striking confirmation. It was the time of day when the beach is crowded by itinerant and clamorous vendors, hawking cakes and sweets and biscuits. Not knowing quite what to do to show her affection for us, the Princess hailed the next one to come by; he had nothing left but a loaf of rye bread, of the kind one throws to the ducks. The Princess took it and said to me: “For your grandmother.” And yet it was to me that she held it out, saying with a friendly smile, “You shall give it to her yourself,” thinking that my pleasure would thus be more complete if there were no intermediary between myself and the animals. Other vendors came up, and she stuffed my pockets with everything that they had, tied up in packets, comfits, sponge-cakes, sugar-sticks. “You will eat some yourself,” she told me, “and give some to your grandmother,” and she had the vendors paid by the little negro page, dressed in red satin, who followed her everywhere and was a nine days’ wonder on the beach. Then she said good-bye to Mme de Villeparisis and held out her hand to us with the intention of treating us in the same way as she treated her friend, as people whom she knew, and of bringing herself within our reach. But this time she must have reckoned our level as not quite so low in the scale of creation, for her equality

with us was indicated by the Princess to my grandmother by that tender and maternal smile which one bestows upon a little boy when one says good-bye to him as though to a grown-up person. By a miraculous stride in evolution, my grandmother was no longer a duck or an antelope, but had already become what Mme Swann would have called a "*baby*." Finally, having taken leave of us all, the Princess resumed her stroll along the sunlit esplanade, curving and inflecting her splendid form, which, like a serpent coiled about a wand, twined itself round the white parasol patterned in blue which she carried unopened in her hand. She was my first Royalty—I say my first, for the Princesse Mathilde was not at all royal in her ways. The second, as we shall see in due course, was to astonish me no less by her graciousness. One aspect of the benevolence of the nobility, kindly intermediaries between commoners and kings, was revealed to me next day when Mme de Villeparisis reported: "She thought you quite charming. She is a woman of the soundest judgment, the warmest heart. Not like so many queens and highnesses. She has real merit." And Mme de Villeparisis added in a tone of conviction, and quite thrilled to be able to say it to us: "I think she would be delighted to see you again."

But on that previous morning, after we had parted from the Princesse de Luxembourg, Mme de Villeparisis said a thing which impressed me far more and was not prompted merely by friendly feeling.

"Are you," she had asked me, "the son of the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry? Indeed! I'm told your father is a most charming man. He is having a splendid holiday just now."

A few days earlier we had heard, in a letter from Mamma, that my father and his travelling-companion M. de Norpois had lost their luggage.

"It has been found, or rather it was never really lost. I can tell you what happened," explained Mme de Villeparisis, who, without our knowing how, seemed to be far better informed than ourselves about my father's travels. "I think your father is now planning to come home earlier, next week, in fact, as he will probably give up the idea of going to Algeciras. But he's anxious to spend a day longer in Toledo, since he's an admirer of a pupil of Titian—I forget the name—whose work can only be seen properly there."

And I wondered by what strange accident, in the impartial telescope through which Mme de Villeparisis considered, from a safe distance, the minuscule, perfunctory, vague agitation of the host of people whom she knew, there had come to be inserted at the spot through which she observed my father a fragment of glass of prodigious magnifying power which made her see in such high relief and in the fullest detail everything that was agreeable about him, the contingencies that obliged him to return home, his difficulties with the customs, his admiration for El Greco, and, altering the scale of her vision, showed her this one man, so large among all the rest so small, like that Jupiter to whom Gustave Moreau, when he portrayed him by the side of a weak mortal, gave a superhuman stature.

My grandmother bade Mme de Villeparisis good-bye, so that we might stay and imbibe the fresh air for a little while longer outside the hotel, until they signalled to us through the glazed partition that our lunch was ready. There were sounds of uproar. The young mistress of the King of the Cannibal Island had been down to bathe and was now coming back to the hotel.

"Really and truly, it's a perfect plague, it's enough to make one decide to emigrate!" cried the president in a towering rage as he crossed her path.

Meanwhile the notary's wife was following the bogus queen with eyes that seemed ready to start from their sockets.

"I can't tell you how angry Mme Blandais makes me when she stares at those people like that," said the president to the judge, "I feel I want to slap her. That's just the way to make the wretches appear important, which is of course the very thing they want. Do ask her husband to tell her what a fool she's making of herself. I swear I won't go out with them again if they stop and gape at those masqueraders."

As to the coming of the Princesse de Luxembourg, whose carriage, on the day she had left the fruit, had drawn up outside the hotel, it had not passed unobserved by the little group of wives, the notary's, the president's and the judge's, who had already for some time past been extremely anxious to know whether that Mme de Villeparisis whom everyone treated with so much respect—which all these ladies were burning to hear that she did not deserve—was a genuine marquise and not an adventuress. Whenever Mme de Villeparisis passed through the hall the judge's wife, who scented irregularities everywhere, would lift her nose from her needlework and stare at the intruder in a way that made her friends die with laughter.

"Oh, well, you know," she proudly explained, "I always begin by believing the worst. I will never admit that a woman is properly married until she has shown me her birth certificate and her marriage lines. But never fear—just wait till I've finished my little investigation."

And so day after day the ladies would come together and laughingly ask: "Any news?"

But on the evening of the Princesse de Luxembourg's call the judge's wife laid a finger on her lips.

"I've discovered something."

"Oh, isn't Mme Poncin simply wonderful? I never saw ... But do tell us! What's happened?"

"Just listen to this. A woman with yellow hair and six inches of paint on her face and a carriage which reeked of harlot a mile away—which only a creature like that would dare to have—came here today to call on the so-called Marquise!"

"Oh-yow-yow! Crash bang! Did you ever! Why, it must be the woman we saw—you remember, President—we said at the time we didn't at all like the look of her, but we didn't know that it was the 'Marquise' she'd come to see. A woman with a nigger-boy, you mean?"

"That's the one."

"You don't say! Do you happen to know her name?"

"Yes, I made a mistake on purpose. I picked up her card. She *trades* under the name of the 'Princesse de Luxembourg'! Wasn't I right to have my doubts about her? It's a nice thing to have to fraternise with a Baronne d'Ange like that?"<sup>10</sup>

The president quoted Mathurin Régnier's *Macette* to the judge.

It must not, however, be supposed that this misunderstanding was merely temporary, like those that occur in the second act of a farce to be cleared up before the final curtain. Mme de Luxembourg, a niece of the King of England and of the Emperor of Austria, and Mme de Villeparisis, when one called to take the other for a drive, always appeared like two "old trots" of the kind one has always such difficulty in avoiding at a watering-place. Nine tenths of the men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain appear to a large section of the middle classes as crapulous paupers (which, individually, they not infrequently are) whom no respectable person would dream of asking to dinner. The middle classes pitch their standards in this respect too high, for the failings of these men would never prevent their being received with every mark of esteem in houses which they themselves will never enter. And so fondly do the aristocracy imagine that the middle classes know this that they affect a simplicity in speaking of themselves, a disparagement of friends of theirs who are particularly "on their beam-ends," that compounds the misunderstanding. If, by chance, a man of the fashionable world has dealings with the petty bourgeoisie because, having more money than he knows what to do with, he finds himself elected chairman of all sorts of important financial concerns, his business associates who at last see a nobleman worthy to be ranked with the professional classes, would take their oaths that such a man would not consort with the Marquis ruined by gambling whom the said business associates assume to be all the more destitute of friends the more friendly he makes himself. And they cannot get over their surprise when the duke who is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the colossal undertaking arranges a marriage for his son with the daughter of that very marquis, who may be a gambler but who bears the oldest name in France, just as a sovereign would sooner see his son marry the daughter of a dethroned king than that of a president still in office. In other words, the two worlds have as fanciful a view of one another as the inhabitants of the resort situated at one end of Balbec Bay have of the resort at the other end: from Rivebelle you can just see Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse; but even that is deceptive, for you imagine that you are seen from Marcouville, where, as a matter of fact, the splendours of Rivebelle are almost wholly invisible.

The Balbec doctor, called in to cope with a sudden feverish attack, gave the opinion that I ought not to stay out all day on the beach in the blazing sun during the hot weather, and wrote out various prescriptions for me. My grandmother took these with a show of respect in which I could at once discern her firm resolve to ignore them all, but did pay attention to the advice on the question of hygiene, and accepted an offer from Mme de Villeparisis to take us for drives in her carriage. After this I would spend the mornings going to and fro between my own room and my grandmother's. Hers did not look out directly on the sea, as mine did, but was open on three of its four sides—on to a strip of the esplanade, a courtyard, and a view of the country inland—and was furnished differently from mine, with armchairs embroidered with metallic filigree and pink flowers from which the cool and pleasant odour that greeted one on entering seemed to emanate. And at that hour when the sun's rays, drawn from different exposures and, as it were, from different hours of the day, broke the angles of the wall, projected on to the chest of drawers, side by side with a reflection of the beach, a festal altar as variegated as a bank of field-flowers, hung on the fourth wall the folded, quivering, warm wings of a radiance ready at any moment to resume its flight, warmed like a bath a square of provincial carpet before the window overlooking the courtyard which the sun festooned and patterned like a climbing vine, and added to the charm and complexity of the room's furniture by seeming to pluck and scatter the petals of the silken flowers on the chairs and to make their silver threads stand out from the fabric, this room in which I lingered for a moment before going to get ready for our drive suggested a prism in which the colours of the

light that shone outside were broken up, a hive in which the sweet juices of the day which I was about to taste were distilled, scattered, intoxicating and visible, a garden of hope which dissolved in a quivering haze of silver threads and rose petals. But before all this I had drawn back my own curtains, impatient to know what Sea it was that was playing that morning by the shore, like a Nereid. For none of those Seas ever stayed with us longer than a day. The next day there would be another, which sometimes resembled its predecessor. But I never saw the same one twice.

There were some that were of so rare a beauty that my pleasure on catching sight of them was enhanced by surprise. By what privilege, on one morning rather than another, did the window on being uncurtained disclose to my wondering eyes the nymph Glauconome, whose lazy beauty, gently breathing, had the transparency of a vaporous emerald through which I could see teeming the ponderable elements that coloured it? She made the sun join in her play, with a smile attenuated by an invisible haze which was no more than a space kept vacant about her translucent surface, which, thus curtailed, was rendered more striking, like those goddesses whom the sculptor carves in relief upon a block of marble the rest of which he leaves unchiselled. So, in her matchless colour, she invited us out over those rough terrestrial roads, from which, sitting with Mme de Villeparisis in her barouche, we should glimpse, all day long and without ever reaching it, the coolness of her soft palpitation.

Mme de Villeparisis used to order her carriage early, so that we should have time to reach Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, or the rocks of Quetteholme, or some other goal which, for a somewhat lumbering vehicle, was far enough off to require the whole day. In my joy at the thought of the long drive we were going to take I would hum some tune that I had heard recently as I strolled up and down until Mme de Villeparisis was ready. If it was Sunday, hers would not be the only carriage drawn up outside the hotel; several hired cabs would be waiting there, not only for the people who had been invited to Féterne by Mme de Cambremer, but for those who, rather than stay at home all day like children in disgrace, declared that Sunday was always quite impossible at Balbec and set off immediately after lunch to hide themselves in some neighbouring watering-place or to visit one of the "sights" of the neighbourhood. And indeed whenever (which was often) Mme Blandais was asked if she had been to the Cambremers', she would answer emphatically: "No, we went to the Falls of the Bec," as though that were the sole reason for her not having spent the day at Féterne. And the president would charitably remark: "I envy you. I wish I had gone there instead. They must be well worth seeing."

Beside the row of carriages, in front of the porch in which I stood waiting, was planted, like some shrub of a rare species, a young page who attracted the eye no less by the unusual and harmonious colouring of his hair than by his plant-like epidermis. Inside, in the hall, corresponding to the narthex, or Church of the Catechumens in a primitive basilica, through which the persons who were not staying in the hotel were entitled to pass, the comrades of the "outside" page did not indeed work much harder than he but did at least execute certain movements. It is probable that in the early morning they helped with the cleaning. But in the afternoon they stood there only like a chorus who, even when there is nothing for them to do, remain upon the stage in order to strengthen the representation. The general manager, the same who had so terrified me, reckoned on increasing their number considerably next year, for he had "big ideas." And this prospect greatly afflicted the manager of the hotel, who found that all these boys were simply "busybodies," by which he meant that they got in the visitors' way and were of no use to anyone. But between lunch and dinner at least, between the exits and entrances of the visitors, they did fill an otherwise empty stage, like those pupils of Mme de Maintenon who, in the garb of young Israelites, carry on the action whenever Esther or Joad "goes off." But the outside page, with his delicate tints, his slender, fragile frame, in proximity to whom I stood waiting for the Marquise to come down, preserved an immobility mixed with a certain melancholy, for his elder brothers had left the hotel for more brilliant careers elsewhere, and he felt isolated upon this alien soil. At last Mme de Villeparisis appeared. To stand by her carriage and to help her into it ought perhaps to have been part of the young page's duties. But he knew that a person who brings her own servants to an hotel expects them to wait on her and is not as a rule lavish with her tips, and that the same was true also of the nobility of the old Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme de Villeparisis belonged to both these categories. The arborescent page concluded therefore that he could expect nothing from her, and leaving her own maid and footman to pack her and her belongings into the carriage, he continued to dream sadly of the enviable lot of his brothers and preserved his vegetable immobility.

We would set off; some time after rounding the railway station, we came into a country road which soon became as familiar to me as the roads round Combray, from the bend where it took off between charming orchards to the turning at which we left it where there were tilled fields on either side. Among these we could see here and there an apple-tree, stripped it was true of its blossom and bearing no more than a fringe of pistils, but sufficient even so to enchant me since I could imagine, seeing those inimitable leaves, how their broad expanse, like the ceremonial carpet spread for a wedding that was now over, had been only recently swept by the white satin train of their blushing flowers.

How often in Paris, during the month of May of the following year, was I to bring home a branch of apple-blossom from the florist and afterwards to spend the night in company with its flowers in which bloomed the same creamy essence that still powdered with its froth the burgeoning leaves and between whose white corollas it seemed almost as though it had been the florist who, from generosity towards me, from a taste for invention too and as an effective contrast, had added on either side the supplement of a becoming pink bud: I sat gazing at them, I grouped them in the light of my lamp—for so long that I was often still there when the dawn brought to their whiteness the same flush with which it must at that moment have been tingeing their



sisters on the Balbec road—and I sought to carry them back in my imagination to that roadside, to multiply them, to spread them out within the frame prepared for them, on the canvas already primed, of those fields and orchards whose outline I knew by heart, which I so longed to see, which one day I must see, again, at the moment when, with the exquisite fervour of genius, spring covers their canvas with its colours.

Before getting into the carriage, I had composed the seascape which I was going to look out for, which I hoped to see with Baudelaire's "radiant sun" upon it, and which at Balbec I could distinguish only in too fragmentary a form, broken by so many vulgar adjuncts that had no place in my dream—bathers, cabins, pleasure yachts. But when, Mme de Villeparisis's carriage having reached the top of a hill, I caught a glimpse of the sea through the leafy boughs of the trees, then no doubt at such a distance those temporal details which had set it apart, as it were, from nature and history disappeared, and I could try to persuade myself as I looked down upon its waters that they were the same which Leconte de Lisle describes for us in his *Orestie*, where "like a flight of birds of prey, at break of day" the long-haired warriors of heroic Hellas "with oars a hundred thousand sweep the resounding deep." But on the other hand I was no longer near enough to the sea, which seemed to me not alive but congealed, I no longer felt any power beneath its colours, spread like those of a picture between the leaves, through which it appeared as insubstantial as the sky and only of an intenser blue.

Mme de Villeparisis, seeing that I was fond of churches, promised me that we should visit several of them, and especially the church at Carqueville "quite buried in all its old ivy," as she said with a gesture of her hand which seemed tastefully to be clothing the absent façade in an invisible and delicate screen of foliage. Mme de Villeparisis would often, with this little descriptive gesture, find just the right word to define the charm and distinctiveness of an historic building, always avoiding technical terms, but incapable of concealing her thorough understanding of the things to which she referred. She appeared to seek an excuse for this erudition in the fact that one of her father's country houses, the one in which she had lived as a girl, was situated in a region where there were churches similar in style to those round Balbec, so that it would have been shameful if she had not acquired a taste for architecture, this house being, incidentally, one of the finest examples of that of the Renaissance. But as it was also a regular museum, as moreover Chopin and Liszt had played there, Lamartine recited poetry, all the most famous artists for fully a century written thoughts, dashed off melodies, made sketches in the family album, Mme de Villeparisis ascribed, whether from delicacy, good breeding, true modesty or want of speculative intelligence, only this purely material origin to her acquaintance with all the arts, and had seemingly come to regard painting, music, literature, and philosophy as the appanage of a young lady brought up on the most aristocratic lines in an historic building that was classified and starred. One got the impression that for her there were no other pictures than those that have been inherited. She was pleased that my grandmother liked a necklace which she wore, and which hung over her dress. It appeared in the portrait of an ancestress of hers, by Titian, which had never left the family. So that one could be certain of its being genuine. She would not hear a word about pictures bought, heaven knew where, by a Croesus; she was persuaded in advance that they were fakes, and had no desire to see them. We knew that she herself painted flowers in water-colour, and my grandmother, who had heard these praised, spoke to her of them. Mme de Villeparisis modestly changed the subject, but without showing any more surprise or pleasure than would an artist of established reputation to whom compliments mean nothing. She said merely that it was a delightful pastime because, even if the flowers that sprang from the brush were nothing wonderful, at least the work made you live in the company of real flowers, of the beauty of which, especially when you were obliged to study them closely in order to draw them, you could never grow tired. But at Balbec Mme de Villeparisis was giving herself a holiday, in order to rest her eyes.

We were astonished, my grandmother and I, to find how much more "liberal" she was than even the majority of the middle class. She did not understand how anyone could be scandalised by the expulsion of the Jesuits, saying that it had always been done, even under the Monarchy, in Spain even. She defended the Republic, reproaching it for its anti-clericalism only to this extent: "I should find it just as bad to be prevented from going to mass when I wanted to, as to be forced to go to it when I didn't!" and even startled us with such remarks as: "Oh! the aristocracy in these days, what does it amount to?" or, "To my mind, a man who doesn't work doesn't count!"—perhaps only because she sensed how much they gained in spice and piquancy, how memorable they became, on her lips.

When we heard these advanced opinions—though never so far advanced as to amount to socialism, which Mme de Villeparisis held in abhorrence—expressed so frequently and with so much frankness precisely by one of those people in consideration of whose intelligence our scrupulous and timid impartiality would refuse to condemn outright the ideas of conservatives, we came very near, my grandmother and I, to believing that in the pleasant companion of our drives was to be found the measure and the pattern of truth in all things. We took her word for it when she pronounced judgment on her Titians, the colonnade of her country house, the conversational talent of Louis-Philippe. But—like those learned people who hold us spellbound when we get them on to Egyptian painting or Etruscan inscriptions, and yet talk so tritely about modern work that we wonder whether we have not overestimated the interest of the sciences in which they are versed since they do not betray therein the mediocrity of mind which they must have brought to those studies just as much as to their fatuous essays on Baudelaire—Mme de Villeparisis, questioned by me about Chateaubriand, about Balzac, about Victor Hugo, each of whom in his day had been the guest of her parents and had been glimpsed by her, smiled at my reverence, told amusing anecdotes about them such as she had just been telling us about dukes and statesmen, and severely criticised those writers precisely because they had been lacking in that modesty, that self-effacement, that sober art which is satisfied with a single precise stroke and does not over-

emphasise, which avoids above all else the absurdity of grandiloquence, in that aptness, those qualities of moderation, of judgment and simplicity to which she had been taught that real greatness aspired and attained. It was evident that she had no hesitation in placing above them men who might after all, perhaps, by virtue of those qualities, have had the advantage over a Balzac, a Hugo, a Vigny in a drawing-room, an academy, a cabinet council, men like Molé, Fontanes, Vitrolles, Bersot, Pasquier, Lebrun, Salvandy or Daru.

"Like those novels of Stendhal which you seem to admire. You would have given him a great surprise, I assure you, if you had spoken to him in that tone. My father, who used to meet him at M. Mérimée's—now he was a man of talent, if you like—often told me that Beyle (that was his real name) was appallingly vulgar, but quite good company at dinner, and not in the least conceited about his books. Why, you must have seen for yourself how he just shrugged his shoulders at the absurdly extravagant compliments of M. de Balzac. There at least he showed that he knew how to behave like a gentleman."

She possessed the autographs of all these great men, and seemed, presuming on the personal relations which her family had had with them, to think that her judgment of them must be better founded than that of young people who, like myself, had had no opportunity of meeting them. "I think I have a right to speak about them, since they used to come to my father's house; and as M. Sainte-Beuve, who was a most intelligent man, used to say, in forming an estimate you must take the word of people who saw them close to and were able to judge more exactly their real worth."

Sometimes, as the carriage laboured up a steep road through ploughlands, making the fields more real, adding to them a mark of authenticity like the precious floweret with which certain of the old masters used to sign their pictures, a few hesitant cornflowers, like those of Combray, would follow in our wake. Presently the horses outdistanced them, but a little way on we would glimpse another which while awaiting us had pricked up its azure star in front of us in the grass. Some made so bold as to come and plant themselves by the side of the road, and a whole constellation began to take shape, what with my distant memories and these domesticated flowers.

We began to go down the hill; and then we would meet, climbing it on foot, on a bicycle, in a cart or carriage, one of those creatures—flowers of a fine day but unlike the flowers of the field, for each of them secretes something that is not to be found in another and that will prevent us from gratifying with any of her peers the desire she has aroused in us—a farm-girl driving her cow or reclining on the back of a waggon, a shopkeeper's daughter taking the air, a fashionable young lady erect on the back seat of a landau, facing her parents. Certainly Bloch had been the means of opening a new era and had altered the value of life for me on the day when he had told me that the dreams which I had entertained on my solitary walks along the Méséglise way, when I hoped that some peasant girl might pass whom I could take in my arms, were not a mere fantasy which corresponded to nothing outside myself but that all the girls one met, whether villagers or "young ladies," were alike ready and willing to give heed to such yearnings. And even if I were fated, now that I was ill and did not go out by myself, never to be able to make love to them, I was happy all the same, like a child born in a prison or a hospital who, having long supposed that the human organism was capable of digesting only dry bread and medicines, has learned suddenly that peaches, apricots and grapes are not simply part of the decoration of the country scene but delicious and easily assimilated food. Even if his gaoler or his nurse does not allow him to pluck those tempting fruits, still the world seems to him a better place and existence in it more clement. For a desire seems to us more attractive, we repose on it with more confidence, when we know that outside ourselves there is a reality which conforms to it, even if, for us, it is not to be realised. And we think more joyfully of a life in which (on condition that we eliminate for a moment from our mind the tiny obstacle, accidental and special, which prevents us personally from doing so) we can imagine ourselves to be assuaging that desire. As to the pretty girls who went past, from the day on which I had first known that their cheeks could be kissed, I had become curious about their souls. And the universe had appeared to me more interesting.

Mme de Villeparisis's carriage moved fast. I scarcely had time to see the girl who was coming in our direction; and yet—since the beauty of human beings is not like the beauty of things, and we feel that it is that of a unique creature, endowed with consciousness and free-will—as soon as her individuality, a soul still vague, a will unknown to me, presented a tiny picture of itself, enormously reduced but complete, in the depths of her indifferent eyes, at once, by a mysterious response of the pollen ready in me for the pistils that should receive it, I felt surging through me the embryo, equally vague, equally minute, of the desire not to let this girl pass without forcing her mind to become aware of my person, without preventing her desires from wandering to someone else, without insinuating myself into her dreams and taking possession of her heart. Meanwhile our carriage had moved on; the pretty girl was already behind us; and as she had—of me—none of those notions which constitute a person in one's mind, her eyes, which had barely seen me, had forgotten me already. Was it because I had caught but a momentary glimpse of her that I had found her so attractive? It may have been. In the first place, the impossibility of stopping when we meet a woman, the risk of not meeting her again another day, give her at once the same charm as a place derives from the illness or poverty that prevents us from visiting it, or the lustreless days which remain to us to live from the battle in which we shall doubtless fall. So that, if there were no such thing as habit, life must appear delightful to those of us who are continually under the threat of death—that is to say, to all mankind. Then, if our imagination is set going by the desire for what we cannot possess, its flight is not limited by a reality perceived in these casual encounters in which the charms of the passing stranger are generally in direct ratio to the swiftness of our passage. If night is falling and the carriage is moving fast, whether in town or country, there is not a single torso, disfigured like an antique marble by the speed that tears us away and the dusk that blurs it, that does not aim

at our heart, from every crossing, from the lighted interior of every shop, the arrows of Beauty, that Beauty of which we are sometimes tempted to ask ourselves whether it is, in this world, anything more than the complementary part that is added to a fragmentary and fugitive stranger by our imagination, overstimulated by regret.

Had I been free to get down from the carriage and to speak to the girl whom we were passing, I might perhaps have been disillusioned by some blemish on her skin which from the carriage I had not distinguished. (Whereupon any attempt to penetrate into her life would have seemed suddenly impossible. For beauty is a sequence of hypotheses which ugliness cuts short when it bars the way that we could already see opening into the unknown.) Perhaps a single word which she might have uttered, or a smile, would have furnished me with an unexpected key or clue with which to read the expression on her face, to interpret her bearing, which would at once have become commonplace. It is possible, for I have never in real life met any girls so desirable as on days when I was with some solemn person from whom, despite the myriad pretexts that I invented, I could not tear myself away: some years after the one in the course of which I went for the first time to Balbec, as I was driving through Paris with a friend of my father, and had caught sight of a woman walking quickly along the dark street, I felt that it was unreasonable to forfeit, for a purely conventional scruple, my share of happiness in what may very well be the only life there is, and jumping from the carriage without a word of apology I went in search of the stranger, lost her at the junction of two streets, caught up with her again in a third, and arrived at last, breathless, beneath a street lamp, face to face with old Mme Verdurin whom I had been carefully avoiding for years, and who, in her delight and surprise, exclaimed: "But how very nice of you to have run all this way just to say how d'ye do to me!"

That year at Balbec, on the occasion of such encounters, I would assure my grandmother and Mme de Villeparisis that I had so severe a headache that the best thing for me would be to go home alone on foot. But they would never let me get out of the carriage. And I must add the pretty girl (far harder to find again than an historic monument, for she was nameless and had the power of locomotion) to the collection of all those whom I promised myself that I would examine more closely at a later date. One of them, however, happened to pass more than once before my eyes in circumstances which allowed me to believe that I should be able to get to know her as fully as I wished. This was a milk-girl who came from a farm with an additional supply of cream for the hotel. I fancied that she had recognised me also; and she did indeed look at me with an attentiveness which was perhaps due only to the surprise which my attentiveness caused her. And next day, a day on which I had been resting all morning, when Françoise came in about noon to draw my curtains, she handed me a letter which had been left for me downstairs. I knew no one at Balbec. I had no doubt that the letter was from the milk-girl. Alas, it was only from Bergotte who, as he happened to be passing, had tried to see me, but on hearing that I was asleep had scribbled a few charming lines for which the lift-boy had addressed an envelope which I had supposed to have been written by the milk-girl. I was bitterly disappointed, and the thought that it was more difficult and more flattering to get a letter from Bergotte did not in the least console me for this one's not being from her. As for the girl, I never came across her again, any more than I came across those whom I had seen only from Mme de Villeparisis's carriage. Seeing and then losing them all thus increased the state of agitation in which I was living, and I found a certain wisdom in the philosophers who recommend us to set a limit to our desires (if, that is, they refer to our desire for people, for that is the only kind that leads to anxiety, having for its object something unknown but conscious. To suppose that philosophy could be referring to the desire for wealth would be too absurd). At the same time I was inclined to regard this wisdom as incomplete, for I told myself that these encounters made me find even more beautiful a world which thus caused to grow along all the country roads flowers at once rare and common, fleeting treasures of the day, windfalls of the drive, of which the contingent circumstances that might not, perhaps, recur had alone prevented me from taking advantage, and which gave a new zest to life.

But perhaps in hoping that, one day, with greater freedom, I should be able to find similar girls on other roads, I was already beginning to falsify what is exclusively individual in the desire to live in the company of a woman whom one has found attractive, and by the mere fact that I admitted the possibility of bringing it about artificially, I had implicitly acknowledged its illusoriness.

On the day when Mme de Villeparisis took us to Carqueville to see the ivy-covered church of which she had spoken to us and which, built upon rising ground, dominated both the village and the river that flowed beneath it with its little mediaeval bridge, my grandmother, thinking that I would like to be left alone to study the building at my leisure, suggested to her friend that they should go on and wait for me at the pastry-cook's, in the village square which was clearly visible from where we were and beneath its mellow patina seemed like another part of a wholly ancient object. It was agreed that I should join them there later. In the mass of verdure in front of which I was left standing I was obliged, in order to recognise a church, to make a mental effort which involved my grasping more intensely the idea "Church." In fact, as happens to schoolboys who gather more fully the meaning of a sentence when they are made, by translating or by paraphrasing it, to divest it of the forms to which they are accustomed, I was obliged perpetually to refer back to this idea of "Church," which as a rule I scarcely needed when I stood beneath steeples that were recognisable in themselves, in order not to forget, here that the arch of this clump of ivy was that of a Gothic window, there that the salience of the leaves was due to the carved relief of a capital. Then came a breath of wind, sending a tremor through the mobile porch, which was traversed by eddies flickering and spreading like light; the leaves unfurled against one another; and, quivering, the arboreal façade bore away with it the undulant, rustling, fugitive pillars.

As I came away from the church I saw by the old bridge a cluster of girls from the village who, probably because it was Sunday, were standing about in their best clothes, hailing the boys who went past. One of them, a tall girl not so well dressed as the others but seeming to enjoy some ascendancy over them—for she scarcely answered when they spoke to her—with a more serious and a more self-willed air, was sitting on the parapet of the bridge with her feet hanging down, and holding on her lap a bowl full of fish which she had presumably just caught. She had a tanned complexion, soft eyes but with a look of disdain for her surroundings, and a small nose, delicately and attractively modelled. My eyes alighted upon her skin; and my lips, at a pinch, might have believed that they had followed my eyes. But it was not only to her body that I should have liked to attain; it was also the person that lived inside it, and with which there is but one form of contact, namely to attract its attention, but one sort of penetration, to awaken an idea in it.

And this inner being of the handsome fisher-girl seemed to be still closed to me; I was doubtful whether I had entered it, even after I had seen my own image furtively reflected in the twin mirrors of her gaze, following an index of refraction that was as unknown to me as if I had been placed in the field of vision of a doe. But just as it would not have sufficed that my lips should find pleasure in hers without giving pleasure to them too, so I could have wished that the idea of me which entered this being and took hold in it should bring me not merely her attention but her admiration, her desire, and should compel her to keep me in her memory until the day when I should be able to meet her again. Meanwhile I could see, within a stone's-throw, the square in which Mme de Villeparisis's carriage must be waiting for me. I had not a moment to lose; and already I could feel that the girls were beginning to laugh at the sight of me standing there before them. I had a five-franc piece in my pocket. I drew it out, and, before explaining to the girl the errand on which I proposed to send her, in order to have a better chance of her listening to me I held the coin for a moment before her eyes.

"Since you seem to belong to the place," I said to her, "I wonder if you would be so good as to take a message for me. I want you to go to a pastry-cook's—which is apparently in a square, but I don't know where that is—where there is a carriage waiting for me. One moment! To make quite sure, will you ask if the carriage belongs to the Marquise de Villeparisis? But you can't miss it; it's a carriage and pair."

That was what I wished her to know, so that she should regard me as someone of importance. But when I had uttered the words "Marquise" and "carriage and pair," suddenly I had a sense of enormous assuagement. I felt that the fisher-girl would remember me, and together with my fear of not being able to see her again, a part of my desire to do so evaporated too. It seemed to me that I had succeeded in touching her person with invisible lips, and that I had pleased her. And this forcible appropriation of her mind, this immaterial possession, had robbed her of mystery as much as physical possession would have done.

We came down towards Hudimesnil; and suddenly I was overwhelmed with that profound happiness which I had not often felt since Combray, a happiness analogous to that which had been given me by—among other things—the steeples of Martinville. But this time it remained incomplete. I had just seen, standing a little way back from the hog's-back road along which we were travelling, three trees which probably marked the entry to a covered driveway and formed a pattern which I was not seeing for the first time. I could not succeed in reconstructing the place from which they had been as it were detached, but I felt that it had been familiar to me once; so that, my mind having wavered between some distant year and the present moment, Balbec and its surroundings began to dissolve and I wondered whether the whole of this drive were not a make-believe, Balbec a place to which I had never gone except in imagination, Mme de Villeparisis a character in a story and the three old trees the reality which one recaptures on raising one's eyes from the book which one has been reading and which describes an environment into which one has come to believe that one has been bodily transported.

I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it could not grasp, as when an object is placed out of our reach, so that our fingers, stretched out at arm's-length, can only touch for a moment its outer surface, without managing to take hold of anything. Then we rest for a little while before thrusting out our arm with renewed momentum, and trying to reach an inch or two further. But if my mind was thus to collect itself, to gather momentum, I should have to be alone. What would I not have given to be able to draw aside as I used to do on those walks along the Guermantes way, when I detached myself from my parents! I felt indeed that I ought to do so. I recognised that kind of pleasure which requires, it is true, a certain effort on the part of the mind, but in comparison with which the attractions of the indolence which inclines us to renounce that pleasure seem very slight. That pleasure, the object of which I could only dimly feel, which I must create for myself, I experienced only on rare occasions, but on each of these it seemed to me that the things that had happened in the meantime were of little importance, and that in attaching myself to the reality of that pleasure alone could I at length begin to lead a true life. I put my hand for a moment across my eyes, so as to be able to shut them without Mme de Villeparisis's noticing. I sat there thinking of nothing, then with my thoughts collected, compressed and strengthened I sprang further forward in the direction of the trees, or rather in that inner direction at the end of which I could see them inside myself. I felt again behind them the same object, known to me and yet vague, which I could not bring nearer. And yet all three of them, as the carriage moved on, I could see coming towards me. Where had I looked at them before? There was no place near Combray where an avenue opened off the road like that. Nor was there room for the site which they recalled to me in the scenery of the place in Germany where I had gone one year with my grandmother to take the waters. Was I to suppose, then, that they came from years already so remote in my life that the landscape which surrounded them had been entirely obliterated from my memory and that, like the pages which, with a sudden thrill, we recognise in a book that

we imagined we had never read, they alone survived from the forgotten book of my earliest childhood? Were they not rather to be numbered among those dream landscapes, always the same, at least for me in whom their strange aspect was only the objectivation in my sleeping mind of the effort I made while awake either to penetrate the mystery of a place beneath the outward appearance of which I was dimly conscious of there being something more, as had so often happened to me on the Guermantes way, or to try to put mystery back into a place which I had longed to know and which, from the day when I had come to know it, had seemed to me to be wholly superficial, like Balbec? Or were they merely an image freshly extracted from a dream of the night before, but already so worn, so faded that it seemed to me to come from somewhere far more distant? Or had I indeed never seen them before, and did they conceal beneath their surface, like certain trees on tufts of grass that I had seen beside the Guermantes way, a meaning as obscure, as hard to grasp, as is a distant past, so that, whereas they were inviting me to probe a new thought, I imagined that I had to identify an old memory? Or again, were they concealing no hidden thought, and was it simply visual fatigue that made me see them double in time as one sometimes sees double in space? I could not tell. And meanwhile they were coming towards me; perhaps some fabulous apparition, a ring of witches or of Norns who would propound their oracles to me. I chose rather to believe that they were phantoms of the past, dear companions of my childhood, vanished friends who were invoking our common memories. Like ghosts they seemed to be appealing to me to take them with me, to bring them back to life. In their simple and passionate gesticulation I could discern the helpless anguish of a beloved person who has lost the power of speech, and feels that he will never be able to say to us what he wishes to say and we can never guess. Presently, at a cross-roads, the carriage left them. It was bearing me away from what alone I believed to be true, what would have made me truly happy; it was like my life.

I watched the trees gradually recede, waving their despairing arms, seeming to say to me: "What you fail to learn from us today, you will never know. If you allow us to drop back into the hollow of this road from which we sought to raise ourselves up to you, a whole part of yourself which we were bringing to you will vanish for ever into thin air." And indeed if, in the course of time, I did discover the kind of pleasure and disquiet which I had just felt once again, and if one evening—too late, but then for all time—I fastened myself to it, of those trees themselves I was never to know what they had been trying to give me nor where else I had seen them. And when, the road having forked and the carriage with it, I turned my back on them and ceased to see them, while Mme de Villeparisis asked me what I was dreaming about, I was as wretched as if I had just lost a friend, had died myself, had broken faith with the dead or repudiated a god.

It was time to be thinking of home. Mme de Villeparisis, who had a certain feeling for nature, colder than that of my grandmother but capable of recognising, even outside museums and noblemen's houses, the simple and majestic beauty of certain old and venerable things, told her coachman to take us back by the old Balbec road, a road little used but planted with old elm-trees which we thought magnificent.

Once we had got to know this road, for a change we would return—unless we had taken it on the outward journey—by another which ran through the woods of Chantereine and Canteloup. The invisibility of the numberless birds that took up one another's song close beside us in the trees gave me the same sense of being at rest that one has when one shuts one's eyes. Chained to my flap-seat like Prometheus on his rock, I listened to my Oceanides. And whenever I caught a glimpse of one of those birds as it flitted from one leaf to another, there was so little apparent connexion between it and the songs I heard that I could not believe I was beholding their cause in that little body, fluttering, startled and blank.

This road was like many others of the same kind which are to be found in France, climbing on a fairly steep gradient and then gradually descending over a long stretch. At that particular moment, I found no great attraction in it; I was only glad to be going home. But it became for me later on a frequent source of joy by remaining in my memory as a lure to which all the similar roads that I was to take, on walks or drives or journeys, would at once attach themselves without breach of continuity and would be able, thanks to it, to communicate immediately with my heart. For as soon as the carriage or the motor-car turned into one of these roads that seemed to be the continuation of the road along which I had driven with Mme de Villeparisis, what I found my present consciousness immediately dwelling upon, as upon the most recent event in my past, would be (all the intervening years being quietly obliterated) the impressions that I had had on those bright summer afternoons and evenings, driving in the neighbourhood of Balbec, when the leaves smelt good, the mist was rising from the ground, and beyond the nearby village one could see through the trees the sun setting as though it had been some place further along the road, distant and forested, which we should not have time to reach that evening. Linked up with those I was experiencing now in another place, on a similar road, surrounded by all the incidental sensations of breathing fresh air, of curiosity, indolence, appetite, gaiety which were common to them both, and excluding all others, these impressions would be reinforced, would take on the consistency of a particular type of pleasure, and almost of a framework of existence which, as it happened, I rarely had the luck to come across, but in which these awakened memories introduced, amid the reality that my senses could perceive, a large enough element of evoked, dreamed, unseizable reality to give me, among these regions through which I was passing, more than an aesthetic feeling, a fleeting but exalted ambition to stay and live there for ever. How often since then, at a mere whiff of green leaves, has not being seated on a folding-seat opposite Mme de Villeparisis, meeting the Princesse de Luxembourg who waved a greeting to her from her own carriage, coming back to dinner at the Grand Hotel, appeared to me as one of those ineffable moments of happiness which neither the present nor the future can restore to us and which we taste only once in a lifetime!

Often dusk would have fallen before we reached the hotel. Shyly I would quote to Mme de Villeparisis, pointing to the moon in the sky, some memorable expression of Chateaubriand or Vigny or Victor Hugo: "She shed all around her that ancient secret of melancholy" or "Weeping like Diana by the brink of her streams" or "The shadows nuptial, solemn and august."

"And you think that good, do you?" she would ask, "inspired, as you call it. I must confess that I am always surprised to see people taking things seriously nowadays which the friends of those gentlemen, while giving them full credit for their qualities, were the first to laugh at. People weren't so free then with the word 'genius' as they are now, when if you say to a writer that he has talent he takes it as an insult. You quote me a fine phrase of M. de Chateaubriand's about moonlight. You shall see that I have my own reasons for being resistant to it. M. de Chateaubriand used often to come to see my father. He was quite a pleasant person when you were alone with him, because then he was simple and amusing, but the moment he had an audience he would begin to pose, and then he became absurd. Once, in my father's presence, he claimed that he had flung his resignation in the King's face, and that he had controlled the Conclave, forgetting that he had asked my father to beg the King to take him back, and that my father had heard him make the most idiotic forecasts of the Papal election. You ought to have heard M. de Blacas on that famous Conclave; he was a very different kind of man from M. de Chateaubriand. As for his fine phrases about the moon, they had quite simply become a family joke. Whenever the moon was shining, if there was anyone staying with us for the first time he would be told to take M. de Chateaubriand for a stroll after dinner. When they came in, my father would take his guest aside and say: 'Well, and was M. de Chateaubriand very eloquent?'—'Oh, yes.' 'He talked to you about the moonlight.'—'Yes, how did you know?'—'One moment, didn't he say?' and then my father would quote the phrase. 'He did; but how in the world ...?'—'And he spoke to you of the moonlight on the Roman Campagna?'—'But, my dear sir, you're a magician.' My father was no magician, but M. de Chateaubriand had the same little speech about the moon which he served up every time."

At the mention of Vigny she laughed: "The man who said: 'I am the Comte Alfred de Vigny!' One is either a count or one isn't; it is not of the slightest importance."

And then perhaps she discovered that it was, after all, of some slight importance, for she went on: "For one thing I'm by no means sure that he was, and in any case he was of very inferior stock, that gentleman who speaks in his verses of his 'esquire's crest.' In such charming taste, is it not, and so interesting to his readers! Like Musset, a plain citizen of Paris, who laid so much stress on 'The golden falcon that surmounts my helm.' As if you would ever hear a real gentleman say a thing like that! At least Musset had some talent as a poet. But except for *Cinq-Mars*, I've never been able to read a thing by M. de Vigny. I get so bored that the book falls from my hands. M. Molé, who had all the wit and tact that were wanting in M. de Vigny, put him properly in his place when he welcomed him to the Academy. What, you don't know the speech? It's a masterpiece of irony and impertinence."

She found fault with Balzac, whom she was surprised to find her nephews admiring, for having presumed to describe a society "in which he was never received" and of which his descriptions were wildly improbable. As for Victor Hugo, she told us that M. de Bouillon, her father, who had friends among the young Romantics thanks to whom he had attended the first performance of *Hernani*, had been unable to sit through it, so ridiculous had he found the verse of that gifted but extravagant writer who had acquired the title of "major poet" only by virtue of having struck a bargain, and as a reward for the not disinterested indulgence that he showed towards the dangerous aberrations of the socialists.

We had now come in sight of the hotel, with its lights, so hostile that first evening on our arrival, now protective and kind, speaking to us of home. And when the carriage drew up outside the door, the porter, the bell-hops, the lift-boy, attentive, clumsy, vaguely uneasy at our lateness, massed on the steps to receive us, were numbered, now that they had grown familiar, among those beings who change so many times in the course of our lives, as we ourselves change, but in whom, when they are for the time being the mirror of our habits, we find comfort in the feeling that we are being faithfully and amicably reflected. We prefer them to friends whom we have not seen for some time, for they contain more of what we are at present. Only the outside page, exposed to the sun all day, had been taken indoors for protection from the cold night air and swaddled in thick woollen garments which, combined with the orange effulgence of his locks and the curiously red bloom of his cheeks, made one, seeing him there in the glassed-in hall, think of a hot-house plant muffled up for protection from the frost. We got out of the carriage with the help of a great many more servants than were required, but they were conscious of the importance of the scene and each felt obliged to take some part in it. I was always very hungry. And so, often, in order not to keep dinner waiting, I would not go upstairs to the room which had succeeded in becoming so really mine that to catch sight of its long violet curtains and low bookcases was to find myself alone again with that self of which things, like people, gave me a reflected image; and we would all wait together in the hall until the head waiter came to tell us that our dinner was ready. This gave us another opportunity of listening to Mme de Villeparisis.

"But you must be tired of us by now," my grandmother would protest.

"Not at all! Why, I'm delighted, what could be nicer?" replied her friend with a winning smile, drawing out, almost intoning her words in a way that contrasted markedly with her customary simplicity of speech.

And indeed at such moments as this she was not natural; her mind reverted to her early training, to the aristocratic manner in which a great lady is supposed to show commoners that she is glad to be with them, that she is not at all arrogant. And her one and only failure in true politeness lay in this excess of politeness—which it was easy to identify as the professional bent of a lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, who, always seeing in her humbler friends the latent discontent that she must one day arouse in their bosoms, greedily

seizes every possible opportunity to establish in advance, in the ledger in which she keeps her social account with them, a credit balance which will enable her presently to enter on the debit side the dinner or reception to which she will not invite them. And so, having long ago taken effect in her once and for all, and oblivious of the fact that now both the circumstances and the people concerned were different, and that in Paris she would wish to see us often at her house, the spirit of her caste was urging Mme de Villeparisis on with feverish ardour, as if the time that was allowed her for being amiable to us was limited, to step up, while we were at Balbec, her gifts of roses and melons, loans of books, drives in her carriage and verbal effusions. And for that reason, quite as much as the dazzling splendour of the beach, the many-coloured flamboyance and subaqueous light of the rooms, as much even as the riding-lessons by which tradesmen's sons were deified like Alexander of Macedon, the daily kindnesses shown us by Mme de Villeparisis, and also the unaccustomed, momentary, holiday ease with which my grandmother accepted them, have remained in my memory as typical of life at the seaside.

"Give them your coats to take upstairs."

My grandmother handed them to the manager, and because he had been so nice to me I was distressed by this want of consideration, which seemed to pain him.

"I think you've hurt his feelings," said the Marquise. "He probably fancies himself too great a gentleman to carry your wraps. I remember the Duc de Nemours, when I was still quite little, coming to see my father who was living then on the top floor of the Hôtel Bouillon, with a fat parcel under his arm, and letters and newspapers. I can see the Prince now, in his blue coat, framed in our doorway, which had such pretty panelling—I think it was Bagard who used to do it—you know those fine laths that they used to cut, so supple that the joiner would twist them sometimes into little shells and flowers, like the ribbons round a nosegay. 'Here you are, Cyrus,' he said to my father, 'look what your porter's given me to bring you. He said to me: Since you're going up to see the Count, it's not worth my while climbing all those stairs; but take care you don't break the string.'—Now that you've got rid of your things, why don't you sit down," she said to my grandmother, taking her by the hand. "Here, take this chair."

"Oh, if you don't mind, not that one! It's too small for two, and too big for me by myself. I shouldn't feel comfortable."

"You remind me, for it was exactly like this one, of an armchair I had for many years, until at last I couldn't keep it any longer, because it had been given to my mother by the unfortunate Duchesse de Praslin. My mother, though she was the simplest person in the world, really, had ideas that belonged to another generation, which even in those days I could scarcely understand; and at first she had not been at all willing to let herself be introduced to Mme de Praslin, who had been plain Mlle Sebastiani, while she, because she was a Duchess, felt that it was not for her to be introduced to my mother. And really, you know," Mme de Villeparisis went on, forgetting that she herself did not understand these fine shades of distinction, "even if she had just been Mme de Choiseul, there was a good deal to be said for her claim. The Choiseuls are everything you could want; they spring from a sister of Louis the Fat; they were real sovereigns down in Bassigny. I admit that we beat them in marriages and in distinction, but the seniority is pretty much the same. This little matter of precedence gave rise to several comic incidents, such as a luncheon party which was kept waiting a whole hour or more before one of these ladies could make up her mind to let herself be introduced to the other. In spite of which they became great friends, and she gave my mother a chair like this one, in which people always refused to sit, as you've just done, until one day my mother heard a carriage drive into the courtyard. She asked a young servant who it was. 'The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, ma'am.' 'Very well, say that I am at home.' A quarter of an hour passed; no one came. 'What about the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld?' my mother asked, 'where is she?' 'She's on the stairs, ma'am, getting her breath,' said the young servant, who had not been long up from the country, where my mother had the excellent habit of getting all her servants. Often she had seen them born. That's the only way to get really good ones. And they're the rarest of luxuries. And sure enough the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld had the greatest difficulty in getting upstairs, for she was an enormous woman, so enormous, indeed, that when she did come into the room my mother was quite at a loss for a moment to know where to put her. And then the seat that Mme de Praslin had given her caught her eye. 'Won't you sit down?' she said, bringing it forward. And the Duchess filled it from side to side. She was quite a pleasant woman, for all her ... imposingness. 'She still creates a certain effect when she comes in,' one of our friends said once. 'She certainly creates an effect when she goes out,' said my mother, who was rather more fine in her speech than would be thought proper nowadays. Even in Mme de La Rochefoucauld's own drawing-room people didn't hesitate to make fun of her to her face (and she was always the first to laugh at it) over her ample proportions. 'But are you all alone?' my mother once asked M. de La Rochefoucauld, when she had come to pay a call on the Duchess, and being met at the door by him had not seen his wife who was in an alcove at the other end of the room. 'Is Mme de La Rochefoucauld not at home? I don't see her.'—'How charming of you!' replied the Duke, who had about the worst judgment of any man I have ever known, but was not altogether lacking in humour."

After dinner, when I had gone upstairs with my grandmother, I said to her that the qualities which attracted us in Mme de Villeparisis, her tact, her shrewdness, her discretion, her self-effacement, were not perhaps of very great value since those who possessed them in the highest degree were merely people like Molé and Loménie, and that if the want of them can make everyday social relations disagreeable yet it did not prevent conceited fellows who had no judgment—whom it was easy to deride, like Bloch—from becoming Chateaubriand, Vigny, Hugo, Balzac ... But at the name of Bloch, my grandmother expostulated. And she proceeded to sing the praises of Mme de Villeparisis. As we are told that it is the preservation of the species



which guides our individual preferences in love and, so that the child may be constituted in the most normal fashion, sends fat men in pursuit of lean women and vice versa, so in some dim way it was the requirements of my happiness, threatened by my disordered nerves, by my morbid tendency to melancholy and solitude, that made her allot the highest place to the qualities of balance and judgment, peculiar not only to Mme de Villeparisis but to a society in which I might find distraction and assuagement—a society similar to the one in which our ancestors saw the minds of a Doudan, a M. de Rémusat flourish, not to mention a Beauséjour, a Joubert, a Sévigné, a type of mind that invests life with more happiness, with greater dignity than the converse refinements which had led a Baudelaire, a Poe, a Verlaine, a Rimbaud to sufferings, to a disrepute such as my grandmother did not wish for her daughter's child. I interrupted her with a kiss and asked her if she had noticed such and such a remark Mme de Villeparisis had made which seemed to point to a woman who thought more of her noble birth than she was prepared to admit. In this way I used to submit my impressions of life to my grandmother, for I was never certain what degree of respect was due to anyone until she had pointed it out to me. Every evening I would come to her with the mental sketches that I had made during the day of all those non-existent people who were not her.

Once I said to her: "I couldn't live without you."

"But you mustn't speak like that," she replied in a troubled voice. "We must be a bit pluckier than that. Otherwise, what would become of you if I went away on a journey? But I hope that you would be quite sensible and quite happy."

"I could manage to be sensible if you went away for a few days, but I should count the hours."

"But if I were to go away for months ..." (at the mere thought my heart turned over) "... for years ... for ..."

We both fell silent. We dared not look one another in the face. And yet I was suffering more keenly from her anguish than from my own. And so I walked across to the window and said to her distinctly, with averted eyes:

"You know what a creature of habit I am. For the first few days after I've been separated from the people I love best, I'm miserable. But though I go on loving them just as much, I get used to their absence, my life becomes calm and smooth. I could stand being parted from them for months, for years ..."

I was obliged to stop speaking and look straight out of the window. My grandmother left the room for a moment. But next day I began to talk to her about philosophy, and, speaking in the most casual tone but at the same time taking care that my grandmother should pay attention to my words, I remarked what a curious thing it was that, according to the latest scientific discoveries, the materialist position appeared to be crumbling, and what was again most likely was the immortality of souls and their future reunion.

Mme de Villeparisis gave us warning that presently she would not be able to see so much of us. A young nephew who was preparing for Saumur, and was meanwhile stationed in the neighbourhood, at Doncières, was coming to spend a few weeks' leave with her, and she would be devoting most of her time to him. In the course of our drives together she had spoken highly of his intelligence and above all his kindheartedness, and already I imagined that he would take a liking to me, that I should be his best friend; and when, before his arrival, his aunt gave my grandmother to understand that he had unfortunately fallen into the clutches of an appalling woman with whom he was infatuated and who would never let him go, since I was persuaded that that sort of love was doomed to end in mental derangement, crime and suicide, thinking how short a time was reserved for our friendship, already so great in my heart although I had not yet set eyes on him, I wept for that friendship and for the misfortunes that were in store for it, as we weep for someone we love when we learn that he is seriously ill and that his days are numbered.

One afternoon of scorching heat I was in the dining-room of the hotel, plunged in semi-darkness to shield it from the sun, which gilded the drawn curtains through the gaps between which twinkled the blue of the sea, when along the central gangway leading from the beach to the road I saw approaching, tall, slim, bare-necked, his head held proudly erect, a young man with penetrating eyes whose skin was as fair and his hair as golden as if they had absorbed all the rays of the sun. Dressed in a suit of soft, whitish material such as I could never have believed that any man would have the audacity to wear, the thinness of which suggested no less vividly than the coolness of the dining-room the heat and brightness of the glorious day outside, he was walking fast. His eyes, from one of which a monocle kept dropping, were the colour of the sea. Everyone looked at him with interest as he passed, knowing that this young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray was famed for his elegance. All the newspapers had described the suit in which he had recently acted as second to the young Duc d'Uzès in a duel. One felt that the distinctive quality of his hair, his eyes, his skin, his bearing, which would have marked him out in a crowd like a precious vein of opal, azure-shot and luminous, embedded in a mass of coarser substance, must correspond to a life different from that led by other men. So that when, before the attachment which Mme de Villeparisis had been deploring, the prettiest women in society had disputed the possession of him, his presence, at a watering-place for instance, in the company of the beauty of the season to whom he was paying court, not only brought her into the limelight, but attracted every eye fully as much to himself. Because of his "tone," because he had the insolent manner of a young "blood," above all because of his extraordinary good looks, some even thought him effeminate-looking, though without holding it against him since they knew how virile he was and how passionately fond of women. This was the nephew about whom Mme de Villeparisis had spoken to us. I was delighted at the thought that I was going to enjoy his company for some weeks, and confident that he would bestow on me all his affection. He strode rapidly across the whole width of the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which kept darting away in front of him like a butterfly. He was coming from the beach, and the sea which filled the lower half of the glass front of the hall made a background against which he stood out full-length, as in certain portraits whose painters attempt, without in any way falsifying the most accurate observation of contemporary life, but by

choosing for their sitter an appropriate setting—a polo ground, golf links, a racecourse, the bridge of a yacht—to furnish a modern equivalent of those canvases on which the old masters used to present the human figure in the foreground of a landscape. A carriage and pair awaited him at the door; and, while his monocle resumed its gambollings on the sunlit road, with the elegance and mastery which a great pianist contrives to display in the simplest stroke of execution, where it did not seem possible that he could reveal his superiority to a performer of the second class, Mme de Villeparisis's nephew, taking the reins that were handed him by the coachman, sat down beside him and, while opening a letter which the manager of the hotel brought out to him, started up his horses.

How disappointed I was on the days that followed, when, each time that I met him outside or in the hotel—his head erect, perpetually balancing the movements of his limbs round the fugitive and dancing monocle which seemed to be their centre of gravity—I was forced to acknowledge that he had evidently no desire to make our acquaintance, and saw that he did not bow to us although he must have known that we were friends of his aunt. And calling to mind the friendliness that Mme de Villeparisis, and before her M. de Norpois, had shown me, I thought that perhaps they were only mock aristocrats and that there must be a secret article in the laws that govern the nobility which allowed women, perhaps, and certain diplomats to discard, in their relations with commoners, for a reason which was beyond me, the haughtiness which must, on the other hand, be pitilessly maintained by a young marquis. My intelligence might have told me the opposite. But the characteristic feature of the ridiculous age I was going through—awkward indeed but by no means infertile—is that we do not consult our intelligence and that the most trivial attributes of other people seem to us to form an inseparable part of their personality. In a world thronged with monsters and with gods, we know little peace of mind. There is hardly a single action we perform in that phase which we would not give anything, in later life, to be able to annul. Whereas what we ought to regret is that we no longer possess the spontaneity which made us perform them. In later life we look at things in a more practical way, in full conformity with the rest of society, but adolescence is the only period in which we learn anything.

This insolence which I surmised in M. de Saint-Loup, and all that it implied of innate hardness, received confirmation from his attitude whenever he passed us, his body as inflexibly erect as ever, his head held as high, his gaze as impassive, not to say as implacable, devoid of that vague respect which one has for the rights of other people, even if they do not know one's aunt, in accordance with which I did not behave in quite the same way towards an old lady as towards a gas lamp. These frigid manners were as far removed from the charming letters which, only a few days before, I had still imagined him writing to me to express his regard as, from the enthusiasm of the Chamber and of the populace which he has pictured himself rousing by an imperishable speech, is the humble, dull, obscure position of the dreamer who, after rehearsing it thus by himself, for himself, aloud, finds himself, once the imaginary applause has died away, just the same Tom, Dick or Harry as before. When Mme de Villeparisis, doubtless in an attempt to counteract the bad impression that had been made on us by an exterior indicative of an arrogant and unfriendly nature, spoke to us again of the inexhaustible kindness of her great-nephew (he was the son of one of her nieces, and a little older than myself), I marvelled how the gentry, with an utter disregard of truth, ascribe tenderness of heart to people whose hearts are in reality so hard and dry, provided only that they behave with common courtesy to the brilliant members of their own set. Mme de Villeparisis herself confirmed, though indirectly, my diagnosis, which was already a conviction, of the essential points of her nephew's character one day when I met them both coming along a path so narrow that she could not do otherwise than introduce me to him. He seemed not to hear that a person's name was being announced to him; not a muscle of his face moved; his eyes, in which there shone not the faintest gleam of human sympathy, showed merely, in the insensibility, in the inanity of their gaze an exaggeration failing which there would have been nothing to distinguish them from lifeless mirrors. Then, fastening on me those hard eyes as though he wished to examine me before returning my salute, with an abrupt gesture which seemed to be due rather to a reflex action of his muscles than to an exercise of will, keeping between himself and me the greatest possible interval, he stretched his arm out to its full extension and, at the end of it, offered me his hand. I supposed that it must mean, at the very least, a duel when, next day, he sent me his card. But he spoke to me when we met only of literature, and declared after a long talk that he would like immensely to spend several hours with me every day. He had not only, in this encounter, given proof of an ardent zest for the things of the mind; he had shown a regard for me which was little in keeping with his greeting of the day before. After I had seen him repeat the same process every time someone was introduced to him, I realised that it was simply a social usage peculiar to his branch of the family, to which his mother, who had seen to it that he should be perfectly brought up, had moulded his limbs; he went through those motions without thinking about them any more than he thought about his beautiful clothes or hair; they were a thing devoid of the moral significance which I had at first ascribed to them, a thing purely acquired, like that other habit that he had of at once demanding an introduction to the family of anyone he knew, which had become so instinctive in him that, seeing me again the day after our meeting, he bore down on me and without further ado asked to be introduced to my grandmother who was with me, with the same feverish haste as if the request had been due to some instinct of self-preservation, like the act of warding off a blow or of shutting one's eyes to avoid a stream of boiling water, without the protection of which it would have been dangerous to remain a moment longer.

The first rites of exorcism once performed, as a cantankerous fairy discards her preliminary guise and assumes all the most enchanting graces, I saw this disdainful creature become the most friendly, the most considerate young man that I had ever met. "Right," I said to myself, "I've been mistaken about him once already. I was the victim of a mirage. But I've got over the first only to fall for a second, for he must be a

dyed-in-the-wool grandee who's trying to hide it." As a matter of fact it was not long before all the exquisite breeding, all the friendliness of Saint-Loup were indeed to let me see another person, but one very different from what I had suspected.

This young man who had the air of a disdainful aristocrat and sportsman had in fact no respect or curiosity except for the things of the mind, and especially those modern manifestations of literature and art which seemed so ridiculous to his aunt; he was imbued, moreover, with what she called "socialistic spoutings," was filled with the most profound contempt for his caste, and spent long hours in the study of Nietzsche and Proudhon. He was one of those "intellectuals" easily moved to admiration, who shut themselves up in a book and are interested only in the higher thought. Indeed in Saint-Loup the expression of this highly abstract tendency, which removed him so far from my customary preoccupations, while it seemed to me touching, also annoyed me a little. I may say that when I fully realised who his father had been, on days when I had been reading memoirs rich in anecdotes of that famous Comte de Marsantes in whom were embodied the special graces of a generation already remote, my mind full of speculations, and anxious to obtain fuller details of the life that M. de Marsantes had led, I was infuriated that Robert de Saint-Loup, instead of being content to be the son of his father, instead of being able to guide me through the old-fashioned romance which his father's existence had been, had raised himself to a passion for Nietzsche and Proudhon. His father would not have shared my regret. He had been himself a man of intelligence, who had transcended the narrow confines of his life as a man of the world. He had hardly had time to know his son, but had hoped that he would prove a better man than himself. And I dare say that, unlike the rest of the family, he would have admired his son, would have rejoiced at his abandoning what had been his own small diversions for austere meditations, and without saying a word, in his modesty as a nobleman of wit, would have read in secret his son's favourite authors in order to appreciate how far Robert was superior to himself.

There was, however, this rather painful consideration: that if M. de Marsantes, with his extremely open mind, would have appreciated a son so different from himself, Robert de Saint-Loup, because he was one of those people who believe that merit is attached only to certain forms of art and of life, had an affectionate but slightly contemptuous memory of a father who had spent all his time hunting and racing, who yawned at Wagner and raved over Offenbach. Saint-Loup was not intelligent enough to understand that intellectual worth has nothing to do with adhesion to any one aesthetic formula, and regarded the "intellectuality" of M. de Marsantes with much the same sort of scorn as might have been felt for Boieldieu or Labiche by sons of Boieldieu or Labiche who had become adherents of the most extreme symbolist literature and the most complicated music. "I scarcely knew my father," he used to say. "He seems to have been a charming man. His tragedy was the deplorable age in which he lived. To have been born in the Faubourg Saint-Germain and to have to live in the days of *La Belle Hélène* would be enough to wreck any existence. Perhaps if he'd been some little shopkeeper mad about the *Ring* he'd have turned out quite different. Indeed they tell me that he was fond of literature. But it's impossible to know, because literature to him meant only the most antiquated stuff." And in my own case, if I found Saint-Loup a trifle earnest, he could not understand why I was not more earnest still. Never judging anything except by its intellectual weightiness, never perceiving the magic appeal to the imagination that I found in things which he condemned as frivolous, he was astonished that I—to whom he imagined himself to be so utterly inferior—could take any interest in them.

From the first Saint-Loup made a conquest of my grandmother, not only by the incessant kindness which he went out of his way to show to us both, but by the naturalness which he put into it as into everything else. For naturalness—doubtless because through the artifice of man it allows a feeling of nature to permeate—was the quality which my grandmother preferred to all others, whether in gardens, where she did not like there to be, as in our Combray garden, too formal flower-beds, or in cooking, where she detested those dressed-up dishes in which you can hardly detect the foodstuffs that have gone to make them, or in piano-playing, which she did not like to be too finicking, too polished, having indeed had a special weakness for the discords, the wrong notes of Rubinstein. This naturalness she found and appreciated even in the clothes that Saint-Loup wore, of a loose elegance, with nothing "swagger" or "dressed-up" about them, no stiffness or starch. She appreciated this rich young man still more highly for the free and careless way that he had of living in luxury without "smelling of money," without giving himself airs; she even discovered the charm of this naturalness in the incapacity which Saint-Loup had kept—though as a rule it is outgrown with childhood, at the same time as certain physiological peculiarities of that age—for preventing his face from at once reflecting every emotion. Something, for instance, that he wanted to have but had not expected, if only a compliment, induced in him a pleasure so quick, so glowing, so volatile, so expansive that it was impossible for him to contain and to conceal it; a grin of delight seized irresistible hold of his face, the too delicate skin of his cheeks allowed a bright red glow to shine through them, his eyes sparkled with confusion and joy; and my grandmother was infinitely touched by this charming show of innocence and frankness, which indeed in Saint-Loup—at any rate at the time of our first friendship—was not misleading. But I have known another person, and there are many such, in whom the physiological sincerity of that fleeting blush in no way excluded moral duplicity; as often as not it proves nothing more than the intensity with which pleasure may be felt—to the extent of disarming them and forcing them publicly to confess it—by natures capable of the vilest treachery. But where my grandmother especially adored Saint-Loup's naturalness was in his way of confessing without the slightest reservation his affection for me, to give expression to which he found words than which she herself, she told me, could not have thought of any more appropriate, more truly loving, words to which "Séigné and Beausergent" might have set their signatures. He was not afraid to make fun of my weaknesses—which he had discerned with a shrewdness that made her smile—but as she herself would have done, affectionately, at the

same time extolling my good qualities with a warmth, an impulsive freedom that showed no sign of the reserve, the coldness by means of which young men of his age are apt to suppose that they give themselves importance. And he evinced, in anticipating my every discomfort, however slight, in covering my legs if the day had turned cold without my noticing it, in arranging (without telling me) to stay later with me in the evening if he thought I was sad or gloomy, a vigilance which, from the point of view of my health, for which a more hardening discipline would perhaps have been better, my grandmother found almost excessive, though as a proof of his affection for me she was deeply touched by it.

It was promptly settled between us that he and I were to be great friends for ever, and he would say "our friendship" as though he were speaking of some important and delightful thing which had an existence independent of ourselves, and which he soon called—apart from his love for his mistress—the great joy of his life. These words filled me with a sort of melancholy and I was at a loss for an answer, for I felt when I was with him, when I was talking to him—and no doubt it would have been the same with anyone else—none of that happiness which it was possible for me to experience when I was by myself. Alone, at times, I felt surging from the depths of my being one or other of those impressions which gave me a delicious sense of well-being. But as soon as I was with someone else, as soon as I was talking to a friend, my mind as it were faced about, it was towards this interlocutor and not towards myself that it directed its thoughts, and when they followed this outward course they brought me no pleasure. Once I had left Saint-Loup, I managed, with the help of words, to put some sort of order into the confused minutes that I had spent with him; I told myself that I had a good friend, that a good friend was a rare thing, and I savoured, when I felt myself surrounded by assets that were difficult to acquire, what was precisely the opposite of the pleasure that was natural to me, the opposite of the pleasure of having extracted from myself and brought to light something that was hidden in my inner darkness. If I had spent two or three hours in conversation with Saint-Loup and he had expressed his admiration of what I had said to him, I felt a sort of remorse, or regret, or weariness at not having remained alone and settled down to work at last. But I told myself that one is not intelligent for oneself alone, that the greatest of men have wanted to be appreciated, that hours in which I had built up a lofty idea of myself in my friend's mind could not be considered wasted. I had no difficulty in persuading myself that I ought to be happy in consequence, and I hoped all the more keenly that this happiness might never be taken from me because I had not actually felt it. We fear more than the loss of anything else the disappearance of possessions that have remained outside ourselves, because our hearts have not taken possession of them. I felt that I was capable of exemplifying the virtues of friendship better than most people (because I should always place the good of my friends before those personal interests to which other people are devoted but which did not count for me), but not of finding happiness in a feeling which, instead of increasing the differences that there were between my nature and those of other people—as there are between all of us—would eliminate them. On the other hand there were moments when my mind distinguished in Saint-Loup a personality more generalised than his own, that of the "nobleman," which like an indwelling spirit moved his limbs, ordered his gestures and his actions; then, at such moments, although in his company, I was alone, as I should have been in front of a landscape the harmony of which I could understand. He was no more than an object the properties of which, in my musings, I sought to explore. The discovery in him of this pre-existent, this immemorial being, this aristocrat who was precisely what Robert aspired not to be, gave me intense joy, but a joy of the mind rather than the feelings. In the moral and physical agility which gave so much grace to his kindnesses, in the ease with which he offered my grandmother his carriage and helped her into it, in the alacrity with which he sprang from the box when he was afraid that I might be cold, to spread his own cloak over my shoulders, I sensed not only the inherited liteness of the mighty hunters who had been for generations the ancestors of this young man who had no pretensions except to intellectuality; their scorn of wealth which, subsisting in him side by side with his enjoyment of it simply because it enabled him to entertain his friends more lavishly, made him so carelessly shower his riches at their feet; I sensed in it above all the certainty or the illusion in the minds of those great lords of being "better than other people," thanks to which they had not been able to hand down to Saint-Loup that anxiety to show that one is "just as good as the next man," that dread of seeming too assiduous of which he was indeed wholly innocent and which mars with so much stiffness and awkwardness the most sincere plebeian civility. Sometimes I reproached myself for thus taking pleasure in considering my friend as a work of art, that is to say in regarding the play of all the parts of his being as harmoniously ordered by a general idea from which they depended but of which he was unaware and which consequently added nothing to his own qualities, to that personal value, intellectual and moral, which he prized so highly.

And yet that idea was to a certain extent their determining cause. It was because he was a gentleman that that mental activity, those socialist aspirations, which made him seek the company of arrogant and ill-dressed young students, connoted in him something really pure and disinterested which was not to be found in them. Looking upon himself as the heir of an ignorant and selfish caste, he was sincerely anxious that they should forgive in him that aristocratic origin which they, on the contrary, found irresistibly attractive and on account of which they sought his acquaintance while simulating coldness and indeed insolence towards him. He was thus led to make advances to people from whom my parents, faithful to the sociological theories of Combray, would have been stupefied at his not turning away in disgust. One day when we were sitting on the sands, Saint-Loup and I, we heard issuing from a canvas tent against which we were leaning a torrent of imprecation against the swarm of Jews that infested Balbec. "You can't go a yard without meeting them," said the voice. "I am not in principle irremediably hostile to the Jewish race, but here there is a plethora of them. You hear nothing but, 'I thay, Apraham, I've chust theen Chacop.' You would think you were in the Rue d'Aboukir." The

man who thus inveighed against Israel emerged at last from the tent, and we raised our eyes to behold this anti-Semite. It was my old friend Bloch. Saint-Loup at once asked me to remind him that they had met each other at the *concours général*, when Bloch had carried off the prize of honour, and since then at a people's university course.<sup>11</sup>

At the most I may have smiled now and then, to discover in Robert the marks of his Jesuit schooling in the embarrassment which the fear of hurting people's feelings at once provoked in him whenever one of his intellectual friends made a social error or did something silly to which Saint-Loup himself attached no importance but felt that the other would have blushed if anybody had noticed it. And it was Robert who used to blush as though he were the guilty party, for instance on the day when Bloch, after promising to come and see him at the hotel, went on: "As I cannot endure to be kept waiting among all the false splendour of these great caravanserais, and the Hungarian band would make me ill, you must tell the 'lightboy' to make them shut up, and to let you know at once."

Personally, I was not particularly anxious that Bloch should come to the hotel. He was at Balbec, not by himself, unfortunately, but with his sisters, and they in turn had innumerable relatives and friends staying there. Now this Jewish colony was more picturesque than pleasing. Balbec was in this respect like such countries as Russia or Romania, where the geography books teach us that the Jewish population does not enjoy the same esteem and has not reached the same stage of assimilation as, for instance, in Paris. Always together, with no admixture of any other element, when the cousins and uncles of Bloch or their co-religionists male or female repaired to the Casino, the ladies to dance, the gentlemen branching off towards the baccarat-tables, they formed a solid troop, homogeneous within itself, and utterly dissimilar to the people who watched them go by and found them there again every year without ever exchanging a word or a greeting, whether these were the Cambremer set, or the senior judge's little group, professional or "business" people, or even simple corn-chandlers from Paris, whose daughters, handsome, proud, mocking and French as the statues at Rheims, would not care to mix with that horde of ill-bred sluts who carried their zeal for "seaside fashions" so far as to be always apparently on their way home from shrimping or out to dance the tango. As for the men, despite the brilliance of their dinner-jackets and patent-leather shoes, the exaggeration of their type made one think of the so-called "bright ideas" of those painters who, having to illustrate the Gospels or the Arabian Nights, consider the country in which the scenes are laid, and give to St Peter or to Ali Baba the identical features of the heaviest "punter" at the Balbec tables. Bloch introduced his sisters, who, though he silenced their chatter with the utmost rudeness, screamed with laughter at the mildest sallies of this brother who was their blindly worshipped idol. Although it is probable that this set of people contained, like every other, perhaps more than any other, plenty of attractions, qualities and virtues, in order to experience these one would first have had to penetrate it. But it was not popular, it sensed this, and saw there the mark of an anti-Semitism to which it presented a bold front in a compact and closed phalanx into which, as it happened, no one dreamed of trying to force his way.

As regards the word "light," I had all the less reason to be surprised at Bloch's pronunciation in that, a few days before, when he had asked me why I had come to Balbec (although it seemed to him perfectly natural that he himself should be there) and whether it had been "in the hope of making grand friends," and I had explained to him that this visit was a fulfilment of one of my earliest longings, though one not so deep as my longing to see Venice, he had replied: "Yes, of course, to sip iced drinks with the pretty ladies, while pretending to read the *Stones of Venighce* by Lord John Ruskin, a dreary bore, in fact one of the most tedious old prozers you could find." Thus Bloch evidently thought that in England not only were all the inhabitants of the male sex called "Lord," but the letter "i" was invariably pronounced "igh." As for Saint-Loup, this mistake in pronunciation seemed to him all the more venial inasmuch as he saw in it pre-eminently a want of those almost "society" notions which my new friend despised as fully as he was versed in them. But the fear lest Bloch, discovering one day that one says "Venice" and that Ruskin was not a lord, should retrospectively imagine that Robert had thought him ridiculous, made the latter feel as guilty as if he had been found wanting in the indulgence with which, as we have seen, he overflowed, so that the blush which would doubtless one day dye the cheek of Bloch on the discovery of his error, Robert already, by anticipation and reversibility, could feel mounting to his own. For he assumed that Bloch attached more importance than he to this mistake—an assumption which Bloch confirmed some days later, when he heard me pronounce the word "lift," by breaking in with: "Oh, one says 'lift,' does one?" And then, in a dry and lofty tone: "Not that it's of the slightest importance." A phrase that is like a reflex action, the same in all proud and susceptible men, in the gravest circumstances as well as in the most trivial, betraying there as clearly as on this occasion how important the thing in question seems to him who declares that it is of no importance; a tragic phrase at times, the first to escape (and then how heart-breakingly) the lips of any man who is at all proud from whom we have just removed the last hope to which he still clung by refusing to do him a service: "Oh, well, it's not of the slightest importance; I shall make some other arrangement": the other arrangement which it is not of the slightest importance that he should be driven to adopt being sometimes suicide.

Thereupon Bloch made me the prettiest speeches. He was certainly anxious to be on the best of terms with me. And yet he asked me: "Is it because you've taken a fancy to the minor aristocracy that you run after de Saint-Loup-en-Bray? You must be suffering from a severe attack of snobbery. Tell me, are you a snob? I think so, what?" Not that his desire to be friendly had suddenly changed. But what is called in not too correct language "ill breeding" was his defect, therefore the defect which he was bound to overlook, and *a fortiori* the defect by which he did not believe that other people could be shocked.

In the human race, the frequency of the virtues that are identical in us all is not more wonderful than the multiplicity of the defects that are peculiar to each one of us. Undoubtedly, it is not common sense that is "the commonest thing in the world"; it is human kindness. In the most distant, the most desolate corners of the earth, we marvel to see it blossom of its own accord, as in a remote valley a poppy like all the poppies in the rest of the world, which it has never seen as it has never known anything but the wind that occasionally stirs the folds of its lonely scarlet cloak. Even if this human kindness, paralysed by self-interest, is not put into practice, it exists none the less, and whenever there is no selfish motive to restrain it, for example when reading a novel or a newspaper, it will blossom, even in the heart of one who, cold-blooded in real life, has retained a tender heart as a lover of serial romances, and turn towards the weak, the just and the persecuted. But the variety of our defects is no less remarkable than the similarity of our virtues. The most perfect person in the world has a certain defect which shocks us or makes us angry. One man is of rare intelligence, sees everything from the loftiest viewpoint, never speaks ill of anyone, but will pocket and forget letters of supreme importance which he himself asked you to let him post for you, and so make you miss a vital engagement without offering you any excuse, with a smile, because he prides himself upon never knowing the time. Another is so refined, so gentle, so delicate in his conduct that he never says anything to you about yourself that you would not be glad to hear, but you feel that he suppresses, that he keeps buried in his heart, where they turn sour, other, quite different opinions, and the pleasure that he derives from seeing you is so dear to him that he will let you faint with exhaustion sooner than leave you to yourself. A third has more sincerity, but carries it so far that he feels bound to let you know, when you have pleaded the state of your health as an excuse for not having been to see him, that you were seen going to the theatre and were reported to be looking well, or else that he has not been able to turn to full advantage the step you took on his behalf, which in any case three other people had already offered to take, so that he is only moderately indebted to you. In similar circumstances the previous friend would have pretended not to know that you had gone to the theatre, or that other people could have done him the same service. But this last friend feels himself obliged to repeat or to reveal to somebody the very thing that is most likely to give offence; is delighted with his own frankness and tells you, emphatically: "I am like that." While others infuriate you by their exaggerated curiosity, or by a want of curiosity so absolute that you can speak to them of the most sensational happenings without their knowing what it is all about; and others again take months to answer you if your letter has been about something that concerns yourself and not them, or else, if they write that they are coming to ask you for something and you dare not leave the house for fear of missing them, do not appear, but leave you in suspense for weeks because, not having received from you the answer which their letter did not in the least call for, they have concluded that you must be cross with them. And others, considering their own wishes and not yours, talk to you without letting you get a word in if they are in good spirits and want to see you, however urgent the work you may have in hand, but if they feel exhausted by the weather or out of humour, you cannot drag a word out of them, they greet your efforts with an inert languor and no more take the trouble to reply, even in monosyllables, to what you say to them than if they had not heard you. Each of our friends has his defects, to such an extent that to continue to love him we are obliged to console ourselves for them—by thinking of his talent, his kindness, his affection—or rather by ignoring them, for which we need to deploy all our good will. Unfortunately our obliging obstinacy in refusing to see the defect in our friend is surpassed by the obstinacy with which he persists in that defect, from his own blindness to it or the blindness that he attributes to other people. For he does not notice it himself or imagines that it is not noticed. Since the risk of giving offence arises principally from the difficulty of appreciating what does and what does not pass unnoticed, we ought at least, from prudence, never to speak of ourselves, because that is a subject on which we may be sure that other people's views are never in accordance with our own. If, when we discover the true lives of other people, the real world beneath the world of appearance, we get as many surprises as on visiting a house of plain exterior which inside is full of hidden treasures, torture-chambers or skeletons, we are no less surprised if, in place of the image that we have of ourselves as a result of all the things that people have said to us, we learn from the way they speak of us in our absence what an entirely different image they have been carrying in their minds of us and of our lives. So that whenever we have spoken about ourselves, we may be sure that our inoffensive and prudent words, listened to with apparent politeness and hypocritical approbation, have given rise afterwards to the most exasperated or the most mirthful, but in either case the least favourable comments. At the very least we run the risk of irritating people by the disproportion between our idea of ourselves and the words that we use, a disproportion which as a rule makes people's talk about themselves as ludicrous as the performances of those self-styled music-lovers who when they feel the need to hum a favourite tune compensate for the inadequacy of their inarticulate murmurings by a strenuous mimicry and an air of admiration which is hardly justified by what they let us hear. And to the bad habit of speaking about oneself and one's defects there must be added, as part of the same thing, that habit of denouncing in other people defects precisely analogous to one's own. For it is always of those defects that one speaks, as though it were a way of speaking of oneself indirectly, and adding to the pleasure of absolving oneself the pleasure of confession. Moreover it seems that our attention, always attracted by what is characteristic of ourselves, notices it more than anything else in other people. One short-sighted man says of another: "But he can scarcely open his eyes!"; a consumptive has his doubts as to the pulmonary integrity of the most robust; an unwashed man speaks only of the baths that other people do not take; an evil-smelling man insists that other people smell; a cuckold sees cuckolds everywhere, a light woman light women, a snob snobs. Then, too, every vice, like every profession, requires and develops a special knowledge which we are never loath to display. The invert sniffs out inverts; the tailor asked out to dine has hardly begun to talk to you before he has

already appraised the cloth of your coat, which his fingers are itching to feel; and if after a few words of conversation you were to ask a dentist what he really thought of you, he would tell you how many of your teeth wanted falling. To him nothing appears more important, or to you, who have noticed his, more absurd. And it is not only when we speak of ourselves that we imagine other people to be blind; we behave as though they were. Each one of us has a special god in attendance who hides from him or promises him the concealment of his defect from other people, just as he closes the eyes and nostrils of people who do not wash to the streaks of dirt which they carry in their ears and the smell of sweat that emanates from their armpits, and assures them that they can with impunity carry both of these about a world that will notice nothing. And those who wear artificial pearls, or give them as presents, imagine that people will take them to be genuine.

Bloch was ill-bred, neurotic and snobbish, and since he belonged to a family of little repute, had to support, as on the floor of the ocean, the incalculable pressures imposed on him not only by the Christians at the surface but by all the intervening layers of Jewish castes superior to his own, each of them crushing with its contempt the one that was immediately beneath it. To pierce his way through to the open air by raising himself from Jewish family to Jewish family would have taken Bloch many thousands of years. It was better to seek an outlet in another direction.

When Bloch spoke to me of the attack of snobbery from which I must be suffering, and bade me confess that I was a snob, I might well have replied: "If I were, I shouldn't be going about with you." I said merely that he was not being very polite. Then he wanted to apologise, but in the way that is typical of the ill-bred man who is only too happy, in retracting his words, to find an opportunity to aggravate his offence. "Forgive me," he would now say to me whenever we met, "I've distressed you, tormented you, I've been wantonly mischievous. And yet—man in general and your friend in particular is so singular an animal—you cannot imagine the affection that I, I who tease you so cruelly, have for you. It brings me often, when I think of you, to the verge of tears." And he gave an audible sob.

What astonished me more in Bloch than his bad manners was to find how the quality of his conversation varied. This youth, so hard to please that of authors who were at the height of their fame he would say: "He's a dismal fool; he's a sheer imbecile," would every now and then recount with immense gusto anecdotes that were simply not funny or would instance as a "really remarkable person" someone who was completely insignificant. This double scale of measuring the wit, the worth, the interest of people continued to puzzle me until I was introduced to M. Bloch, senior.

I had not supposed that we should ever be allowed to meet him, for Bloch junior had spoken ill of me to Saint-Loup and of Saint-Loup to me. In particular, he had said to Robert that I was (still) a frightful snob. "Yes, really, he's thrilled to know M. LLLLegrandin." This trick of Bloch's of isolating a word was a sign at once of irony and literature. Saint-Loup, who had never heard the name Legrandin, was bewildered: "But who is he?" "Oh, he's a *very distinguished* person," Bloch replied with a laugh, thrusting his hands into his pockets as though for warmth, convinced that he was at that moment engaged in contemplation of the picturesque aspect of an extraordinary country gentleman compared to whom those of Barbey d'Aureville were as nothing. He consoled himself for his inability to portray M. Legrandin by giving him a string of capital L's and smacking his lips over the name as over a wine of the finest vintage. But these subjective enjoyments remained hidden from other people. If he spoke ill of me to Saint-Loup he made up for it by speaking no less ill of Saint-Loup to me. We had each of us learned these slanders in detail the very next day, not that we had repeated them to each other, a thing which would have seemed to us very wrong but to Bloch appeared so natural and almost inevitable that in his natural anxiety, in the certainty moreover that he would be telling us only what each of us was bound sooner or later to learn, he preferred to anticipate the disclosure and, taking Saint-Loup aside, admitted that he had spoken ill of him, on purpose, so that it might be repeated to him, swore to him "by Zeus Kronion, binder of oaths" that he loved him dearly, that he would lay down his life for him, and wiped away a tear. The same day, he contrived to see me alone, made his confession, declared that he had acted in my interest, because he felt that a certain kind of social intercourse was fatal to me and that I was "worthy of better things." Then, clasping me by the hand with the sentimentality of a drunkard, although his drunkenness was purely nervous: "Believe me," he said, "and may the black Ker seize me this instant and bear me across the portals of Hades, hateful to men, if yesterday, when I thought of you, of Combray, of my boundless affection for you, of afternoon hours in class which you do not even remember, I did not lie awake sobbing all night long. Yes, all night long, I swear it, and alas, I know—for I know the human soul—you will not believe me." I did indeed "not believe" him, and to these words which I felt he was making up on the spur of the moment and developing as he went on, his swearing "by Ker" added no great weight, the Hellenic cult being in Bloch purely literary. Besides, whenever he began to get emotional over a falsehood and wanted one to share his emotion, he would say "I swear it," more for the hysterical pleasure of lying than to make one think that he was speaking the truth. I did not believe what he was saying, but I bore him no ill-will on that account, for I had inherited from my mother and grandmother their incapacity for rancour even against far worse offenders, and their habit of never condemning anyone.

Besides, Bloch was not altogether a bad fellow: he was capable of being extremely nice. And now that the race of Combray, the race from which sprang creatures as absolutely unspoiled as my grandmother and my mother, seems almost extinct, since I no longer have much choice except between decent brutes, frank and insensitive, the mere sound of whose voices shows at once that they take absolutely no interest in your life—and another kind of men who so long as they are with you understand you, cherish you, grow sentimental to the point of tears, then make up for it a few hours later with some cruel joke at your expense, but come back



to you, always just as understanding, as charming, as in tune with you for the moment, I think that it is of this latter sort that I prefer, if not the moral worth, at any rate the society.

"You cannot imagine my grief when I think of you," Bloch went on. "Actually, I suppose it's a rather Jewish side of my nature coming out," he added ironically, contracting his pupils as though measuring out under the microscope an infinitesimal quantity of "Jewish blood," as a French nobleman might (but never would) have said who among his exclusively Christian ancestry nevertheless numbered Samuel Bernard, or further back still, the Blessed Virgin from whom, it is said, the Lévy family claim descent. "I rather like," he continued, "to take into account the element in my feelings (slight though it is) which may be ascribed to my Jewish origin." He made this statement because it seemed to him at once clever and courageous to speak the truth about his race, a truth which at the same time he managed to water down to a remarkable extent, like misers who decide to discharge their debts but cannot bring themselves to pay more than half of them. This kind of deceit which consists in having the boldness to proclaim the truth, but only after mixing with it an ample measure of lies which falsify it, is commoner than people think, and even among those who do not habitually practise it certain crises in life, especially those in which a love affair is involved, give them occasion to indulge in it.

All these confidential diatribes by Bloch to Saint-Loup against me and to me against Saint-Loup ended in an invitation to dinner. I am by no means sure that he did not first make an attempt to secure Saint-Loup by himself. It would have been so like Bloch to do so that probably he did; but if so, success did not crown his effort, for it was to myself and Saint-Loup both that he said one day: "Dear master, and you, O horseman beloved of Ares, de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, tamer of horses, since I have encountered you by the shore of Amphitrite, resounding with foam, hard by the tents of the swift-shipped Meniers, will both of you come to dinner one day this week with my illustrious sire, of blameless heart?" He proffered this invitation because he desired to attach himself more closely to Saint-Loup who would, he hoped, secure him the right of entry into aristocratic circles. Formed by me, for myself, this ambition would have seemed to Bloch the mark of the most hideous snobbery, quite in keeping with the opinion that he already held of a whole side of my nature which he did not regard—or at least had not hitherto regarded—as the most important side; but the same ambition in himself seemed to him the proof of a finely developed curiosity in a mind anxious to carry out certain social explorations from which he might perhaps glean some literary benefit. M. Bloch senior, when his son had told him that he was going to bring one of his friends in to dinner, and had in a sarcastic but self-satisfied tone enunciated the name and title of that friend: "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray," had been thrown into great commotion. "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray! I'll be jiggered!" he had exclaimed, using the oath which was with him the strongest indication of social deference. And he gazed at a son capable of having formed such an acquaintance with an admiring look which seemed to say: "He really is astounding. Can this prodigy be indeed a child of mine!" which gave my friend as much pleasure as if his monthly allowance had been increased by fifty francs. For Bloch was not in his element at home and felt that his father treated him like a black sheep because of his inveterate admiration for Leconte de Lisle, Heredia and other "Bohemians." But to have got to know Saint-Loup-en-Bray, whose father had been chairman of the Suez Canal board ("I'll be jiggered!") was an indisputable "score." What a pity that they had left the stereoscope in Paris for fear of its being broken on the journey. M. Bloch senior alone had the skill, or at least the right, to manipulate it. He did so, moreover, on rare occasions only, and then to good purpose, on evenings when there was a full-dress affair, with hired waiters. So that from these stereoscope sessions there emanated, for those who were present, as it were a special distinction, a privileged position, and for the master of the house who gave them, a prestige such as talent confers on a man—which could not have been greater had the pictures been taken by M. Bloch himself and the machine his own invention. "You weren't invited to Solomon's yesterday?" one of the family would ask another. "No! I wasn't one of the elect. What was on?" "Oh, a great how-d'ye-do, the stereoscope, the whole box of tricks!" "Indeed! If they had the stereoscope I'm sorry I wasn't there; they say Solomon is quite amazing when he works it."

"Ah, well," said M. Bloch now to his son, "it's a mistake to let him have everything at once. Now he'll have something else to look forward to."

He had actually thought, in his paternal affection and in the hope of touching his son's heart, of sending for the instrument. But it was not "physically possible" in the time, or rather they had thought it would not be; for we were obliged to put off the dinner because Saint-Loup could not leave the hotel, where he was expecting an uncle who was coming to spend a few days with Mme de Villeparisis. Since he was greatly addicted to physical culture, and especially to long walks, it was largely on foot, spending the night in wayside farms, that this uncle was to make the journey from the country house in which he was staying, and the precise moment of his arrival at Balbec was somewhat uncertain. Indeed Saint-Loup, afraid to stir out of doors, even entrusted me with the duty of taking to Incarville, where the nearest telegraph-office was, the messages that he sent every day to his mistress. The uncle in question was called Palamède, a Christian name that had come down to him from his ancestors the Princes of Sicily. And later on, when I found, in the course of my historical reading, belonging to this or that Podestà or Prince of the Church, the same Christian name, a fine Renaissance medal—some said a genuine antique—that had always remained in the family, having passed from generation to generation, from the Vatican cabinet to the uncle of my friend, I felt the pleasure that is reserved for those who, unable from lack of means to start a medal collection or a picture gallery, look out for old names (names of localities, instructive and picturesque as an old map, a bird's-eye view, a sign-board or an inventory of customs; baptismal names whose fine French endings echo the defect of speech, the intonation of an ethnic vulgarity, the corrupt pronunciation whereby our ancestors made Latin and Saxon words undergo lasting mutilations which in due course became the august law-givers of our grammar books)

and, in short, by drawing upon these collections of ancient sonorities, give themselves concerts like the people who acquire violas da gamba and violas d'amore to perform the music of the past on old instruments. Saint-Loup told me that even in the most exclusive aristocratic society his uncle Palamède stood out as being particularly unapproachable, scornful, obsessed with his nobility, forming with his brother's wife and a few other chosen spirits what was known as the Phoenix Club. Even there his insolence was so dreaded that it had happened more than once that society people who had been anxious to meet him and had applied to his own brother for an introduction had met with a refusal: "Really, you mustn't ask me to introduce you to my brother Palamède. Even if my wife and the whole lot of us put ourselves to the task it would be no good. Or else you'd run the risk of his being rude to you, and I shouldn't like that." At the Jockey Club he had, with a few of his friends, marked a list of two hundred members whom they would never allow to be introduced to them. And in the Comte de Paris's circle he was known by the nickname of "The Prince" because of his elegance and his pride.

Saint-Loup told me about his uncle's early life, now long since past. Every day he used to take women to a bachelor establishment which he shared with two of his friends, as good-looking as himself, on account of which they were known as "the three Graces."

"One day, a man who is now one of the brightest luminaries of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, as Balzac would have said, but who at a rather unfortunate stage of his early life displayed bizarre tastes, asked my uncle to let him come to this place. But no sooner had he arrived than it was not to the ladies but to my uncle Palamède that he began to make overtures. My uncle pretended not to understand, and took his two friends aside on some pretext or other. They reappeared on the scene, seized the offender, stripped him, thrashed him till he bled, and then in ten degrees of frost kicked him outside where he was found more dead than alive; so much so that the police started an inquiry which the poor devil had the greatest difficulty in getting them to abandon. My uncle would never go in for such drastic methods now—in fact you can't imagine the number of working men he takes under his wing, only to be repaid quite often with the basest ingratitude—though he's so haughty with society people. It may be a servant who has looked after him in a hotel, for whom he will find a place in Paris, or a farm-labourer whom he will pay to have taught a trade. It's a really rather nice side of his character, in contrast to his social side." For Saint-Loup belonged to that type of young men of fashion, situated at an altitude at which it has been possible to cultivate such expressions as "what is really rather nice about him," "his nicer side," precious seeds which produce very rapidly a way of looking at things in which one counts oneself as nothing and the "people" as everything; the exact opposite, in a word, of plebeian pride. "I'm told it was quite extraordinary to what extent he set the tone, to what extent he laid down the law for the whole of society when he was a young man. As far as he was concerned, in any circumstance he did whatever seemed most agreeable or most convenient to himself, but immediately it was imitated by all the snobs. If he felt thirsty at the theatre, and had a drink brought to him in his box, a week later the little sitting-rooms behind all the boxes would be filled with refreshments. One wet summer when he had a touch of rheumatism, he ordered an overcoat of a loose but warm vicuna wool, which is generally used for travelling rugs, and insisted on the blue and orange stripes. The big tailors at once received orders from their customers for blue overcoats, fringed and shaggy. If for some reason he wanted to remove every aspect of ceremony from a dinner in a country house where he was spending the day, and to underline the distinction had come without evening clothes and sat down to table in the suit he had been wearing that afternoon, it became the fashion not to dress for dinner in the country. If instead of taking a spoon to eat a pudding he used a fork, or a special implement of his own invention which he had had made for him by a silversmith, or his fingers, it was no longer permissible to eat it in any other way. He wanted once to hear some Beethoven quartets again (for with all his preposterous ideas he is far from being a fool and has great gifts) and arranged for some musicians to come and play them to him and a few friends once a week. The ultra-fashionable thing that season was to give quite small parties with chamber music. I should say he's not done at all badly out of life. With his looks, he must have had any number of women! I couldn't tell you exactly which, because he's very discreet. But I do know that he was thoroughly unfaithful to my poor aunt. Which doesn't mean that he wasn't always perfectly charming to her, that she didn't adore him, and that he didn't go on mourning her for years. When he's in Paris, he still goes to the cemetery nearly every day."

The morning after Robert had told me all these things about his uncle while waiting for him (as it happened in vain), as I was passing the Casino alone on my way back to the hotel, I had the sensation of being watched by somebody who was not far off. I turned my head and saw a man of about forty, very tall and rather stout, with a very black moustache, who, nervously slapping the leg of his trousers with a switch, was staring at me, his eyes dilated with extreme attentiveness. From time to time these eyes were shot through by a look of restless activity such as the sight of a person they do not know excites only in men in whom, for whatever reason, it inspires thoughts that would not occur to anyone else—madmen, for instance, or spies. He darted a final glance at me that was at once bold, prudent, rapid and profound, like a last shot which one fires at an enemy as one turns to flee, and, after first looking all round him, suddenly adopting an absent and lofty air, with an abrupt revolution of his whole person he turned towards a playbill in the reading of which he became absorbed, while he hummed a tune and fingered the moss-rose in his button-hole. He drew from his pocket a note-book in which he appeared to be taking down the title of the performance that was announced, looked at his watch two or three times, pulled down over his eyes a black straw hat the brim of which he extended with his hand held out over it like an eye-shade, as though to see whether someone was coming at last, made the perfunctory gesture of annoyance by which people mean to show that they have waited long enough, although they never make it when they are really waiting, then pushing back his hat and exposing a scalp cropped close

except at the sides where he allowed a pair of waved "pigeon's-wings" to grow quite long, he emitted the loud panting breath that people exhale not when they are too hot but when they wish it to be thought that they are too hot. He gave me the impression of a hotel crook who, having been watching my grandmother and myself for some days, and planning to rob us, had just discovered that I had caught him in the act of spying on me. Perhaps he was only seeking by his new attitude to express abstractedness and detachment in order to put me off the scent, but it was with an exaggeration so aggressive that his object appeared to be—at least as much as the dissipating of the suspicions he might have aroused in me—to avenge a humiliation which I must unwillingly have inflicted on him, to give me the idea not so much that he had not seen me as that I was an object of too little importance to attract his attention. He threw back his shoulders with an air of bravado, pursed his lips, twisted his moustache, and adjusted his face into an expression that was at once indifferent, harsh, and almost insulting. So much so that I took him at one moment for a thief and at another for a lunatic. And yet his scrupulously ordered attire was far more sober and far more simple than that of any of the summer visitors I saw at Balbec, and reassured me as to my own suit, so often humiliated by the usual dazzling whiteness of their holiday garb. But my grandmother was coming towards me, we took a turn together, and I was waiting for her, an hour later, outside the hotel into which she had gone for a moment, when I saw emerge from it Mme de Villeparisis with Robert de Saint-Loup and the stranger who had stared at me so intently outside the Casino. Swift as a lightning-flash his look shot through me, just as at the moment when I had first noticed him, and returned, as though he had not seen me, to hover, slightly lowered, before his eyes, deadened, like the neutral look which feigns to see nothing without and is incapable of reporting anything to the mind within, the look which expresses merely the satisfaction of feeling round it the eyelids which it keeps apart with its beatific roundness, the devout and sanctimonious look that we see on the faces of certain hypocrites, the smug look on those of certain fools. I saw that he had changed his clothes. The suit he was wearing was darker even than the other; and no doubt true elegance lies nearer to simplicity than false; but there was something more: from close at hand one felt that if colour was almost entirely absent from these garments it was not because he who had banished it from them was indifferent to it but rather because for some reason he forbade himself the enjoyment of it. And the sobriety which they displayed seemed to be of the kind that comes from obedience to a rule of diet rather than from lack of appetite. A dark green thread harmonised, in the stuff of his trousers, with the stripe on his socks, with a refinement which betrayed the vivacity of a taste that was everywhere else subdued, to which this single concession had been made out of tolerance, while a spot of red on his tie was imperceptible, like a liberty which one dares not take.

"How are you? Let me introduce my nephew, the Baron de Guermantes," Mme de Villeparisis said to me, while the stranger, without looking at me, muttering a vague "Charmed!" which he followed with a "H'm, h'm, h'm," to make his affability seem somehow forced, and crooking his little finger, forefinger and thumb, held out to me his middle and ring fingers, destitute of rings, which I clasped through his suede glove; then, without lifting his eyes to my face, he turned towards Mme de Villeparisis.

"Good gracious, I shall be forgetting my own name next!" she exclaimed with a laugh. "Here am I calling you Baron de Guermantes. Let me introduce the Baron de Charlus. But after all, it's not a very serious mistake," she went on, "for you're a thorough Guermantes all the same."

By this time my grandmother had reappeared, and we all set out together. Saint-Loup's uncle declined to honour me not only with a word but with so much as a look in my direction. If he stared strangers out of countenance (and during this short excursion he two or three times hurled his terrible and searching scrutiny like a sounding-lead at insignificant people of the most humble extraction who happened to pass), on the other hand he never for a moment, if I was to judge by myself, looked at persons whom he knew—as a detective on a secret mission might except his personal friends from his professional vigilance. Leaving my grandmother, Mme de Villeparisis and him to talk to one another, I fell behind with Saint-Loup.

"Tell me, am I right in thinking I heard Mme de Villeparisis say just now to your uncle that he was a Guermantes?"

"Of course he is: Palamède de Guermantes."

"Not the same Guermantes who have a place near Combray, and claim descent from Geneviève de Brabant?"

"Most certainly: my uncle, who is the very last word in heraldry and all that sort of thing, would tell you that our 'cry,' our war-cry, that is to say, which was changed afterwards to 'Passavant,' was originally 'Combraysis,' " he said, smiling so as not to appear to be priding himself on this prerogative of a "cry," which only the quasi-royal houses, the great chiefs of feudal bands, enjoyed. "It's his brother who has the place now."

So she was related, and very closely, to the Guermantes, this Mme de Villeparisis who had for so long been for me the lady who had given me a duck filled with chocolates when I was small, more remote then from the Guermantes way than if she had been shut up somewhere on the Méséglise way, less brilliant, less highly placed by me than was the Combray optician, and who now suddenly went through one of those fantastic rises in value, parallel to the no less unforeseen depreciations of other objects in our possession, which—rise and fall alike—introduce in our youth, and in those periods of our life in which a trace of youth persists, changes as numerous as the Metamorphoses of Ovid.

"Haven't they got the busts of all the old lords of Guermantes down there?"

"Yes, and a lovely sight they are!" Saint-Loup was ironical. "Between you and me, I look on all that sort of thing as rather a joke. But what they have got at Guermantes, which is a little more interesting, is quite a touching portrait of my aunt by Carrière. It's as fine as Whistler or Velasquez," went on Saint-Loup, who in his neophyte zeal was not always very exact about degrees of greatness. "There are also some stunning pictures by

Gustave Moreau. My aunt is the niece of your friend Mme de Villeparisis; she was brought up by her, and married her cousin, who was a nephew, too, of my aunt Villeparisis, the present Duc de Guermantes."

"Then what is your uncle?"

"He bears the title of Baron de Charlus. Strictly, when my great-uncle died, my uncle Palamède ought to have taken the title of Prince des Laumes, which was that of his brother before he became Duc de Guermantes—in that family they change their names as often as their shirts. But my uncle has peculiar ideas about all that sort of thing. And as he feels that people are rather apt to overdo the Italian Prince and Grandee of Spain business nowadays, and although he had half-a-dozen princely titles to choose from, he has remained Baron de Charlus, as a protest, and with an apparent simplicity which really covers a good deal of pride. 'In these days,' he says, 'everybody is a prince; one really must have something to distinguish one; I shall call myself Prince when I wish to travel incognito.' According to him there is no older title than the Charlus barony; to prove to you that it's earlier than the Montmorency title, though they used to claim, quite wrongly, to be the premier barons of France when they were only premier in the Ile-de-France, where their fief was, my uncle will hold forth to you for hours on end and enjoy doing so because, although he's a most intelligent man, really gifted, he regards that sort of thing as quite a live topic of conversation." Saint-Loup smiled again. "But as I'm not like him, you mustn't ask me to talk pedigrees. I know nothing more deadly, more outdated; really, life's too short."

I now recognised in the hard look which had made me turn round outside the Casino the same that I had seen fixed on me at Tansonville at the moment when Mme Swann had called Gilberte away.

"Wasn't Mme Swann one of the numerous mistresses you told me your uncle M. de Charlus had had?"

"Good lord, no! That is to say, my uncle's a great friend of Swann, and has always stood up for him. But no one has ever suggested that he was his wife's lover. You would cause the utmost astonishment in Parisian society if people thought you believed that."

I dared not reply that it would have caused even greater astonishment in Combray society if people had thought that I did not believe it.

My grandmother was delighted with M. de Charlus. No doubt he attached an extreme importance to all questions of birth and social position, and my grandmother had remarked this, but without any trace of that severity which as a rule embodies a secret envy and irritation, at seeing another person enjoy advantages which one would like but cannot oneself possess. Since, on the contrary, my grandmother, content with her lot and not for a moment regretting that she did not move in a more brilliant sphere, employed only her intellect in observing the eccentricities of M. de Charlus, she spoke of Saint-Loup's uncle with that detached, smiling, almost affectionate benevolence with which we reward the object of our disinterested observation for the pleasure that it has given us, all the more so because this time the object was a person whose pretensions, if not legitimate at any rate picturesque, made him stand out in fairly vivid contrast to the people whom she generally had occasion to see. But it was above all in consideration of his intelligence and sensibility, qualities which it was easy to see that M. de Charlus, unlike so many of the society people whom Saint-Loup derided, possessed in a marked degree, that my grandmother had so readily forgiven him his aristocratic prejudice. And yet this prejudice had not been sacrificed by the uncle, as it had been by the nephew, to higher qualities. Rather, M. de Charlus had reconciled it with them. Possessing, by virtue of his descent from the Ducs de Nemours and the Princes de Lamballe, documents, furniture, tapestries, portraits painted for his ancestors by Raphael, Velasquez, Boucher, justified in saying that he was "visiting" a museum and a matchless library when he was merely going over his family mementoes, he still placed the whole heritage of the aristocracy in the high position from which Saint-Loup had toppled it. Perhaps also, being less ideological than Saint-Loup, less satisfied with words, a more realistic observer of men, he did not care to neglect an essential element of prestige in their eyes which, if it gave certain disinterested pleasures to his imagination, could often be a powerfully effective aid to his utilitarian activities. No agreement can ever be reached between men of his sort and those who obey an inner ideal which drives them to rid themselves of such advantages so that they may seek only to realise that ideal, resembling in that respect the painters and writers who renounce their virtuosity, the artistic people who modernise themselves, the warrior people who initiate universal disarmament, the absolute governments which turn democratic and repeal their harsh laws, though as often as not the sequel fails to reward their noble efforts; for the artists lose their talent, the nations their age-old predominance; pacifism often breeds wars and tolerance criminality. If Saint-Loup's strivings towards sincerity and emancipation could not but be regarded as extremely noble, to judge by their visible result, one could still be thankful that they had failed to bear fruit in M. de Charlus, who had transferred to his own home much of the admirable furniture from the Hôtel Guermantes instead of replacing it, like his nephew, with Art Nouveau furniture, pieces by Lebourg or Guillaumin. It was none the less true that M. de Charlus's ideal was highly artificial, and, if the epithet can be applied to the word ideal, as much social as artistic. In certain women of great beauty and rare culture whose ancestresses, two centuries earlier, had shared in all the glory and grace of the old order, he found a distinction which made him capable of taking pleasure in their society alone, and doubtless his admiration for them was sincere, but countless reminiscences, historical and artistic, evoked by their names played a considerable part in it, just as memories of classical antiquity are one of the reasons for the pleasure which a literary man finds in reading an ode by Horace that is perhaps inferior to poems of our own day which would leave him cold. Any of these women by the side of a pretty commoner was for him what an old picture is to a contemporary canvas representing a procession or a wedding—one of those old pictures the history of which we know, from the Pope or King who ordered them, through the hands of the eminent persons whose acquisition of them, by gift, purchase, conquest or inheritance, recalls to us

some event or at least some alliance of historic interest, and consequently some knowledge that we ourselves have acquired, gives it new meaning, increases our sense of the richness of the possessions of our memory or of our erudition. M. de Charlus was thankful that a prejudice similar to his own, by preventing these few great ladies from mixing with women whose blood was less pure, presented them for his veneration intact, in their unadulterated nobility, like some eighteenth-century façade supported on its flat columns of pink marble, in which the passage of time has wrought no change.

M. de Charlus extolled the true "nobility" of mind and heart which characterised these women, playing upon the word in a double sense by which he himself was taken in, and in which lay the falsehood of this bastard conception, of this medley of aristocracy, generosity and art, but also its seductiveness, dangerous to people like my grandmother, to whom the less refined but more innocent prejudice of a nobleman who cared only about quarterings and took no thought for anything besides would have appeared too silly for words, whereas she was defenceless as soon as a thing presented itself under the externals of an intellectual superiority, so much so, indeed, that she regarded princes as enviable above all other men because they were able to have a La Bruyère or a Fénelon as their tutors.

Outside the Grand Hotel the three Guermantes left us; they were going to luncheon with the Princesse de Luxembourg. While my grandmother was saying good-bye to Mme de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup to my grandmother, M. de Charlus, who up till then had not addressed a single word to me, drew back from the group and arriving at my side, said to me: "I shall be taking tea this evening after dinner in my aunt Villeparisis's room. I hope that you will give me the pleasure of seeing you there with your grandmother." With which he rejoined the Marquise.

Although it was Sunday, there were no more carriages waiting outside the hotel now than at the beginning of the season. The notary's wife, in particular, had decided that it was not worth the expense of hiring one every time simply because she was not going to the Cambremers', and simply stayed in her room.

"Is Mme Blandais not well?" her husband was asked. "We haven't seen her all morning."

"She has a slight headache—the heat, you know, this thundery weather. The least thing upsets her. But I expect you'll see her this evening. I've told her she ought to come down. It can do her nothing but good."

I had supposed that in thus inviting us to take tea with his aunt, whom I never doubted that he would have warned of our coming, M. de Charlus wished to make amends for the impoliteness which he had shown me during our walk that morning. But when, on our entering Mme de Villeparisis's room, I attempted to greet her nephew, for all that I walked right round him while in shrill accents he was telling a somewhat spiteful story about one of his relatives, I could not succeed in catching his eye. I decided to say "Good evening" to him, and fairly loud, to warn him of my presence; but I realised that he had observed it, for before ever a word had passed my lips, just as I was beginning to bow to him, I saw his two fingers held out for me to shake without his having turned to look at me or paused in his story. He had evidently seen me, without letting it appear that he had, and I noticed then that his eyes, which were never fixed on the person to whom he was speaking, strayed perpetually in all directions, like those of certain frightened animals, or those of street hawkers who, while delivering their patter and displaying their illicit merchandise, keep a sharp look-out, though without turning their heads, on the different points of the horizon from which the police may appear at any moment. At the same time I was a little surprised to find that Mme de Villeparisis, while glad to see us, did not seem to have been expecting us, and I was still more surprised to hear M. de Charlus say to my grandmother: "Ah! what a capital idea of yours to come and pay us a visit! Charming of them, is it not, my dear aunt?" No doubt he had noticed his aunt's surprise at our entry and thought, as a man accustomed to set the tone, that it would be enough to transform that surprise into joy were he to show that he himself felt it, that it was indeed the feeling which our arrival there ought to prompt. In which he calculated wisely; for Mme de Villeparisis, who had a high opinion of her nephew and knew how difficult it was to please him, appeared suddenly to have found new attractions in my grandmother and welcomed her with open arms. But I failed to understand how M. de Charlus could, in the space of a few hours, have forgotten the invitation—so curt but apparently so intentional, so premeditated—which he addressed to me that same morning, or why he called a "capital idea" on my grandmother's part an idea that had been entirely his own. With a regard for accuracy which I retained until I had reached the age at which I realised that it is not by questioning him that one learns the truth of what another man has had in his mind, and that the risk of a misunderstanding which will probably pass unobserved is less than that which may come from a purblind insistence: "But, Monsieur," I reminded him, "you remember, surely, that it was you who asked me if we would come round this evening?" Not a sound, not a movement betrayed that M. de Charles had so much as heard my question. Seeing which, I repeated it, like diplomats or like young men after a misunderstanding who endeavour, with untiring and unrewarded zeal, to obtain an explanation which their adversary is determined not to give them. Still M. de Charlus answered me not a word. I seemed to see hovering upon his lips the smile of those who from a great height pass judgment on the character and breeding of their inferiors.

Since he refused all explanation, I tried to provide one for myself, but succeeded only in hesitating between several, none of which might have been the right one. Perhaps he did not remember, or perhaps it was I who had failed to understand what he had said to me that morning ... More probably, in his pride, he did not wish to appear to have sought the company of people he despised, and preferred to cast upon them the responsibility for their intrusion. But then, if he despised us, why had he been so anxious that we should come, or rather that my grandmother should come, for of the two of us it was to her alone that he spoke that evening, and never once to me? Talking with the utmost animation to her, as also to Mme de Villeparisis, hiding, so to speak, behind them as though he were seated at the back of a theatre-box, he merely turned from

them every now and then the searching gaze of his penetrating eyes and fastened it on my face, with the same gravity, the same air of preoccupation, as if it had been a manuscript difficult to decipher.

No doubt, had it not been for those eyes, M. de Charlus's face would have been similar to the faces of many good-looking men. And when Saint-Loup, speaking to me of various other Guermantes, said on a later occasion: "Admittedly, they don't have that thoroughbred air, that look of being noblemen to their finger-tips, that uncle Palamède has," confirming my suspicion that a thoroughbred air and aristocratic distinction were not something mysterious and new but consisted in elements which I had recognised without difficulty and without receiving any particular impression from them, I was to feel that another of my illusions had been shattered. But however much M. de Charlus tried to seal hermetically the expression on that face, to which a light coating of powder lent a faintly theatrical aspect, the eyes were like two crevices, two loop-holes which alone he had failed to block, and through which, according to one's position in relation to him, one suddenly felt oneself in the path of some hidden weapon which seemed to bode no good, even to him who, without being altogether master of it, carried it within himself in a state of precarious equilibrium and always on the verge of explosion; and the circumspect and unceasingly restless expression of those eyes, with all the signs of exhaustion which the heavy pouches beneath them stamped upon his face, however carefully he might compose and regulate it, made one think of some incognito, some disguise assumed by a powerful man in danger, or merely by a dangerous—but tragic—individual. I should have liked to divine what was this secret which other men did not carry in their breasts and which had already made M. de Charlus's stare seem to me so enigmatic when I had seen him that morning outside the Casino. But with what I now knew of his family I could no longer believe that it was that of a thief, nor, after what I had heard of his conversation, of a madman. If he was so cold towards me, while making himself so agreeable to my grandmother, this did not perhaps arise from any personal antipathy, for in general, to the extent that he was kindly disposed towards women, of whose faults he spoke without, as a rule, departing from the utmost tolerance, he displayed towards men, and especially young men, a hatred so violent as to suggest that of certain misogynists for women. Of two or three "gigolos," relatives or intimate friends of Saint-Loup, who happened to mention their names, M. de Charlus remarked with an almost ferocious expression in sharp contrast to his usual coldness: "Young scum!" I gathered that the particular fault which he found in the young men of the day was their effeminacy. "They're nothing but women," he said with scorn. But what life would not have appeared effeminate beside that which he expected a man to lead, and never found energetic or virile enough? (He himself, when he walked across country, after long hours on the road would plunge his heated body into frozen streams.) He would not even concede that a man should wear a single ring.

But this obsession with virility did not prevent his having also the most delicate sensibilities. When Mme de Villeparisis asked him to describe to my grandmother some country house in which Mme de Sévigné had stayed, adding that she could not help feeling that there was something rather "literary" about that lady's distress at being parted from "that tiresome Mme de Grignan":

"On the contrary," he retorted, "I can think of nothing more genuine. Besides, it was a time in which feelings of that sort were thoroughly understood. The inhabitant of La Fontaine's Monomotapa, running round to see his friend who had appeared to him in a dream looking rather sad, the pigeon finding that the greatest of evils is the absence of the other pigeon, seem to you perhaps, my dear aunt, as exaggerated as Mme de Sévigné's impatience for the moment when she will be alone with her daughter. It's so beautiful, what she says when she leaves her: 'This parting gives a pain to my soul which I feel like an ache in my body. In absence one is liberal with the hours. One anticipates a time for which one is longing.'"

My grandmother was delighted to hear the Letters thus spoken of, exactly as she would have spoken of them herself. She was astonished that a man could understand them so well. She found in M. de Charlus a delicacy, a sensibility that were quite feminine. We said to each other afterwards, when we were by ourselves and discussed him together, that he must have come under the strong influence of a woman—his mother, or in later life his daughter if he had any children. "A mistress," I thought to myself, remembering the influence which Saint-Loup's seemed to have had over him and which enabled me to realise the degree to which men can be refined by the women with whom they live.

"Once she was with her daughter, she had probably nothing to say to her," put in Mme de Villeparisis.

"Most certainly she had: if it was only what she calls 'things so slight that nobody else would notice them but you and I.' And anyhow she was with her. And La Bruyère tells us that that is everything: 'To be with the people one loves, to speak to them, not to speak to them, it is all the same.' He is right: that is the only true happiness," added M. de Charlus in a mournful voice, "and alas, life is so ill arranged that one very rarely experiences it. Mme de Sévigné was after all less to be pitied than most of us. She spent a great part of her life with the person whom she loved."

"You forget that it wasn't 'love' in her case, since it was her daughter."

"But what matters in life is not whom or what one loves," he went on, in a judicial, peremptory, almost cutting tone, "it is the fact of loving. What Mme de Sévigné felt for her daughter has a far better claim to rank with the passion that Racine described in *Andromaque* or *Phèdre* than the commonplace relations young Sévigné had with his mistresses. It's the same with a mystic's love for his God. The hard and fast lines with which we circumscribe love arise solely from our complete ignorance of life."

"You like *Andromaque* and *Phèdre* that much?" Saint-Loup asked his uncle in a faintly contemptuous tone.

"There is more truth in a single tragedy of Racine than in all the dramatic works of Monsieur Victor Hugo," replied M. de Charlus.

"Society people really are appalling," Saint-Loup murmured in my ear. "Say what you like, to prefer Racine to Victor is a bit thick!" He was genuinely distressed by his uncle's words, but the satisfaction of saying "say what you like" and better still "a bit thick" consoled him.

In these reflexions upon the sadness of having to live apart from those one loves (which were to lead my grandmother to say to me that Mme de Villeparisis's nephew understood certain things a great deal better than his aunt, and moreover had something about him that set him far above the average clubman) M. de Charlus not only revealed a refinement of feeling such as men rarely show; his voice itself, like certain contralto voices in which the middle register has not been sufficiently cultivated, so that when they sing it sounds like an alternating duet between a young man and a woman, mounted, when he expressed these delicate sentiments, to its higher notes, took on an unexpected sweetness and seemed to embody choirs of betrothed maidens, of sisters, pouring out their fond feelings. But the bevy of young girls whom M. de Charlus in his horror of every kind of effeminacy would have been so distressed to learn that he gave the impression of sheltering thus within his voice did not confine themselves to the interpretation, the modulation of sentimental ditties. Often while M. de Charlus was talking one could hear their laughter, the shrill, fresh laughter of school-girls or coquettes twitting their companions with all the mischievousness of sharp tongues and quick wits.

He told us about a house that had belonged to his family, in which Marie-Antoinette had slept, with a park laid out by Le Nôtre, which now belonged to the Israels, the wealthy financiers, who had bought it. "Israel—at least that is the name these people go by, though it seems to me a generic, an ethnic term rather than a proper name. One cannot tell; possibly people of that sort do not have names, and are designated only by the collective title of the tribe to which they belong. It is of no importance! To have been the abode of the Guermantes and to belong to the Israels!!!" His voice rose. "It reminds me of a room in the Château of Blois where the caretaker who was showing me round said to me: 'This is where Mary Stuart used to say her prayers. I use it to keep my brooms in.' Naturally I wish to know no more of this house that has disgraced itself, any more than of my cousin Clara de Chimay who has left her husband. But I keep a photograph of the house, taken when it was still unspoiled, just as I keep one of the Princess before her large eyes had learned to gaze on anyone but my cousin. A photograph acquires something of the dignity which it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shows us things that no longer exist. I could give you a copy, since you are interested in that style of architecture," he said to my grandmother. At that moment, noticing that the embroidered handkerchief which he had in his pocket was exhibiting its coloured border, he thrust it sharply down out of sight with the scandalised air of a prudish but far from innocent lady concealing attractions which, by an excess of scrupulosity, she regards as indecent.

"Would you believe it?" he went on. "The first thing these people did was to destroy Le Nôtre's park, which is as bad as slashing a picture by Poussin. For that alone, these Israels ought to be in prison. It is true," he added with a smile, after a moment's silence, "that there are probably plenty of other reasons why they should be there! In any case, you can imagine the effect of an English garden with that architecture."

"But the house is in the same style as the Petit Trianon," said Mme de Villeparisis, "and Marie-Antoinette had an English garden laid out there."

"Which, after all, ruins Gabriel's façade," replied M. de Charlus. "Obviously, it would be an act of vandalism now to destroy the Hameau. But whatever may be the spirit of the age, I beg leave to doubt whether, in that respect, a whim of Mme Israels has the same justification as the memory of the Queen."

Meanwhile my grandmother had been making signs to me to go up to bed, in spite of the urgent appeals of Saint-Loup who, to my utter shame, had alluded in front of M. de Charlus to the depression which used often to come upon me at night before I went to sleep, and which his uncle must regard as betokening a sad want of virility. I lingered a few moments still, then went upstairs, and was greatly surprised when, a little later, having heard a knock at my bedroom door and asked who was there, I heard the voice of M. de Charlus saying dryly: "It is Charlus. May I come in, Monsieur? Monsieur," he continued in the same tone as soon as he had shut the door, "my nephew was saying just now that you were apt to be a little upset at night before going to sleep, and also that you were an admirer of Bergotte's books. As I had one here in my luggage which you probably do not know, I have brought it to you to while away these moments during which you are unhappy."

I thanked M. de Charlus warmly and told him that I had been afraid that what Saint-Loup had said to him about my distress at the approach of night would have made me appear in his eyes even more stupid than I was.

"Not at all," he answered in a gentler voice. "You have not, perhaps, any personal merit—I've no idea, so few people have! But for a time at least you have youth, and that is always an attraction. Besides, Monsieur, the greatest folly of all is to mock or to condemn in others what one does not happen to feel oneself. I love the night, and you tell me that you dread it. I love the scent of roses, and I have a friend whom it throws into a fever. Do you suppose that for that reason I consider him inferior to me? I try to understand everything and I take care to condemn nothing. In short, you must not be too sorry for yourself; I do not say that these moods of depression are not painful, I know how much one can suffer from things which others would not understand. But at least you have placed your affection wisely in your grandmother. You see a great deal of her. And besides, it is a legitimate affection, I mean one that is repaid. There are so many of which that cannot be said!"

He walked up and down the room, looking at one thing, picking up another. I had the impression that he had something to tell me, and could not find the right words to express it.



"I have another volume of Bergotte here. I will have it fetched for you," he went on, and rang the bell. Presently a page came. "Go and find me your head waiter. He is the only person here who is capable of performing an errand intelligently," said M. de Charlus stiffly. "Monsieur Aimé, sir?" asked the page. "I cannot tell you his name. Ah yes, I remember now, I did hear him called Aimé. Run along, I'm in a hurry." "He won't be a minute, sir, I saw him downstairs just now," said the page, anxious to appear efficient. A few minutes went by. The page returned. "Sir, M. Aimé has gone to bed. But I can take a message." "No, you must get him out of bed." "But I can't do that, sir; he doesn't sleep here." "Then you can leave us alone."

"But, Monsieur," I said when the page had gone, "you are too kind; one volume of Bergotte will be quite enough."

"That is just what I was thinking, after all." M. de Charlus continued to walk up and down the room. Several minutes passed in this way, then after a few moments' hesitation and several false starts, he swung sharply round and, in his earlier biting tone of voice, flung at me: "Good night, Monsieur!" and left the room.

After all the lofty sentiments which I had heard him express that evening, next day, which was the day of his departure, on the beach in the morning, as I was on my way down to bathe, when M. de Charlus came across to tell me that my grandmother was waiting for me to join her as soon as I left the water, I was greatly surprised to hear him say, pinching my neck as he spoke with a familiarity and a laugh that were frankly vulgar: "But he doesn't care a fig for his old grandmother, does he, eh? Little rascal!"

"What, Monsieur! I adore her!"

"Monsieur," he said stepping back a pace, and with a glacial air, "you are still young; you should profit by your youth to learn two things: first, to refrain from expressing sentiments that are too natural not to be taken for granted; and secondly not to rush into speech in reply to things that are said to you before you have penetrated their meaning. If you had taken this precaution a moment ago you would have saved yourself the appearance of speaking at cross-purposes like a deaf man, thereby adding a second absurdity to that of having anchors embroidered on your bathing-dress. I have lent you a book by Bergotte which I require. See that it is brought to me within the next hour by that head waiter with the absurd and inappropriate name, who, I suppose, is not in bed at this time of day. You make me realise that I was premature in speaking to you last night of the charms of youth. I should have done you a greater service had I pointed out to you its thoughtlessness, its inconsequence, and its want of comprehension. I hope, Monsieur, that this little douche will be no less salutary to you than your bathe. But don't let me keep you standing: you may catch cold. Good day, Monsieur."

No doubt he felt remorse for this speech, for some time later I received—in a morocco binding on the front of which was inlaid a panel of tooled leather representing in demi-relief a spray of forget-me-nots—the book which he had lent me, and which I had sent back to him, not by Aimé who was apparently off duty, but by the lift-boy.

M. de Charlus having gone, Robert and I were free at last to dine with Bloch. And I realised during this little party that the stories too readily admitted by our friend as funny were favourite stories of M. Bloch senior, and that the son's "really remarkable person" was always one of his father's friends whom he had so classified. There are a certain number of people whom we admire in our childhood, a father who is wittier than the rest of the family, a teacher who acquires credit in our eyes from the philosophy he reveals to us, a schoolfellow more advanced than we are (which was what Bloch had been to me) who despises the Musset of the *Espoir en Dieu* when we still admire it, and when we have reached Leconte or Claudel will be raving only about

At Saint-Blaise, at the Zuecca  
You were well, you were well pleased ...

to which he will add:

Padua is a place to adore  
Where very great doctors of law ...  
But I prefer the polenta ...  
Goes past in her cloak of velour  
La Toppatelle,

and of all the *Nuits* will remember only:

At Le Havre, facing the Atlantic,  
At Venice, in the Lido's gloom,  
Where on the grass above a tomb  
Comes to die the pale Adriatic.

So, whenever we confidently admire anyone, we collect from him and quote with admiration sayings vastly inferior to the sort which, left to our own judgment, we would sternly reject, just as the writer of a novel puts into it, on the pretext that they are true, "witticisms" and characters which in the living context are like a dead weight, mere padding. Saint-Simon's portraits, composed by himself evidently without any self-admiration, are admirable, whereas the strokes of wit of the clever people he knew which he cites as being delightful are frankly mediocre when they have not become meaningless. He would have scorned to invent what he reports as so acute or so colourful when said by Mme Cornuel or Louis XIV, a point which is to be remarked also in many other writers, and is capable of various interpretations, of which it is enough to note but one for the present: namely, that in the state of mind in which we "observe" we are a long way below the level to which we rise when we create.

There was, then, embedded in my friend Bloch, a father Bloch who lagged forty years behind his son and told preposterous stories at which he laughed as loudly, inside my friend's being, as did the real, visible, authentic Bloch senior, since to the laugh which the latter emitted, not without several times repeating the last word so that his audience might taste the full flavour of the story, was added the braying laugh with which the

son never failed, at table, to greet his father's anecdotes. Thus it came about that after saying the most intelligent things Bloch junior, manifesting the portion that he had inherited from his family, would tell us for the thirtieth time some of the gems which Bloch senior brought out only (together with his swallow-tail coat) on the solemn occasions on which Bloch junior brought someone to the house on whom it was worth while making an impression: one of his masters, a "chum" who had taken all the prizes, or, this evening, Saint-Loup and myself. For instance: "A military critic of great insight, who had brilliantly worked out, supporting them with infallible proofs, the reasons for which, in the Russo-Japanese war, the Japanese must inevitably be beaten and the Russians victorious," or else: "He is an eminent gentleman who passes for a great financier in political circles and for a great politician in financial circles." These stories were interchangeable with one about the Baron de Rothschild and one about Sir Rufus Isaacs, who were brought into the conversation in an equivocal manner which might let it be supposed that M. Bloch knew them personally.

I myself was taken in, and from the way in which M. Bloch spoke of Bergotte I assumed that he too was an old friend. In fact, all the famous people M. Bloch claimed to know he knew only "without actually knowing them," from having seen them at a distance in the theatre or in the street. He imagined, moreover, that his own appearance, his name, his personality were not unknown to them, and that when they caught sight of him they had often to repress a furtive inclination to greet him. People in society, because they know men of talent in the flesh, because they have them to dinner in their houses, do not on that account understand them any better. But when one has lived to some extent in society, the silliness of its inhabitants makes one too desirous to live, makes one suppose too high a standard of intelligence, in the obscure circles in which people know only "without actually knowing." I was to discover this when I introduced the topic of Bergotte.

M. Bloch was not alone in being a social success at home. My friend was even more so with his sisters, whom he continually twitted in hectoring tones, burying his face in his plate, and making them laugh until they cried. They had adopted their brother's language, and spoke it fluently, as if it had been obligatory and the only form of speech that intelligent people could use. When we arrived, the eldest sister said to one of the younger ones: "Go, tell our sage father and our venerable mother!" "Whelps," said Bloch, "I present to you the cavalier Saint-Loup, hurler of javelins, who is come for a few days from Doncières to the dwellings of polished stone, fruitful in horses." And, since he was as vulgar as he was literate, his speech ended as a rule in some pleasantry of a less Homeric kind: "Come, draw closer your pepla with the fair clasps. What's all this fandangle? Does your mother know you're out?" And the misses Bloch collapsed in a tempest of laughter. I told their brother how much pleasure he had given me by recommending me to read Bergotte, whose books I had loved.

M. Bloch senior, who knew Bergotte only by sight, and Bergotte's life only from what was common gossip, had a manner quite as indirect of making the acquaintance of his books, by the help of judgments that were by way of being literary. He lived in the world of approximations, where people salute in a void and criticise in error, a world where assurance, far from being tempered by ignorance and inaccuracy, is increased thereby. It is the propitious miracle of self-esteem that, since few of us can have brilliant connexions or profound attainments, those to whom they are denied still believe themselves to be the best endowed of men, because the optics of our social perspective make every grade of society seem the best to him who occupies it and who regards as less favoured than himself, ill-endowed, to be pitied, the greater men whom he names and calumniates without knowing them, judges and despises without understanding them. Even in cases where the multiplication of his modest personal advantages by self-esteem would not suffice to assure a man the share of happiness, superior to that accorded to others, which is essential to him, envy is always there to make up the balance. It is true that if envy finds expression in scornful phrases, we must translate "I have no wish to know him" by "I have no means of knowing him." That is the intellectual meaning. But the emotional meaning is indeed, "I have no wish to know him." The speaker knows that it is not true, but he does not, all the same, say it simply to deceive; he says it because it is what he feels, and that is sufficient to bridge the gulf, that is to say to make him happy.

Self-centredness thus enabling every human being to see the universe spread out in descending tiers beneath himself who is its lord, M. Bloch afforded himself the luxury of being a pitiless one when in the morning, as he drank his chocolate, seeing Bergotte's signature at the foot of an article in the newspaper which he had scarcely opened, he disdainfully granted him a hearing which was soon cut short, pronounced sentence upon him, and gave himself the comforting pleasure of repeating after every mouthful of the scalding brew: "That fellow Bergotte has become unreadable. My word, what a bore the brute can be. I really must stop my subscription. It's such a rigmarole—stodgy stuff!" And he helped himself to another slice of bread.

This illusory importance of M. Bloch senior did, however, extend some little way beyond the radius of his own perceptions. In the first place his children regarded him as a superior person. Children have always a tendency either to depreciate or to exalt their parents, and to a good son his father is always the best of fathers, quite apart from any objective reasons there may be for admiring him. Now, such reasons were not altogether lacking in the case of M. Bloch, who was an educated man, shrewd, affectionate towards his family. In his most intimate circle they were all the more proud of him because if, in "society," people are judged, in accordance with a standard scale which is incidentally absurd and a series of false but fixed rules, by comparison with the aggregate of all the other fashionable people, in the subdivisions of middle-class life on the other hand, dinner parties and family reunions turn upon certain people who are pronounced agreeable and amusing but who in "society" would not survive a second evening. Moreover in this social environment where the artificial values of the aristocracy do not exist, their place is taken by even more stupid distinctions. Thus it was that in his family circle, and even to a fairly remote degree of consanguinity, an

alleged similarity in his way of wearing his moustache and in the bridge of his nose led to M. Bloch's being called "the Duc d'Aumale's double." (In the world of club bell-hops, is not the one who wears his cap on one side and his tunic tightly buttoned so as to give himself the appearance, he imagines, of a foreign officer, also a personage of a sort to his colleagues?)

The resemblance was of the faintest, but it seemed almost to confer a title. Whenever he was mentioned, it was always: "Bloch? Which one? The Duc d'Aumale?" as people say "Princesse Murat? Which one? The Queen (of Naples)?" And together with certain other minor indications it combined to give him, in the eyes of the cousinhood, an acknowledged claim to distinction. Not going to the lengths of having a carriage of his own, M. Bloch used on special occasions to hire an open victoria with a pair of horses from the Company, and would drive through the Bois de Boulogne, reclining indolently, two fingers on his temple, two others under his chin, and if people who did not know him concluded that he was an "old humbug," they were convinced in the family that in point of elegance Uncle Solomon could have taught Gramont-Caderousse a thing or two. He was one of those people who when they die, because for years they have shared a table in a restaurant on the boulevard with its editor, are described in the social column of the *Radical* as "well known Paris figures." M. Bloch told Saint-Loup and me that Bergotte knew so well why he, M. Bloch, always cut him, that as soon as he caught sight of him, at the theatre or in the club, he avoided his eye. Saint-Loup blushed, for it occurred to him that this club could not be the Jockey, of which his father had been president. On the other hand it must be a fairly exclusive club, for M. Bloch had said that Bergotte would never have got into it if he had come up now. So it was not without the fear that he might be "underrating his adversary" that Saint-Loup asked whether the club in question were that of the Rue Royale, which was considered "degrading" by his own family, and to which he knew that certain Jews were admitted. "No," replied M. Bloch in a tone at once careless, proud and ashamed, "it is a small club, but far more agreeable: the Ganaches. We're very strict there, don't you know." "Isn't Sir Rufus Israel the president?" Bloch junior asked his father, so as to give him the opportunity for a glorious lie, unaware that the financier had not the same eminence in Saint-Loup's eyes as in his. The fact of the matter was that the Ganaches club boasted not Sir Rufus Israel but one of his staff. But as this man was on the best of terms with his employer, he had at his disposal a stock of the financier's cards, and would give one to M. Bloch whenever he wished to travel on a line of which Sir Rufus was a director, so that old Bloch was able to say: "I'm just going round to the Club to ask for a letter of introduction from Sir Rufus." And the card enabled him to dazzle the guards on the trains.

The misses Bloch were more interested in Bergotte and, reverting to him rather than pursue the subject of the Ganaches, the youngest asked her brother, in the most serious tone imaginable, for she believed that there existed, for the designation of men of talent, no other terms than those which he was in the habit of using:

"Is he a really amazing cove, this Bergotte? Is he in the category of the great johnnies, chaps like Villiers and Catulle?"

"I've met him several times at dress rehearsals," said M. Nissim Bernard. "He is an uncouth creature, a sort of Schlemihl."

There was nothing very serious in this allusion to Chamisso's story, but the epithet "Schlemihl" formed part of that dialect, half-German, half-Jewish, which delighted M. Bloch in the family circle, but struck him as vulgar and out of place in front of strangers. And so he cast a reproving glance at his uncle.

"He has talent," said Bloch.

"Ah!" said his sister gravely, as though to imply that in that case there was some excuse for me.

"All writers have talent," said M. Bloch scornfully.

"In fact it appears," went on his son, raising his fork and screwing up his eyes with an air of diabolical irony, "that he is going to put up for the Academy."

"Go on. He hasn't enough to show them," replied his father, who seemed not to have for the Academy the same contempt as his son and daughters. "He hasn't the necessary calibre."

"Besides, the Academy is a salon, and Bergotte has no polish," declared the uncle (from whom Mme Bloch had expectations), a mild and inoffensive person whose surname, Bernard, might perhaps by itself have quickened my grandfather's powers of diagnosis, but would have appeared too little in harmony with a face which looked as if it had been brought back from Darius's palace and restored by Mme Dieulafoy, had not his first name, Nissim, chosen by some collector desirous of giving a crowning touch of orientalism to this figure from Susa, set hovering above it the pinions of an androcephalous bull from Khorsabad. But M. Bloch never stopped insulting his uncle, either because he was inflamed by the unresisting good-humour of his butt, or because, the rent of the villa being paid by M. Nissim Bernard, the beneficiary wished to show that he retained his independence and above all scorned to seek by flattery to make sure of the rich inheritance to come.

"Of course, whenever there's a chance of saying something pompous and stupid, one can be quite certain that you won't miss it. You'd be the first to lick his boots if he were in the room!" shouted M. Bloch, while M. Nissim Bernard in sorrow lowered over his plate the ringleted beard of King Sargon. (My schoolfriend, since he had begun to grow a beard, which also was blue-black and crimped, looked very like his great-uncle.)

What most hurt the old man was being treated so rudely in front of his manservant. He murmured an unintelligible sentence of which all that could be made out was: "When the meschores are in the room." "Meschores," in the Bible, means "the servant of God." In the family circle the Blochs used the word to refer to the servants, and were always delighted by it, because their certainty of not being understood either by Christians or by the servants themselves enhanced in M. Nissim Bernard and M. Bloch their twofold distinction of being "masters" and at the same time "Jews." But this latter source of satisfaction became a

source of displeasure when there was "company." At such times M. Bloch, hearing his uncle say "meschore," felt that he was over-exposing his oriental side, just as a harlot who has invited some of her sisters to meet her respectable friends is annoyed if they allude to their profession or use objectionable words. Hence, far from being mollified by his uncle's plea, M. Bloch, beside himself with rage, could contain himself no longer. He let no opportunity pass of scarifying the wretched old man.

"What! Are you the son of the Marquis de Marsantes? Why, I knew him very well," said M. Nissim Bernard to Saint-Loup. I supposed that he meant the word "knew" in the sense in which Bloch's father had said that he knew Bergotte, namely by sight. But he went on: "Your father was a great friend of mine." Meanwhile, Bloch had turned very red, his father was looking intensely cross, and the misses Bloch were choking with suppressed laughter. The fact was that in M. Nissim Bernard the love of ostentation, which in M. Bloch and his children was held in check, had engendered the habit of perpetual lying. For instance, if he was staying in an hotel, M. Nissim Bernard, as M. Bloch equally might have done, would have his newspapers brought to him by his valet in the dining-room in the middle of lunch, when everybody was there, so that they should see that he travelled with a valet. But to the people with whom he made friends in the hotel the uncle used to say, what the nephew would never have said, that he was a senator. For all that he was certain that they would sooner or later discover that the title was usurped, he could not, at the critical moment, resist the temptation to assume it. M. Bloch suffered acutely from his uncle's lies and from all the embarrassments that they caused him. "Don't pay any attention to him, he's a terrible old yarn-spinner," he whispered to Saint-Loup, whose interest was whetted all the more, for he was curious to explore the psychology of liars. "A greater liar even than the Ithacan Odysseus, albeit Athene called him the greatest liar among mortals," his son completed the indictment. "Well, upon my word!" cried M. Nissim Bernard, "If I'd known that I was going to sit down to dinner with my old friend's son! Why, I have a photograph still of your father at home in Paris, and any number of letters from him. He used always to call me 'uncle,' nobody ever knew why. He was a charming man, sparkling. I remember so well a dinner I gave at Nice: there was Sardou, Labiche, Augier" ... "Molière, Racine, Corneille," M. Bloch added sarcastically, while his son completed the list of guests with "Plautus, Menander, Kalidasa." M. Nissim Bernard, cut to the quick, stopped short in his reminiscence, and, ascetically depriving himself of a great pleasure, remained silent until the end of dinner.

"Saint-Loup with helm of bronze," said Bloch, "have a piece more of this duck with thighs heavy with fat, over which the illustrious sacrificer of birds has poured numerous libations of red wine."

As a rule, after bringing out from his store for one of his son's distinguished fellow-students his anecdotes of Sir Rufus Israels and others, M. Bloch, feeling that he had succeeded in touching and melting his son's heart, would withdraw, in order not to "demean" himself in the eyes of a "schoolkid." If, however, there was an absolutely compelling reason, as for instance on the night when his son passed the *agrégation*, M. Bloch would add to the usual string of anecdotes the following ironical reflexion which he ordinarily reserved for his own personal friends and which the young Bloch was extremely proud to see produced for him: "The Government have acted unpardonably. They have forgotten to consult M. Coquelin! M. Coquelin has let it be known that he is displeased." (M. Bloch prided himself on being a reactionary, and contemptuous of theatrical people.)

But the misses Bloch and their brother blushed to the tips of their ears, so impressed were they when Bloch senior, to show that he could be regal to the last in his entertainment of his son's two "chums," gave the order for champagne to be served, and announced casually that, as a "treat" for us, he had taken three stalls for the performance which a company from the Opéra-Comique was giving that evening at the Casino. He was sorry that he had not been able to get a box. They had all been taken. In any case, he had often been in the boxes, and really one saw and heard better in the stalls. However, if the failing of his son, that is to say the failing which his son believed to be invisible to other people, was coarseness, the father's was avarice. And so it was in a decanter that we were served, under the name of champagne, with a light sparkling wine, while under that of orchestra stalls he had taken three in the pit, which cost half as much, miraculously persuaded by the divine intervention of his failing that neither at table nor in the theatre (where the boxes were all empty) would the difference be noticed. When M. Bloch had invited us to moisten our lips in the flat glasses which his son dignified with the style and title of "craters with deeply hollowed flanks," he showed us a picture to which he was so much attached that he always brought it with him to Balbec. He told us that it was a Rubens. Saint-Loup asked innocently if it was signed. M. Bloch replied, blushing, that he had had the signature cut off to make it fit the frame, but that it made no difference, as he had no intention of selling the picture. Then he hurriedly bade us good night, in order to bury himself in the *Journal Officiel*, back numbers of which littered the house and which, he informed us, he was obliged to read carefully on account of his "parliamentary position," as to the precise nature of which he gave us no enlightenment.

"I shall take a muffler," said Bloch, "for Zephyrus and Boreas are vying with each other over the fish-teeming sea, and should we but tarry a little after the show is over, we shall not be home before the first flush of Eos, the rosy-fingered. By the way," he asked Saint-Loup when we were outside (and I trembled, for I realised at once that it was of M. de Charlus that Bloch spoke in tones of sarcasm), "who was that splendid old card dressed in black that I saw you walking with the day before yesterday on the beach?"

"That was my uncle," replied Saint-Loup, somewhat ruffled.

Unfortunately, a "gaffe" was far from seeming to Bloch a thing to be avoided. He shook with laughter. "Heartiest congratulations. I ought to have guessed: he has a lot of style, and the most priceless dial of an old dotard of the highest lineage."

"You are absolutely mistaken: he's an extremely clever man," retorted Saint-Loup, now furious.

"I'm sorry about that; it makes him less complete. All the same, I should very much like to know him, for I flatter myself I could write some highly adequate pieces about old buffers like that. He's killing when you see him go by. But I should disregard the caricaturable aspect of his mug, which really is hardly worthy of an artist enamoured of the plastic beauty of phrases, although (you'll forgive me) it had me doubled up for quite a while with joyous laughter, and I should bring out the aristocratic side of your uncle, who on the whole makes a tip-top impression, and when one has finished laughing, does strike one with his considerable sense of style. But," he went on, addressing me this time, "there is something in a completely different connexion about which I have been meaning to question you, and every time we are together, some god, some blessed denizen of Olympus, makes me completely forget to ask for a piece of information which might before now have been and is sure some day to be of the greatest use to me. Tell me, who was the lovely lady I saw you with in the Zoological Gardens accompanied by a gentleman whom I seem to know by sight and a girl with long hair?"

It had been quite plain to me at the time that Mme Swann did not remember Bloch's name, since she had referred to him by another, and had described my friend as being on the staff of some Ministry, as to which I had never since then thought of finding out whether he had joined it. But how came it that Bloch, who, according to what she then told me, had got himself introduced to her, was ignorant of her name? I was so astonished that I paused for a moment before answering.

"Whoever she is," he went on, "heartily congratulations. You can't have been bored with her. I picked her up a few days before that on the Zone railway, where, speaking of zones, she was so kind as to undo hers for the benefit of your humble servant. I've never had such a time in my life, and we were just going to make arrangements to meet again when somebody she knew had the bad taste to get in at the last station but one."

My continued silence did not appear to please Bloch. "I was hoping," he said, "thanks to you, to learn her address, so as to go there several times a week to taste in her arms the delights of Eros, dear to the gods; but I do not insist since you seem pledged to discretion with respect to a professional who gave herself to me three times running, and in the most rarefied manner, between Paris and the Point-du-Jour. I'm bound to see her again some night."

I called upon Bloch after his dinner; he returned my call, but I was out and he was seen asking for me by Françoise, who, as it happened, although he had visited us at Combray, had never set eyes on him before. So that she knew only that one of "the gentlemen" I knew had looked in to see me, she did not know "with what effect," dressed in a nondescript way which had not made any particular impression upon her. Now though I knew quite well that certain of Françoise's social ideas must for ever remain impenetrable to me, based as they were, perhaps, partly upon confusions between words and names which she had once and for all time mistaken for one another, I could not refrain, for all that I had long since abandoned the quest for enlightenment in such cases, from seeking—though in vain—to discover what could be the immense significance that the name of Bloch had for Françoise. For no sooner had I mentioned to her that the young man whom she had seen was M. Bloch than she took several paces backwards so great were her stupor and disappointment. "What! Is that M. Bloch?" she cried, thunder-struck, as if so portentous a personage ought to have been endowed with an appearance which "made you realise" as soon as you saw him that you were in the presence of one of the great ones of the earth; and, like someone who has discovered that an historical character is not up to the level of his reputation, she repeated in an awed tone of voice, in which I could detect the latent seeds of a universal scepticism: "So that's M. Bloch! Well, really, you would never think it, to look at him." She seemed also to bear me a grudge, as if I had always "overdone" the praise of Bloch to her. At the same time she was kind enough to add: "Well, he may be M. Bloch, and all that, but at least Monsieur can say he's every bit as good."

She had presently, with respect to Saint-Loup, whom she worshipped, a disillusionment of a different kind and of shorter duration: she discovered that he was a Republican. For although, when speaking for instance of the Queen of Portugal, she would say with that disrespect which is, among the people, the supreme form of respect: "Amélie, Philippe's sister," Françoise was a Royalist. But above all a marquis, a marquis who had dazzled her at first sight, and who was for the Republic, seemed no longer real. And it aroused in her the same ill-humour as if I had given her a box which she had believed to be made of gold, and had thanked me for it effusively, and then a jeweller had revealed to her that it was only plated. She at once withdrew her esteem from Saint-Loup, but soon afterwards restored it to him, having reflected that he could not, being the Marquis de Saint-Loup, be a Republican, that he was just pretending, out of self-interest, for with the Government we had it might be a great advantage to him. From that moment her coldness towards him and her resentment towards me ceased. And when she spoke of Saint-Loup she said: "He's a hypocrite," with a broad and kindly smile which made it dear that she "considered" him again just as much as when she first knew him, and that she had forgiven him.

In fact, Saint-Loup was obviously sincere and disinterested, and it was this intense moral purity which, unable to find entire satisfaction in a selfish emotion such as love, and moreover not finding in him the impossibility (which existed in me, for instance) of gaining spiritual nourishment elsewhere than in oneself, rendered him truly capable (to the extent that I was incapable) of friendship.

Françoise was no less mistaken about Saint-Loup when she said that he "just pretended" not to look down on the common people: you had only to see him when he was in a temper with his groom. It had indeed sometimes happened that Robert would scold his groom with a certain amount of brutality, which was proof in him of a sense not so much of the difference as of the equality between the classes. "But," he said when I reproached him for having treated the man rather harshly, "why should I go out of my way to speak politely to

him? Isn't he my equal? Isn't he just as near to me as any of my uncles and cousins? You seem to think I ought to treat him with respect, as an inferior. You talk like an aristocrat!" he added scornfully.

And indeed if there was a class to which he showed himself prejudiced and hostile, it was the aristocracy, so much so that he found it as hard to believe in the superior qualities of a man of the world as he found it easy to believe in those of a man of the people. When I mentioned the Princesse de Luxembourg, whom I had met with his aunt:

"An old trout," was his comment. "Like all that lot. She's a sort of cousin of mine, by the way."

Having a strong prejudice against the people who frequented it, he went rarely into "society," and the contemptuous or hostile attitude which he adopted towards it served to intensify, among all his closest relatives, the painful impression made by his liaison with a woman of the theatre, a liaison which, they declared, would be his ruin, blaming it specially for having bred in him that spirit of denigration, that rebelliousness, for having "led him astray," until it was only a matter of time before he dropped out altogether. And so, many easy-going men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain were without compunction when they spoke of Robert's mistress. "Whores do their job," they would say, "they're as good as anybody else. But not that one! We can't forgive her. She has done too much harm to a fellow we're fond of." Of course, he was not the first to be thus ensnared. But the others amused themselves like men of the world, continued to think like men of the world about politics and everything else. Whereas Saint-Loup's family found him "soured." They failed to realise that for many young men of fashion who would otherwise remain uncultivated mentally, rough in their friendships, without gentleness or taste, it is very often their mistresses who are their real masters, and liaisons of this sort the only school of ethics in which they are initiated into a superior culture, where they learn the value of disinterested relations. Even among the lower orders (who in point of coarseness so often remind us of high society) the woman, more sensitive, more fastidious, more leisured, is driven by curiosity to adopt certain refinements, respects certain beauties of sentiment and of art which, though she may not understand them, she nevertheless places above what has seemed most desirable to the man, above money or position. Now whether it concerns the mistress of a young blood (such as Saint-Loup) or a young workman (electricians, for instance, must now be included in our truest order of Chivalry) her lover has too much admiration and respect for her not to extend them also to what she herself respects and admires; and for him the scale of values is thereby overturned. Her very sex makes her weak; she suffers from nervous troubles, inexplicable things which in a man, or even in another woman—an aunt or cousin of his—would bring a smile to the lips of this robust young man. But he cannot bear to see the woman he loves suffer. The young nobleman who, like Saint-Loup, has a mistress acquires the habit, when he takes her out to dine, of carrying in his pocket the valerian drops which she may need, of ordering the waiter, firmly and with no hint of sarcasm, to see that he shuts the doors quietly and does not put any damp moss on the table, so as to spare his companion those little ailments which he himself has never felt, which compose for him an occult world in whose reality she has taught him to believe, ailments for which he now feels sympathy without needing to understand them, for which he will still feel sympathy when women other than she are the sufferers. Saint-Loup's mistress—as the first monks of the Middle Ages taught Christendom—had taught him to be kind to animals, for which she had a passion, never going anywhere without her dog, her canaries, her parrots; Saint-Loup looked after them with motherly devotion and regarded those who were unkind to animals as brutes. At the same time an actress, or so-called actress, like the woman who was living with him—whether she was intelligent or not, and as to that I had no knowledge—by making him find society women boring, and look upon having to go out to a party as a painful duty, had saved him from snobbishness and cured him of frivolity. Thanks to her, social relations filled a smaller place in the life of her young lover, but whereas, if he had been simply a man about town, vanity or self-interest would have dictated his choice of friends as rudeness would have characterised his treatment of them, his mistress had taught him to bring nobility and refinement into his friendships. With her feminine instinct, with a keener appreciation of certain qualities of sensibility in men which her lover might perhaps, without her guidance, have misunderstood and mocked, she had always been quick to distinguish from among the rest of Saint-Loup's friends the one who had a real affection for him, and to make that one her favourite. She knew how to persuade him to feel grateful to that friend, to show his gratitude, to notice what things gave his friend pleasure and what pain. And presently Saint-Loup, without any more need for her to prompt him, began to think of these things by himself, and at Balbec, where she was not with him, for me whom she had never seen, whom he had perhaps not yet so much as mentioned in his letters to her, of his own accord would pull up the window of a carriage in which I was sitting, take out of the room the flowers that made me feel unwell, and when he had to say good-bye to several people at once would contrive to do so before it was actually time for him to go, so as to be left alone and last with me, to make that distinction between them and me, to treat me differently from the rest. His mistress had opened his mind to the invisible, had brought an element of seriousness into his life, of delicacy into his heart, but all this escaped his sorrowing family who repeated: "That creature will be the death of him, and meanwhile she's doing what she can to disgrace him."

It is true that he had already drawn from her all the good that she was capable of doing him; and that she now caused him only incessant suffering, for she had taken an intense dislike to him and tormented him in every possible way. She had begun, one fine day, to regard him as stupid and absurd because the friends that she had among the younger writers and actors had assured her that he was, and she duly repeated what they had said with that passion, that lack of reserve which we show whenever we receive from without, and adopt as our own, opinions or customs of which we previously knew nothing. She readily professed, like her actor friends, that between Saint-Loup and herself there was an unbridgeable gulf, because they were of a different breed, because she was an intellectual and he, whatever he might claim, by birth an enemy of the intellect. This view of him seemed to her profound, and she sought confirmation of it in the most insignificant words, the most trivial actions of her lover. But when the same friends had further convinced her that she was destroying the great promise she had shown in company so ill-suited to her, that her lover's influence would finally rub off on her, that by living with him she was ruining her future as an artist, to her contempt for Saint-Loup was added the sort of hatred that she would have felt for him if he had insisted upon inoculating her with a deadly germ. She saw him as seldom as possible, at the same time postponing a definite rupture, which seemed to me a highly improbable event. Saint-Loup made such sacrifices for her that unless she was ravishingly beautiful (but he had always refused to show me her photograph, saying: "For one thing, she's not a beauty, and besides she always takes badly. They're only some snapshots that I took myself with my Kodak; they would give you a false impression of her") it seemed unlikely that she would find another man prepared to do the same. I never reflected that a fancy to make a name for oneself even when one has no talent, that the admiration, merely the privately expressed admiration, of people by whom one is impressed, can (although it may not perhaps have been the case with Saint-Loup's mistress), even for a little prostitute, be motives more determining than the pleasure of making money. Without quite understanding what was going on in his mistress's mind, Saint-Loup did not believe her to be completely sincere either in her unfair reproaches or in her promises of undying love, but nevertheless at certain moments had the feeling that she would break with him whenever she could, and accordingly, impelled no doubt by an instinctive desire to preserve his love that was perhaps more clear-sighted than he was himself, and incidentally bringing into play a practical capacity for business which was compatible in him with the loftiest and blindest impulses of the heart, had refused to settle any capital on her, had borrowed an enormous sum so that she should want nothing, but made it over to her only from day to day. And no doubt, assuming that she really did think of leaving him, she was calmly waiting until she had "feathered her nest," a process which, with the money given her by Saint-Loup, would not perhaps take very long, but would all the same be an extra lease of time to prolong the happiness of my new friend—or his misery.

This dramatic period of their liaison—which had now reached its most acute, its cruellest state for Saint-Loup, for she had forbidden him to remain in Paris, where his presence exasperated her, and had forced him to spend his leave at Balbec, within easy reach of his regiment—had begun one evening at the house of one of his aunts, on whom he had prevailed to allow his mistress to come there, before a large party, to recite some fragments of a symbolist play in which she had once appeared in an avant-garde theatre, and for which she had brought him to share the admiration that she herself professed.

But when she appeared in the room, with a large lily in her hand, and wearing a costume copied from the *Ancilla Domini* which she had persuaded Saint-Loup was an absolute "vision of beauty," her entrance had been greeted, in that assemblage of clubmen and duchesses, with smiles which the monotonous tone of her singing, the oddity of certain words and their frequent repetition, had changed into fits of giggles, stifled at first but presently so uncontrollable that the wretched reciter had been unable to go on. Next day Saint-Loup's aunt had been universally censured for having allowed so grotesque an actress to appear in her drawing-room. A well-known duke made no bones about telling her that she had only herself to blame if she found herself criticised. "Damn it all, people really don't come to see turns like that! If the woman had talent, even; but she has none and never will have any. 'Pon my soul, Paris is not so stupid as people make out. Society does not consist exclusively of imbeciles. This little lady evidently believed that she was going to take Paris by surprise. But Paris is not so easily surprised as all that, and there are still some things that they can't make us swallow."

As for the actress, she left the house with Saint-Loup, exclaiming: "What do you mean by letting me in for those old hens, those uneducated bitches, those oafs? I don't mind telling you, there wasn't a man in the room who hadn't leered at me or tried to paw me, and it was because I wouldn't look at them that they were out to get their revenge."

Words which had changed Robert's antipathy for society people into a horror that was altogether more profound and distressing, and was provoked in him most of all by those who least deserved it, devoted kinsmen who, on behalf of the family, had sought to persuade his mistress to break with him, a move which she represented to him as inspired by their desire for her. Robert, although he had at once ceased to see them, used to imagine when he was separated from his mistress as he was now, that they or others like them were profiting by his absence to return to the charge and had possibly enjoyed her favours. And when he spoke of the lechers who betrayed their friends, who sought to corrupt women, tried to make them come to houses of assignation, his whole face radiated suffering and hatred.

"I'd kill them with less compunction than I'd kill a dog, which is at least a decent, honest and faithful beast. They're the ones who deserve the guillotine if you like, far more than poor wretches who've been led into crime by poverty and by the cruelty of the rich."

He spent the greater part of his time sending letters and telegrams to his mistress. Every time that, while still preventing him from returning to Paris, she found an excuse to quarrel with him by post, I read the news at



once on his tormented face. Since she never told him in what way he was at fault, he suspected that she did not know herself, and had simply had enough of him; but he nevertheless longed for an explanation and would write to her: "Tell me what I've done wrong. I'm quite ready to acknowledge my faults," the grief that overpowered him having the effect of persuading him that he had behaved badly.

But she kept him waiting indefinitely for answers which, when they came, were utterly meaningless. And so it was almost always with a furrowed brow and often empty-handed that I would see Saint-Loup returning from the post office, where, alone in all the hotel, he and Françoise went to fetch or to hand in letters, he from a lover's impatience, she with a servant's mistrust of others. (His telegrams obliged him to make a much longer journey.)

When, some days after our dinner with the Blochs, my grandmother told me with a joyful air that Saint-Loup had just asked her whether she would like him to take a photograph of her before he left Balbec, and when I saw that she had put on her nicest dress for the purpose and was hesitating between various hats, I felt a little annoyed at this childishness, which surprised me on her part. I even wondered whether I had not been mistaken in my grandmother, whether I did not put her on too lofty a pedestal, whether she was as unconcerned about her person as I had always supposed, whether she was entirely innocent of the weakness which I had always thought most alien to her, namely vanity.

Unfortunately, the displeasure that was aroused in me by the prospect of this photographic session, and more particularly by the delight with which my grandmother appeared to be looking forward to it, was sufficiently apparent for Françoise to notice it and to do her best, unintentionally, to increase it by making me a sentimental, gushing speech by which I refused to appear moved.

"Oh, Monsieur, my poor Madame will be so pleased at having her likeness taken. She's going to wear the hat that her old Françoise has trimmed for her: you must let her."

I persuaded myself that it was not cruel of me to mock Françoise's sensibility, by reminding myself that my mother and grandmother, my models in all things, often did the same. But my grandmother, noticing that I seemed put out, said that if her sitting for her photograph offended me in any way she would give up the idea. I would not hear of it. I assured her that I saw no harm in it, and let her adorn herself, but, thinking to show how shrewd and forceful I was, added a few sarcastic and wounding words calculated to neutralise the pleasure which she seemed to find in being photographed, with the result that, if I was obliged to see my grandmother's magnificent hat, I succeeded at least in driving from her face that joyful expression which ought to have made me happy. Alas, it too often happens, while the people we love best are still alive, that such expressions appear to us as the exasperating manifestation of some petty whim rather than as the precious form of the happiness which we should dearly like to procure for them. My ill-humour arose more particularly from the fact that, during that week, my grandmother had appeared to be avoiding me, and I had not been able to have her to myself for a moment, either by night or day. When I came back in the afternoon to be alone with her for a little I was told that she was not in the hotel; or else she would shut herself up with Françoise for endless confabulations which I was not permitted to interrupt. And when, after being out all evening with Saint-Loup, I had been thinking on the way home of the moment at which I should be able to go to my grandmother and embrace her, I waited in vain for her to give the three little knocks on the party wall which would tell me to go in and say good night to her. At length I would go to bed, a little resentful of her for depriving me, with an indifference so new and strange in her, of a joy on which I had counted so much, and I would lie there for a while, my heart throbbing as in my childhood, listening to the wall which remained silent, until I cried myself to sleep.

That day, as for some days past, Saint-Loup had been obliged to go to Doncières, where, until he returned there for good, he would be on duty now until late every afternoon. I was sorry that he was not at Balbec. I had seen some young women, who at a distance had seemed to me lovely, alighting from carriages and entering either the ballroom of the Casino or the ice-cream shop. I was going through one of those phases of youth, devoid of any particular love, as it were in abeyance, in which at all times and in all places—as a lover the woman by whose charms he is smitten—we desire, we seek, we see Beauty. Let but a single flash of reality—the glimpse of a woman from afar or from behind—enable us to project the image of Beauty before our eyes, and we imagine that we have recognised it, our hearts beat, and we will always remain half-persuaded that it was She, provided that the woman has vanished: it is only if we manage to overtake her that we realise our mistake.

Moreover, as I was becoming more and more unwell, I was inclined to overrate the simplest pleasures because of the very difficulty of attaining them. I seemed to see charming women all round me, because I was too tired, if it was on the beach, too shy if it was in the Casino or at a pastry-cook's, to go anywhere near them. And yet, if I was soon to die, I should have liked to know beforehand what the prettiest girls that life had to offer looked like at close quarters, in reality, even if it should be another than myself or no one at all who was to take advantage of that offer (I did not, in fact, realise that a desire for possession underlay my curiosity). I should have had the courage to enter the ballroom if Saint-Loup had been with me. Left by myself, I was simply hanging about in front of the Grand Hotel until it was time for me to join my grandmother, when, still almost at the far end of the esplanade, along which they projected a striking patch of colour, I saw five or six young girls as different in appearance and manner from all the people one was accustomed to see at Balbec as would have been a flock of gulls arriving from God knows where and performing with measured tread upon the sands—the dawdlers flapping their wings to catch up with the rest—a parade the purpose of

which seems as obscure to the human bathers whom they do not appear to see as it is clearly determined in their own birdish minds.

One of these unknown girls was pushing a bicycle in front of her; two others carried golf-clubs; and their attire generally was in striking contrast to that of the other girls at Balbec, some of whom, it was true, went in for sports, but without adopting a special outfit.

It was the hour at which ladies and gentlemen came out every day for a stroll along the front, exposed to the merciless fire of the lorgnette fastened upon them, as if they had each borne some disfigurement which she felt it her duty to inspect in its minutest details, by the senior judge's wife, proudly seated there with her back to the band-stand, in the middle of that dread line of chairs on which presently they too, actors turned critics, would come and establish themselves, to scrutinise in their turn the passing crowds. All these people who paced up and down the esplanade, lurching as heavily as if it had been the deck of a ship (for they could not lift a leg without at the same time waving their arms, turning their eyes, squaring their shoulders, compensating by a balancing movement on one side for the movement they had just made on the other, and puffing out their faces), pretending not to see, so as to let it be thought that they were not interested in them, but covertly eyeing, for fear of running into them, the people who were walking beside or coming towards them, did in fact bump into them, became entangled with them, because each was mutually the object of the same secret attention veiled beneath the same apparent disdain—love, and consequently fear, of the crowd being one of the most powerful motives in all human beings, whether they seek to please other people or to impress them, or to show that they despise them; and in the case of the solitary, even if his seclusion is absolute and lifelong it is often based on a deranged love of the crowd which so far overrides every other feeling that, unable to win the admiration of his hall-porter, of the passers-by, of the cabman he hails, he prefers not to be seen by them at all, and with that object abandons every activity that would oblige him to go out of doors.

In the midst of all these people, some of whom were pursuing a train of thought, but then betrayed its instability by a fitfulness of gesture, an aberrancy of gaze as inharmonious as the circumspect titubation of their neighbours, the girls whom I had noticed, with the control of gesture that comes from the perfect suppleness of one's own body and a sincere contempt for the rest of humanity, were advancing straight ahead, without hesitation or stiffness, performing exactly the movements that they wished to perform, each of their limbs completely independent of the others, the rest of the body preserving that immobility which is so noticeable in good waltzers. They were now quite near me. Although each was of a type absolutely different from the others, they all had beauty; but to tell the truth I had seen them for so short a time, and without venturing to look hard at them, that I had not yet individualised any of them. Except for one, whose straight nose and dark complexion singled her out from the rest, like the Arabian king in a Renaissance picture of the Epiphany, they were known to me only by a pair of hard, obstinate and mocking eyes, for instance, or by cheeks whose pinkness had a coppery tint reminiscent of geraniums; and even these features I had not yet indissolubly attached to any one of these girls rather than to another; and when (according to the order in which the group met the eye, marvellous because the most different aspects were juxtaposed, because all the colour scales were combined in it, but confused as a piece of music in which I was unable to isolate and identify at the moment of their passage the successive phrases, no sooner distinguished than forgotten) I saw a pallid oval, black eyes, green eyes, emerge, I did not know if these were the same that had already charmed me a moment ago, I could not relate them to any one girl whom I had set apart from the rest and identified. And this want, in my vision, of the demarcations which I should presently establish between them permeated the group with a sort of shimmering harmony, the continuous transmutation of a fluid, collective and mobile beauty.

It was not perhaps mere chance in life that, in forming this group of friends, had chosen them all so beautiful; perhaps these girls (whose demeanour was enough to reveal their bold, hard and frivolous natures), extremely aware of everything that was ludicrous or ugly, incapable of yielding to an intellectual or moral attraction, had naturally felt a certain repulsion for all those among the companions of their own age in whom a pensive or sensitive disposition was betrayed by shyness, awkwardness, constraint, by what they would regard as antipathetic, and from such had held aloof; while attaching themselves, conversely, to others to whom they were drawn by a certain blend of grace, suppleness and physical elegance, the only form in which they were able to picture a straightforward and attractive character and the promise of pleasant hours in one another's company. Perhaps, too, the class to which they belonged, a class which I should not have found it easy to define, was at that point in its evolution when, thanks either to its growing wealth and leisure, or to new sporting habits, now prevalent even among certain elements of the working class, and a physical culture to which had not yet been added the culture of the mind, a social group comparable to the smooth and prolific schools of sculpture which have not yet gone in for tortured expression, produces naturally, and in abundance, fine bodies, fine legs, fine hips, wholesome, serene faces, with an air of agility and guile. And were they not noble and calm models of human beauty that I beheld there, outlined against the sea, like statues exposed to the sunlight on a Grecian shore?

Just as if, within their little band, which progressed along the esplanade like a luminous comet, they had decided that the surrounding crowd was composed of beings of another race not even whose sufferings could awaken in them any sense of fellowship, they appeared not to see them, forced those who had stopped to talk to step aside, as though from the path of a machine which had been set going by itself and which could not be expected to avoid pedestrians; and if some terrified or furious old gentleman whose existence they did not even acknowledge and whose contact they spurned took precipitate and ludicrous flight, they merely looked at

one another and laughed. They had, for whatever did not form part of their group, no affectation of contempt; their genuine contempt was sufficient. But they could not set eyes on an obstacle without amusing themselves by clearing it, either in a running jump or with both feet together, because they were all brimming over with the exuberance that youth so urgently needs to expend that even when it is unhappy or unwell, obedient rather to the necessities of age than to the mood of the day, it can never let pass an opportunity to jump or to slide without indulging in it conscientiously, interrupting and interspersing even the slowest walk—as Chopin his most melancholy phrase—with graceful deviations in which caprice is blended with virtuosity. The wife of an elderly banker, after hesitating between various possible exposures for her husband, had settled him in a deck-chair facing the esplanade, sheltered from wind and sun by the bandstand. Having seen him comfortably installed there, she had gone to buy a newspaper which she would read aloud to him by way of diversion, one of her little absences which she never prolonged for more than five minutes, which seemed to her quite long enough but which she repeated at fairly frequent intervals so that this old husband on whom she lavished an attention that she took care to conceal should have the impression that he was still quite alive and like other people and was in no need of protection. The platform of the band-stand provided, above his head, a natural and tempting springboard across which, without a moment's hesitation, the eldest of the little band began to run; she jumped over the terrified old man, whose yachting cap was brushed by her nimble feet, to the great delight of the other girls, especially of a pair of green eyes in a doll-like face, which expressed, for that bold act, an admiration and a merriment in which I seemed to discern a trace of shyness, a shamefaced and blustering shyness which did not exist in the others. "Oh, the poor old boy, I feel sorry for him; he looks half dead," said a girl in a rasping voice, with more sarcasm than sympathy. They walked on a little way, then stopped for a moment in the middle of the road, oblivious of the fact that they were impeding the passage of other people, in an agglomerate that was at once irregular in shape, compact, weird and shrill, like an assembly of birds before taking flight; then they resumed their leisurely stroll along the esplanade, against the background of the sea.

By this time their charming features had ceased to be indistinct and jumbled. I had dealt them like cards into so many heaps to compose (failing their names, of which I was still ignorant): the tall one who had jumped over the old banker; the little one silhouetted against the horizon of sea with her plump and rosy cheeks and green eyes; the one with the straight nose and dark complexion who stood out among the rest; another, with a face as white as an egg in which a tiny nose described an arc of a circle like a chicken's beak—a face such as one sometimes sees in the very young; yet another, also tall, wearing a hooded cape (which gave her so shabby an appearance and so contradicted the elegance of the figure beneath that the explanation which suggested itself was that this girl must have parents of high position who valued their self-esteem so far above the visitors to Balbec and the sartorial elegance of their own children that it was a matter of the utmost indifference to them that their daughter should stroll on the front dressed in a way which humbler people would have considered too modest); a girl with brilliant, laughing eyes and plump, matt cheeks, a black polo-cap crammed on her head, who was pushing a bicycle with such an uninhibited swing of the hips, and using slang terms so typical of the gutter and shouting so loudly when I passed her (although among her expressions I caught that tiresome phrase "living one's own life") that, abandoning the hypothesis which her friend's hooded cape had prompted me to formulate, I concluded instead that all these girls belonged to the population which frequents the velodromes, and must be the very juvenile mistresses of racing cyclists. In any event, none of my suppositions embraced the possibility of their being virtuous. At first sight—in the way in which they looked at one another and laughed, in the insistent stare of the one with the matt complexion—I had grasped that they were not. Besides, my grandmother had always watched over me with a delicacy too tremulous for me not to believe that the sum total of the things one ought not to do is indivisible and that girls who are lacking in respect for their elders would not suddenly be stopped short by scruples at the prospect of pleasures more tempting than that of jumping over an octogenarian.

Though they were now separately identifiable, still the interplay of their eyes, animated with self-assurance and the spirit of comradeship and lit up from one moment to the next either by the interest or the insolent indifference which shone from each of them according to whether her glance was directed at her friends or at passers-by, together with the consciousness of knowing one another intimately enough always to go about together in an exclusive "gang," established between their independent and separate bodies, as they slowly advanced, an invisible but harmonious bond, like a single warm shadow, a single atmosphere, making of them a whole as homogeneous in its parts as it was different from the crowd through which their procession gradually wound.

For an instant, as I passed the dark one with the plump cheeks who was wheeling a bicycle, I caught her smiling, sidelong glance, aimed from the centre of that inhuman world which enclosed the life of this little tribe, an inaccessible, unknown world wherein the idea of what I was could certainly never penetrate or find a place. Wholly occupied with what her companions were saying, had she seen me—this young girl in the polo-cap pulled down very low over her forehead—at the moment in which the dark ray emanating from her eyes had fallen on me? If she had seen me, what could I have represented to her? From the depths of what universe did she discern me? It would have been as difficult for me to say as, when certain distinguishing features in a neighbouring planet are made visible thanks to the telescope, it is to conclude therefrom that human beings inhabit it, and that they can see us, and to guess what ideas the sight of us can have aroused in their minds.

If we thought that the eyes of such a girl were merely two glittering sequins of mica, we should not be athirst to know her and to unite her life to ours. But we sense that what shines in those reflecting discs is not due solely to their material composition; that it is the dark shadows, unknown to us, of the ideas that that

person cherishes about the people and places she knows—the turf of racecourses, the sand of cycling tracks over which, pedalling on past fields and woods, she would have drawn me after her, that little peri, more seductive to me than she of the Persian paradise—the shadows, too, of the home to which she will presently return, of the plans that she is forming or that others have formed for her; and above all that it is she, with her desires, her sympathies, her revulsions, her obscure and incessant will. I knew that I should never possess this young cyclist if I did not possess also what was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire; a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be fulfilled, but an exhilarating one because, what had hitherto been my life having ceased of a sudden to be my whole life, being no more now than a small part of the space stretching out before me which I was burning to cover and which was composed of the lives of these girls, it offered me that prolongation, that possible multiplication of oneself, which is happiness. And no doubt the fact that we had, these girls and I, not one habit—as we had not one idea—in common must make it more difficult for me to make friends with them and to win their regard. But perhaps, also, it was thanks to those differences, to my consciousness that not a single element that I knew or possessed entered into the composition of the nature and actions of these girls, that satiety had been succeeded in me by a thirst—akin to that with which a parched land burns—for a life which my soul, because it had never until now received one drop of it, would absorb all the more greedily, in long draughts, with a more perfect imbibition.

I had looked so closely at the dark cyclist with the bright eyes that she seemed to notice my attention, and said to the tallest of the girls something that I could not hear but that made her laugh. Truth to tell, this dark-haired one was not the one who attracted me most, simply because she was dark and because (since the day on which, from the little path by Tansonville, I had seen Gilberte) a girl with reddish hair and a golden skin had remained for me the inaccessible ideal. But had I not loved Gilberte herself principally because she had appeared to me haloed with that aureole of being the friend of Bergotte, of going to look at cathedrals with him? And in the same way could I not rejoice at having seen this dark girl look at me (which made me hope that it would be easier for me to get to know her first), for she would introduce me to the pitiless one who had jumped over the old man's head, to the cruel one who had said "I feel sorry for the poor old boy," to all these girls in turn of whom she enjoyed the prestige of being the inseparable companion? And yet the supposition that I might some day be the friend of one or other of these girls, that these eyes, whose incomprehensible gaze struck me from time to time and played unwillingly upon me like an effect of sunlight on a wall, might ever, by some miraculous alchemy, allow the idea of my existence, some affection for my person, to interpenetrate their ineffable particles, that I myself might some day take my place among them in the evolution of their course by the sea's edge—that supposition appeared to me to contain within it a contradiction as insoluble as if, standing before some Attic frieze or a fresco representing a procession, I had believed it possible for me, the spectator, to take my place, beloved of them, among the divine participants.

Was, then, the happiness of knowing these girls unattainable? Certainly it would not have been the first of its kind that I had renounced. I had only to recall the numberless strangers whom, even at Balbec, the carriage bowling away from them at full speed had forced me for ever to abandon. And indeed the pleasure I derived from the little band, as noble as if it had been composed of Hellenic virgins, arose from the fact that it had something of the fleetingness of the passing figures on the road. This evanescence of persons who are not known to us, who force us to cast off from our habitual life in which the women whose society we frequent have all, in course of time, laid bare their blemishes, urges us into that state of pursuit in which there is no longer anything to stem the tide of imagination. To strip our pleasures of imagination is to reduce them to their own dimensions, that is to say to nothing. Offered me by one of those procuresses whose good offices, as has been seen, I by no means always scorned, withdrawn from the element which gave them so many nuances, such impreciseness, these girls would have enchanted me less. We need imagination, awakened by the uncertainty of being unable to attain its object, to create a goal which hides the other goal from us, and by substituting for sensual pleasures the idea of penetrating another life, prevents us from recognising that pleasure, from tasting its true savour, from restricting it to its own range. We need, between us and the fish which, if we saw it for the first time cooked and served on a table, would not appear worth the endless shifts and wiles required to catch it, the intervention, during our afternoons with the rod, of the rippling eddy to whose surface come flashing, without our quite knowing what we intend to do with them, the bright gleam of flesh, the hint of a form, in the fluidity of a transparent and mobile azure.

These girls benefited also by that alteration of social proportions characteristic of seaside life. All the advantages which, in our ordinary environment, extend and enhance us, we there find to have become invisible, in fact eliminated; while on the other hand the people whom we suppose, without reason, to enjoy similar advantages appear to us amplified to artificial dimensions. This made it easier for unknown women in general, and today for these girls in particular, to acquire an enormous importance in my eyes, and impossible to make them aware of such importance as I might myself possess.

But if the parade of the little band could be said to be but an excerpt from the endless flight of passing women, which had always disturbed me, that flight was here reduced to a movement so slow as to approach immobility. And the very fact that, in a phase so far from rapid, faces no longer swept away in a whirlwind, but calm and distinct, still seemed to me beautiful, prevented me from thinking, as I had so often thought when Mme de Villeparisis's carriage bore me away, that at closer quarters, if I had stopped for a moment, certain details, a pock-marked skin, a flaw in the nostrils, a gawping expression, a grimace of a smile, an ugly figure, might have been substituted, in the face and body of the woman, for those that I had doubtless imagined; for no more than a pretty outline, the glimpse of a fresh complexion, had sufficed for me to add, in

entire good faith, a ravishing shoulder, a delicious glance of which I carried in my mind for ever a memory or a preconceived idea, these rapid decipherings of a person whom we momentarily glimpse exposing us thus to the same errors as those too rapid readings in which, on the basis of a single syllable and without waiting to identify the rest, we replace the word that is in the text by a wholly different word with which our memory supplies us. It could not be so with me now. I had looked at their faces long and carefully; I had seen each of them, not from every angle and rarely in full face, but all the same in two or three aspects different enough to enable me to make the necessary correction or verification to "prove" the difficult suppositions of line and colour that are hazarded at first sight, and to see subsist in them, through successive expressions, something unalterably material. I could say to myself with conviction that neither in Paris nor at Balbec, on the most favourable assumption of what, even if I had been able to stop and talk to them, the passing women who had caught my eye would have been like, had there ever been any whose appearance, followed by their disappearance without my having got to know them, had left me with more regret than would these, had given me the idea that their friendship could be so intoxicating. Never, among actresses or peasants or convent girls, had I seen anything so beautiful, impregnated with so much that was unknown, so inestimably precious, so apparently inaccessible. They were, of the unknown and potential happiness of life, an illustration so delicious and in so perfect a state that it was almost for intellectual reasons that I was sick with despair at the thought of being unable to sample, in unique conditions which left no room for any possibility of error, all that is most mysterious in the beauty which we desire, and which we console ourselves for never possessing by demanding pleasure—as Swann had always refused to do before Odette's day—from women whom we have not desired, so that we die without ever having known what that other pleasure was. It might well be, of course, that it was not in reality an unknown pleasure, that on close inspection its mystery would dissolve, that it was no more than a projection, a mirage of desire. But in that case I had only to blame the compulsion of a law of nature—which if it applied to these girls would apply to all—and not the imperfection of the object. For it was the one that I would have chosen above all others, convinced as I was, with a botanist's satisfaction, that it was not possible to find gathered together rarer specimens than these young flowers that at this moment before my eyes were breaking the line of the sea with their slender hedge, like a bower of Pennsylvania roses adorning a cliffside garden, between whose blooms is contained the whole tract of ocean crossed by some steamer, so slow in gliding along the blue, horizontal line that stretches from one stem to the next that an idle butterfly, dawdling in the cup of a flower which the ship's hull has long since passed, can wait, before flying off in time to arrive before it, until nothing but the tiniest chink of blue still separates the prow from the first petal of the flower towards which it is steering.

I went indoors because I was to dine at Rivebelle with Robert, and my grandmother insisted that on those evenings, before going out, I must lie down for an hour on my bed, a rest which the Balbec doctor presently ordered me to extend to all other evenings too.

As it happened, there was no need, when one went indoors, to leave the esplanade and to enter the hotel by the hall, that is to say from the back. By virtue of an alteration of the clock which reminded me of those Saturdays when, at Combray, we used to have lunch an hour earlier, now with summer at the full the days had become so long that the sun was still high in the heavens, as though it were only tea-time, when the tables were being laid for dinner in the Grand Hotel. And so the great sliding windows remained open on to the esplanade. I had only to step across a low wooden sill to find myself in the dining-room, through which I walked to take the lift.

As I passed the reception desk I addressed a smile to the manager, and without the slightest twinge of distaste collected one in return from a face which, since I had been at Balbec, my comprehensive study had impregnated and transformed like a natural history specimen. His features had become familiar to me, charged with a meaning that was of no importance but none the less intelligible like a script which one can read, and had ceased in any way to resemble those strange and repellent characteristics which his face had presented to me on that first day, when I had seen before me a personage now forgotten, or, if I succeeded in recalling him, unrecognisable, difficult to identify with this insignificant and polite individual of which the other was but a caricature, a hideous and rapid sketch. Without either the shyness or the sadness of the evening of my arrival, I rang for the lift attendant, who no longer stood in silence while I rose by his side as in a mobile thoracic cage propelled upwards along its ascending pillar, but repeated to me:

"There aren't the people now as there was a month back. They're beginning to go now; the days are drawing in." He said this not because there was any truth in it but because, having an engagement, presently, on a warmer part of the coast, he would have liked us all to leave as soon as possible so that the hotel could be shut up and he have a few days to himself before "rejoining" his new place. "Rejoin" and "new" were not, as it happened, incompatible terms, since, for the lift-boy, "rejoin" was the usual form of the verb "to join." The only thing that surprised me was that he condescended to say "place," for he belonged to that modern proletariat which seeks to eliminate from its speech every trace of a career in service. And a moment later indeed he informed me that in the "situation" which he was about to "rejoin," he would have a smarter "tunic" and a better "salary," the words "livery" and "wages" sounding to him obsolete and unseemly. And since, by an absurd contradiction, the vocabulary has survived the conception of inequality among the "masters," I was always failing to understand what the lift-boy said. For instance, the only thing that interested me was to know whether my grandmother was in the hotel. Now, forestalling my questions, the lift-boy would say to me: "That lady has just come out of your rooms." I was invariably taken in; I supposed that he meant my grandmother. "No, that lady who I think is an employee of yours." Since, in the traditional vocabulary of the upper classes which ought indeed to be done away with, a cook is not called an employee, I thought for a moment: "But he

must have made a mistake. We don't own a factory; we haven't any employees." Suddenly I remembered that the title of "employee," like the wearing of a moustache among waiters, is a sop to their self-esteem given to servants, and realised that this lady who had just gone out must be Françoise (probably on a visit to the coffee-maker, or to watch the Belgian lady's maid at her sewing), though even this sop did not satisfy the lift-boy, for he would say quite naturally, speaking pityingly of his own class, "the working man" or "the small man," using the same singular form as Racine when he speaks of "the poor man." But as a rule, for my zeal and timidity of the first evening were now things of the past, I no longer spoke to the lift-boy. It was he now who stood there and received no answer during the short journey on which he threaded his way through the hotel, which, hollowed out inside like a toy, deployed around us, floor by floor, the ramifications of its corridors in the depths of which the light grew velvety, lost its tone, blurred the communicating doors or the steps of the service stairs which it transformed into that amber haze, unsubstantial and mysterious as a twilight, in which Rembrandt picks out here and there a window-sill or a well-head. And on each landing a golden light reflected from the carpet indicated the setting sun and the lavatory window.

I wondered whether the girls I had just seen lived at Balbec, and who they could be. When our desire is thus concentrated upon a little tribe of humanity which it singles out from the rest, everything that can be associated with that tribe becomes a spring of emotion and then of reflexion. I had heard a lady say on the esplanade: "She's a friend of the Simonet girl" with that self-important air of inside knowledge, as who should say: "He's the inseparable companion of young La Rochefoucauld." And immediately she had detected on the face of the person to whom she gave this information a curiosity to see more of the favoured person who was "a friend of the Simonet girl." A privilege, obviously, that did not appear to be granted to all the world. For aristocracy is a relative thing. And there are plenty of out-of-the-way places where the son of an upholsterer is the arbiter of fashion and reigns over a court like any young Prince of Wales. I have often since then sought to recall how it first sounded to me there on the beach, that name of Simonet, still uncertain in its form, which I had not clearly distinguished, and also in its significance, its designation of such and such a person as opposed to another; instinct, in short, with that vagueness and novelty which we find so moving in the sequel, when a name whose letters are every moment engraved more deeply on our hearts by our incessant thought of them has become (though this was not to happen to me with the name of the "Simonet girl" until several years had passed) the first coherent sound that comes to our lips, whether on waking from sleep or on recovering from a fainting fit, even before the idea of what time it is or of where we are, almost before the word "I," as though the person whom it names were more "us" than we are ourselves, and as though after a brief spell of unconsciousness the phase that is the first to dissolve were that in which we were not thinking of her. I do not know why I said to myself from the first that the name Simonet must be that of one of the band of girls; from that moment I never ceased to wonder how I could get to know the Simonet family, get to know them, moreover, through people whom they would consider superior to themselves (which ought not to be difficult if they were only common little wenches) so that they might not form a disdainful idea of me. For one cannot have a perfect knowledge, one cannot effect the complete absorption of a person who disdains one, so long as one has not overcome that disdain. And since, whenever the idea of women who are so different from us penetrates our minds, unless we are able to forget it or the competition of other ideas eliminates it, we know no rest until we have converted these aliens into something that is compatible with ourselves, the mind being in this respect endowed with the same kind of reaction and activity as our physical organism, which cannot abide the infusion of any foreign body into its veins without at once striving to digest and assimilate it. The Simonet girl must be the prettiest of them all—she who, I felt moreover, might yet become my mistress, for she was the only one who, two or three times half-turning her head, had appeared to take cognisance of my fixed stare. I asked the lift-boy whether he knew of any people at Balbec called Simonet. Not liking to admit that there was anything he did not know, he replied that he seemed to have heard the name somewhere. When we reached the top floor I asked him to send me up the latest list of visitors.

I stepped out of the lift, but instead of going to my room I made my way further along the corridor, for before my arrival the valet in charge of the landing, despite his horror of draughts, had opened the window at the end, which instead of looking out to the sea faced the hill and valley inland, but never allowed them to be seen because its panes, which were made of clouded glass, were generally closed. I made a brief halt in front of it, time enough just to pay my devotions to the view which for once it revealed beyond the hill immediately behind the hotel, a view that contained only a single house situated at some distance, to which the perspective and the evening light, while preserving its mass, gave a gem-like precision and a velvet casing, as though to one of those architectural works in miniature, tiny temples or chapels wrought in gold and enamel, which serve as reliquaries and are exposed only on rare and solemn days for the veneration of the faithful. But this moment of adoration had already lasted too long, for the valet, who carried in one hand a bunch of keys and with the other saluted me by touching his sacristan's skull cap, though without raising it on account of the pure, cool evening air, came and drew together, like those of a shrine, the two sides of the window, and so shut off the minute edifice, the glistening relic from my adoring gaze.

I went into my room. Gradually, as the season advanced, the picture that I found there in my window changed. At first it was broad daylight, and dark only if the weather was bad: and then, in the greenish glass which it distended with the curve of its rounded waves, the sea, set between the iron uprights of my casement window like a piece of stained glass in its leads, ravelled out over all the deep rocky border of the bay little plumed triangles of motionless foam etched with the delicacy of a feather or a downy breast from Pisanello's pencil, and fixed in that white, unvarying, creamy enamel which is used to depict fallen snow in Gallé's glass.

Presently the days grew shorter and at the moment when I entered the room the violet sky seemed branded with the stiff, geometrical, fleeting, effulgent figure of the sun (like the representation of some miraculous sign, of some mystical apparition) lowering over the sea on the edge of the horizon like a sacred picture over a high altar, while the different parts of the western sky exposed in the glass fronts of the low mahogany bookcases that ran along the walls, which I carried back in my mind to the marvellous painting from which they had been detached, seemed like those different scenes executed long ago for a confraternity by some old master on a reliquary, whose separate panels are now exhibited side by side in a gallery, so that the visitor's imagination alone can restore them to their place on the predella of the reredos.

A few weeks later, when I went upstairs, the sun had already set. Like the one that I used to see at Combray, behind the Calvary, when I came home from a walk and was getting ready to go down to the kitchen before dinner, a band of red sky above the sea, compact and clearcut as a layer of aspic over meat, then, a little later, over a sea already cold and steel-blue like a grey mullet, a sky of the same pink as the salmon that we should presently be ordering at Rivebelle, reawakened my pleasure in dressing to go out to dinner. Close to the shore, patches of vapour, soot-black but with the burnish and consistency of agate, visibly solid and palpable, were trying to rise one above another over the sea in ever wider tiers, so that the highest of them, poised on top of the twisted column and overreaching the centre of gravity of those which had hitherto supported them, seemed on the point of bringing down in ruin this lofty structure already half-way up the sky, and precipitating it into the sea. The sight of a ship receding like a nocturnal traveller gave me the same impression that I had had in the train of being set free from the necessity of sleep and from confinement in a bedroom. Not that I felt myself a prisoner in the room in which I now was, since in another hour I should be leaving it to drive away in a carriage. I threw myself down on the bed; and, just as if I had been lying in a berth on board one of those steamers which I could see quite near me and which at night it would be strange to see stealing slowly through the darkness, like shadowy and silent but unsleeping swans, I was surrounded on all sides by pictures of the sea.

But as often as not they were, indeed, only pictures; I forgot that below their coloured expanse lay the sad desolation of the beach, swept by the restless evening breeze whose breath I had so anxiously felt on my arrival at Balbec; besides, even in my room, being wholly taken up with thoughts of the girls I had seen go by, I was no longer in a sufficiently calm or disinterested state of mind to receive any really profound impression of beauty. The anticipation of dinner at Rivebelle made my mood more frivolous still, and my mind, dwelling at such moments upon the surface of the body which I was about to dress up in order to try to appear as pleasing as possible to the feminine eyes which would scrutinise me in the well-lit restaurant, was incapable of putting any depth behind the colour of things. And if, beneath my window, the soft, unwearying flight of swifts and swallows had not arisen like a playing fountain, like living fireworks, joining the intervals between their soaring rockets with the motionless white streaming lines of long horizontal wakes—without the charming miracle of this natural and local phenomenon which brought into touch with reality the scenes that I had before my eyes—I might easily have believed that they were no more than a selection, made afresh every day, of paintings which were shown quite arbitrarily in the place in which I happened to be and without having any necessary connexion with that place. At one time it was an exhibition of Japanese colour-prints: beside the neat disc of sun, red and round as the moon, a yellow cloud seemed a lake against which black swords were outlined like the trees upon its shore, while a bar of a tender pink which I had never seen since my first paint-box swelled out like a river on either bank of which boats seemed to be waiting high and dry for someone to push them down and set them afloat. And with the contemptuous, bored and frivolous glance of an amateur or a woman hurrying through a picture gallery between two social engagements, I would say to myself: "Curious sunset, this; it's different, but after all I've seen them just as delicate, just as remarkable as this." I had more pleasure on evenings when a ship, absorbed and liquefied by the horizon, appeared so much the same colour as its background, as in an Impressionist picture, that it seemed to be also of the same substance, as though its hull and the rigging in which it tapered into a slender filigree had simply been cut out from the vaporous blue of the sky. Sometimes the ocean filled almost the whole of my window, raised as it was by a band of sky edged at the top only by a line that was of the same blue as the sea, so that I supposed it to be still sea, and the change in colour due only to some effect of lighting. Another day the sea was painted only in the lower part of the window, all the rest of which was filled with so many clouds, packed one against another in horizontal bands, that its panes seemed, by some premeditation or predilection on the part of the artist, to be presenting a "Cloud Study," while the fronts of the various bookcases showing similar clouds but in another part of the horizon and differently coloured by the light, appeared to be offering as it were the repetition—dear to certain contemporary masters—of one and the same effect caught at different hours but able now in the immobility of art to be seen all together in a single room, drawn in pastel and mounted under glass. And sometimes to a sky and sea uniformly grey a touch of pink would be added with an exquisite delicacy, while a little butterfly that had gone to sleep at the foot of the window seemed to be appending with its wings at the corner of this "Harmony in Grey and Pink" in the Whistler manner the favourite signature of the Chelsea master. Then even the pink would vanish; there was nothing now left to look at. I would get to my feet and, before lying down again, close the inner curtains. Above them I could see from my bed the ray of light that still remained, growing steadily fainter and thinner, but it was without any feeling of sadness, without any regret for its passing, that I thus allowed the hour at which as a rule I was seated at table to die above the curtains, for I knew that this day was of another kind from ordinary days, longer, like those arctic days which night interrupts for a few minutes only; I knew that from the chrysalis of this twilight, by a radiant metamorphosis, the dazzling light of the Rivebelle restaurant was preparing to emerge. I said to myself: "It's



time"; I stretched myself on the bed, and rose, and finished dressing; and I found a charm in these idle moments, relieved of every material burden, in which, while the others were dining down below, I was employing the forces accumulated during the inactivity of this late evening hour only in drying my washed body, in putting on a dinner-jacket, in tying my tie, in making all those gestures which were already dictated by the anticipated pleasure of seeing again some woman whom I had noticed at Rivebelle last time, who had seemed to be watching me, had perhaps left the table for a moment only in the hope that I would follow her; it was with joy that I embellished myself with all these allurements so as to give myself, fresh, alert and whole-hearted, a new life, free, without cares, in which I would lean my hesitations upon the calm strength of Saint-Loup and would choose, from among the different species of animated nature and the produce of every land, those which, composing the unfamiliar dishes that my companion would at once order, might have tempted my appetite or my imagination.

And then at the end of the season came the days when I could no longer go straight in from the front through the dining-room; its windows stood open no more, for it was night now outside and the swarm of poor folk and curious idlers, attracted by the blaze of light which was beyond their reach, hung in black clusters, chilled by the north wind, on the luminous sliding walls of that buzzing hive of glass.

There was a knock at my door; it was Aimé who had come upstairs in person with the latest list of visitors.

Aimé could not go away without telling me that Dreyfus was guilty a thousand times over. "It will all come out," he assured me, "not this year, but next. It was a gentleman who's very thick with the General Staff who told me. I asked him if they wouldn't decide to bring it all to light at once, before the year is out. He laid down his cigarette," Aimé went on, acting the scene for my benefit, and shaking his head and his forefinger as his informant had done, as much as to say: "We mustn't be too impatient."—"Not this year, Aimé," he said to me, putting his hand on my shoulder, 'It isn't possible. But next Easter, yes!' " And Aimé tapped me gently on the shoulder, saying, "You see, I'm showing you exactly what he did," whether because he was flattered at this act of familiarity by a distinguished person or so that I might better appreciate, with a full knowledge of the facts, the weight of the argument and our grounds for hope.

It was not without a slight pang that on the first page of the list I caught sight of the words "Simonet and family." I had in me a store of old dream-memories dating from my childhood, in which all the tenderness that existed in my heart but, being felt by my heart, was not distinguishable from it, was brought to me by a being as different as possible from myself. Once again I fashioned such a being, utilising for the purpose the name Simonet and the memory of the harmony that had reigned between the young bodies which I had seen deployed on the beach in a sportive procession worthy of Greek art or of Giotto. I did not know which of these girls was Mlle Simonet, if indeed any of them was so named, but I did know that I was loved by Mlle Simonet and that with Saint-Loup's help I was going to try to get to know her. Unfortunately, having on that condition only obtained an extension of his leave, he was obliged to report for duty every day at Doncières: but to make him commit a breach of his military obligations I had felt that I might count, more even than on his friendship for myself, on that same curiosity as a human naturalist which I myself had so often felt—even without having seen the person mentioned, and simply on hearing it said that there was a pretty cashier at a fruiterer's—to become acquainted with a new variety of feminine beauty. But I had been wrong in hoping to excite that curiosity in Saint-Loup by speaking to him of my band of girls. For it had been and would remain paralysed in him by his love for the actress whose lover he was. And even if he had felt it lightly stirring within him he would have repressed it, from an almost superstitious belief that on his own fidelity might depend that of his mistress. And so it was without any promise from him that he would take an active interest in my girls that we set off to dine at Rivebelle.

On the first few occasions, when we arrived there, the sun would just have set, but it was light still; in the garden outside the restaurant, where the lamps had not yet been lighted, the heat of the day was falling and settling, as though in a vase along the sides of which the transparent, dusky jelly of the air seemed of such consistency that a tall rose-tree, fastened against the dim wall which it veined with pink, looked like the arborescence that one sees at the heart of an onyx. Presently it was after nightfall when we alighted from the carriage, often indeed when we started from Balbec if the weather was bad and we had put off sending for the carriage in the hope of a lull. But on those days it was with no sense of gloom that I listened to the wind howling, for I knew that it did not mean the abandonment of my plans, imprisonment in my bedroom, I knew that in the great dining-room of the restaurant which we would enter to the sound of the music of the gipsy band, the innumerable lamps would triumph easily over the darkness and the cold, by applying to them their broad cauteries of molten gold, and I climbed light-heartedly after Saint-Loup into the closed carriage which stood waiting for us in the rain.

For some time past the words of Bergotte, when he pronounced himself positive that, in spite of all I might say, I had been created to enjoy pre-eminently the pleasures of the mind, had restored to me, with regard to what I might succeed in achieving later on, a hope that was disappointed afresh every day by the boredom I felt on settling down before a writing-table to start work on a critical essay or a novel. "After all," I said to myself, "perhaps the pleasure one feels in writing it is not the infallible test of the literary value of a page; perhaps it is only a secondary state which is often superadded, but the want of which can have no prejudicial effect on it. Perhaps some of the greatest masterpieces were written while yawning." My grandmother set my doubts at rest by telling me that I should be able to work, and to enjoy working, as soon as I was well. And, our doctor having thought it only prudent to warn me of the grave risks to which my state of health might expose me, and having outlined all the hygienic precautions that I ought to take to avoid any accident, I subordinated all my pleasures to an object which I judged to be infinitely more important than them, that of

becoming strong enough to be able to bring into being the work which I had, possibly, within me, and had been exercising over myself, ever since I had come to Balbec, a scrupulous and constant control. Nothing would have induced me to touch the cup of coffee which would have robbed me of the night's sleep that was necessary if I was not to be tired next day. But when we arrived at Rivebelle, immediately—what with the excitement of a new pleasure, and finding myself in that different zone into which the exceptional introduces us after having cut the thread, patiently spun throughout so many days, that was guiding us towards wisdom—as though there were never to be any such thing as tomorrow, nor any lofty aims to be realised, all that precise machinery of prudent hygiene which had been working to safeguard them vanished. A waiter was offering to take my coat, whereupon Saint-Loup asked: "You're sure you won't be cold? Perhaps you'd better keep it: it's not very warm in here."

"No, no," I assured him, and perhaps I did not feel the cold; but however that might be, I no longer knew the fear of falling ill, the necessity of not dying, the importance of work. I gave up my coat; we entered the dining-room to the sound of some warlike march played by the gipsy band, we advanced between two rows of tables laid for dinner as along an easy path of glory, and, feeling a happy glow imparted to our bodies by the rhythms of the band which conferred on us these military honours, this unmerited triumph, we concealed it beneath a grave and frozen mien, beneath a languid, casual gait, so as not to be like those music-hall "mashers" who, wedding a ribald verse to a patriotic air, come running on to the stage with the martial countenance of a victorious general.

From that moment I was a new man, who was no longer my grandmother's grandson and would remember her only when it was time to get up and go, but the brother, for the time being, of the waiters who were going to bring us our dinner.

The dose of beer, and *a fortiori* of champagne, which at Balbec I should not have ventured to take in a week, albeit to my calm and lucid consciousness the savour of those beverages represented a pleasure clearly appreciable if easily sacrificed, I now imbibed at a sitting, adding to it a few drops of port which I was too bemused to be able to taste, and I gave the violinist who had just been playing the two louis which I had been saving up for the last month with a view to buying something, I could not remember what. Several of the waiters, let loose among the tables, were flying along at full speed, each carrying on his outstretched palm a dish which it seemed to be the object of this kind of race not to let fall. And in fact the chocolate soufflés arrived at their destination unspilled, the potatoes *à l'anglaise*, in spite of the gallop that must have given them a shaking, arranged as at the start round the Pauillac lamb. I noticed one of these waiters, very tall, plumed with superb black locks, his face dyed in a tint that suggested certain species of rare birds rather than a human being, who, running without pause (and, one would have said, without purpose) from one end of the room to the other, recalled one of those macaws which fill the big aviaries in zoological gardens with their gorgeous colouring and incomprehensible agitation. Presently the spectacle settled down, in my eyes at least, into an order at once more noble and more calm. All this dizzy activity became fixed in a quiet harmony. I looked at the round tables whose innumerable assemblage filled the restaurant like so many planets, as the latter are represented in old allegorical pictures. Moreover, there seemed to be some irresistible force of attraction at work among these various stars, and at each table the diners had eyes only for the tables at which they were not sitting, with the possible exception of some wealthy Amphitryon who, having managed to secure a famous author, was endeavouring to extract from him, thanks to the magic properties of the turning-table, a few insignificant remarks at which the ladies marvelled. The harmony of these astral tables did not prevent the incessant revolution of the countless waiters who, because instead of being seated like the diners they were on their feet, performed their gyrations in a more exalted sphere. No doubt they were running, one to fetch the hors d'œuvres, another to change the wine or to bring clean glasses. But despite these special reasons, their perpetual course among the round tables yielded, after a time, to the observer the law of its dizzy but ordered circulation. Seated behind a bank of flowers, two horrible cashiers, busy with endless calculations, seemed two witches occupied in forecasting by astrological signs the disasters that might from time to time occur in this celestial vault fashioned according to the scientific conceptions of the Middle Ages.

And I rather pitied all the diners because I felt that for them the round tables were not planets and that they had not cut through the scheme of things in such a way as to be delivered from the bondage of habitual appearances and enabled to perceive analogies. They thought that they were dining with this or that person, that the dinner would cost roughly so much, and that tomorrow they would begin all over again. And they appeared absolutely indifferent to the progress through their midst of a train of young waiters who, having probably at that moment no urgent duty, advanced processionally bearing rolls of bread in baskets. Some of these, the youngest, stunned by the cuffs which the head waiters administered to them as they passed, fixed melancholy eyes upon a distant dream and were consoled only if some visitor from the Balbec hotel in which they had once been employed, recognising them, said a few words to them, telling them in person to take away the champagne which was not fit to drink, an order that filled them with pride.

I could hear the twanging of my nerves, in which there was a sense of well-being independent of the external objects that might have produced it, and which the least shifting of my body or of my attention was enough to make me feel, just as to a closed eye a slight compression gives the sensation of colour. I had already drunk a good deal of port, and if I now asked for more it was not so much with a view to the well-being which the additional glasses would bring me as an effect of the well-being produced by the glasses that had gone before. I allowed the music itself to guide my pleasure from note to note, and, meekly following, it rested on each in turn. If, like one of those chemical industries by means of which compounds are produced in large quantities which in a state of nature are encountered only by accident and very rarely, this restaurant

at Rivebelle assembled at one and the same moment more women to tempt me with beckoning vistas of happiness than I should have come across in the course of walks or travels in a whole year, at the same time this music that greeted our ears—arrangements of waltzes, of German operettas, of music-hall songs, all of them quite new to me—was itself like an ethereal pleasure-dome superimposed upon the other and more intoxicating still. For these tunes, each as individual as a woman, did not reserve, as she would have done, for some privileged person the voluptuous secret which they contained: they offered it to me, ogled me, came up to me with wayward or wanton movements, accosted me, caressed me as if I had suddenly become more seductive, more powerful, richer. Certainly I found in these tunes an element of cruelty; because any such thing as a disinterested feeling for beauty, a gleam of intelligence, was unknown to them; for them physical pleasure alone existed. And they are the most merciless of hells, the most firmly sealed, for the jealous wretch to whom they present that pleasure—that pleasure which the woman he loves is enjoying with another—as the only thing that exists in the world for her who is all the world to him. But while I was humming softly to myself the notes of this tune and returning its kiss, the pleasure peculiar to itself which it made me feel became so dear to me that I would have left my father and mother to follow it through the singular world which it constructed in the invisible, in lines alternately filled with languor and vivacity. Although such a pleasure as this is not calculated to enhance the value of the person to whom it comes, for it is perceived by him alone, and although whenever, in the course of our lives, we have failed to attract a woman who has caught sight of us, she did not know whether at that moment we possessed this inward and subjective felicity which, consequently, could in no way have altered the judgment that she passed on us, I felt myself more powerful, almost irresistible. It seemed to me that my love was no longer something unattractive, at which people might smile, but had precisely the touching beauty, the seductiveness, of this music, itself comparable to a congenial atmosphere in which she whom I loved and I would have met, suddenly grown intimate.

This restaurant was not frequented solely by women of easy virtue, but also by people of the very best society, who came there for afternoon tea or gave big dinner-parties there. The tea-parties were held in a long gallery, glazed and narrow, shaped like a funnel, which led from the entrance hall to the dining-room and was bounded on one side by the garden, from which it was separated (but for a few stone pillars) only by its wall of glass which opened here and there. The result of which, apart from ubiquitous draughts, was sudden and intermittent bursts of sunshine, a dazzling and changeable light that made it almost impossible to see the tea-drinkers, so that when they were installed there, at tables crowded pair after pair the whole way along the narrow gully, shimmering and sparkling with every movement they made in drinking their tea or in greeting one another, it resembled a giant fish-tank or bow-net in which a fisherman has collected all his glittering catch, which, half out of water and bathed in sunlight, coruscate before one's eyes in an ever-changing iridescence.

A few hours later, during dinner, which, naturally, was served in the dining-room, the lights would be turned on, even when it was still quite light out of doors, so that one saw before one's eyes, in the garden, among summerhouses glimmering in the twilight like pale spectres of evening, arbours whose glaucous verdure was pierced by the last rays of the setting sun and which, from the lamp-lit room in which one was dining, appeared through the glass no longer—as one would have said of the ladies drinking tea in the afternoon along the blue and gold corridor—caught in a glittering and dripping net, but like the vegetation of a pale and green aquarium of gigantic size lit by a supernatural light. People began to rise from the table; and if each party, while their dinner lasted, although they spent the whole time examining, recognising, naming the party at the next table, had been held in perfect cohesion about their own, the magnetic force that had kept them gravitating round their host of the evening lost its power at the moment when they repaired for coffee to the same corridor that had been used for the tea-parties; so that it often happened that in its passage from place to place some party on the march dropped one or more of its human corpuscles who, having come under the irresistible attraction of the rival party, detached themselves for a moment from their own, in which their places were taken by ladies or gentlemen who had come across to speak to friends before hurrying off with an "I really must get back to my host Monsieur X ..." And for the moment one was reminded of two separate bouquets that had exchanged a few of their flowers. Then the corridor too began to empty. Often, since even after dinner there might still be a little light left outside, this long corridor was left unlighted, and, skirted by the trees that overhung it on the other side of the glass, it suggested a pleached alley in a wooded and shady garden. Sometimes, in the gloom, a fair diner would be lingering there. As I passed through it one evening on my way out I saw, sitting among a group of strangers, the beautiful Princesse de Luxembourg. I raised my hat without stopping. She recognised me, and nodded to me with a smile; in the air, far above her salutation, but emanating from the movement, rose melodiously a few words addressed to myself, which must have been a somewhat amplified good-evening, intended not to stop me but simply to complete the gesture, to make it a spoken greeting. But her words remained so indistinct and the sound which was all that I caught was prolonged so sweetly and seemed to me so musical that it was as if, among the dim branches of the trees, a nightingale had begun to sing.

If it so happened that, to finish the evening with a party of his friends whom we had met, Saint-Loup decided to go on to the Casino of a neighbouring resort, and, taking them with him, put me in a carriage by myself, I would urge the driver to go as fast as he possibly could, so that the minutes might pass less slowly which I must spend without having anyone at hand to exempt me from furnishing my own sensibility—reversing the engine, so to speak, and emerging from the passivity in which I was caught and held as in a mesh—with those modifications which, since my arrival at Rivebelle, I had been receiving from other people. The risk of collision with a carriage coming the other way along those lanes where there was barely room for one

and it was dark as pitch; the instability of the surface, crumbling in many places, at the cliff's edge; the proximity of its vertical drop to the sea—none of these things exerted on me the slight stimulus that would have been required to bring the vision and the fear of danger within the orbit of my reason. For just as it is not the desire to become famous but the habit of being industrious that enables us to produce a finished work, so it is not the activity of the present moment but wise reflexions from the past that help us to safeguard the future. But if already, before this point, on my arrival at Rivebelle, I had flung irretrievably away from me those crutches of reason and self-control which help our infirmity to follow the right road, if I now found myself the victim of a sort of moral ataxia, the alcohol that I had drunk, in stretching my nerves exceptionally, had given to the present moment a quality, a charm, which did not have the effect of making me more competent or indeed more resolute to defend it; for in making me prefer it a thousand times to the rest of my life, my exaltation isolated it therefrom; I was enclosed in the present, like heroes and drunkards; momentarily eclipsed, my past no longer projected before me that shadow of itself which we call our future; placing the goal of my life no longer in the realisation of the dreams of the past, but in the felicity of the present moment, I could see no further than it. So that, by a contradiction which was only apparent, it was at the very moment in which I was experiencing an exceptional pleasure, in which I felt that my life might yet be happy, in which it should have become more precious in my sight, it was at this very moment that, delivered from the anxieties which it had hitherto inspired in me, I unhesitatingly abandoned it to the risk of an accident. But after all, I was doing no more than concentrate in a single evening the carelessness that, for most men, is diluted throughout their whole existence, in which every day they face unnecessarily the dangers of a sea-voyage, of a trip in an aeroplane or motor-car, when there is waiting for them at home the person whom their death would shatter, or when the book whose eventual publication is the sole reason for their existence is still stored in the fragile receptacle of their brain. And so too in the Rivebelle restaurant, on evenings when we stayed there after dinner, if anyone had come in with the intention of killing me, since I no longer saw, save in a distance too remote to have any reality, my grandmother, my life to come, the books I might write, since I now clung body and soul to the scent of the woman at the next table, to the politeness of the waiters, to the contours of the waltz that the band was playing, since I was glued to the sensation of the moment, with no extension beyond its limits, nor any object other than not to be separated from it, I should have died in and with that sensation, I should have let myself be slaughtered without offering any resistance, without a movement, a bee drugged with tobacco smoke that had ceased to take any thought for preserving the accumulation of its labours and the hopes of its hive.

I ought here to add that this insignificance into which the most serious matters relapsed, by contrast with the violence of my exaltation, came in the end to include Mlle Simonet and her friends. The enterprise of knowing them seemed to me easy now but a matter of indifference, for my immediate sensation, thanks to its extraordinary intensity, to the joy that its slightest modifications, its mere continuity provoked, alone had any importance for me; all the rest, parents, work, pleasures, girls at Balbec, weighed no more than a flake of foam in a strong wind that will not let it find a resting place, existed no longer save in relation to this internal power: inebriation brings about for an hour or two a state of subjective idealism, pure phenomenalism; everything is reduced to appearances and exists only as a function of our sublime self. This is not to say that a genuine love, if we have one, cannot subsist in such a state. But we feel so unmistakably, as though in a new atmosphere, that unknown pressures have altered the dimensions of that love, that we can no longer consider it in the old way. It is indeed still there, but somehow displaced, no longer weighing upon us, satisfied by the sensation which the present affords it, a sensation that is sufficient for us, since for what is not the here and now we take no thought. Unfortunately the coefficient which thus alters our values alters them only during that hour of intoxication. The people who were no longer of any importance, whom we scattered with our breath like soap-bubbles, will tomorrow resume their density; we shall have to try afresh to settle down to work which had ceased to have any meaning. A more serious matter still, these mathematics of the morrow, the same as those of yesterday, in whose problems we shall find ourselves inexorably involved, govern us even during those hours, and we alone are unconscious of their rule. If there is a hostile or virtuous woman in our vicinity, that question so difficult an hour ago—to know whether we should succeed in finding favour with her—seems to us now a million times easier of solution without having become easier in any respect, for it is only in our eyes, in our own inward eyes, that we have altered. And she is as displeased with us at this moment for having taken a liberty with her as we shall be with ourselves next day at the thought of having given a hundred francs to the bell-hop, and for the same reason, which in our case has merely been delayed, namely the absence of intoxication.

I knew none of the women who were at Rivebelle and who, because they were part and parcel of my intoxication just as its reflexions are part and parcel of a mirror, appeared to me a thousand times more desirable than the less and less existent Mlle Simonet. One of them, young, fair, alone, with a sad expression on a face framed in a straw hat trimmed with field-flowers, gazed at me for a moment with a dreamy air and struck me as being attractive. Then it was the turn of another, and of a third; finally of a dark one with glowing cheeks. Almost all of them were known, if not to myself, to Saint-Loup.

He had, in fact, before he made the acquaintance of his present mistress, lived so much in the restricted world of amorous adventure that of all the women who were dining on those evenings at Rivebelle, where many of them had appeared quite by chance, having come to the coast some to join their lovers, others in the hope of finding lovers, there was scarcely one that he did not know from having spent—he himself, or one or other of his friends—at least one night with her. He did not greet them if they were with men, and they, although they looked more at him than at anyone else because the indifference which he was known to feel

towards every woman who was not his actress gave him in their eyes a special glamour, appeared not to know him. But you could hear them whispering: "That's young Saint-Loup. It seems he's still quite gone on that tart of his. It's true love! What a handsome fellow he is! I think he's just wonderful. And what style! Some women have all the luck, don't they? And he's so nice in every way. I saw a lot of him when I was with d'Orléans. They were quite inseparable, those two. He was going the pace in those days. But he's given it all up now, she can't complain. Ah! she can certainly consider herself lucky. I wonder what in the world he sees in her. He must be a bit of a chump, when all's said and done. She's got feet like boats, whiskers like an American, and her undies are filthy. I can tell you, a little shop-girl would be ashamed to be seen in her knickers. Do just look at his eyes a moment: you'd go to hell for a man like that. Hush, don't say a word; he's seen me; look, he's smiling. Oh, he knew me all right. Just you mention my name to him, and see what he says!" Between these women and him I caught a glance of mutual understanding. I should have liked him to introduce me to them, so that I might ask them for assignations which they would grant me, even if I was unable to keep them. For otherwise each of their faces would remain for all time devoid, in my memory, of that part of itself—just as though it had been hidden by a veil—which varies in every woman, which we cannot imagine in any woman until we have actually seen it in her, and which appears only in the look she gives us that acquiesces in our desire and promises that it shall be satisfied. And yet, even thus reduced, their faces meant far more to me than those of women whom I knew to be virtuous, and did not seem to me to be flat, like theirs, with nothing behind them, fashioned in one piece with no depth or solidity. It was not, of course, for me what it must be for Saint-Loup who, by an act of memory, beneath the indifference, transparent to him, of the motionless features which affected not to know him, or beneath the dull formality of the greeting that might equally well have been addressed to anyone else, could recall, could see, dishevelled locks, a convulsed mouth, a pair of half-closed eyes, a whole silent picture like those that painters, to deceive the bulk of their visitors, drape with a decent covering. For me, who felt that nothing of my personality had penetrated the surface of any one of these women, or would be borne by her upon the unknown ways which she would tread through life, these faces remained sealed. But it was enough for me to know that they did open in order for them to seem to me to be more precious than I should have thought them had they been only handsome medals instead of locketts within which memories of love were hidden. As for Robert, scarcely able to keep his seat at table, concealing beneath a courtier's smile his warrior's thirst for action—when I looked at him closely I could see to what extent the vigorous bone structure of his triangular face must have been modelled on that of his ancestors, a face designed rather for an ardent bowman than for a sensitive man of letters. Beneath the delicate skin the bold construction, the feudal architecture were apparent. His head reminded one of those old castle keeps on which the disused battlements are still to be seen, although inside they have been converted into libraries.

On the way back to Balbec, of this or that charmer to whom he had introduced me I would repeat to myself without a moment's interruption, and yet almost unconsciously: "What a delightful woman!" as one sings a refrain. True, these words were prompted rather by overexcitement than by any lasting judgment. It was nevertheless true that if I had had a thousand francs on me and if there had still been a jeweller's shop open at that hour, I should have bought the unknown a ring. When the successive hours of our lives unfold as though on too widely disparate planes, we find that we give away too much of ourselves to all sorts of people who next day will not interest us in the least. But we feel that we are still responsible for what we said to them overnight, and that we must honour our promises.

Since, on those evenings, I came back late, it was a pleasure to be reunited, in a room no longer hostile, with the bed in which, on the day of my arrival, I had supposed that it would always be impossible for me to find any rest, whereas now my weary limbs longed for its support; so that, one after the other, my thighs, my hips and my shoulders sought to adhere at every point to the sheets that covered its mattress, as if my fatigue, like a sculptor, had wished to take a cast of an entire human body. But I could not get to sleep; I sensed the approach of morning; peace of mind, health of body were no longer mine. In my distress it seemed to me that I should never recapture them. I should have had to sleep for a long time if I were to find them again. But then, had I begun to doze, I must in any event be awakened in a couple of hours by the symphony concert on the beach. Suddenly I fell asleep, plunged into that deep slumber in which vistas are opened to us of a return to childhood, the recapture of past years, and forgotten feelings, of disincarnation, the transmigration of souls, the evoking of the dead, the illusions of madness, retrogression towards the most elementary of the natural kingdoms (for we say that we often see animals in our dreams, but we forget that almost always we are ourselves animals therein, deprived of that reasoning power which projects upon things the light of certainty; on the contrary we bring to bear on the spectacle of life only a dubious vision, extinguished anew every moment by oblivion, the former reality fading before that which follows it as one projection of a magic lantern fades before the next as we change the slide), all those mysteries which we imagine ourselves not to know and into which we are in reality initiated almost every night, as into the other great mystery of extinction and resurrection. Rendered more vagabond by the difficulty of digesting my Rivebelle dinner, the successive and flickering illumination of shadowy zones of my past made of me a person for whom the supreme happiness would have been to meet Legrandin, with whom I had just been talking in my dream.

And then, even my own life was entirely hidden from me by a new scene, like the drop lowered right at the front of the stage before which, while the scene shifters are busy behind, actors appear in an interim turn. The turn in which I was now playing a part was in the manner of oriental tales; I retained no knowledge of my past or of myself, on account of the extreme proximity of this interposed scenery; I was merely a character receiving the bastinado and undergoing various punishments for a crime the nature of which I could not make

out, though it was actually that of having drunk too much port. Suddenly I awoke and discovered that, thanks to a long sleep, I had not heard a note of the concert. It was already afternoon; I verified this by my watch after several efforts to sit up in bed, efforts fruitless at first and interrupted by backward falls on to my pillow, brief falls of the kind that are a sequel of sleep as of other forms of intoxication, whether due to wine or to convalescence; in any case, even before I had looked at the time, I was certain that it was past midday. Last night I had been nothing more than an empty vessel, weightless, and (since one must have been lying down in order to be able to sit up, and have been asleep to be able to keep silent) had been unable to refrain from moving about and talking, no longer had any stability, any centre of gravity; I had been set in motion and it seemed that I might have continued on my dreary course until I reached the moon. But if, while I slept, my eyes had not seen the time, my body had nevertheless contrived to calculate it, had measured the hours not on a dial superficially decorated with figures, but by the steadily growing weight of all my replenished forces which, like a powerful clock, it had allowed, notch by notch, to descend from my brain into the rest of my body where they now accumulated as far as the top of my knees the unimpaired abundance of their store. If it is true that the sea was once upon a time our native element, in which we must plunge our blood to recover our strength, it is the same with oblivion, with mental nothingness; we seem then to absent ourselves for a few hours from time, but the forces which have gathered in that interval without being expended measure it by their quantity as accurately as the pendulum of the clock or the crumbling hillocks of the hour-glass. Moreover, one does not emerge more easily from such a sleep than from a prolonged spell of wakefulness, so strongly does everything tend to persist; and if it is true that certain narcotics make us sleep, to have slept for a long time is an even more potent narcotic, after which we have great difficulty in making ourselves wake up. Like a sailor who sees plainly the quay where he can moor his boat, still tossed by the waves, I had every intention of looking at the time and of getting up, but my body was constantly cast back upon the tide of sleep; the landing was difficult, and before I attained a position in which I could reach my watch and confront its time with that indicated by the wealth of accumulated materials which my exhausted limbs had at their disposal, I fell back two or three times more upon my pillow.

At length I could reach and read it: "Two o'clock in the afternoon!" I rang, but at once I plunged back into a sleep which this time must have lasted infinitely longer if I was to judge by the refreshment, the vision of an immense night outlived, which I experienced on awakening. And yet, since my awakening was caused by the entry of Françoise, and since her entry had been prompted by my ringing the bell, this second sleep which, it seemed to me, must have been longer than the other and had brought me so much well-being and forgetfulness, could not have lasted for more than half a minute.

My grandmother opened the door of my bedroom, and I asked her countless questions about the Legrandin family.

It is not enough to say that I had returned to tranquillity and health, for it was more than a mere interval of space that had divided them from me the day before; I had had all night long to struggle against a contrary tide, and then I not only found myself again in their presence, but they had once more entered into me. At certain definite and still somewhat painful points beneath the surface of my empty head which would one day be broken, letting my ideas dissolve for ever, those ideas had once again taken their proper place and resumed that existence by which hitherto, alas, they had failed to profit.

Once again I had escaped from the impossibility of sleeping, from the deluge, the shipwreck of my nervous storms. I no longer feared the threats that had loomed over me the evening before, when I was deprived of rest. A new life was opening before me; without making a single movement, for I was still shattered, although quite alert and well, I savoured my weariness with a light heart; it had isolated and broken the bones of my legs and arms, which I could feel assembled before me, ready to come together again, and which I would rebuild merely by singing, like the architect in the fable.<sup>12</sup>

Suddenly I remembered the fair girl with the sad expression whom I had seen at Rivebelle and who had looked at me for a moment. Many others, in the course of the evening, had seemed to me attractive; now she alone arose from the depths of my memory. I felt that she had noticed me, and expected one of the Rivebelle waiters to come to me with a whispered message from her. Saint-Loup did not know her and believed that she was respectable. It would be very difficult to see her, to see her constantly. But I was prepared to make any sacrifice: I thought now only of her. Philosophy distinguishes often between free and necessary acts. Perhaps there is none to the necessity of which we are more completely subjected than that which, by virtue of a climbing power held in check during the act itself, brings back (once our mind is at rest) a memory until then levelled down with all the rest by the oppressive force of bemusement and makes it spring to the surface because unknown to us it contained more than any of the others a charm of which we do not become aware until the following day. And perhaps, too, there is no act so free, for it is still unprompted by habit, by that sort of mental obsession which, in matters of love, encourages the invariable reappearance of the image of one particular person.

That day, as it happened, was the day after the one on which I had seen the beautiful procession of young girls advancing along the sea-front. I questioned a number of the visitors in the hotel about them, people who came almost every year to Balbec. They could tell me nothing. Later on, a photograph showed me why. Who could now have recognised in them, scarcely and yet quite definitely beyond the age at which one changes so completely, an amorphous, delicious mass, still utterly childish, of little girls who, only a few years back, might have been seen sitting in a ring on the sand round a tent: a sort of vague, white constellation in which

one would have distinguished a pair of eyes that sparkled more than the rest, a mischievous face, flaxen hair, only to lose them again and to confound them almost at once in the indistinct and milky nebula.

No doubt, in those earlier years that were still so comparatively recent, it was not, as it had been yesterday when they appeared for the first time before me, the impression of the group but the group itself that had been lacking in clearness. Then those children, still mere babies, had been at that elementary stage in their development when personality has not yet stamped its seal on each face. Like those primitive organisms in which the individual barely exists by itself, is constituted by the polypary rather than by each of the polyps that compose it, they were still pressed one against another. Sometimes one pushed her neighbour over, and then a giggle, which seemed the sole manifestation of their personal life, convulsed them all together, obliterating, merging those imprecise and grinning faces in the congealment of a single cluster, scintillating and tremulous. In an old photograph of themselves, which they were one day to give me, and which I have kept ever since, their childish troupe already presents the same number of participants as, later, their feminine procession; one can sense from it that their presence must even then have made on the beach an unusual impression which forced itself on the attention, but one cannot recognise them individually save by a process of reasoning, making allowances for all the transformations possible during girlhood, up to the point at which these reconstituted forms would begin to encroach upon another individuality which must be identified also, and whose handsome face, owing to the concomitance of a tall build and curly hair, may quite possibly have been, long ago, that wizened and impish little grin which the photograph album presents to us; and the distance traversed in a short interval of time by the physical characteristics of each of these girls making of them a criterion too vague to be of any use, and moreover what they had in common and, so to speak, collectively, being therefore very pronounced, it sometimes happened that even their most intimate friends mistook one for another in this photograph, so much so that the question could in the last resort be settled only by some detail of costume which one of them was certain to have worn to the exclusion of the others. Since those days, so different from the day on which I had just seen them strolling along the front, so different and yet so close in time, they still gave way to fits of laughter, as I had observed the previous afternoon, but to laughter of a kind that was no longer the intermittent and almost automatic laughter of childhood, a spasmodic explosion which, in those days, had continually sent their heads dipping out of the circle, as the clusters of minnows in the Vivonne used to scatter and vanish only to gather again a moment later; each of their physiognomies was now mistress of itself, their eyes were fixed on the goal they were pursuing; and it had taken, yesterday, the tremulous uncertainty of my first impression to make me confuse vaguely (as their childish hilarity and the old photograph had confused) the spores, now individualised and disjoined, of the pale madrepore.

Doubtless often enough before, when pretty girls went by, I had promised myself that I would see them again. As a rule, people thus seen do not appear a second time; moreover our memory, which speedily forgets their existence, would find it difficult to recall their features; our eyes would not recognise them, perhaps, and in the meantime we have seen others go by, whom we shall not see again either. But at other times, and this was what was to happen with the pert little band at Balbec, chance brings them back insistently before our eyes. Chance seems to us then a good and useful thing, for we discern in it as it were the rudiments of organisation, of an attempt to arrange our lives; and it makes it easy, inevitable, and sometimes—after interruptions that have made us hope that we may cease to remember—painful for us to retain in our minds images for the possession of which we shall come in time to believe that we were predestined, and which but for chance we should from the very first have managed to forget, like so many others, so easily.

Presently Saint-Loup's visit drew to an end. I had not seen those girls again on the beach. He was too little at Balbec in the afternoons to have time to pay attention to them and attempt, in my interest, to make their acquaintance. In the evenings he was freer, and continued to take me regularly to Rivebelle. There are, in such restaurants, as there are in public gardens and railway trains, people enclosed in a quite ordinary appearance, whose names astonish us when, having happened to ask, we discover that they are not the mere inoffensive strangers whom we supposed but no less than the Minister or the Duke of whom we have so often heard. Two or three times already, in the Rivebelle restaurant, when everyone else was getting ready to leave, Saint-Loup and I had seen a man of large stature, very muscular, with regular features and a grizzled beard, come in and sit down at a table, where his pensive gaze remained fixed with concentrated attention upon the void. One evening, on our asking the landlord who this obscure, solitary and belated diner was, "What!" he exclaimed, "do you mean to say you don't know the famous painter Elstir?" Swann had once mentioned his name to me, I had entirely forgotten in what connexion; but the omission of a particular memory, like that of part of a sentence when we are reading, leads sometimes not to uncertainty but to the birth of a premature certainty. "He's a friend of Swann's, and a very well-known artist, extremely good," I told Saint-Loup. Immediately the thought swept through us both like a thrill of emotion, that Elstir was a great artist, a celebrated man, and that, confounding us with the rest of the diners, he had no suspicion of the excitement into which we were plunged by the idea of his talent. Doubtless, his unconsciousness of our admiration and of our acquaintance with Swann would not have troubled us had we not been at the seaside. But since we were still at an age when enthusiasm cannot keep silence, and had been transported into a life where anonymity is suffocating, we wrote a letter, signed with both our names, in which we revealed to Elstir in the two diners seated within a few feet of him two passionate admirers of his talent, two friends of his great friend Swann, and asked to be allowed to pay our homage to him in person. A waiter undertook to convey this missive to the celebrity.

A celebrity Elstir was perhaps not yet at this period quite to the extent claimed by the landlord, though he was to reach the height of his fame within a very few years. But he had been one of the first to frequent this



restaurant when it was still only a sort of farmhouse, and had brought to it a whole colony of artists (who had all, as it happened, migrated elsewhere as soon as the farm, where they used to feed in the open air under a lean-to roof, had become a fashionable centre; Elstir himself had returned to Rivebelle this evening on account of the temporary absence of his wife, with whom he lived not far away). But great talent, even when its existence is not yet recognised, will inevitably provoke a few quirks of admiration, such as the landlord had managed to detect in the questions asked by more than one English lady visitor, athirst for information as to the life led by Elstir, or in the number of letters that he received from abroad. Then the landlord had further remarked that Elstir did not like to be disturbed when he was working, that he would rise in the middle of the night and take a young model down to the sea-shore to pose for him, nude, if the moon was shining, and had told himself that so much labour was not in vain, nor the admiration of the tourist unjustified, when he had recognised in one of Elstir's pictures a wooden cross which stood by the roadside on the way into Rivebelle.

"That's it all right," he would repeat with stupefaction, "there are all the four beams! Oh, he does take a lot of trouble!"

And he did not know whether a little *Sunrise over the Sea* which Elstir had given him might not be worth a fortune.

We watched him read our letter, put it in his pocket, finish his dinner, begin to ask for his things, get up to go; and we were so convinced that we had offended him by our overture that we would now have hoped (as keenly as at first we had dreaded) to make our escape without his noticing us. What did not cross our minds for a single instant was a consideration which should have seemed to us of cardinal importance, namely that our enthusiasm for Elstir, on the sincerity of which we would not have allowed the least doubt to be cast, which we could indeed have confirmed with the evidence of our bated breath, our desire to do no matter what that was difficult or heroic for the great man, was not, as we imagined it to be, admiration, since neither of us had ever seen anything that he had painted; our feeling might have as its object the hollow idea of a "great artist," but not a body of work which was unknown to us. It was, at most, admiration in the abstract, the nervous envelope, the sentimental framework of an admiration without content, that is to say a thing as indissolubly attached to boyhood as are certain organs which no longer exist in the adult man; we were still boys. Elstir meanwhile was approaching the door when suddenly he turned and came towards us. I was overcome by a delicious thrill of terror such as I could not have felt a few years later, because, as age diminishes the capacity, familiarity with the world meanwhile destroys in us any inclination to provoke such strange encounters, to feel that kind of emotion.

In the course of the few words that Elstir came to say to us, sitting down at our table, he never replied to me on the several occasions on which I spoke to him of Swann. I began to think that he did not know him. He nevertheless asked me to come and see him at his Balbec studio, an invitation which he did not extend to Saint-Loup, and which I had earned, as I might not, perhaps, from Swann's recommendation had Elstir been a friend of his (for the part played by disinterested motives is greater than we are inclined to think in people's lives), by a few words which made him think that I was devoted to the arts. He lavished on me a friendliness which was as far above that of Saint-Loup as the latter's was above the affability of a shopkeeper. Compared with that of a great artist, the friendliness of a great nobleman, however charming it may be, seems like play-acting, like simulation. Saint-Loup sought to please; Elstir loved to give, to give himself. Everything that he possessed, ideas, works, and the rest which he counted for far less, he would have given gladly to anyone who understood him. But, for lack of congenial company, he lived in an unsociable isolation which fashionable people called pose and ill-breeding, the authorities a recalcitrant spirit, his neighbours madness, his family selfishness and pride.

And no doubt at first he had thought with pleasure, even in his solitude, that, thanks to his work, he was addressing from a distance, was imbuing with a loftier idea of himself, those who had misunderstood or offended him. Perhaps, in those days, he lived alone not from indifference but from love of his fellows, and, just as I had renounced Gilberte in order to appear to her again one day in more attractive colours, dedicated his work to certain people as a sort of new approach to them whereby, without actually seeing him, they would be brought to love him, admire him, talk about him; a renunciation is not always total from the start, when we decide upon it in our original frame of mind and before it has reacted upon us, whether it be the renunciation of an invalid, a monk, an artist or a hero. But if he had wished to produce with certain people in his mind, in producing he had lived for himself, remote from society, to which he had become indifferent; the practice of solitude had given him a love for it, as happens with every big thing which we have begun by fearing, because we know it to be incompatible with smaller things which we prize and which it does not so much deprive us of as detach us from. Before we experience it, our whole preoccupation is to know to what extent we can reconcile it with certain pleasures which cease to be pleasures as soon as we have experienced it.

Elstir did not stay talking to us for long. I made up my mind that I would go to his studio during the next few days, but on the following afternoon, after I had accompanied my grandmother to the far end of the seafront, near the cliffs of Canapville, on the way back, at the corner of one of the little streets which ran down at right angles to the beach, we passed a girl who, hanging her head like an animal that is being driven reluctant to its stall, and carrying golf-clubs, was walking in front of an authoritarian-looking person, in all probability her or one of her friends' "Miss," who suggested a portrait of Jeffreys by Hogarth, with a face as red as if her favourite beverage were gin rather than tea, on which a dried smear of tobacco at the corner of her mouth prolonged the curve of a moustache that was grizzled but abundant. The girl who preceded her

resembled the member of the little band who, beneath a black polo-cap, had shown in an expressive chubby face a pair of laughing eyes. However, though this one had also a black polo-cap, she struck me as being even prettier than the other; the line of her nose was straighter, the curve of the nostrils fuller and more fleshy. Besides, the other had seemed a proud, pale girl, this one a child well-disciplined and of rosy complexion. And yet, since she was pushing a bicycle just like the other's, and was wearing the same kid gloves, I concluded that the differences arose perhaps from the angle and the circumstances in which I now saw her, for it was hardly likely that there could be at Balbec a second girl with a face that was on the whole so similar and combining the same details in her accoutrement. She flung a rapid glance in my direction. During the next few days, when I saw the little band again on the beach, and indeed long afterwards when I knew all the girls who composed it, I could never be absolutely certain that any of them—even the one who resembled her most, the girl with the bicycle—was indeed the one that I had seen that evening at the corner of the street at the end of the esplanade, a girl who was scarcely but still just perceptibly different from the one I had noticed in the procession.

From that moment, whereas for the last few days my mind had been occupied chiefly by the tall one, it was the one with the golf-clubs, presumed to be Mlle Simonet, who began once more to absorb my attention. When walking with the others she would often stop, forcing her friends, who seemed greatly to respect her, to stop also. Thus it is, coming to a halt, her eyes sparkling beneath her polo-cap, that I still see her again today, silhouetted against the screen which the sea spreads out behind her, and separated from me by a transparent sky-blue space, the interval of time that has elapsed since then—the first impression, faint and tenuous in my memory, desired, pursued, then forgotten, then recaptured, of a face which I have many times since projected upon the cloud of the past in order to be able to say to myself, of a girl who was actually in my room: "It is she!"

But it was perhaps yet another, the one with geranium cheeks and green eyes, whom I should have liked most to know. And yet, whichever of them it might be, on any given day, that I preferred to see, the others, without her, were sufficient to excite my desire which, concentrated now chiefly on one, now on another, continued—as, on the first day, my confused vision had done—to combine and blend them, to make of them the little world apart, animated by a life in common, which indeed they doubtless imagined themselves to form; and in becoming a friend of one of them I should have penetrated—like a cultivated pagan or a meticulous Christian going among barbarians—a youthful society in which thoughtlessness, health, sensual pleasure, cruelty, unintellectuality and joy held sway.

My grandmother, whom I had told of my meeting with Elstir and who rejoiced at the thought of all the intellectual profit that I might derive from his friendship, considered it absurd and none too polite of me not to have yet gone to pay him a visit. But I could think only of the little band, and being uncertain of the hour at which the girls would be passing along the front, I dared not absent myself. My grandmother was astonished, too, at the elegance of my attire, for I had suddenly remembered suits which had been lying all this time at the bottom of my trunk. I put on a different one every day, and had even written to Paris ordering new hats and new ties.

It adds a great charm to life in a watering-place like Balbec if the face of a pretty girl, a vendor of shells, cakes or flowers, painted in vivid colours in our mind, is regularly, from early morning, the purpose of each of those leisured, luminous days which we spend on the beach. They become then, and for that reason, albeit idle, as alert as working-days, pointed, magnetised, raised slightly to meet an approaching moment, that in which, while we purchase shortbread, roses, ammonites, we will delight in seeing, on a feminine face, colours displayed as purely as on a flower. But at least one can speak to these young vendors, and this dispenses one from having to construct with one's imagination those aspects which a mere visual perception fails to provide, and to re-create their life, magnifying its charm, as in front of a portrait; moreover, precisely because one speaks to them, one can learn where and at what time it will be possible to see them again. Now I had none of these advantages when it came to the little band. Since their habits were unknown to me, when on certain days I failed to catch a glimpse of them, not knowing the cause of their absence I sought to discover whether it was something fixed and regular, if they were to be seen only every other day, or in certain kinds of weather, or if there were days on which they were not to be seen at all. I imagined myself already friends with them, and saying: "But you weren't there the other day?" "Weren't we? Oh, no, of course not; it was a Saturday. On Saturdays we don't ever come, because ..." If only it were simply a matter of knowing that on black Saturday it was useless to torment oneself, that one might range the beach from end to end, sit down outside the pastry-cook's and pretend to be nibbling an éclair, poke into the curio shop, wait for bathing time, the concert, high tide, sunset, night, all without seeing the longed-for little band. But the fatal day did not, perhaps, come once a week. It did not, perhaps, of necessity fall on a Saturday. Perhaps certain atmospheric conditions influenced it or were entirely unconnected with it. How many observations, patient but not at all serene, must one accumulate of the movements, to all appearance irregular, of these unknown worlds before being able to be sure that one has not allowed oneself to be led astray by mere coincidence, that one's forecasts will not be proved wrong, before deducing the incontrovertible laws, acquired at the cost of so much painful experience, of that passionate astronomy!

Remembering that I had not yet seen them on some particular day of the week, I assured myself that they would not be coming, that it was useless to wait any longer on the beach. And at that very moment I caught sight of them. And yet on another day which, in so far as I had been able to conjecture that there were laws that guided the return of those constellations, must, I had calculated, prove an auspicious day, they did not come. But to this primary uncertainty as to whether I should see them or not that day, there was added

another, more disquieting: whether I should ever set eyes on them again, for I had no reason, after all, to know that they were not about to set sail for America, or return to Paris. This was enough to make me begin to love them. One can feel an attraction towards a particular person. But to release that fount of sorrow, that sense of the irreparable, those agonies which prepare the way for love, there must be—and this is perhaps, more than a person, the actual object which our passion seeks so anxiously to embrace—the risk of an impossibility. Thus already they were acting upon me, those influences which recur in the course of our successive love-affairs (which can moreover occur, but then rather in the life of big cities, in relation to working-girls of whose half-holidays we are uncertain and whom we are alarmed not to have seen at the factory exit), or which at least have recurred in the course of mine. Perhaps they are inseparable from love; perhaps everything that formed a distinctive feature of our first love comes to attach itself to those that follow, by virtue of recollection, suggestion, habit, and, through the successive periods of our life, gives to its different aspects a general character.

I seized every pretext for going down to the beach at the hours when I hoped to succeed in finding them there. Having caught sight of them once while we were at lunch, I now invariably came in late for it, waiting interminably on the esplanade for them to pass; spending the whole of my brief stay in the dining-room interrogating with my eyes its azure wall of glass; rising long before dessert, so as not to miss them should they have gone out at a different hour, and chafing with irritation at my grandmother when, with unwitting malevolence, she made me stay with her past the hour that seemed to me propitious. I tried to prolong the horizon by changing the position of my chair, and if by chance I did catch sight of one or other of the girls, since they all partook of the same special essence, it was as if I had seen projected before my face in a shifting, diabolical hallucination a little of the unfriendly and yet passionately coveted dream which, but a moment ago, had existed only—stagnating permanently there—in my brain.

I loved none of them, loving them all, and yet the possibility of meeting them was in my daily life the sole element of delight, alone aroused in me those hopes for which one would break down every obstacle, hopes ending often in fury if I had not seen them. For the moment, these girls eclipsed my grandmother in my affection; the longest journey would at once have seemed attractive to me had it been to a place in which they might be found. It was to them that my thoughts agreeably clung when I supposed myself to be thinking of something else or of nothing. But when, even without knowing it, I thought of them, they, more unconsciously still, were for me the mountainous blue undulations of the sea, the outline of a procession against the sea. It was the sea that I hoped to find, if I went to some town where they had gone. The most exclusive love for a person is always a love for something else.

Meanwhile my grandmother, because I now showed a keen interest in golf and tennis and was letting slip an opportunity of seeing at work and hearing talk an artist whom she knew to be one of the greatest of his time, evinced for me a scorn which seemed to me to be based on somewhat narrow views. I had guessed long ago in the Champs-Élysées, and had verified since, that when we are in love with a woman we simply project on to her a state of our own soul; that consequently the important thing is not the worth of the woman but the profundity of the state; and that the emotions which a perfectly ordinary girl arouses in us can enable us to bring to the surface of our consciousness some of the innermost parts of our being, more personal, more remote, more quintessential than any that might be evoked by the pleasure we derive from the conversation of a great man or even from the admiring contemplation of his work.

I finally had to comply with my grandmother's wishes, all the more reluctantly in that Elstir lived at some distance from the front in one of the newest of Balbec's avenues. The heat of the day obliged me to take the tramway which passed along the Rue de la Plage, and I endeavoured, in order to persuade myself that I was in the ancient realm of the Cimmerians, in the country, perhaps, of King Mark, or on the site of the Forest of Broceliande, not to look at the gimcrack splendour of the buildings that extended on either hand, among which Elstir's villa was perhaps the most sumptuously hideous, in spite of which he had taken it because, of all that there were to be had at Balbec, it was the only one that provided him with a really big studio.

It was with averted eyes that I crossed the garden, which had a lawn (similar, on a smaller scale, to that of any suburban villa round Paris), a statuette of an amorous gardener, glass balls in which one saw one's distorted reflexion, beds of begonias, and a little arbour beneath which rocking chairs were drawn up round an iron table. But after all these preliminaries stamped with urban ugliness, I took no notice of the chocolate mouldings on the plinths once I was in the studio; I felt perfectly happy, for, with the help of all the sketches and studies that surrounded me, I foresaw the possibility of raising myself to a poetical understanding, rich in delights, of manifold forms which I had not hitherto isolated from the total spectacle of reality. And Elstir's studio appeared to me like the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world in which, from the chaos that is everything we see, he had extracted, by painting them on various rectangles of canvas that were placed at all angles, here a sea-wave angrily crashing its lilac foam on to the sand, there a young man in white linen leaning on the rail of a ship. The young man's jacket and the splashing wave had acquired a new dignity from the fact that they continued to exist, even though they were deprived of those qualities in which they might be supposed to consist, the wave being no longer able to wet or the jacket to clothe anyone.

At the moment at which I entered, the creator was just finishing, with the brush which he had in his hand, the outline of the setting sun.

The blinds were closed almost everywhere round the studio, which was fairly cool and, except in one place where daylight laid against the wall its brilliant but fleeting decoration, dark; one small rectangular window alone was open, embowered in honeysuckle and giving on to an avenue beyond a strip of garden; so that the atmosphere of the greater part of the studio was dusky, transparent and compact in its mass, but liquid and

sparkling at the edges where the sunlight encased it, like a lump of rock crystal of which one surface, already cut and polished, gleams here and there like a mirror with iridescent rays. While Elstir, at my request, went on painting, I wandered about in the half-light, stopping to examine first one picture, then another.

Most of those that covered the walls were not what I should chiefly have liked to see of his work, paintings in what an English art journal which lay on the reading-room table in the Grand Hotel called his first and second manners, the mythological manner and the manner in which he showed signs of Japanese influence, both admirably represented, it was said, in the collection of Mme de Guermantes. Naturally enough, what he had in his studio were almost all seascapes done here at Balbec. But I was able to discern from these that the charm of each of them lay in a sort of metamorphosis of the objects represented, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which designate things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with that notion.

Sometimes, at my window in the hotel at Balbec, in the morning when Françoise undid the blankets that shut out the light, or in the evening when I was waiting until it was time to go out with Saint-Loup, I had been led by some effect of sunlight to mistake what was only a darker stretch of sea for a distant coastline, or to gaze delightedly at a belt of liquid azure without knowing whether it belonged to sea or sky. But presently my reason would reestablish between the elements the distinction which my first impression had abolished. In the same way from my bedroom in Paris I would sometimes hear a dispute, almost a riot, in the street below, until I had traced back to its cause—a carriage for instance that was rattling towards me—that noise from which I now eliminated the shrill and discordant vociferations which my ear had really heard but which my reason knew that wheels did not produce. But the rare moments in which we see nature as she is, poetically, were those from which Elstir's work was created. One of the metaphors that occurred most frequently in the seascapes which surrounded him here was precisely that which, comparing land with sea, suppressed all demarcation between them. It was this comparison, tacitly and untiringly repeated on a single canvas, which gave it that multifarious and powerful unity, the cause (not always clearly perceived by themselves) of the enthusiasm which Elstir's work aroused in certain collectors.

It was, for instance, for a metaphor of this sort—in a picture of the harbour of Carquethuit, a picture which he had finished only a few days earlier and which I stood looking at for a long time—that Elstir had prepared the mind of the spectator by employing, for the little town, only marine terms, and urban terms for the sea. Whether because its houses concealed a part of the harbour, a dry dock, or perhaps the sea itself plunging deep inland, as constantly happened on the Balbec coast, on the other side of the promontory on which the town was built the roofs were overtopped (as they might have been by chimneys or steeples) by masts which had the effect of making the vessels to which they belonged appear town-bred, built on land, an impression reinforced by other boats moored along the jetty but in such serried ranks that you could see men talking across from one deck to another without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec which, in the distance, surrounded by water on every side because you saw them without seeing the town, in a powdery haze of sunlight and crumbling waves, seemed to be emerging from the waters, blown in alabaster or in sea-foam, and, enclosed in the band of a variegated rainbow, to form an ethereal, mystical tableau. On the beach in the foreground the painter had contrived that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between land and sea. The men who were pushing down their boats into the sea were running as much through the waves as along the sand, which, being wet, reflected the hulls as if they were already in the water. The sea itself did not come up in an even line but followed the irregularities of the shore, which the perspective of the picture increased still further, so that a ship actually at sea, half-hidden by the projecting works of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing through the middle of the town; women gathering shrimps among the rocks had the appearance, because they were surrounded by water and because of the depression which, beyond the circular barrier of rocks, brought the beach (on the two sides nearest the land) down to sea-level, of being in a marine grotto overhung by ships and waves, open yet protected in the midst of miraculously parted waters. If the whole picture gave this impression of harbours in which the sea penetrated the land, in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian, the strength of the marine element was everywhere apparent; and round about the rocks, at the mouth of the harbour where the sea was rough, one sensed, from the muscular efforts of the fishermen and the slant of the boats leaning over at an acute angle, compared with the calm erectness of the warehouse, the church, the houses in the town to which some of the figures were returning and from which others were setting out to fish, that they were riding bareback on the water as though on a swift and fiery animal whose rearing, but for their skill, must have unseated them. A party of holiday-makers were putting gaily out to sea in a boat that tossed like a jaunting-car on a rough road; their boatmen, blithe but none the less attentive, trimmed the bellying sail, everyone kept in his place in order not to unbalance and capsize the boat, and so they went scudding through sunlit fields and shady places, rushing down the slopes. It was a fine morning in spite of the recent storm. Indeed, one could still feel the powerful impulses that must first be neutralised in order to attain the easy balance of the boats that lay motionless, enjoying sunshine and breeze, in parts where the sea was so calm that the reflections had almost more solidity and reality than the floating hulls, vaporised by an effect of the sunlight and made to overlap one another by the perspective. Or rather one would not have called them other parts of the sea. For between those parts there was as much difference as there was between one of them and the church rising from the water, or the ships behind the town. One's reason then set to work

to make a single element of what was in one place black beneath a gathering storm, a little further all of one colour with the sky and as brightly burnished, and elsewhere so bleached by sunshine, haze and foam, so compact, so terrestrial, so circumscribed with houses that one thought of some white stone causeway or of a field of snow, up the slope of which one was alarmed to see a ship come climbing high and dry, as a carriage climbs dripping from a ford, but which a moment later, when you saw on the raised, uneven surface of the solid plain boats drunkenly heaving, you understood, identical in all these different aspects, to be still the sea.

Although it is rightly said that there can be no progress, no discovery in art, but only in the sciences, and that each artist starting afresh on an individual effort cannot be either helped or hindered therein by the efforts of any other, it must none the less be acknowledged that, in so far as art brings to light certain laws, once an industry has popularised them, the art that was first in the field loses retrospectively a little of its originality. Since Elstir began to paint, we have grown familiar with what are called “wonderful” photographs of scenery and towns. If we press for a definition of what their admirers mean by the epithet, we shall find that it is generally applied to some unusual image of a familiar object, an image different from those that we are accustomed to see, unusual and yet true to nature, and for that reason doubly striking because it surprises us, takes us out of our cocoon of habit, and at the same time brings us back to ourselves by recalling to us an earlier impression. For instance, one of these “magnificent” photographs will illustrate a law of perspective, will show us some cathedral which we are accustomed to see in the middle of a town, taken instead from a selected vantage point from which it will appear to be thirty times the height of the houses and to be thrusting out a spur from the bank of the river, from which it is actually at some distance. Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him precisely to bring out certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since art had been the first to disclose them. A river, because of the windings of its course, a bay because of the apparent proximity to one another of the cliffs on either side of it, would seem to have hollowed out in the heart of the plain or of the mountains a lake absolutely landlocked on every side. In a picture of a view from Balbec painted upon a scorching day in summer an inlet of the sea, enclosed between walls of pink granite, appeared not to be the sea, which began further out. The continuity of the ocean was suggested only by the gulls which, wheeling over what seemed to be solid rock, were as a matter of fact sniffing the shifting tide. Other laws emerged, as, at the foot of immense cliffs, the moist vapour of from the same can the lilliputian grace of white sails on the blue mirror on whose surface they looked like sleeping butterflies, and certain contrasts between the depth of the shadows and the paleness of the light. This play of light and shade, which photography has also rendered commonplace, had interested Elstir so much that at one time he had delighted in painting what were almost mirages, in which a castle crowned with a tower appeared as a completely circular castle extended by a tower at its summit, and at its foot by an inverted tower, either because the exceptional purity of the atmosphere on a fine day gave the shadow reflected in the water the hardness and brightness of stone, or because the morning mists rendered the stone as vaporous as the shadow. And similarly, beyond the sea, behind a line of woods, another sea began, roseate with the light of the setting sun, which was in fact the sky. The light, fashioning as it were new solids, thrust back the hull of the boat on which it fell behind the other hull that was still in shadow, and arranged as it were the steps of a crystal staircase on what was in reality the flat surface, broken only by the play of light and shade, of the morning sea. A river running beneath the bridges of a town was caught from such an angle that it appeared entirely dislocated, now broadening into a lake, now narrowing into a rivulet, broken elsewhere by the interposition of a hill crowned with trees among which the townsman would repair at evening to breathe the cool air; and even the rhythm of this topsy-turvy town was assured only by the rigid vertical of the steeples which did not rise but rather, in accordance with the plumb-line of the pendulum of gravity beating time as in a triumphal march, seemed to hold suspended beneath them the blurred mass of houses that rose in terraces through the mist along the banks of the crushed, disjointed stream. And (since Elstir’s earliest works belonged to the time in which a painter would embellish his landscape by inserting a human figure), on the cliff’s edge or among the mountains, the path too, that half-human part of nature, underwent, like river or ocean, the eclipses of perspective. And whether a mountain ridge, or the spray of a waterfall, or the sea prevented the eye from following the continuity of the path, visible to the traveller but not to us, the little human figure in old-fashioned clothes, lost in those solitudes, seemed often to be stopped short on the edge of a precipice, the path which he had been following ending there, while, a thousand feet above him in those pine-forests, it was with a fond eye and a relieved heart that we saw reappear the threadlike whiteness of its sandy surface, grateful to the wayfarer’s feet, though the mountainside had concealed from us its intervening bends as it skirted the waterfall or the gulf.

The effort made by Elstir to strip himself, when face to face with reality, of every intellectual notion, was all the more admirable in that this man who made himself deliberately ignorant before sitting down to paint, forgot everything that he knew in his honesty of purpose (for what one knows does not belong to oneself), had in fact an exceptionally cultivated mind. When I confessed to him the disappointment I had felt on seeing the porch at Balbec:

“What!” he exclaimed, “you were disappointed by the porch! Why, it’s the finest illustrated Bible that the people have ever had. That Virgin and all the bas-reliefs telling the story of her life—it’s the most loving, the most inspired expression of that endless poem of adoration and praise in which the Middle Ages extolled the glory of the Madonna. If you only knew, side by side with the most scrupulous accuracy in rendering the sacred text, what exquisite *trouvailles* came to the old carver, what profound thoughts, what delicious poetry! The idea of that great sheet in which the angels carry the body of the Virgin, too sacred for them to venture to

touch it with their hands" (I mentioned to him that this theme had been treated also at Saint-André-des-Champs; he had seen photographs of the porch there, and agreed, but pointed out that the eagerness of those little peasant figures, all scurrying together round the Virgin, was not at all the same thing as the gravity of those two great angels, almost Italian, so slender, so gentle); "and the angel who carries away the Virgin's soul, to reunite it with her body; or in the meeting of the Virgin with Elizabeth, Elizabeth's gesture when she touches the Virgin's womb and marvels to feel that it is swollen; and the outstretched arm of the midwife who had refused, without touching, to believe in the Virgin Birth; and the loincloth thrown by the Virgin to St Thomas to give him proof of the Resurrection; that veil, too, which the Virgin tears from her own breast to cover the nakedness of her son, whose blood, the wine of the Eucharist, the Church collects from one side of him, while on the other the Synagogue, its kingdom at an end, has its eyes bandaged, holds a half-broken sceptre and lets fall, together with the crown that is slipping from its head, the tables of the old law. And the husband who, on the Day of Judgment, as he helps his young wife to rise from her grave, lays her hand against his own heart to reassure her, to prove to her that it is indeed beating, isn't that also rather a stunning idea, really inspired? And the angel who is taking away the sun and the moon which are no longer needed since it is written that the Light of the Cross will be seven times brighter than the light of the firmament; and the one who is dipping his hand into Jesus' bath, to see whether the water is warm enough; and the one emerging from the clouds to place the crown on the Virgin's brow; and all the angels leaning from the vault of heaven, between the balusters of the New Jerusalem, and throwing up their arms in horror or joy at the sight of the torments of the wicked or the bliss of the elect! Because it's all the circles of heaven, a whole gigantic poem full of theology and symbolism that you have there. It's prodigious, it's divine, it's a thousand times better than anything you will see in Italy, where for that matter this very tympanum has been carefully copied by sculptors with far less genius. Because, you know, it's all a question of genius. There never was a time when everybody had genius, that's all nonsense, it would be more extraordinary than the golden age. The chap who carved that façade, take my word for it, was every bit as good, had just as profound ideas, as the men you admire most at the present day. I could show you what I meant if we went there together. There are certain passages from the Office of the Assumption which have been conveyed with a subtlety that not even a Redon could equal."

And yet, when my eager eyes had opened before the façade of Balbec church, it was not this vast celestial vision of which he spoke to me that I had seen, not this gigantic theological poem which I understood to have been inscribed there in stone. I spoke to him of those great statues of saints mounted on stilts which formed a sort of avenue on either side.

"It starts from the mists of antiquity to end in Jesus Christ," he explained. "You see on one side his ancestors after the spirit, on the other the Kings of Judah, his ancestors after the flesh. All the ages are there. And if you looked more closely at what you took for stilts you would have been able to give names to the figures standing on them. Under the feet of Moses you would have recognised the golden calf, under Abraham's the ram, and under Joseph's the demon counselling Potiphar's wife."

I told him also that I had gone there expecting to find an almost Persian building, and that this had doubtless been one of the chief factors in my disappointment. "Not at all," he assured me, "it's perfectly true. Some parts of it are quite oriental. One of the capitals reproduces so exactly a Persian subject that you cannot simply explain it by the persistence of oriental traditions. The carver must have copied some casket brought from the East by navigators." And indeed he was later to show me the photograph of a capital on which I saw dragons that were almost Chinese devouring one another, but at Balbec this little piece of sculpture had passed unnoticed by me in the general effect of the building which did not conform to the pattern traced in my mind by the words "an almost Persian church."

The intellectual pleasures which I was enjoying in this studio did not in the least prevent me from being aware, although they enveloped us as it were in spite of ourselves, of the warm glazes, the sparkling penumbra of the room itself and, through the little window framed with honeysuckle, in the rustic avenue, the resilient dryness of the sun-parched earth, veiled only by the diaphanous gauze woven of distance and the shade of the trees. Perhaps the unconscious well-being induced by this summer day came like a tributary to swell the flood of joy that had surged in me at the sight of Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour*.

I had supposed Elstir to be a modest man, but I realised my mistake on seeing his face cloud with melancholy when, in a little speech of thanks, I uttered the word "fame." Men who believe that their works will last—as was the case with Elstir—form the habit of placing them in a period when they themselves will have crumbled into dust. And thus, by obliging them to reflect on their own extinction, the idea of fame saddens them because it is inseparable from the idea of death. I changed the subject in the hope of dispelling the cloud of ambitious melancholy with which I had unwillingly shadowed Elstir's brow. "Someone advised me once," I said, thinking of the conversation we had had with Legrandin at Combray, as to which I was glad of an opportunity of learning Elstir's views, "not to visit Brittany, because it would not be wholesome for a mind with a natural inclination towards day-dreams." "Not at all," he replied. "When a mind has a tendency towards day-dreams, it's a mistake to shield it from them, to ration them. So long as you divert your mind from its day-dreams, it will not know them for what they are; you will be the victim of all sorts of appearances because you will not have grasped their true nature. If a little day-dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time. One must have a thorough understanding of one's day-dreams if one is not to be troubled by them; there is a way of separating one's dreams from one's life which so often produces good results that I wonder whether one oughtn't to try it just in case, simply as a

preventative, as certain surgeons suggest that, to avoid the risk of appendicitis later on, we ought all to have our appendixes taken out when we're children."

Elstir and I had meanwhile been walking towards the end of the studio, and had reached the window that looked across the garden on to a narrow side-street that was almost a country lane. We had gone there to breathe the cooler air of the late afternoon. I supposed myself to be nowhere near the girls of the little band, and it was only by sacrificing for once the hope of seeing them that I had yielded to my grandmother's entreaties and had gone to see Elstir. For we do not know the whereabouts of what we are seeking, and often we avoid for a long time the place to which, for quite different reasons, everyone has been asking us to go; but we never suspect that we shall there see the very person of whom we are thinking. I looked out vaguely over this rustic path which passed quite close to the studio but did not belong to Elstir. Suddenly there appeared on it, coming towards us at a rapid pace, the young cyclist of the little band, with her polocap pulled down over her dark hair towards her plump cheeks, her eyes gay and slightly challenging; and on that auspicious path, miraculously filled with the promise of delights, I saw her, beneath the trees, address to Elstir the smiling greeting of a friend, a rainbow that bridged for me the gulf between our terraqueous world and regions which I had hitherto regarded as inaccessible. She even came up to shake hands with the painter, though without stopping, and I saw that she had a tiny beauty spot on her chin. "Do you know that girl, Monsieur?" I asked Elstir, realising that he might introduce me to her, invite her to his house. And this peaceful studio with its rural horizon was at once filled with a surfeit of delight such as a child might feel in a house where he was already happily playing when he learned that, in addition, out of that bounteousness which enables lovely things and noble hosts to increase their gifts beyond all measure, a sumptuous meal was being prepared for him. Elstir told me that she was called Albertine Simonet, and gave me the names also of her friends, whom I described to him with sufficient accuracy for him to identify them almost without hesitation. I had made a mistake with regard to their social position, but not the mistake that I usually made at Balbec. I was always ready to take the sons of shopkeepers for princes when they appeared on horseback. This time I had placed in a shady milieu the daughters of middle-class people, extremely rich, belonging to the world of trade and industry. It was the class which, at first sight, interested me least, since it held for me none of the mystery either of the people or of a society such as that of the Guermantes. And no doubt if a preliminary glamour which they would never now lose had not been conferred on them, in my dazzled eyes, by the glaring vacuity of seaside life, I should perhaps not have succeeded in resisting and overcoming the idea that they were the daughters of prosperous merchants. I could not help marvelling at what a wonderful workshop the French middle class was for sculpture of the most varied kind. What unexpected types, what richness of invention in the character of the faces, what firmness, what freshness, what simplicity in the features! The shrewd old burghers from whom these Dianas and these nymphs had sprung seemed to me to have been the greatest of statuaries. Scarcely had I had time to register the social metamorphosis of the little band—for these discoveries of a mistake, these modifications of the notion one has of a person, have the instantaneousness of a chemical reaction—than the idea had already established itself behind the guttersnipe ways of these girls, whom I had taken for the mistresses of racing cyclists or prize-fighters, that they might easily be connected with the family of some lawyer or other whom we knew. I was barely conscious of who Albertine Simonet was. She had certainly no conception of what she was one day to mean to me. Even the name, Simonet, which I had already heard spoken on the beach, I should have spelt with a double "n" had I been asked to write it down, never dreaming of the importance which this family attached to there being only one. The further we descend the social scale the more we find that snobbery fastens on to mere trifles which are perhaps no more null than the distinctions observed by the aristocracy, but, being more obscure, more peculiar to each individual, surprise us more. Possibly there had been Simonnets who had done badly in business, or worse still. The fact remains that the Simonets never failed, it appeared, to be annoyed if anyone doubled their "n." They were as proud, perhaps, of being the only Simonets in the world with one "n" instead of two as the Montmorencys of being the premier barons of France. I asked Elstir whether these girls lived at Balbec; yes, he told me, some of them at any rate. The villa in which one of them lived was precisely at the far end of the beach, where the cliffs of Canapville began. Since this girl was a great friend of Albertine Simonet, this was one more reason for me to believe that it was indeed the latter whom I had met that day when I was with my grandmother. There were of course so many of those little streets running down to the beach, and all at the same angle, that I could not have specified exactly which of them it had been. One would like to remember a thing accurately, but at the time one's vision is always clouded. And yet that Albertine and the girl whom I had seen going to her friend's house were one and the same person was a practical certainty. In spite of this, whereas the countless images that have since been presented to me by the dark young golfer, however different they may be, are superimposed one upon the other (because I know that they all belong to her), and by retracing my memories I can, under cover of that identity and as if through an internal passageway, run through all those images in turn without losing my grasp of one and the same person; if, on the other hand, I wish to go back to the girl whom I passed that day when I was with my grandmother, I have to emerge into the open air. I am convinced that it is Albertine whom I find there, the same who used often to come to a halt in the midst of her friends during their walks against the backdrop of the sea; but all those more recent images remain separate from that earlier one because I am unable to confer on her retrospectively an identity which she did not have for me at the moment she caught my eye; whatever assurance I may derive from the law of probabilities, that girl with the plump cheeks who stared at me so boldly from the corner of the little street and from the beach, and by whom I believe that I might have been loved, I have never, in the strict sense of the words, seen again.



Was it my hesitation between the different girls of the little band, all of whom retained something of the collective charm which had disturbed me from the first, that, combined with those other reasons, allowed me later on, even at the time of my greater—my second—love for Albertine, a sort of intermittent and all too brief liberty to abstain from loving her? From having strayed among all her friends before it finally concentrated on her, my love kept for some time between itself and the image of Albertine a certain “play” which enabled it, like ill-adjusted stage lighting, to flit over others before returning to focus upon her; the connexion between the pain which I felt in my heart and the memory of Albertine did not seem to me a necessary one; I might perhaps have been able to co-ordinate it with the image of another person. And this enabled me, in a momentary flash, to banish the reality altogether, not only the external reality, as in my love for Gilberte (which I had recognised to be an inner state wherein I drew from myself alone the particular quality, the special character of the person I loved, everything that rendered her indispensable to my happiness), but even the other reality, internal and purely subjective.

“Not a day passes but one or other of them comes by here, and looks in for a minute or two,” Elstir told me, plunging me into despair at the thought that if I had gone to see him at once, when my grandmother had begged me to do so, I should in all probability have made Albertine’s acquaintance long since.

She had continued on her way; from the studio she was no longer in sight. I supposed that she had gone to join her friends on the front. If I could have been there with Elstir, I should have got to know them. I thought up endless pretexts to induce him to take a stroll with me on the beach. I no longer had the same feeling of serenity as before the apparition of the girl in the frame of the little window, so charming until then in its fringe of honey-suckle and now so drearily empty. Elstir caused me a joy that was mixed with torture when he agreed to walk a few steps with me but said that he must first finish the piece of work on which he was engaged. It was a study of some flowers, but not those of which I would rather have commissioned a portrait from him than one of a person, so that I might learn from the revelation of his genius what I had so often sought in vain from the flowers themselves—hawthorn white and pink, cornflowers, apple-blossom. Elstir as he worked talked botany to me, but I scarcely listened; he was no longer sufficient in himself, he was now only the necessary intermediary between these girls and me; the prestige which, only a few moments ago, his talent had still given him in my eyes was now worthless except in so far as it might confer a little on me also in the eyes of the little band to whom I should be introduced by him.

I paced up and down the room, impatient for him to finish what he was doing; I picked up and examined various sketches, quantities of which were stacked against the walls. It was thus that I happened to bring to light a water-colour which evidently belonged to a much earlier period in Elstir’s life, and gave me that particular kind of enchantment which is diffused by works of art not only delightfully executed but representing a subject so singular and so seductive that it is to it that we attribute a great deal of their charm, as if that charm were something that the painter had merely to discover and observe, realised already in a material form by nature, and to reproduce. The fact that such objects can exist, beautiful quite apart from the painter’s interpretation of them, satisfies a sort of innate materialism in us, against which our reason contends, and acts as a counterpoise to the abstractions of aesthetic theory. It was—this water-colour—the portrait of a young woman, by no means beautiful but of a curious type, in a close-fitting hat not unlike a bowler, trimmed with a ribbon of cerise silk; in one of her mittened hands was a lighted cigarette, while the other held at knee-level a sort of broadbrimmed garden hat, no more than a screen of plaited straw to keep off the sun. On a table by her side, a tall vase filled with pink carnations. Often (and it was the case here) the singularity of such works is due principally to their having been executed in special conditions, so that it is not immediately clear to us whether, for instance, the strange attire of a female model is her costume for a fancy-dress ball, or whether, conversely, the scarlet cloak which an elderly man looks as though he had put on in response to some whim of the painter’s is his professor’s or alderman’s gown or his cardinal’s cape. The ambiguous character of the person whose portrait now confronted me arose, without my understanding it, from the fact that it was a young actress of an earlier generation half dressed up as a man. But the bowler beneath which the hair was fluffy but short, the velvet jacket, without lapels, opening over a white shirt-front, made me hesitate as to the period of the clothes and the sex of the model, so that I did not know exactly what I had before my eyes, except that it was a most luminous piece of painting. And the pleasure which it afforded me was troubled only by the fear that Elstir, by delaying further, would make me miss the girls, for the declining sun now hung low in the little window. Nothing in this water-colour was merely set down there as a fact and painted because of its practical relevance to the scene, the costume because the young woman must be wearing something, the vase to hold the flowers. The glass of the vase, cherished for its own sake, seemed to be holding the water in which the stems of the carnations were dipped in something as limpid, almost as liquid as itself; the woman’s clothes enveloped her in a material that had an independent, fraternal charm, and, if the products of industry can compete in charm with the wonders of nature, as delicate, as pleasing to the touch of the eye, as freshly painted as the fur of a cat, the petals of a flower, the feathers of a dove. The whiteness of the shirt-front, as fine as soft hail, with its gay pleats gathered into little bells like lilies of the valley, was spangled with bright gleams of light from the room, themselves sharply etched and subtly shaded as if they were flowers stitched into the linen. And the velvet of the jacket, with its brilliant sheen, had something rough, frayed and shaggy about it here and there that recalled the crumpled brightness of the carnations in the vase. But above all one felt that Elstir, heedless of any impression of immorality that might be given by this transvestite costume worn by a young actress for whom the talent she would bring to the role was doubtless of less importance than the titillation she would offer to the jaded or depraved senses of some of her audience, had on the contrary fastened upon this equivocal aspect as on an aesthetic element which

deserved to be brought into prominence, and which he had done everything in his power to emphasise. Along the lines of the face, the latent sex seemed to be on the point of confessing itself to be that of a somewhat boyish girl, then vanished, and reappeared further on with a suggestion rather of an effeminate, vicious and pensive youth, then fled once more and remained elusive. The dreamy sadness in the expression of the eyes, by its very contrast with the accessories belonging to the world of debauchery and the stage, was not the least disturbing element in the picture. One imagined moreover that it must be feigned, and that the young person who seemed ready to submit to caresses in this provoking costume had probably thought it intriguing to enhance the provocation with this romantic expression of a secret longing, an unspoken grief. At the foot of the picture was inscribed: "*Miss Sacripant*, October, 1872." I could not contain my admiration. "Oh, it's nothing, only a rough sketch I did when I was young; it was a costume for a variety show. It's all ages ago now." "And what has become of the model?" A bewilderment provoked by my words preceded on Elstir's face the indifferent, absent-minded air which, a moment later, he displayed there. "Quick, give it to me!" he said, "I hear Madame Elstir coming, and though, I assure you, the young person in the bowler hat never played any part in my life, still there's no point in my wife's coming in and finding the picture staring her in the face. I've kept it only as an amusing sidelight on the theatre of those days." And, before putting it away behind the pile, Elstir, who perhaps had not set eyes on the sketch for years, gave it a careful scrutiny. "I must keep just the head," he murmured, "the lower part is really too shockingly bad, the hands are a beginner's work." I was miserable at the arrival of Mme Elstir, who could only delay us still further. The window-sill was already aglow. Our excursion would be a pure waste of time. There was no longer the slightest chance of our seeing the girls, and consequently it mattered now not at all how quickly Mme Elstir left us. In fact she did not stay very long. I found her most tedious; she might have been beautiful at twenty, driving an ox in the Roman Campagna, but her dark hair was streaked with grey and she was common without being simple, because she believed that a pompous manner and a majestic pose were required by her statuesque beauty, which, however, advancing age had robbed of all its charm. She was dressed with the utmost simplicity. And it was touching but at the same time surprising to hear Elstir exclaim, whenever he opened his mouth, and with a respectful gentleness, as if merely uttering the words moved him to tenderness and veneration: "My beautiful Gabrielle!" Later on, when I had become familiar with Elstir's mythological paintings, Mme Elstir acquired beauty in my eyes also. I understood then that to a certain ideal type illustrated by certain lines, certain arabesques which reappeared incessantly throughout his work, to a certain canon of art, he had attributed a character that was almost divine, since he had dedicated all his time, all the mental effort of which he was capable, in a word his whole life, to the task of distinguishing those lines as clearly and of reproducing them as faithfully as possible. What such an ideal inspired in Elstir was indeed a cult so solemn, so exacting, that it never allowed him to be satisfied with what he had achieved; it was the most intimate part of himself; and so he had never been able to look at it with detachment, to extract emotion from it, until the day on which he encountered it, realised outside himself, in the body of a woman, the body of the woman who had in due course become Mme Elstir and in whom he had been able (as is possible only with something that is not oneself) to find it meritorious, moving, divine. How restful, moreover, to be able to place his lips upon that ideal Beauty which hitherto he had been obliged so laboriously to extract from within himself, and which now, mysteriously incarnate, offered itself to him in a series of communions, filled with saving grace. Elstir at this period was no longer at that youthful age in which we look only to the power of the mind for the realisation of our ideal. He was nearing the age at which we count on bodily satisfactions to stimulate the force of the brain, at which mental fatigue, by inclining us towards materialism, and the diminution of our energy, towards the possibility of influences passively received, begin to make us admit that there may indeed be certain bodies, certain callings, certain rhythms that are specially privileged, realising so naturally our ideal that even without genius, merely by copying the movement of a shoulder, the tension of a neck, we can achieve a masterpiece; it is the age at which we like to caress Beauty with our eyes objectively, outside ourselves, to have it near us, in a tapestry, in a beautiful sketch by Titian picked up in a second-hand shop, in a mistress as lovely as Titian's sketch. When I understood this I could no longer look at Mme Elstir without a feeling of pleasure, and her body began to lose its heaviness, for I filled it with an idea, the idea that she was an immaterial creature, a portrait by Elstir. She was one for me, and doubtless for him too. The particulars of life do not matter to the artist; they merely provide him with the opportunity to lay bare his genius. One feels unmistakably, when one sees side by side ten portraits of different people painted by Elstir, that they are all, first and foremost, Elstirs. Only, after that rising tide of genius which sweeps over and submerges an artist's life, when the brain begins to tire, gradually the balance is disturbed and, like a river that resumes its course after the counterflow of a spring tide, it is life that once more takes the upper hand. But, while the first period lasted, the artist has gradually evolved the law, the formula of his unconscious gift. He knows what situations, if he is a novelist, what scenes, if he is a painter, provide him with the material, unimportant in itself but essential to his researches, as a laboratory might be or a workshop. He knows that he has created his masterpieces out of effects of attenuated light, out of the action of remorse upon consciousness of guilt, out of women posed beneath trees or half-immersed in water, like statues. A day will come when, owing to the erosion of his brain, he will no longer have the strength, faced with those materials which his genius was wont to use, to make the intellectual effort which alone can produce his work, and yet will continue to seek them out, happy to be near them because of the spiritual pleasure, the allurements to work, that they arouse in him; and, surrounding them besides with an aura of superstition as if they were superior to all things else, as if there dwelt in them already a great part of the work of art which they might be said to carry within them ready-made, he will confine himself to the company, to the adoration of his models. He will hold endless conversations with the

repentant criminals whose remorse and regeneration once formed the subject of his novels; he will buy a house in a countryside where mists attenuate the light, he will spend long hours looking at women bathing; he will collect sumptuous stuffs. And thus the beauty of life, an expression somehow devoid of meaning, a stage this side of art at which I had seen Swann come to rest, was that also which, by a slackening of creative ardour, idolatry of the forms which had inspired it, a tendency to take the line of least resistance, must gradually undermine an Elstir's progress.

At last he had applied the final brush-stroke to his flowers. I sacrificed a minute to look at them. There was no merit in my doing so, for I knew that there was no chance now of our finding the girls on the beach; and yet, had I believed them to be still there, and that these wasted moments would make me miss them, I should have stopped to look none the less, for I should have told myself that Elstir was more interested in his flowers than in my meeting with the girls. My grandmother's nature, a nature that was the exact opposite of my complete egoism, was nevertheless reflected in certain aspects of my own. In circumstances in which someone to whom I was indifferent, for whom I had always feigned affection or respect, ran the risk merely of some unpleasantness whereas I was in real danger, I could not have done otherwise than commiserate with him on his vexation as though it had been something important, and treat my own danger as nothing, because I would feel that these were the proportions in which he must see things. To be quite accurate, I would go even further and not only not complain of the danger in which I myself stood but go half-way to meet it, and with respect to one that threatened other people, try, on the contrary, at the risk of being endangered myself, to avert it from them. The reasons for this are several, none of them to my credit. One is that if, as long as I was simply applying my reason to the matter, I felt that I cherished life above all else, whenever in the course of my existence I have found myself obsessed by mental worry or merely by nervous anxieties, sometimes so puerile that I would not dare to reveal them, if an unforeseen circumstance then arose, involving for me the risk of being killed, this new preoccupation was so trivial in comparison with the others that I welcomed it with a sense of relief, almost of joy. Thus I find that I have experienced, although the least courageous of men, a feeling which has always seemed to me, in my reasoning moods, so foreign to my nature, so inconceivable: the intoxication of danger. But even if, when a danger arose, however mortal, I were going through an entirely calm and happy phase, I could not, were I with another person, refrain from sheltering him behind me and choosing for myself the post of danger. When a sufficient number of experiences had taught me that I invariably acted and enjoyed acting thus, I discovered—and was deeply ashamed by the discovery—that it was because, contrary to what I had always believed and asserted, I was extremely sensitive to the opinion of others. Not that this kind of unconfessed self-esteem has anything to do with vanity or conceit. For what might satisfy one or other of those failings would give me no pleasure, and I have always refrained from indulging them. But with the people in whose company I have succeeded in concealing most effectively the minor assets a knowledge of which might have given them a less paltry idea of me, I have never been able to deny myself the pleasure of showing them that I take more trouble to avert the risk of death from their path than from my own. As my motive is then self-esteem and not virtue, I find it quite natural that in any crisis they should act differently. I am far from blaming them for it, as I should perhaps do if I had been moved by a sense of duty, a duty which would seem to me in that case to be as incumbent upon them as upon myself. On the contrary, I feel that it is eminently sensible of them to safeguard their lives, while at the same time being unable to prevent myself from pushing my own safety into the background, which is particularly absurd and culpable of me since I have come to realise that the lives of many of the people in front of whom I plant myself when a bomb bursts are more valueless even than my own.

However, on the day of this first visit to Elstir, the time was still distant at which I was to become conscious of this difference in value, and there was no question of danger, but simply—a premonitory sign of that pernicious self-esteem—the question of my not appearing to attach to the pleasure which I so ardently desired more importance than to the work which the painter had still to finish. It was finished at last. And, once we were out of doors, I discovered that—so long were the days still at this season—it was not so late as I had supposed. We strolled down to the front. What stratagems I employed to keep Elstir standing at the spot where I thought that the girls might still come past! Pointing to the cliffs that towered beside us, I kept on asking him to tell me about them, so as to make him forget the time and stay there a little longer. I felt that we had a better chance of waylaying the little band if we moved towards the end of the beach.

"I should like to look at those cliffs with you from a little nearer," I said to him, having noticed that one of the girls was in the habit of going in that direction. "And as we go, do tell me about Carquethuit. I should so like to see Carquethuit," I went on, without thinking that the novel character which manifested itself with such force in Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour* might belong perhaps rather to the painter's vision than to any special quality in the place itself. "Since I've seen your picture, I think that is where I should most like to go, there and to the Pointe du Raz, but of course that would be quite a journey from here."

"Yes, and besides, even if it weren't nearer, I should advise you perhaps all the same to visit Carquethuit," he replied. "The Pointe du Raz is magnificent, but after all it's simply another of those high cliffs of Normandy or Brittany which you know already. Carquethuit is quite different, with those rocks on a low shore. I know nothing in France like it, it reminds me rather of certain aspects of Florida. It's very curious, and moreover extremely wild. It's between Clitourps and Nehomme; you know how desolate those parts are; the sweep of the coast-line is exquisite. Here, the coast-line is pretty ordinary, but along there I can't tell you what grace it has, what softness."

Dusk was falling; it was time to be turning homewards. I was accompanying Elstir back to his villa when suddenly, as it were Mephistopheles springing up before Faust, there appeared at the end of the avenue—like

a simple objectification, unreal and diabolical, of the temperament diametrically opposed to my own, of the semi-barbarous and cruel vitality of which I, in my weakness, my excess of tortured sensibility and intellectuality, was so destitute—a few spots of the essence impossible to mistake for anything else, a few spores of the zoophytic band of girls, who looked as though they had not seen me but were unquestionably engaged in passing a sarcastic judgment on me. Feeling that a meeting between them and us was now inevitable, and that Elstir would be certain to call me, I turned my back like a bather preparing to meet the shock of a wave; I stopped dead and, leaving my illustrious companion to pursue his way, remained where I was, stooping, as if I had suddenly become engrossed in it, towards the window of the antique shop which we happened to be passing at that moment. I was not sorry to give the appearance of being able to think of something other than these girls, and I was already dimly aware that when Elstir did call me up to introduce me to them I should wear that sort of inquiring expression which betrays not surprise but the wish to look surprised—such bad actors are we all, or such good mind-readers our fellow-men—that I should even go so far as to point a finger to my breast, as who should ask “Are you calling me?” and then run to join him, my head lowered in compliance and docility and my face coldly masking my annoyance at being torn from the study of old pottery in order to be introduced to people whom I had no wish to know. Meanwhile I contemplated the window and waited for the moment when my name, shouted by Elstir, would come to strike me like an expected and innocuous bullet. The certainty of being introduced to these girls had had the effect of making me not only feign indifference to them, but actually feel it. Henceforth inevitable, the pleasure of knowing them began at once to contract, to shrink, appeared smaller to me than the pleasure of talking to Saint-Loup, of dining with my grandmother, of making excursions in the vicinity which I would regret being probably forced to abandon in consequence of my relations with people who could scarcely be much interested in old buildings. Moreover, what diminished the pleasure which I was about to feel was not merely the imminence but the incoherence of its realisation. Laws as precise as those of hydrostatics maintain the relative position of the images which we form in a fixed order, which the proximity of the event at once upsets. Elstir was about to call me. This was not at all the way in which I had so often, on the beach, in my bedroom, imagined myself making the acquaintance of these girls. What was about to happen was a different event, for which I was not prepared. I recognised in it neither my desire nor its object; I regretted almost that I had come out with Elstir. But, above all, the shrinking of the pleasure that I had previously expected to feel was due to the certainty that nothing now could take it from me. And it recovered, as though by some latent elasticity in itself, its full extent when it ceased to be subjected to the pressure of that certainty, at the moment when, having decided to turn my head, I saw Elstir, standing a few feet away with the girls, bidding them good-bye. The face of the girl who stood nearest to him, round and plump and glittering with the light in her eyes, reminded me of a cake on the top of which a place has been kept for a morsel of blue sky. Her eyes, even when fixed on an object, gave the impression of mobility, as on days of high wind the air, though invisible, lets us perceive the speed with which it is coursing between us and the sky. For a moment her eyes met mine, like those travelling skies on stormy days which approach a slower cloud, touch it, overtake it, pass it. But they do not know one another, and are soon driven far apart. So, now, our looks were for a moment confronted, each ignorant of what the celestial continent that lay before it held by way of promises or threats for the future. Only at the moment when her gaze was directly coincident with mine, without slackening its pace it clouded over slightly. So on a clear night the wind-swept moon passes behind a cloud and veils its brightness for a moment, but soon reappears. But already Elstir had left the girls without having summoned me. They disappeared down a side-street; he came towards me. My whole plan was wrecked.

I have said that Albertine had not seemed to me that day to be the same as on previous days, and that each time I saw her she was to appear different. But I felt at that moment that certain modifications in the appearance, the importance, the stature of a person may also be due to the variability of certain states of consciousness interposed between that person and ourselves. One of those that play the most considerable part in this respect is belief (that evening my belief, then the vanishing of my belief, that I was about to know Albertine had, with a few seconds’ interval only, rendered her almost insignificant, then infinitely precious, in my eyes; some years later, the belief, then the disappearance of the belief, that Albertine was faithful to me, brought about similar changes).

Of course, long ago at Combray, I had seen how, according to the time of day, according to whether I was entering one or the other of the two dominant moods that governed my sensibility in turn, my grief at not being with my mother would lessen or grow, as imperceptible all afternoon as is the moon’s light when the sun is shining, and then, when night had come, reigning alone in my anxious heart in place of recent memories now obliterated. But on that day at Balbec, when I saw that Elstir was leaving the girls without having called me, I learned for the first time that the variations in the importance which a pleasure or a sorrow has in our eyes may depend not merely on this alternation of two moods, but on the displacement of invisible beliefs, such, for example, as make death seem to us of no account because they bathe it in a glow of unreality, and thus enable us to attach importance to our attending a musical evening which would lose much of its charm if, on the announcement that we were sentenced to be guillotined, the belief that had bathed the evening in its warm glow suddenly evaporated. It is true that something in me was aware of this role that beliefs play: namely, my will; but its knowledge is vain if one’s intelligence and one’s sensibility continue in ignorance; these last are sincere when they believe that we are anxious to forsake a mistress to whom our will alone knows that we are still attached. This is because they are clouded by the belief that we shall see her again at any moment. But let this belief be shattered, let them suddenly become aware that this mistress has

gone from us for ever, and our intelligence and sensibility, having lost their focus, run mad, the most infinitesimal pleasure becomes infinitely great.

Variation of a belief, annulment also of love, which, pre-existent and mobile, comes to rest on the image of a woman simply because that woman will be almost impossible of attainment. Thenceforward we think not so much of the woman, whom we have difficulty in picturing to ourselves, as of the means of getting to know her. A whole series of agonies develops and is sufficient to fix our love definitely upon her who is its almost unknown object. Our love becomes immense, and we never dream how small a place in it the real woman occupies. And if suddenly, as at the moment when I had seen Elstir stop to talk to the girls, we cease to be uneasy, to suffer anguish, since it is this anguish that is the whole of our love, it seems to us as though our love had abruptly vanished at the moment when at length we grasp the prey to whose value we had not given enough thought before. What did I know of Albertine? One or two glimpses of a profile against the sea, less beautiful, assuredly, than those of Veronese's women whom I ought, had I been guided by purely aesthetic reasons, to have preferred to her. By what other reasons could I be guided, since, my anxiety having subsided, I could recapture only those mute profiles, possessing nothing else? Since my first sight of Albertine I had thought about her endlessly, I had carried on with what I called by her name an interminable inner dialogue in which I made her question and answer, think and act, and in the infinite series of imaginary Albertines who followed one after the other in my fancy hour by hour, the real Albertine, glimpsed on the beach, figured only at the head, just as the actress who "creates" a role, the star, appears, out of a long series of performances, in the few first alone. That Albertine was scarcely more than a silhouette, all that had been superimposed upon her being of my own invention, to such an extent when we love does the contribution that we ourselves make outweigh—even in terms of quantity alone—those that come to us from the beloved object. And this is true of loves that have been realised in actuality. There are loves that can not only develop but survive on very little—and this even among those that have achieved their carnal fulfilment. An old drawing-master who had taught my grandmother had been presented by some obscure mistress with a daughter. The mother died shortly after the birth of the child, and the drawing-master was so broken-hearted that he did not long survive her. In the last months of his life my grandmother and some of the Combray ladies, who had never liked to make any allusion in his presence to the woman with whom in any case he had not officially lived and had had comparatively sparse relations, took it into their heads to ensure the little girl's future by clubbing together to provide her with an annuity. It was my grandmother who suggested this; several of her friends jibbed; after all, was the child really such a very interesting case? Was she even the child of her reputed father? With women like that, one could never be sure. Finally, everything was settled. The child came to thank the ladies. She was plain, and so absurdly like the old drawing-master as to remove every shadow of doubt. Since her hair was the only nice thing about her, one of the ladies said to her father, who had brought her: "What pretty hair she has." And thinking that now, the guilty woman being dead and the old man only half alive, a discreet allusion to that past of which they had always pretended to know nothing could do no harm, my grandmother added: "It must run in the family. Did her mother have pretty hair like that?" "I don't know," was the old man's quaint answer, "I never saw her except with a hat on."

Before rejoining Elstir, I caught sight of myself in a glass. To add to the disaster of my not having been introduced to the girls, I noticed that my tie was all crooked, and my hat left long wisps of hair showing, which did not become me; but it was a piece of luck, all the same, that they should have seen me, even thus attired, in Elstir's company, and so could not forget me; also that I should have put on that morning, at my grandmother's suggestion, my smart waistcoat, when I might so easily have been wearing one that was simply hideous, and that I was carrying my best stick. For while an event for which we are longing never happens quite in the way we have been expecting, failing the advantages on which we supposed that we might count, others present themselves for which we never hoped, and make up for our disappointment; and we have been so dreading the worst that in the end we are inclined to feel that, taking one thing with another, chance has, on the whole, been rather kind to us.

"I did so much want to know them," I said as I rejoined Elstir. "Then why did you stand a mile away?" These were his actual words, uttered not because they expressed what was really in his mind, since, if his desire had been to gratify mine, he could quite easily have called me, but perhaps because he had heard phrases of this sort, in familiar use among vulgar people when they are caught in the wrong, and because even great men are in certain respects much the same as vulgar people, and take their everyday excuses from the same common stock just as they get their daily bread from the same baker; or it may be that such remarks (which ought, one might almost say, to be read backwards, since their literal meaning is the opposite of the truth) are the instantaneous effect, the negative exposure of a reflex action. "They were in a hurry." It struck me that of course they must have stopped him from summoning a person who did not greatly attract them; otherwise he would not have failed to do so, after all the questions that I had put to him about them, and the interest which he must have seen that I took in them.

"We were speaking just now of Carquethuit," he said to me as we walked towards his villa. "I've done a little sketch in which you can see the curve of the beach much better. The painting is not too bad, but it's different. If you will allow me, as a souvenir of our friendship, I'd like to give you the sketch," he went on, for the people who refuse us the objects of our desire are always ready to offer us something else.

"I should very much like, if you have such a thing, a photograph of the little portrait of Miss Sacripant. By the way, that's not a real name, surely?"

"It's the name of a character the sitter played in a stupid little musical comedy."

"But, I assure you, Monsieur, that I've never set eyes on her; you look as though you thought that I knew her."

Elstir was silent. "It couldn't be Mme Swann before she was married?" I hazarded, in one of those sudden fortuitous stumblings upon the truth, which are rare enough in all conscience, and yet suffice, after the event, to give a certain cumulative support to the theory of presentiments, provided that one takes care to forget all the wrong guesses that would invalidate it.

Elstir did not reply. The portrait was indeed that of Odette de Cr cy. She had preferred not to keep it for many reasons, some of them only too obvious. But there were others less apparent. The portrait dated from before the point at which Odette, disciplining her features, had made of her face and figure that creation the broad outlines of which her hairdressers, her dressmakers, she herself—in her way of holding herself, of speaking, of smiling, of moving her hands and eyes, of thinking—were to respect throughout the years to come. It required the vitiated taste of a surfeited lover to make Swann prefer to all the countless photographs of the "definitive" Odette who was his charming wife the little photograph which he kept in his room and in which, beneath a straw hat trimmed with pansies, one saw a thin young woman, fairly plain, with bunched-out hair and drawn features.

But in any case, even if the portrait had been, not anterior, like Swann's favourite photograph, to the systematisation of Odette's features into a new type, majestic and charming, but subsequent to it, Elstir's vision would have sufficed to discompose that type. Artistic genius acts in a similar way to those extremely high temperatures which have the power to split up combinations of atoms which they proceed to combine afresh in a diametrically opposite order, corresponding to another type. All that artificial harmony which a woman has succeeded in imposing upon her features, the maintenance of which she oversees in her mirror every day before going out, relying on the angle of her hat, the smoothness of her hair, the vivacity of her expression, to ensure its continuity, that harmony the keen eye of the great painter instantly destroys, substituting for it a rearrangement of the woman's features such as will satisfy a certain pictorial ideal of femininity which he carries in his head. Similarly it often happens that, after a certain age, the eye of a great scientist will find everywhere the elements necessary to establish those relations which alone are of interest to him. Like those craftsmen, those players who, instead of making a fuss and asking for what they cannot have, content themselves with whatever comes to hand, the artist might say of anything, no matter what, that it will serve his purpose. Thus a cousin of the Princesse de Luxembourg, a beauty of the most queenly type, having taken a fancy to a form of art which was new at that time, had asked the leading painter of the naturalist school to do her portrait. At once the artist's eye found what he had been seeking everywhere. And on his canvas there appeared, in place of the proud lady, a street-girl, and behind her a vast, sloping, purple background which reminded one of the Place Pigalle. But even without going so far as that, not only will the portrait of a woman by a great artist not seek in the least to give satisfaction to various demands on the woman's part—such as, for instance, when she begins to age, make her have herself photographed in dresses that are almost those of a little girl which bring out her still youthful figure and make her appear like the sister or even the daughter of her own daughter, who, if need be, is tricked out for the occasion as a "perfect fright" beside her. It will, on the contrary, emphasise those very blemishes which she seeks to hide, and which (as for instance a sickly, almost greenish complexion) are all the more tempting to him since they show "character," though they are enough to destroy the illusions of the ordinary beholder who sees crumble into dust the ideal of which the woman so proudly sustained the figment, and which set her, in her unique, irreducible form, so far outside, so far above the rest of humanity. Fallen now, situated outside her own type in which she sat unassailably enthroned, she is now just an ordinary woman, in the legend of whose superiority we have lost all faith. We are so accustomed to incorporating in this type not only the beauty of an Odette but her personality, her identity, that standing before the portrait which has thus stripped her of it we are inclined to protest not simply "How plain he has made her!" but "Why, it isn't the least bit like her!" We find it hard to believe that it can be she. We do not recognise her. And yet there is a person there on the canvas whom we are quite conscious of having seen before. But that person is not Odette; the face of the person, her body, her general appearance seem familiar. They recall to us not this particular woman who never held herself like that, whose natural pose never formed any such strange and teasing arabesque, but other women, all the women whom Elstir has ever painted, women whom invariably, however they may differ from one another, he has chosen to plant thus, in full face, with an arched foot thrust out from under the skirt, a large round hat in one hand, symmetrically corresponding, at the level of the knee which it covers, to that other disc, higher up in the picture, the face. And furthermore, not only does a portrait by the hand of genius dislocate a woman's type, as it has been defined by her coquetry and her selfish conception of beauty, but if it is also old, it is not content with ageing the original in the same way as a photograph ages its sitter, by showing her dressed in the fashions of long ago. In a portrait, it is not only the manner the woman then had of dressing that dates her, it is also the manner the artist had of painting. And this, Elstir's earliest manner, was the most devastating of birth certificates for Odette because it not only established her, as did her photographs of the same period, as the younger sister of various well-known courtesans, but made her portrait contemporary with the countless portraits that Manet or Whistler had painted of all those vanished models, models who already belonged to oblivion or to history.

It was along this train of thought, silently ruminated over by Elstir's side as I accompanied him to his door, that I was being led by the discovery that I had just made of the identity of his model, when this first discovery caused me to make a second, more disturbing still, concerning the identity of the artist. He had painted the portrait of Odette de Cr cy. Could it possibly be that this man of genius, this sage, this recluse,

this philosopher with his marvellous flow of conversation, who towered over everyone and everything, was the ridiculous, depraved painter who had at one time been adopted by the Verdurins? I asked him if he had known them, and whether by any chance it was he that they used to call M. Biche. He answered me in the affirmative, with no trace of embarrassment, as if my question referred to a period in his life that was already somewhat remote and he had no suspicion of the extraordinary disillusionment he was causing me. But, looking up, he read it on my face. His own assumed an expression of annoyance. And, as we were now almost at the gate of his house, a man of less distinction of heart and mind might simply have said good-bye to me a trifle dryly and taken care to avoid seeing me again. This however was not Elstir's way with me; like the master that he was—and it was, perhaps, from the point of view of pure creativity, his one fault that he was a master in that sense of the word, for an artist, if he is to be absolutely true to the life of the spirit, must be alone, and not squander his ego, even upon disciples—from every circumstance, whether involving himself or other people, he sought to extract, for the better edification of the young, the element of truth that it contained. He chose therefore, instead of the words that might have avenged the injury to his pride, those that could prove instructive to me. "There is no man," he began, "however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived a life, the memory of which is so unpleasant to him that he would gladly expunge it. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man—so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise—unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded. I know that there are young people, the sons and grandsons of distinguished men, whose masters have instilled into them nobility of mind and moral refinement from their schooldays. They may perhaps have nothing to retract from their past lives; they could publish a signed account of everything they have ever said or done; but they are poor creatures, feeble descendants of doctrinaires, and their wisdom is negative and sterile. We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you, have not been shaped by a paterfamilias or a schoolmaster, they have sprung from very different beginnings, having been influenced by everything evil or commonplace that prevailed round about them. They represent a struggle and a victory. I can see that the picture of what we were at an earlier stage may not be recognisable and cannot, certainly, be pleasing to contemplate in later life. But we must not repudiate it, for it is a proof that we have really lived, that it is in accordance with the laws of life and of the mind that we have, from the common elements of life, of the life of studios, of artistic groups—assuming one is a painter—extracted something that transcends them."

Meanwhile we had reached his door. I was disappointed at not having met the girls. But after all there was now the possibility of meeting them again later on; they had ceased merely to be silhouetted against a horizon where I had been ready to suppose that I should never see them reappear. Around them no longer swirled that sort of great eddy which had separated me from them, which had been merely the expression of the perpetually active desire, mobile, urgent, fed ever on fresh anxieties, which was aroused in me by their inaccessibility, their flight from me, possibly for ever. I could now set my desire for them at rest, hold it in reserve, among all those other desires the realisation of which, as soon as I knew it to be possible, I would cheerfully postpone. I took leave of Elstir; I was alone once again. Then all of a sudden, despite my recent disappointment, I saw in my mind's eye all that chain of coincidences which I had not supposed could possibly come about: that Elstir should be a friend of those very girls, that they, who only that morning had been to me merely figures in a picture with the sea for background, had seen me, had seen me walking in friendly intimacy with a great painter, who was now informed of my secret longing and would no doubt do what he could to assuage it. All this had been a source of pleasure to me, but that pleasure had remained hidden; it was like one of those visitors who wait before letting us know that they are in the room until everyone else has gone and we are by ourselves. Then only do we catch sight of them, and can say to them, "I am at your service," and listen to what they have to tell us. Sometimes between the moment at which these pleasures have entered our consciousness and the moment at which we are free to entertain them, so many hours have passed, we have in the meantime seen so many people, that we are afraid lest they should have grown tired of waiting. But they are patient, they do not grow tired, and as soon as the crowd has gone we find them there ready for us. Sometimes, then, it is we ourselves who are so exhausted that it seems as though our weary mind will no longer have the strength to seize and retain those memories, those impressions for which our frail self is the one habitable place, the sole means of realisation. And we should regret that failure, for existence is of little interest save on days when the dust of realities is mingled with magic sand, when some trivial incident becomes a springboard for romance. Then a whole promontory of the inaccessible world emerges from the twilight of dream and enters our life, our life in which, like the sleeper awakened, we actually see the people of whom we had dreamed with such ardent longing that we had come to believe that we should never see them except in our dreams.

The assuagement brought about by the probability of my now being able to meet the little band whenever I chose was all the more precious to me because I should not have been able to keep watch for them during the next few days, which were taken up with preparations for Saint-Loup's departure. My grandmother was anxious to offer my friend some token of her gratitude for all the kindnesses that he had shown to her and myself. I told her that he was a great admirer of Proudhon, and this put it into her head to send for a collection of autograph letters by that philosopher which she had once bought. Saint-Loup came to the hotel to look at them on the day of their arrival, which was also his last day at Balbec. He read them eagerly, fingering each page with reverence, trying to get the sentences by heart; and then, rising from the table, was



beginning to apologise to my grandmother for having stayed so long, when he heard her say: "No, no, take them with you, they are for you to keep. That was why I sent for them, to give them to you."

He was overwhelmed by a joy which he could no more control than we can a physical condition that arises without the intervention of our will. He blushed scarlet as a child who has just been punished, and my grandmother was far more touched to see all the efforts he made (without success) to contain the joy that convulsed him than she would have been to hear any words of thanks that he could have uttered. But he, fearing that he had failed to show his gratitude properly, begged me to make his excuses to her again, next day, leaning from the window of the little local train which was to take him back to his regiment. The distance was, as a matter of fact, nothing. He had thought of going by road, as he had frequently done that summer, when he was to return the same evening and was not encumbered with baggage. But this time he would in any case have had to put all his heavy luggage in the train. And he found it simpler to take the train himself too, following the advice of the manager who, on being consulted, replied that "Carriage or train, it was more or less equivocal." He meant it to be understood that they were equivalent (in fact, very much what Françoise would have expressed as "coming to the same as makes no difference"). "Very well," Saint-Loup had decided, "I shall take the 'little crawler.' " I should have taken it too, had I not been tired, and gone with my friend to Doncières; failing this I kept on promising, all the time we waited in Balbec station—the time, that is to say, which the driver of the little train spent waiting for unpunctual friends, without whom he refused to start, and also in seeking some refreshment for himself—to go over there and see him several times a week. As Bloch had also come to the station—much to Saint-Loup's disgust—the latter, seeing that our companion could hear him begging me to come to luncheon, to dinner, to stay altogether at Doncières, finally turned to him and, in the most forbidding tone, intended to counteract the forced civility of the invitation and to prevent Bloch from taking it seriously: "If you ever happen to be passing through Doncières any afternoon when I'm off duty, you might ask for me at the barracks; but I hardly ever am off duty." Perhaps, also, Robert was afraid that I might not come alone, and, thinking that I was more intimate with Bloch than I made out, was providing me in this way with a travelling companion, one who would urge me on.

I was afraid that this tone, this manner of inviting a person while advising him not to come, might have wounded Bloch, and felt that Saint-Loup would have done better to say nothing. But I was mistaken, for after the train had gone, while we were walking back together as far as the crossroads where we had to separate, one road going to the hotel, the other to the Blochs' villa, he never stopped asking me on what day we should go to Doncières, for after "all the civility that Saint-Loup had shown" him, it would be "too rude" on his part not to accept his invitation. I was glad that he had not noticed, or was so little displeased as to wish to let it be thought that he had not noticed, in what a less than pressing, indeed barely polite, tone the invitation had been issued. At the same time I should have liked Bloch, for his own sake, to refrain from making a fool of himself by going over at once to Doncières. But I dared not offer a piece of advice which could only have offended him by hinting that Saint-Loup had been less pressing than he himself was impressed. He was a great deal too ready to respond, and even if all his faults of this nature were atoned for by remarkable qualities which others, with more reserve than he, would never have possessed, he carried tactlessness to a pitch that was almost maddening. According to him, the week must not pass without our going to Doncières (he said "our" for I think that he counted to some extent on my presence there as an excuse for his own). All the way home, opposite the gymnasium in its grove of trees, opposite the tennis courts, the mayor's office, the shellfish stall, he stopped me, imploring me to fix a day, and, as I did not, left me in anger, saying: "As your lordship pleases. For my part, I am obliged to go since he has invited me."

Saint-Loup was still so afraid of not having thanked my grandmother properly that he charged me once again to express his gratitude to her a day or two later in a letter I received from him from the town in which he was quartered, a town which seemed, on the envelope where the post-mark had stamped its name, to be hastening to me across country, to tell me that within its walls, in the Louis XVI cavalry barracks, he was thinking of me. The paper was embossed with the arms of Marsantes, in which I could make out a lion surmounting a coronet closed by the cap of a peer of France.

"After a journey which," he wrote, "passed pleasantly enough, with a book I bought at the station, by Arvède Barine<sup>13</sup> (a Russian author, I fancy; it seemed to me remarkably well written for a foreigner, but you shall give me your critical opinion, since you are bound to know all about it, you who are a fount of knowledge and have read everything), here I am again in the thick of this debased existence, where, alas, I feel a sad exile, not having here what I left behind at Balbec; this life in which I can find no affectionate memory, no intellectual attraction; an environment which you would no doubt despise yet which has a certain charm. Everything seems to have changed since I left it, for in the interval one of the most important periods in my life, that from which our friendship dates, has begun. I hope that it may never come to an end. I have spoken of our friendship, of you, to one person only, to the friend I told you of, who has just paid me a surprise visit here. She would very much like to know you, and I feel that you would get on well together, for she too is extremely literary. Otherwise, to go over in my mind all our talks, to relive those hours which I never shall forget, I have shut myself off from my comrades, excellent fellows, but altogether incapable of understanding that sort of thing. This remembrance of the moments I spent with you I should almost have preferred, on my first day here, to conjure up for my own solitary enjoyment, without writing to you. But I was afraid lest, with your subtle mind and ultra-sensitive heart, you might needlessly torment yourself if you did not hear from me, if, that is to say, you still condescend to occupy your thoughts with this blunt trooper whom you will have a hard task to polish and refine and make a little more subtle and worthier of your company."

On the whole this letter, in its affectionate spirit, was not at all unlike those which, when I did not yet know Saint-Loup, I had imagined that he would write to me, in those day-dreams from which the coldness of his first greeting had shaken me by bringing me face to face with an icy reality which was not, however, to last. Once I had received this letter, every time the post was brought in, at lunch-time, I could tell at once when it was from him that a letter came, for it had always that second face which a person assumes when he is absent, in the features of which (the characters of the handwriting) there is no reason why we should not suppose that we can detect an individual soul just as much as in the line of a nose or the inflexions of a voice.

I would now happily remain at the table while it was being cleared, and, if it was not a moment at which the girls of the little band might be passing, it was no longer solely towards the sea that I would turn my eyes. Since I had seen such things depicted in water-colours by Elstir, I sought to find again in reality, I cherished as though for their poetic beauty, the broken gestures of the knives still lying across one another, the swollen convexity of a discarded napkin into which the sun introduced a patch of yellow velvet, the half-empty glass which thus showed to greater advantage the noble sweep of its curved sides and, in the heart of its translucent crystal, clear as frozen daylight, some dregs of wine, dark but glittering with reflected lights, the displacement of solid objects, the transmutation of liquids by the effect of light and shade, the shifting colours of the plums which passed from green to blue and from blue to golden yellow in the half-plundered dish, the promenade of the antiquated chairs that came twice daily to take their places round the white cloth spread on the table as on an altar at which were celebrated the rites of the palate, and where in the hollows of the oyster-shells a few drops of lustral water had remained as in tiny holy-water stoups of stone; I tried to find beauty there where I had never imagined before that it could exist, in the most ordinary things, in the profundities of "still life."

When, some days after Saint-Loup's departure, I had succeeded in persuading Elstir to give a small party at which I should meet Albertine, the freshness of appearance and elegance of attire, both quite momentary, which were to be observed in me at the moment of my starting out from the Grand Hotel (and which were due respectively to a longer rest than usual and to special pains over my toilet) were such that I regretted my inability to reserve them (and also the credit accruing from Elstir's friendship) for the captivation of some other, more interesting person, I regretted having to use them all up on the simple pleasure of making Albertine's acquaintance. My brain assessed this pleasure at a very low value now that it was assured. But, inside, my will did not for a moment share this illusion, that will which is the persevering and unalterable servant of our successive personalities; hidden away in the shadow, despised, downtrodden, untiringly faithful, toiling incessantly, and with no thought for the variability of the self, to ensure that the self may never lack what is needed. While, at the moment when we are about to start on an eagerly awaited journey, our intelligence and our sensibility begin to ask themselves whether it is really worth the trouble, the will, knowing that those lazy masters would at once begin to consider that journey the most wonderful experience if it became impossible for us to undertake it, leaves them arguing outside the station, vying with each other in their hesitations; but it busies itself with buying the tickets and putting us into the carriage before the train starts. It is as invariable as the intelligence and the sensibility are fickle, but since it is silent, gives no account of its actions, it seems almost non-existent; it is by its dogged determination that the other constituent parts of our personality are led, but without seeing it, whereas they distinguish clearly all their own uncertainties. So my intelligence and my sensibility began a discussion as to the real value of the pleasure that there would be in knowing Albertine, while I studied in the glass vain and perishable attractions which they would have preserved intact for use on some other occasion. But my will would not let the hour pass at which I must start, and it was Elstir's address that it called out to the driver. My intelligence and my sensibility were at liberty, now that the die was cast, to think this a pity. If my will had given the man a different address, they would have been properly had.

When I arrived at Elstir's a few minutes later, I thought at first that Mlle Simonet was not in the studio. There was certainly a girl sitting there in a silk frock, bareheaded, but one whose marvellous hair, whose nose, whose complexion, meant nothing to me, in whom I did not recognise the human entity that I had extracted from a young cyclist in a polo-cap strolling past between myself and the sea. Nevertheless it was Albertine. But even when I knew it to be her, I gave her no thought. On entering any social gathering, when one is young, one loses consciousness of one's old self, one becomes a different man, every drawing-room being a fresh universe in which, coming under the sway of a new moral perspective, we fasten our attention, as if they were to matter to us for all time, on people, dances, card-tables, all of which we shall have forgotten by the morning. Obligated to follow, if I was to arrive at the goal of conversation with Albertine, a route in no way of my own planning, which first brought me to a halt in front of Elstir, passed by other groups of guests to whom I was presented, then along the buffet table, at which I was offered, and where I ate, a strawberry tart or two, while I listened, motionless, to the music that had begun in another part of the room, I found myself giving to these various incidents the same importance as to my introduction to Mlle Simonet, an introduction which was now nothing more than one among several such incidents, having entirely forgotten that it had been, but a few minutes since, my sole object in coming there. But is it not thus, in the bustle of daily life, with every true happiness, every great sorrow? In a room full of other people we receive from the woman we love the answer, auspicious or fatal, which we have been awaiting for the last year. But we must go on talking, ideas come flocking one after another, unfolding a smooth surface which is pricked now and then at the very most by a dull throb from the memory, infinitely more profound but very narrow, that misfortune has come upon us. If, instead of misfortune, it is happiness, it may be that not until many years have elapsed will we recall that the most important event in our emotional life occurred without our having time to give it any prolonged

attention, or even to become aware of it almost, at a social gathering to which we had gone solely in expectation of that event.

When Elstir asked me to come with him so that he might introduce me to Albertine, who was sitting a little further down the room, I first of all finished eating a coffee éclair and, with a show of keen interest, asked an old gentleman whose acquaintance I had just made (and to whom I thought that I might offer the rose in my buttonhole which he had admired) to tell me more about the old Norman fairs. This is not to say that the introduction which followed did not give me any pleasure and did not assume a certain solemnity in my eyes. But so far as the pleasure was concerned, I was naturally not conscious of it until some time later, when, back at the hotel, and in my room alone, I had become myself again. Pleasure in this respect is like photography. What we take, in the presence of the beloved object, is merely a negative, which we develop later, when we are back at home, and have once again found at our disposal that inner dark-room the entrance to which is barred to us so long as we are with other people.

If my consciousness of the pleasure it had brought me was thus retarded by a few hours, the gravity of this introduction made itself felt at once. At the moment of introduction, for all that we feel ourselves to have been suddenly rewarded, to have been furnished with a pass that will admit us henceforward to pleasures which we have been pursuing for weeks past, we realise only too clearly that this acquisition puts an end for us not merely to hours of toilsome search—a relief that can only fill us with joy—but also to the existence of a certain person, the person whom our imagination had wildly distorted, whom our anxious fear that we might never become known to her had magnified. At the moment when our name rings out on the lips of the introducer, especially if the latter amplifies it, as Elstir now did, with a flattering commentary—that sacramental moment, as when in a fairy tale the magician commands a person suddenly to become someone else—she to whose presence we have been longing to attain vanishes: indeed, how could she remain the same when—by reason of the attention which she is obliged to pay to the announcement of our name and the sight of our person—in the eyes that only yesterday were situated at an infinite distance (where we supposed that ours, wandering, unsteady, desperate, divergent, would never succeed in meeting them) the conscious gaze, the incommunicable thought which we were seeking have just been miraculously and quite simply replaced by our own image painted in them as in a smiling mirror? If this incarnation of ourselves in the person who seemed to differ most from us is what does most to modify the appearance of the person to whom we have just been introduced, the form of that person still remains quite vague; and we may wonder whether it will turn out to be a god, a table or a basin. But, as nimble as the wax-modellers who will fashion a bust before our eyes in five minutes, the few words which the stranger is now going to say to us will substantiate that form and give it something positive and final that will exclude all the hypotheses in which our desire and our imagination had been indulging. Doubtless, even before coming to this party, Albertine had ceased to be for me simply that phantom fit to haunt the rest of our lives which a passing stranger of whom we know nothing and have caught but the barest glimpse remains. Her relationship to Mme Bontemps had already restricted the scope of those marvellous hypotheses, by stopping one of the channels along which they might have spread. As I drew closer to the girl and began to know her better, this knowledge developed by a process of subtraction, each constituent of imagination and desire giving place to a notion which was worth infinitely less, a notion to which, it is true, there was added presently a sort of equivalent, in the domain of real life, of what joint stock companies give one, after repaying one's original investment, and call dividend shares. Her name, her family connections, had been the first limit set to my suppositions. Her friendly greeting as, standing close beside her, I once again saw the tiny mole on her cheek, below her eye, marked another stage; finally, I was surprised to hear her use the adverb "perfectly," in place of "completely," of two people whom she mentioned, saying of one, "She's perfectly mad, but very nice all the same," and of the other, "He's perfectly common and perfectly boring." However little to be commended this use of "perfectly" may be, it indicates a degree of civilisation and culture which I could never have imagined as having been attained by the bacchante with the bicycle, the orgiastic muse of the golf-course. Nor did it mean that after this first metamorphosis Albertine was not to change again for me, many times. The qualities and defects which a person presents to us, exposed to view on the surface of his or her face, rearrange themselves in a totally different order if we approach them from a new angle—just as, in a town, buildings that appear strung in extended order along a single line, from another viewpoint are disposed in depth and their relative heights altered. To begin with, Albertine struck me as somewhat shy instead of implacable; she seemed to me more proper than ill-bred, judging by the descriptions, "she has bad manners" or "she has peculiar manners," which she applied to each in turn of the girls of whom I spoke to her; finally, she presented as a target for my line of vision a temple that was somewhat inflamed and by no means attractive to the eye, and no longer the curious look which I had always associated with her until then. But this was merely a second impression and there were doubtless others through which I would successively pass. Thus it can be only after one has recognised, not without some tentative stumblings, the optical errors of one's first impression that one can arrive at an exact knowledge of another person, supposing such knowledge to be ever possible. But it is not; for while our original impression of him undergoes correction, the person himself, not being an inanimate object, changes for his part too: we think that we have caught him, he shifts, and, when we imagine that at last we are seeing him clearly, it is only the old impressions which we had already formed of him that we have succeeded in clarifying, when they no longer represent him.

And yet, whatever the inevitable disappointments that it must bring in its train, this movement towards what we have only glimpsed, what we have been free to dwell upon and imagine at our leisure, this movement is the only one that is wholesome for the senses, that whets their appetite. How drearily monotonous must be the lives of people who, from indolence or timidity, drive in their carriages straight to the doors of friends whom they have got to know without having first dreamed of knowing them, without ever daring, on the way, to stop and examine what arouses their desire!

I returned home thinking of that party, of the coffee éclair which I had finished eating before I let Elstir take me up to Albertine, the rose which I had given the old gentleman, all the details selected unbeknown to us by the circumstances of the occasion, which compose for us, in a special and quite fortuitous order, the picture that we retain of a first meeting. But I had the impression that I was seeing this picture from another angle of vision, very far removed from myself, realising that it had not existed only for me, when some months later, to my great surprise, on my speaking to Albertine about the day on which I had first met her, she reminded me of the éclair, the flower that I had given away, all those things which I had supposed to have been, I cannot say of importance only to myself, but perceived only by myself, and which I now found thus transcribed, in a version of which I had never suspected the existence, in the mind of Albertine. On this first day itself, when,

on my return to the hotel, I was able to visualise the memory which I had brought away with me, I realised what a conjuring trick had been performed, and with what consummate sleight of hand, and how I had talked for a moment or two with a person who, thanks to the skill of the conjurer, without actually embodying anything of that other person whom I had for so long been following as she paced beside the sea, had been substituted for her. I might, for that matter, have guessed as much in advance, since the girl on the beach was a fabrication of my own. In spite of which, since I had, in my conversations with Elstir, identified her with Albertine, I felt myself in honour bound to fulfil to the real the promises of love made to the imagined Albertine. We betroth ourselves by proxy, and then feel obliged to marry the intermediary. Moreover, if there had disappeared from my life, provisionally at any rate, an anguish that the memory of polite manners, the expression "perfectly common" and an inflamed temple had sufficed to assuage, that memory awakened in me another kind of desire which, though placid and in no way painful, resembling a brotherly feeling, might in the long run become fully as dangerous by making me feel at every moment a compelling need to kiss this new person whose good manners, whose shyness, whose unexpected accessibility, arrested the futile course of my imagination but gave birth to a tender gratitude. And then, since memory begins at once to record photographs independent of one another, eliminates every link, any kind of sequence between the scenes portrayed in the collection which it exposes to our view, the most recent does not necessarily destroy or cancel those that came before. Confronted with the commonplace and touching Albertine to whom I had spoken that afternoon, I still saw the other mysterious Albertine outlined against the sea. These were now memories, that is to say pictures neither of which now seemed to me any truer than the other. Finally, to conclude this account of my first introduction to Albertine, when trying to recapture that little beauty spot on her cheek, just under the eye, I remembered that, looking from Elstir's window when Albertine had gone by, I had seen it on her chin. In fact, when I saw her I noticed that she had a beauty spot, but my errant memory made it wander about her face, fixing it now in one place, now in another.

Whatever my disappointment in finding in Mlle Simonet a girl so little different from those that I knew already, just as my disillusionment when I saw Balbec church did not prevent me from wishing still to go to Quimperlé, Pont-Aven and Venice, I comforted myself with the thought that through Albertine at any rate, even if she herself was not all that I had hoped, I might make the acquaintance of her comrades of the little band.

I thought at first that I should fail in this. As she was to be staying (and I too) for a long time still at Balbec, I had decided that the best thing was not to make my efforts to meet her too apparent, but to wait for an accidental encounter. But even if this should occur every day it was greatly to be feared that she would confine herself to acknowledging my greeting from a distance, and such meetings, repeated day after day throughout the whole season, would benefit me not at all.

Shortly after this, one morning when it had been raining and was almost cold, I was accosted on the front by a girl wearing a little toque and carrying a muff, so different from the girl whom I had met at Elstir's party that to recognise in her the same person seemed an operation beyond the power of the human mind; mine was, however, successful in performing it, but after a moment's surprise which did not, I think, escape Albertine's notice. On the other hand, remembering the "well-bred" manners which had so impressed me before, I now experienced a converse astonishment at her rude tone and manners typical of the "little band." Moreover, her temple had ceased to be the reassuring optical centre of her face, either because I was now on her other side, or because her toque hid it, or else possibly because its inflammation was not a constant thing.

"What weather!" she began. "Really the perpetual summer of Balbec is all stuff and nonsense. Don't you do anything here? We never see you playing golf, or dancing at the Casino. You don't ride either. You must be bored stiff. You don't find it too deadly, idling about on the beach all day? Ah, so you like basking in the sun like a lizard? You must have plenty of time on your hands. I can see you're not like me; I simply adore all sports. You weren't at the Sogne races? We went in the 'tram,' and I can quite understand that you wouldn't see any fun in going in an old rattletrap like that. It took us two whole hours! I could have gone there and back three times on my bike."

I who had admired Saint-Loup when, in the most natural manner in the world, he had called the little local train the "crawler," because of the ceaseless windings of its line, was daunted by the glibness with which Albertine spoke of it as the "tram" and the "rattletrap." I could sense her mastery of a mode of nomenclature in which I was afraid of her detecting and despising my inferiority. And the full wealth of the synonyms that the little band possessed to designate this railway had not yet been revealed to me. In speaking, Albertine kept her head motionless and her nostrils pinched, and scarcely moved her lips. The result of this was a drawling, nasal sound, into the composition of which there entered perhaps a provincial heredity, a juvenile affectation of British phlegm, the teaching of a foreign governess and a congestive hypertrophy of the mucus of the nose. This enunciation which, as it happened, soon disappeared when she knew people better, giving place to a natural girlish tone, might have been thought unpleasant. But to me it was peculiarly delightful. Whenever I had gone for several days without seeing her, I would refresh my spirit by repeating to myself: "We don't ever see you playing golf," with the nasal intonation in which she had uttered the words, point blank, without moving a muscle of her face. And I thought then that there was no one in the world so desirable.

We formed, that morning, one of those couples who dotted the front here and there with their conjunction, their stopping together just long enough to exchange a few words before breaking apart, each to resume separately his or her divergent stroll. I took advantage of this immobility to look again and discover once and for all where exactly the little mole was placed. Then, just as a phrase of Vinteuil which had delighted me in the sonata, and which my recollection allowed to wander from the andante to the finale, until the day when,

having the score in my hands, I was able to find it and to fix it in my memory in its proper place, in the scherzo, so this mole, which I had visualised now on her cheek, now on her chin, came to rest for ever on her upper lip, just below her nose. In the same way, too, we are sometimes amazed to come upon lines that we know by heart in a play in which we never dreamed that they were to be found.

At that moment, as if in order that the rich decorative ensemble formed by the lovely train of maidens, at once pink and golden, baked by the sun and wind, might freely proliferate before the sea in all the variety of its forms, Albertine's friends, with their shapely limbs, their supple figures, but so different one from another, came into sight in a cluster that spread out as it advanced in our direction, but closer to the sea, in a parallel line. I asked Albertine's permission to walk for a little way with her. Unfortunately, all she did was to wave her hand to them in greeting. "But your friends will be disappointed if you don't go with them," I hinted, hoping that we might all walk together.

A young man with regular features, carrying a bag of golf-clubs, sauntered up to us. It was the baccarat-player whose fast ways so enraged the senior judge's wife. In a frigid, impassive tone, which he evidently regarded as an indication of the highest distinction, he bade Albertine good day. "Been playing golf, Octave?" she asked. "How did it go? Were you in form?" "Oh, it's too sickening; I'm a wash-out," he replied. "Was Andrée playing?" "Yes, she went round in seventy-seven." "Why, that's a record!" "I went round in eighty-two yesterday." He was the son of an immensely rich manufacturer who was to take an important part in the organisation of the coming World's Fair. I was struck by the extreme degree to which, in this young man and the other very rare male friends of the band of girls, the knowledge of everything that pertained to clothes and how to wear them, cigars, English drinks, horses—a knowledge which he displayed down to its minutest details with a haughty infallibility that approached the reticent modesty of the true expert—had been developed in complete isolation, unaccompanied by the least trace of any intellectual culture. He had no hesitation as to the right time and place for dinner-jacket or pyjamas, but had no notion of the circumstances in which one might or might not employ this or that word, or even of the simplest rules of grammar. This disparity between the two forms of culture must have existed also in his father, the President of the Householders' Association of Balbec, for, in an open letter to the electors which he had recently had posted on all the walls, he announced: "I desired to see the Mayor, to chat to him about it, but he would not listen to my just grievances." Octave, at the Casino, took prizes in all the dancing competitions, for the boston, the tango, and what-not, an accomplishment that would enable him, if he chose, to make a fine marriage in that seaside society where it is not figuratively but literally that the girls are "wedded" to their "dancing partners." He lit a cigar with a "D'you mind?" to Albertine, as one who asks permission to finish an urgent piece of work while going on talking. For he was one of those people who can never be "doing nothing," although there was nothing, in fact, that he could ever be said to do. And since complete inactivity in the end has the same effect as prolonged overwork, in the mental sphere as much as in the life of the body and the muscles, the steadfast intellectual nullity that reigned behind Octave's meditative brow had ended by giving him, despite his air of unruffled calm, an ineffectual itch to think which kept him awake at night, for all the world like an overwrought philosopher.

Thinking that if I knew their male friends I should have more opportunities of seeing the girls, I had been on the point of asking for an introduction to Octave. I told Albertine this, as soon as he had left us, still muttering "I'm a wash-out," thinking to put into her head the idea of doing it next time.

"Come, come," she exclaimed, "I can't introduce you to a gigolo! This place simply swarms with them. But what on earth would they have to say to you? This one plays golf quite well, and that's all there is to him. I know what I'm talking about; you'd find he wasn't at all your sort."

"Your friends will be cross with you if you desert them like this," I repeated, hoping that she would then suggest my joining the party.

"Oh, no, they don't need me."

We passed Bloch, who directed at me a subtle, insinuating smile, and, embarrassed by the presence of Albertine, whom he did not know, or, rather, knew "without knowing" her, lowered his head towards his neck in a stiff, ungainly motion. "Who's that weird customer?" Albertine asked. "I can't think why he should bow to me since he doesn't know me. So I didn't respond."

I had no time to explain to her, for, bearing straight down upon us, "Excuse me," he began, "for interrupting you, but I must tell you that I'm going to Doncières tomorrow. I cannot put it off any longer without discourtesy; indeed, I wonder what de Saint-Loup-en-Bray must think of me. I just came to let you know that I shall take the two o'clock train. At your service."

But I thought now only of seeing Albertine again, and of trying to get to know her friends, and Doncières, since they were not going there, and my going would bring me back too late to see them still on the beach, seemed to me to be situated at the other end of the world. I told Bloch that it was impossible.

"Oh, very well, I shall go alone. In the fatuous alexandrines of Master Arouet, I shall say to Saint-Loup, to beguile his clericalism:

My duty stands alone, by his in no way bound;  
Though he should choose to fail, yet faithful I'll be found."

"I admit he's not a bad-looking boy," said Albertine, "but he makes me feel quite sick."

I had never thought that Bloch might be "not a bad-looking boy"; and yet in fact he was. With his rather prominent forehead, his very aquiline nose, and his air of being extremely clever and of being convinced of his cleverness, he had a pleasing face. But he could not succeed in pleasing Albertine. This was perhaps to some extent due to the bad side of her, to the hardness, the insensitivity of the little band, its rudeness

towards everything that was not itself. And later on, when I introduced them, Albertine's antipathy for him did not diminish. Bloch belonged to a social group in which, between scoffing at high society and at the same time showing the due regard for polite manners which a man is supposed to show who "does not soil his hands," a sort of special compromise has been reached which differs from the manners of the fashionable world but is none the less a peculiarly odious form of worldliness. When he was introduced to anyone he would bow with a sceptical smile, and at the same time with an exaggerated show of respect, and, if it was to a man, would say: "Pleased to meet you, sir," in a voice which ridiculed the words that it was uttering, though with a consciousness of belonging to someone who was not a boor. Having sacrificed this first moment to a custom which he at once followed and derided (just as on the first of January he would say: "The compliments of the season to you!"), he would adopt an air of infinite cunning, and would "proffer subtle words" which were often true enough but "got on" Albertine's nerves. When I told her on this first day that his name was Bloch, she exclaimed: "I would have betted anything he was a Yid. Typical of their creepy ways!" In fact, Bloch was destined to give Albertine other grounds for annoyance later on. Like many intellectuals, he was incapable of saying a simple thing in a simple way. He would find some precious qualifier for every statement, and would sweep from the particular to the general. It irritated Albertine, who was never too well pleased at other people's paying attention to what she was doing, that when she had sprained her ankle and was lying low, Bloch said of her: "She is outstretched on her couch, but in her ubiquity has not ceased to frequent simultaneously vague golf-courses and dubious tennis-courts." He was simply being "literary," of course, but in view of the difficulties which Albertine felt that it might create for her with friends whose invitations she had declined on the plea that she was unable to move, it was quite enough to make her take a profound dislike to the face and the sound of the voice of the young man who said these things.

We parted, Albertine and I, after promising each other to go out together one day. I had talked to her without being any more conscious of where my words were falling, of what became of them, than if I were dropping pebbles into a bottomless pit. That our words are, as a general rule, filled by the people to whom we address them with a meaning which those people derive from their own substance, a meaning widely different from that which we had put into the same words when we uttered them, is a fact which is perpetually demonstrated in daily life. But if in addition we find ourselves in the company of a person whose education (as Albertine's was to me) is inconceivable, her taste, her reading, her principles unknown to us, we cannot tell whether our words have aroused in her anything that resembles their meaning, any more than in an animal to which we had to make ourselves understood. So that trying to make friends with Albertine seemed to me like entering into contact with the unknown, if not the impossible, an occupation as arduous as breaking in a horse, as restful as keeping bees or growing roses.

I had thought, a few hours before, that Albertine would acknowledge my greeting only from a distance. We had now left one another after planning to make an excursion soon together. I vowed that when I next met Albertine I would treat her with greater boldness, and I had sketched out in advance a plan of all that I would say to her, and even (being now quite convinced that she was not strait-laced) of all the favours that I would demand of her. But the mind is subject to external influences, as plants are, and cells and chemical elements, and the medium which alters it if we immerse it therein is a change of circumstances, or new surroundings. Changed by the mere fact of her presence, when I found myself once again in Albertine's company, I said to her quite different things from what I had planned. Then, remembering her flushed temple, I asked myself whether she might not appreciate more keenly a polite attention which she knew to be disinterested. Finally, I was embarrassed by some of her looks and her smiles. They might equally well signify a laxity of morals and the rather silly merriment of a high-spirited girl who was at heart thoroughly respectable. A single expression, of face or speech, being susceptible of sundry interpretations, I wavered like a schoolboy faced by the difficulties of a piece of Greek prose.

On this occasion we met almost immediately the tall one, Andrée, the one who had jumped over the old banker, and Albertine was obliged to introduce me. Her friend had extraordinarily bright eyes, like a glimpse, through an open door in a dark house, of a room into which the sun is shining with a greenish reflexion from the glittering sea.

A group of five men passed by whom I had come to know very well by sight during my stay at Balbec. I had often wondered who they were. "They're nothing very wonderful," said Albertine with a contemptuous snigger. "The little old one with dyed hair and yellow gloves— isn't he a weird-looking specimen, quite an eyeful, what?—that's the Balbec dentist. He's a good sort. The fat one is the Mayor, not the tiny little fat one, you must have seen him before, he's the dancing master, and he's pretty awful too—he can't stand us, because we make such a row at the Casino and smash his chairs and want to have the carpet up when we dance, which is why he never gives us prizes, though we're the only ones who know how to dance. The dentist is a nice man—I would have said how d'ye do to him, just to make the dancing master mad, but I couldn't because they've got M. de Sainte-Croix with them—he's a county councillor, and he comes of a very good family, but he's joined the Republicans, for money, so no decent people ever speak to him now. He knows my uncle, because they're both in the Government, but the rest of my family always cut him. The thin one in the waterproof is the conductor of the orchestra. What, you don't know him! Oh, he plays divinely. You haven't been to *Cavalleria Rusticana*? Ah, I think it's marvellous! He's giving a concert this evening, but we can't go because it's to be in the town hall. In the Casino it wouldn't matter, but in the town hall, where they've taken down the crucifix, Andrée's mother would have a fit if we went there. You're going to say that my aunt's husband is in the Government. But what difference does that make? My aunt is my aunt, but that's no reason why I should like her. The only thing she's ever wanted to do is get rid of me. No, the person who has really been a mother to



me, and all the more credit to her because she's no relation at all, is a friend of mine whom I love just as much as if she was my mother. I'll show you her photo."

We were joined for a moment by the golf champion and baccarat player, Octave. I thought I had discovered a bond between us, for I learned in the course of our conversation that he was some sort of relative of the Verdurins, who were quite fond of him. But he spoke contemptuously of the famous Wednesdays, adding that M. Verdurin had never even heard of dress-clothes, which made it a horrid bore when one ran into him in certain "music-halls" where one would very much rather not be greeted with "Well, you young rascal" by an old fellow in a jacket and black tie, like a village notary.

Octave left us, and soon it was Andrée's turn, when we came to her villa, into which she vanished without having uttered a single word to me during the whole of our walk. I regretted her departure all the more because, while I was complaining to Albertine how cold her friend had been towards me, and was comparing in my mind this difficulty which Albertine seemed to find in bringing me into contact with her friends with the hostility that Elstir, in attempting to fulfil my wish, seemed to have encountered on that first afternoon, two girls came by to whom I lifted my hat, the misses d'Ambresac, whom Albertine greeted also.

I felt that my position in relation to Albertine would be improved by this meeting. They were the daughters of a kinswoman of Mme de Villeparisis, who was also a friend of Mme de Luxembourg. M. and Mme d'Ambresac, who had a small villa at Balbec and were immensely rich, led the simplest of lives, and always went about in the same clothes, he in the same jacket, she in a dark dress. Both of them used to make sweeping bows to my grandmother, which never led to anything further. The daughters, who were very pretty, were dressed more elegantly, but it was an elegance more suited to Paris than to the seaside. With their long skirts and large hats, they seemed to belong to a different race from Albertine. She, I discovered, knew all about them.

"Oh, so you know the little d'Ambresacs, do you? Well, well, you do have some grand friends. But they're very simple really," she went on as though the two things were mutually exclusive. "They're very nice, but so well brought up that they aren't allowed near the Casino, mainly because of us, because we're too badly behaved. You find them attractive, do you? Well, it all depends on what you like. They're real goody-goodies. Perhaps there's a certain charm in that. If you like goody-goodies, they're all that you could wish for. There must be some attraction, because one of them has got engaged already to the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Which was a cruel blow to the younger one, who was madly in love with that young man. As far as I'm concerned, the way they purse their lips when they talk is enough to madden me. And then they dress in the most absurd way. Fancy going to play golf in silk frocks! At their age, they dress more pretentiously than grown-up women who really know about clothes. Look at Mme Elstir. There's a well-dressed woman if you like." I answered that she had struck me as being dressed with the utmost simplicity. Albertine laughed.

"She's very simply turned out, I admit, but she dresses wonderfully, and to get what you call simplicity costs her a fortune."

Mme Elstir's elegance passed unnoticed by anyone who had not a sober and unerring taste in matters of dress. This I lacked. Elstir possessed it in a supreme degree, so Albertine told me. I had not suspected this, nor that the beautiful but quite simple objects which littered his studio were treasures long desired by him which he had followed from sale-room to sale-room, knowing all their history, until he had made enough money to be able to acquire them. But as to this Albertine, being as ignorant as myself, could not enlighten me. Whereas when it came to clothes, prompted by a coquettish instinct and perhaps by the regretful longing of a penniless girl who is able to appreciate with greater disinterestedness, more delicacy and discrimination, in the rich the things that she will never be able to afford for herself, she spoke very interestingly about the refinement of Elstir's taste, so difficult to satisfy that all women appeared to him badly dressed and, attaching infinite importance to proportions and shades of colour, he would have specially made for his wife, at fabulous prices, the sunshades, hats and coats whose charm he had taught Albertine to appreciate and which a person wanting in taste would no more have noticed than I had. Apart from this, Albertine, who had done a little painting, though without, she confessed, having any "gift" for it, felt a boundless admiration for Elstir, and, thanks to his precept and example, showed a judgment of pictures which was in marked contrast to her enthusiasm for *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The truth was that, though as yet it was hardly apparent, she was highly intelligent, and that in the things that she said the stupidity was not her own but that of her environment and her age. Elstir's had been a good but only a partial influence. All the branches of her intelligence had not reached the same stage of development. Her taste in pictures had almost caught up with her taste in clothes and all forms of elegance, but had not been followed by her taste in music, which was still a long way behind.

Albertine might know all about the Ambresacs; but as he who can achieve great things is not necessarily capable of small, I did not find her, after I had greeted those young ladies, any more disposed to make me known to her friends. "It's very good of you to attach importance to them. You shouldn't take any notice of them; they don't count. What on earth can a lot of kids like them mean to a man like you? Now Andrée, I must say, is remarkably clever. She's a good girl, though perfectly weird at times, but the others are really dreadfully stupid."

When I had left Albertine, I felt suddenly a keen regret that Saint-Loup should have concealed his engagement from me and that he should be doing anything so improper as to choose a wife before breaking with his mistress. And then, some days later, I met Andrée, and as she went on talking to me for some time I seized the opportunity to tell her that I would very much like to see her again next day; but she replied that this was impossible, because her mother was not at all well and she did not want to leave her alone. Two days later I went to see Elstir, who told me that Andrée had taken a great liking to me. When I protested that it was

I who had taken a liking to her from the start, and had asked her to meet me again next day but she couldn't, "Yes, I know, she told me all about that," was his reply, "she was very sorry, but she had promised to go for a picnic somewhere miles from here. They were to drive over in a break, and it was too late for her to get out of it." Although this falsehood was of no real significance since Andrée knew me so slightly, I ought not to have continued to seek the company of a person who was capable of it. For what people have once done they will go on doing indefinitely, and if you go every year to see a friend who, the first few times, was unable to keep an appointment with you, or was in bed with a chill, you will find him in bed with another chill which he has just caught, you will miss him again at another meeting-place where he has failed to appear, for a single and unalterable reason in place of which he supposes himself to have various reasons, according to the circumstances.

One morning, not long after Andrée had told me that she would be obliged to stay beside her mother, I was taking a short stroll with Albertine, whom I had found on the beach tossing up and catching again at the end of a string a weird object which gave her a look of Giotto's "Idolatry"; it was called, as it happened, a "diabolo," and has so fallen into disuse now that, when they come upon the picture of a girl playing with one, the commentators of future generations will solemnly discuss, as it might be in front of the allegorical figures in the Arena Chapel, what it is that she is holding. A moment later their friend with the penurious and hard appearance, the one who on that first day had sneered so malevolently: "I do feel sorry for him, poor old boy," when she saw the old gentleman's head brushed by the flying feet of Andrée, came up to Albertine and said: "Good morning. Am I disturbing you?" She had taken off her hat for comfort, and her hair, like a strange and fascinating plant, lay over her brow, displaying all the delicate tracery of its foliation. Albertine, perhaps irritated at seeing the other bare-headed, made no reply, and preserved a frigid silence in spite of which the girl stayed with us, kept apart from me by Albertine who arranged at one moment to be alone with her, at another to walk with me leaving her to follow. I was obliged, to secure an introduction, to ask for it in the girl's hearing. Then, as Albertine uttered my name, the face and the blue eyes of this girl, whose expression I had thought so cruel when I heard her say: "Poor old boy, I do feel sorry for him," lit up with a cordial and affectionate smile, and she held out her hand to me. Her hair was golden, and not her hair only; for if her cheeks were pink and her eyes blue, it was like the still roseate morning sky which sparkles everywhere with dazzling points of gold.

Instantly aroused, I said to myself that this was a child who when in love grew shy, that it was for my sake, for love of me that she had remained with us despite Albertine's rebuffs, and that she must have rejoiced in the opportunity to confess to me at last, by that smiling, friendly look, that she would be as gentle to me as she was ferocious to other people. Doubtless she had noticed me on the beach when I did not yet know her, and had been thinking of me ever since; perhaps it was to win my admiration that she had mocked at the old gentleman, and because she had not succeeded in getting to know me that on the following days she had appeared so morose. I had often seen her from the hotel, walking by herself on the beach in the evenings. It was probably in the hope of meeting me. And now, hindered as much by Albertine's presence as she would have been by that of the whole band, she had evidently attached herself to us, in spite of the increasing coldness of her friend's attitude, only in the hope of outstaying her, of being left alone with me, when she might make a rendezvous with me for some time when she would find an excuse to slip away without either her family or her friends knowing that she had gone, and would meet me in some safe place before church or after golf. It was all the more difficult to see her because Andrée had quarrelled with her and now detested her. "I've put up quite long enough," she told me, "with her appalling duplicity, her baseness, and all the dirty tricks she's played on me. I've stood it all because of the others. But her latest effort was really too much!" And she told me of some piece of malicious gossip that this girl had perpetrated, which might indeed have injurious consequences for Andrée.

But those private words promised me by Gisèle's confiding eyes for the moment when Albertine should have left us by ourselves were destined never to be spoken, because after Albertine, stubbornly planted between us, had continued to reply with increasing curtness, and had finally ceased to reply at all, to her friend's remarks, Gisèle at length abandoned the attempt and turned back. I reproached Albertine for having been so disagreeable. "It will teach her to be more tactful. She's not a bad kid, but she's so boring. She's got no business, either, to come poking her nose into everything. Why should she fasten herself on to us without being asked? In another minute I'd have told her to go to blazes. Besides, I can't stand her going about with her hair like that; it's such bad form."

I gazed at Albertine's cheeks as she spoke, and asked myself what might be the perfume, the taste of them: that day she was not fresh and cool but smooth, with a uniform pinkness, violet-tinted, creamy, like certain roses whose petals have a waxy gloss. I felt a passionate longing for them such as one feels sometimes for a particular flower. "I hadn't noticed it," was all that I said.

"You stared at her hard enough; anyone would have thought you wanted to paint her portrait," she replied, not at all mollified by the fact that it was at herself that I was now staring so fixedly. "I don't believe you would care for her, though. She's not in the least a flirt. You like girls who flirt, I suspect. Anyhow, she won't have another chance of sticking to us and having to be shaken off. She's going back to Paris later today."

"Are the rest of your friends going too?"

"No, only she and 'Miss,' because she's got to take her exams again; she'll have to swot for them, poor kid. It's not much fun, I don't mind telling you. Of course, you may be set a good subject, you never know. It's such a matter of luck. One girl I know was given: *Describe an accident that you have witnessed*. That was a piece of luck. But I know another girl who had to discuss, in writing too: *Which would you rather have as a friend, Alceste*

or *Philinte*? I'm sure I should have dried up altogether! Apart from everything else, it's not a question to set to girls. Girls go about with other girls; they're not supposed to have gentlemen friends." (This announcement, which showed that I had small chance of being admitted to the little band, made me quake.) "But in any case, even if it was set for boys, what on earth would you expect them to find to say about it? Several parents wrote to the *Gaulois*, to complain of the difficulty of questions like that. The joke of it is that in a collection of prize-winning essays there were two which treated the question in absolutely opposite ways. You see, it all depends on the examiner. One wanted you to say that *Philinte* was a two-faced socialite flatterer, the other that you couldn't help admiring *Alceste*, but that he was too cantankerous, and that as a friend you ought to choose *Philinte*. How can you expect a lot of unfortunate candidates to know what to say when the professors themselves don't agree? But that's nothing. It gets more difficult every year. *Gisèle* will have to pull a string or two if she's to get through."

I returned to the hotel. My grandmother was not there. I waited for her some time, and when at last she appeared, I begged her to allow me, in quite unexpected circumstances, to make an expedition which might keep me away for a couple of days. I had lunch with her, ordered a carriage and drove to the station. *Gisèle* would not be surprised to see me there. After we had changed at *Doncières*, in the Paris train there would be a carriage with a corridor, along which, while the governess dozed, I should be able to lead *Gisèle* into a dark corner and make an appointment to meet her on my return to Paris, which I would then try to put forward to the earliest possible date. I would travel with her as far as *Caen* or *Evreux*, whichever she preferred, and would take the next train back to *Balbec*. And yet, what would she have thought of me had she known that I had hesitated for a long time between her and her friends, that quite as much as with her I had contemplated falling in love with *Albertine*, with the girl with the bright eyes, with *Rosemonde*. I felt a pang of remorse, now that a bond of mutual affection was going to unite me with *Gisèle*. I could, however, truthfully have assured her that *Albertine* no longer attracted me. I had seen her that morning as she swerved aside, almost turning her back on me, to speak to *Gisèle*. Her head was sulkily lowered, and the hair at the back, which was different and darker still, glistened as though she had just been bathing. Like a wet hen, I had thought to myself, and this view of her hair had induced me to embody in *Albertine* a different soul from that implied hitherto by her violet face and mysterious gaze. That shining cataract of hair at the back of her head had been for a moment or two all that I was able to see of her, and continued to be all that I saw in retrospect. Our memory is like one of those shops in the window of which is exposed now one, now another photograph of the same person. And as a rule the most recent exhibit remains for some time the only one to be seen. While the coachman whipped on his horse I sat there listening to the words of gratitude and tenderness that *Gisèle* was murmuring in my ear, all of them born of her friendly smile and outstretched hand; for the fact was that in those periods of my life in which I was not actually in love but desired to be, I carried in my mind not only a physical ideal of beauty which, as the reader has seen, I recognised from a distance in every passing woman far enough away from me for her indistinct features not to belie the identification, but also the mental phantom—ever ready to become incarnate—of the woman who was going to fall in love with me, to take up her cues in the amorous comedy which I had had all written out in my mind from my earliest boyhood, and in which every attractive girl seemed to me to be equally desirous of playing, provided that she had also some of the physical qualifications required. In this play, whoever the new star might be whom I invited to create or to revive the leading part, the plot, the incidents, the lines themselves preserved an unalterable form.

Within the next few days, in spite of the reluctance that *Albertine* had shown to introduce me to them, I knew all the little band of that first afternoon (except *Gisèle*, whom, owing to a prolonged delay at the level crossing by the station and a change in the time-table, I had not succeeded in meeting on the train, which had left some minutes before I arrived, and to whom in any case I never gave another thought), and two or three other girls as well to whom at my request they introduced me. And thus, my expectation of the pleasure which I should find in a new girl springing from another through whom I had come to know her, the latest was like one of those new varieties of rose which gardeners get by using first a rose of another species. And as I passed from corolla to corolla along this chain of flowers, the pleasure of knowing a different one would send me back to the one to whom I was indebted for it, with a gratitude mixed with as much desire as my new hope. Presently I was spending all my time among these girls.

Alas! in the freshest flower it is possible to discern those just perceptible signs which to the instructed mind already betray what will, by the desiccation or fructification of the flesh that is today in bloom, be the ultimate form, immutable and already predestined, of the autumnal seed. The eye follows with delight a nose like a wavelet that deliciously ripples the surface of the water at daybreak, and seems motionless, capturable by the pencil, because the sea is so calm that one does not notice its tidal flow. Human faces seem not to change while we are looking at them, because the revolution they perform is too slow for us to perceive it. But one had only to see, by the side of any of these girls, her mother or her aunt, to realise the distance over which, obeying the internal gravitation of a type that was generally frightful, these features would have travelled in less than thirty years, until the hour when the looks have begun to wane, until the hour when the face, having sunk altogether below the horizon, catches the light no more. I knew that, as deep, as ineluctable as Jewish patriotism or Christian atavism in those who imagine themselves to be the most emancipated of their race, there dwelt beneath the rosy inflorescence of *Albertine*, *Rosemonde*, *Andrée*, unknown to themselves, held in reserve until the occasion should arise, a coarse nose, a protruding jaw, a paunch which would create a sensation when it appeared, but which was actually in the wings, ready to come on, unforeseen, inevitable, just as it might be a burst of *Dreyfusism* or clericalism or patriotic, feudal heroism, emerging suddenly in answer to the call of circumstance from a nature anterior to the individual himself,

through which he thinks, lives, evolves, gains strength or dies, without ever being able to distinguish that nature from the particular motives he mistakes for it. Even mentally, we depend a great deal more than we think upon natural laws, and our minds possess in advance, like some cryptogamous plant, the characteristic that we imagine ourselves to be selecting. For we grasp only the secondary ideas, without detecting the primary cause (Jewish blood, French birth or whatever it may be) that inevitably produced them, and which we manifest when the time comes. But perhaps, while the one may appear to us to be the result of deliberate thought, the other of an imprudent disregard for our own health, we take from our family, as the papilionaceae take the form of their seed, as well the ideas by which we live as the malady from which we shall die.

As in a nursery plantation where the flowers mature at different seasons, I had seen them, in the form of old ladies, on this Balbec shore, those shrivelled seed-pods, those flabby tubers, which my new friends would one day be. But what matter? For the moment it was their flowering-time. And so when Mme de Villeparisis asked me to go for a drive, I sought an excuse to avoid doing so. I no longer visited Elstir unless accompanied by my new friends. I could not even spare an afternoon to go to Doncières, to pay the visit I had promised Saint-Loup. Social engagements, serious discussions, even a friendly conversation, had they usurped the place allotted to my outings with these girls, would have had the same effect on me as if, at lunch-time, one were taken not to eat but to look at an album. The men, the youths, the women, old or mature, in whose society we think to take pleasure, exist for us only on a flat, one-dimensional surface, because we are conscious of them only through visual perception restricted to its own limits; whereas it is as delegates from our other senses that our eyes direct themselves towards young girls; the senses follow, one after another, in search of the various charms, fragrant, tactile, savourous, which they thus enjoy even without the aid of hands and lips; and able, thanks to the arts of transposition, the genius for synthesis in which desire excels, to reconstruct beneath the hue of cheeks or bosom the feel, the taste, the contact that is forbidden them, they give to these girls the same honeyed consistency as they create when they go foraging in a rose-garden, or in a vine whose clusters their eyes devour.

If it rained, although the weather had no power to daunt Albertine, who was often to be seen in her waterproof spinning on her bicycle through the showers, we would spend the day in the Casino, where on such days it would have seemed to me impossible not to go. I had the greatest contempt for the Ambresac sisters, who had never set foot in it. And I willingly joined my new friends in playing tricks on the dancing master. As a rule we had to listen to admonitions from the manager, or from some of his staff usurping directorial powers, because my friends—even Andrée whom on that account I had regarded when I first saw her as so Dionysiac a creature whereas in reality she was delicate, intellectual and this year far from well, in spite of which her actions were responsive less to the state of her health than to the spirit of that age which sweeps everything aside and mingles in a general gaiety the weak with the strong—could not go from the hall to the ball-room without breaking into a run, jumping over all the chairs, and sliding along the floor, their balance maintained by a graceful poise of their outstretched arms, singing the while, mingling all the arts, in that first bloom of youth, in the manner of those poets of old for whom the different genres were not yet separate, so that in an epic poem they would mix agricultural precepts with theological doctrine.

This Andrée, who had struck me when I first saw her as the coldest of them all, was infinitely more refined, more affectionate, more sensitive than Albertine, to whom she displayed the caressing, gentle tenderness of an elder sister. At the Casino she would come across the floor to sit down beside me and was prepared, unlike Albertine, to forgo a waltz or even, if I was tired, to give up the Casino and come to me instead at the hotel. She expressed her friendship for me, for Albertine, in terms that were evidence of the most exquisite understanding of the things of the heart, which may have been partly due to her delicate health. She had always a gay smile of excuse for the childish behaviour of Albertine, who expressed with naïve violence the temptation held out to her by the parties and pleasures which she was incapable of resisting, as Andrée could, in order to stay and talk to me. When the time came for her to go off to a tea-party at the golf-club, if we were all three together at that moment she would get ready to leave and then, coming up to Andrée, would say: "Well, Andrée, what are you waiting for? You know we're having tea at the golf-club." "No, I'm going to stay and talk to him," Andrée would reply, pointing to me. "But you know Mme Durieux invited you," Albertine would cry, as if Andrée's intention to remain with me could be explained only by ignorance on her part as to whether or not she had been invited. "Come, my sweet, don't be such an idiot," Andrée would chide her, and Albertine would not insist, for fear that she might be asked to stay too. She would toss her head and say "Just as you like," in the tone one uses to an invalid who is deliberately killing himself by inches. "Anyway I must fly; I'm sure your watch is slow," and off she would go. "She's a dear girl, but quite impossible," Andrée would say, enveloping her friend in a smile at once caressing and critical. If in this craze for amusement Albertine might be said to echo something of the old original Gilberte, that is because a certain similarity exists, although the type evolves, between all the women we successively love, a similarity that is due to the fixity of our own temperament, which chooses them, eliminating all those who would not be at once our opposite and our complement, apt, that is to say, to gratify our senses and to wring our hearts. They are, these women, a product of our temperament, an image, an inverted projection, a negative of our sensibility. So that a novelist might, in relating the life of his hero, describe his successive love-affairs in almost exactly similar terms, and thereby give the impression not that he was repeating himself but that he was creating, since an artificial novelty is never so effective as a repetition that manages to suggest a fresh truth. He ought, moreover, to note in the character of the lover an index of variation which becomes apparent as the story moves into fresh regions, into different latitudes of life. And perhaps he would be expressing yet another truth if, while

investing all the other *dramatis personae* with distinct characters, he refrained from giving any to the beloved. We understand the characters of people to whom we are indifferent, but how can we ever grasp that of a person who is an intimate part of our existence, whom after a while we no longer distinguish from ourselves, whose motives provide us with an inexhaustible source of anxious hypotheses, continually revised? Springing from somewhere beyond our intellect, our curiosity about the woman we love overleaps the bounds of that woman's character, at which, even if we could stop, we probably never would. The object of our anxious investigation is something more basic than those details of character comparable to the tiny particles of epidermis whose varied combinations form the florid originality of human flesh. Our intuitive radiography pierces them, and the images which it brings back, far from being those of a particular face, present rather the joyless universality of a skeleton.

Andrée, being herself extremely rich while the other was penniless and an orphan, with real generosity lavished on Albertine the full benefit of her wealth. As for her feelings towards Gisèle, they were not quite what I had been led to suppose. News soon reached us of the young student, and when Albertine handed round the letter she had received from her, a letter intended by Gisèle to give an account of her journey and to report her safe arrival to the little band, apologising for her laziness in not yet having written to the others, I was surprised to hear Andrée, whom I imagined to be at daggers drawn with her, say: "I shall write to her tomorrow, because if I wait for her to write I may have to wait for ages, she's such a slacker." And turning to me she added: "You mightn't see much in her, but she's a jolly nice girl, and besides I'm really very fond of her." From which I concluded that Andrée's quarrels were apt not to last very long.

Except on these rainy days, as we always arranged to go on our bicycles along the cliffs, or on an excursion inland, an hour or so before it was time to start I would go upstairs to make myself smart and would complain if Françoise had not laid out all the things that I wanted. Now even in Paris, at the first word of reproach she would proudly and angrily straighten a back which the years had begun to bend, she so humble, modest and charming when her self-esteem was flattered. As this was the mainspring of Françoise's life, her satisfaction and her good humour were in direct ratio to the difficulty of the tasks imposed on her. Those which she had to perform at Balbec were so easy that she displayed an almost continual dissatisfaction which was suddenly multiplied a hundred-fold and combined with an ironic air of offended dignity when I complained, on my way down to join my friends, that my hat had not been brushed or my ties sorted. She who was capable of taking such endless pains and would think nothing of it, on my simply remarking that a coat was not in its proper place would not only boast of the care with which she had "shut it away sooner than let it go gathering the dust," but, paying a formal tribute to her own labours, lamented that it was little enough of a holiday that she was getting at Balbec, and that we would not find another person in the whole world who would consent to put up with such treatment. "I can't think how people can leave things lying about the way you do; you just try and get anyone else to find what you want in such a pell and mell. The devil himself couldn't make head nor tail of it." Or else she would adopt a regal mien, scorching me with her fiery glance, and preserve a silence that was broken as soon as she had fastened the door behind her and had set off down the corridor, which would then reverberate with utterances which I guessed to be abusive, though they remained as indistinct as those of characters in a play whose opening lines are spoken in the wings, before they appear on the stage. But even if nothing was missing and Françoise was in a good temper, still she made herself quite intolerable when I was getting ready to go out with my friends. For, drawing upon a store of jokes which, in my need to talk about these girls, I had told her at their expense, she took it upon herself to reveal to me what I should have known better than she if it had been accurate, which it never was, Françoise having misunderstood what she had heard. She had, like everyone else, her own peculiar character, which in no one resembles a straight highway, but surprises us with its strange, unavoidable windings which other people do not see and which it is painful to have to follow. Whenever I arrived at the stage of "Where is my hat?" or uttered the name of Andrée or Albertine, I was forced by Françoise to stray into endless and absurd sidetracks which greatly delayed my progress. So too when I ordered the cheese or salad sandwiches or sent out for the cakes which I would eat on the cliff with the girls, and which they "might very well have taken turns to provide, if they hadn't been so close-fisted," declared Françoise, to whose aid there came at such moments a whole heritage of atavistic peasant rapacity and coarseness, and for whom one would have said that the divided soul of her late enemy Eulalie had been reincarnated, more becomingly than in St Eloi, in the charming bodies of my friends of the little band. I listened to these accusations with a dull fury at finding myself brought to a standstill at one of those places beyond which the rustic and familiar path that was Françoise's character became impassable, though fortunately never for very long. Then, my hat or coat found and the sandwiches ready, I went to join Albertine, Andrée, Rosemonde, and any others there might be, and we would set out on foot or on our bicycles.

In the old days I should have preferred our excursions to be made in bad weather. For then I still looked to find in Balbec "the land of the Cimmerians," and fine days were a thing that had no right to exist there, an intrusion of the vulgar summer of seaside holiday-makers into that ancient region swathed in eternal mist. But everything that I had hitherto despised and thrust from my sight, not only the effects of sunlight upon sea and shore, but even regattas and race-meetings, I now sought out with ardour, for the same reason which formerly had made me wish only for stormy seas: namely, that they were now associated in my mind, as the others had once been, with an aesthetic idea. For I had gone several times with my new friends to visit Elstir, and, on the days when the girls were there, what he had selected to show us were drawings of pretty women in yachting dress, or else a sketch made on a race-course near Balbec. I had at first shyly admitted to Elstir that I had not felt inclined to go to the meetings that had been held there. "You were wrong," he told me, "it's such a pretty

sight, and so strange too. For one thing, that peculiar creature the jockey, on whom so many eyes are fastened, and who sits there in the paddock so gloomy and grey-faced in his bright jacket, reining in the rearing horse that seems to be one with him: how interesting to analyse his professional movements, the bright splash of colour he makes, with the horse's coat blending in it, against the background of the course! What a transformation of every visible object in that luminous vastness of a race-course where one is constantly surprised by fresh lights and shades which one sees only there! How pretty the women can look there, too! The first meeting in particular was delightful, and there were some extremely elegant women there in the misty, almost Dutch light in which you could feel the piercing cold of the sea even in the sun itself. I've never seen women arriving in carriages, or standing with glasses to their eyes in so extraordinary a light, which was due, I suppose, to the moisture from the sea. Ah! how I should have loved to paint it. I came back from those races wild with enthusiasm and longing to get to work!" After which he waxed more enthusiastic still over the yacht-races, and I realised that regattas, and race-meetings where well-dressed women might be seen bathed in the greenish light of a marine race-course, might be for a modern artist as interesting a subject as the festivities which they so loved to depict were for a Veronese or a Carpaccio. When I suggested this to Elstir, "Your comparison is all the more apt," he replied, "since because of the nature of the city in which they painted, those festivities were to a great extent aquatic. Except that the beauty of the shipping in those days lay as a rule in its solidity, in the complication of its structure. They had water-tournaments, as we have here, held generally in honour of some Embassy, such as Carpaccio shows us in his *Legend of Saint Ursula*. The ships were massive, built like pieces of architecture, and seemed almost amphibious, like lesser Venices set in the heart of the greater, when, moored to the banks by gangways decked with crimson satin and Persian carpets, they bore their freight of ladies in cerise brocade and green damask close under the balconies incrustated with multicoloured marble from which other ladies leaned to gaze at them, in gowns with black sleeves slashed with white, stitched with pearls or bordered with lace. You couldn't tell where the land finished and the water began, what was still the palace or already the ship, the caravel, the galley, the Bucentaur."

Albertine listened with passionate interest to these details of costume, these visions of elegance that Elstir described to us. "Oh, I should so like to see that lace you speak of; it's so pretty, Venetian lace," she exclaimed, "and I should love to see Venice." "You may, perhaps, before very long," Elstir informed her, "be able to gaze at the marvellous stuffs which they used to wear. One used only to be able to see them in the works of the Venetian painters, or very rarely among the treasures of old churches, or now and then when a specimen turned up in the sale-room. But I hear that a Venetian artist, called Fortuné, has rediscovered the secret of the craft, and that in a few years' time women will be able to parade around, and better still to sit at home, in brocades as sumptuous as those that Venice adorned for her patrician daughters with patterns brought from the Orient. But I don't know whether I should much care for that, whether it wouldn't be too much of an anachronism for the women of today, even when they parade at regattas, for, to return to our modern pleasure-craft, the times have completely changed since 'Venice, Queen of the Adriatic.' The great charm of a yacht, of the furnishings of a yacht, of yachting clothes, is their simplicity, as things of the sea, and I do so love the sea. I must confess that I prefer the fashions of today to those of Veronese's and even of Carpaccio's time. What is so attractive about our yachts—and the medium-sized yachts especially, I don't like the huge ones, they're too much like ships; and the same goes for hats, there must be some sense of proportion—is the uniform surface, simple, gleaming, grey, which in a bluish haze takes on a creamy softness. The cabin ought to make us think of a little café. And it's the same with women's clothes on board a yacht; what's really charming are those light garments, uniformly white, cotton or linen or nankeen or drill, which in the sunlight and against the blue of the sea show up with as dazzling a whiteness as a spread sail. Actually, there are very few women who know how to dress, though some of them are quite wonderful. At the races, Mlle Léa had a little white hat and a little white sunshade that were simply enchanting. I don't know what I wouldn't give for that little sunshade."

I should have liked very much to know in what respect this little sunshade differed from any other, and for other reasons, reasons of feminine coquetry, Albertine was still more curious. But, just as Françoise used to explain the excellence of her soufflés by saying simply: "It's a knack," so here the difference lay in the cut. "It was tiny and round, like a Chinese parasol," Elstir said. I mentioned the sunshades carried by various women, but none of them would do. Elstir found them all quite hideous. A man of exquisite taste, singularly hard to please, he would isolate some minute detail which was the whole difference between what was worn by three-quarters of the women he saw, and which he abominated, and a thing which enchanted him by its prettiness; and—in contrast to its effect on myself, for whom every kind of luxury was stultifying—stimulated his desire to paint "so as to make something as attractive."

"Here you see a young lady who has guessed what the hat and sunshade were like," he said to me, pointing to Albertine, whose eyes shone with covetousness.

"How I should love to be rich and to have a yacht!" she said to the painter. "I should come to you for advice on how to do it up. What lovely trips I'd make! And what fun it would be to go to Cowes for the regatta! And a motor-car! Tell me, do you think women's fashions for motoring pretty?"

"No," replied Elstir, "but that will come in time. You see, there are very few good couturiers at present, one or two only, Callot—although they go in rather too freely for lace—Doucet, Cheruit, Paquin sometimes. The others are all ghastly."

"So there's a vast difference between a Callot dress and one from any ordinary shop?" I asked Albertine.

"Why, an enormous difference, my little man! Oh, sorry! Only, alas! what you get for three hundred francs in an ordinary shop will cost two thousand there. But there can be no comparison; they look the same only to

people who know nothing at all about it."

"Quite so," put in Elstir, "though I wouldn't go so far as to say that it's as profound as the difference between a statue from Rheims Cathedral and one from Saint-Augustin. By the way, talking of cathedrals," he went on, addressing himself exclusively to me, because what he was saying referred to an earlier conversation in which the girls had not taken part, and which for that matter would in no way have interested them, "I spoke to you the other day of Balbec church as a great cliff, a huge breakwater built of the stone of the country, but conversely," he went on, showing me a water-colour, "look at these cliffs (it's a sketch I did near here, at the Creuniers); don't those rocks, so powerfully and delicately modelled, remind you of a cathedral?"

And indeed one would have taken them for soaring red arches. But, painted on a scorching hot day, they seemed to have been reduced to dust, volatilised by the heat which had drunk up half the sea so that it had almost been distilled, over the whole surface of the picture, into a gaseous state. On this day when the sunlight had, so to speak, destroyed reality, reality concentrated itself in certain dusky and transparent creatures which, by contrast, gave a more striking, a closer impression of life: the shadows. Thirsting for coolness, most of them, deserting the torrid sea, had taken shelter at the foot of the rocks, out of reach of the sun; others, swimming gently upon the tide, like dolphins, kept close under the sides of occasional moving boats, whose hulls they extended upon the pale surface of the water with their glossy blue forms. It was perhaps the thirst for coolness which they conveyed that did most to give me the sensation of the heat of that day and made me exclaim how much I regretted not knowing the Creuniers. Albertine and Andrée were positive that I must have been there hundreds of times. If so I had been there without knowing it, never suspecting that one day the sight of these rocks would arouse in me such a thirst for beauty, not perhaps precisely natural beauty such as I had sought hitherto among the cliffs of Balbec, but architectural rather. Especially since, having come here to visit the kingdom of the storms, I had never found, on any of my drives with Mme de Villeparisis, when often we saw it only from afar, painted in a gap between the trees, that the sea was sufficiently real or sufficiently liquid or gave a sufficient impression of hurling its massed forces against the shore, and would have liked to see it lie motionless only under a wintry shroud of fog, I could never have believed that I should now be dreaming of a sea which was no more than a whitish vapour that had lost both consistency and colour. But of such a sea Elstir, like the people who sat musing on board those vessels drowsy with the heat, had felt so intensely the enchantment that he had succeeded in transcribing, in fixing for all time upon his canvas, the imperceptible ebb of the tide, the throb of one happy moment; and at the sight of this magic portrait, one could think of nothing else than to range the wide world, seeking to recapture the vanished day in its instantaneous, slumbering beauty.

So that if, before these visits to Elstir—before I had set eyes on one of his sea-pictures in which a young woman in a dress of white serge or linen, on the deck of a yacht flying the American flag, put into my imagination the spiritual "carbon copy" of a white linen dress and coloured flag which at once bred in me an insatiable desire to see there and then with my own eyes white linen dresses and flags against the sea, as if no such experience had ever yet befallen me—I had always striven, when I stood before the sea, to expel from my field of vision, as well as the bathers in the foreground and the yachts with their too dazzling sails that were like seaside costumes, everything that prevented me from persuading myself that I was contemplating the immemorial ocean which had already been pursuing the same mysterious life before the appearance of the human race, and had grudged even the days of radiant sunshine which seemed to me to invest with the trivial aspect of universal summer this coast of fog and tempest, to mark simply a pause, equivalent to what in music is known as a silent bar—now on the contrary it was bad weather that appeared to me to be some baleful accident, no longer worthy of a place in the world of beauty: I felt a keen desire to go out and recapture in reality what had so powerfully aroused my imagination, and I hoped that the weather would be propitious enough for me to see from the summit of the cliff the same blue shadows as in Elstir's picture.

Nor, as I went along, did I still screen my eyes with my hands as in the days when, conceiving nature to be animated by a life anterior to the first appearance of man and in opposition to all those wearisome improvements of industrial civilisation which had hitherto made me yawn with boredom at universal exhibitions or milliners' windows, I endeavoured to see only that section of the sea over which there was no steamer passing, so that I might picture it to myself as immemorial, still contemporary with the ages when it had been divorced from the land, or at least contemporary with the early centuries of Greece, which enabled me to repeat in their literal meaning the lines of "old man Leconte" of which Bloch was so fond:

Gone are the kings, their ships pierced by rams,  
Vanished upon the raging deep, alas,  
The long-haired warriors of heroic Hellas.

I could no longer despise the milliners, now that Elstir had told me that the delicate gesture with which they give a last refinement, a supreme caress to the bows or feathers of a hat after it is finished, would be as interesting to him to paint as that of the jockeys (a statement which had delighted Albertine). But I must wait until I had returned—for milliners, to Paris, for regattas and races to Balbec, where there would be no more now until next year. Even a yacht with women in white linen was not to be found.

Often we encountered Bloch's sisters, to whom I was obliged to bow since I had dined with their father. My new friends did not know them. "I'm not allowed to play with Israelites," Albertine announced. Her way of pronouncing the word—"Issraelites" instead of "Izraelites"—would in itself have sufficed to show, even if one had not heard the rest of the sentence, that it was no feeling of friendliness towards the chosen race that inspired these young bourgeois, brought up in God-fearing homes, and quite ready to believe that the Jews were in the habit of butchering Christian children. "Besides, they're shocking bad form, your friends," said



Andrée with a smile which implied that she knew very well that they were no friends of mine. "Like everything to do with the tribe," added Albertine, in the sententious tone of one who spoke from personal experience. To tell the truth, Bloch's sisters, at once overdressed and half naked, with their languid, brazen, ostentatious, slatternly air, did not create the best impression. And one of their cousins, who was only fifteen, scandalised the Casino by her unconcealed admiration for Mlle Léa, whose talent as an actress M. Bloch senior rated very high, but whose tastes were understood not to be primarily directed towards gentlemen.

There were days when we picnicked at one of the outlying farms which catered for visitors. These were the farms known as Les Ecorres, Marie-Thérèse, La Croix d'Heuland, Bagatelle, Californie and Marie-Antoinette. It was the last that had been adopted by the little band.

But at other times, instead of going to a farm, we would climb to the highest point of the cliff, and, when we had reached it and were seated on the grass, would undo our parcel of sandwiches and cakes. My friends preferred the sandwiches, and were surprised to see me eat only a single chocolate cake, sugared with Gothic tracery, or an apricot tart. This was because, with the sandwiches of cheese or salad, a form of food that was novel to me and was ignorant of the past, I had nothing in common. But the cakes understood, the tarts were talkative. There was in the former an insipid taste of cream, in the latter a fresh taste of fruit which knew all about Combray, and about Gilberte, not only the Gilberte of Combray but the Gilberte of Paris, at whose tea-parties I had come across them again. They reminded me of those cake-plates with the Arabian Nights pattern, the subjects on which so diverted my aunt Léonie when Françoise brought her up, one day Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp, another day Ali Baba, or the Sleeper Awakes or Sinbad the Sailor embarking at Bassorah with all his treasures. I should dearly have liked to see them again, but my grandmother did not know what had become of them and thought moreover that they were just common plates that had been bought in the village. No matter, in grey, rustic Combray they were a multi-coloured inset, as in the dark church were the flickering jewels of the stained-glass windows, as in the twilight of my bedroom were the projections cast by the magic lantern, as in front of the railway-station and the little local line the buttercups from the Indies and the Persian lilacs, as was my great-aunt's collection of old porcelain in the sombre dwelling of an elderly lady in a country town.

Stretched out on the cliff I would see before me nothing but grassy meadows and beyond them not the seven heavens of the Christian cosmogony but two stages only, one of a deeper blue, the sea, and above it another, paler one. We ate our food, and if I had brought with me also some little keepsake which might appeal to one or other of my friends, joy sprang with such sudden violence into their translucent faces, flushed in an instant, that their lips had not the strength to hold it in, and, to allow it to escape, parted in a burst of laughter. They were gathered close round me, and between their faces, which were not far apart, the air that separated them traced azure pathways such as might have been cut by a gardener wishing to create a little space so as to be able himself to move freely through a thicket of roses.

When we had finished eating we would play games which until then I should have thought boring, sometimes such childish games as King of the Castle, or Who Laughs First; not for a kingdom would I have renounced them now; the aurora of adolescence with which the faces of these girls still glowed, and from which I, young as I was, had already emerged, shed its light on everything around them and, like the fluid painting of certain Primitives, brought out in relief the most insignificant details of their daily lives against a golden background. Their faces were for the most part blurred with this misty effulgence of a dawn from which their actual features had not yet emerged. One saw only a charming glow of colour beneath which what in a few years' time would be a profile was not discernible. The profile of today had nothing definitive about it, and could be only a momentary resemblance to some deceased member of the family to whom nature had paid this commemorative courtesy. It comes so soon, the moment when there is nothing left to wait for, when the body is fixed in an immobility which holds no fresh surprise in store, when one loses all hope on seeing—as on a tree in the height of summer one sees leaves already brown—round a face still young hair that is growing thin or turning grey; it is so short, that radiant morning time, that one comes to like only the very youngest girls, those in whom the flesh, like a precious leaven, is still at work. They are no more than a stream of ductile matter, continuously moulded by the fleeting impression of the moment. It is as though each of them was in turn a little statuette of gaiety, of childish earnestness, of cajolery, of surprise, shaped by an expression frank and complete, but fugitive. This plasticity gives a wealth of variety and charm to the pretty attentions which a young girl pays to us. Of course, such attentions are indispensable in the mature woman also, and one who is not attracted to us, or who does not show that she is attracted to us, tends to assume in our eyes a somewhat tedious uniformity. But even these endearments, after a certain age, cease to send gentle ripples over faces which the struggle for existence has hardened, has rendered unalterably militant or ecstatic. One—owing to the prolonged strain of the obedience that subjects wife to husband—will seem not so much a woman's face as a soldier's; another, carved by the sacrifices which a mother has consented to make, day after day, for her children, will be the face of an apostle. A third is, after a stormy passage through the years, the face of an ancient mariner, upon a body of which its garments alone indicate the sex. Certainly the attentions that a woman pays us can still, so long as we are in love with her, endue with fresh charms the hours that we spend in her company. But she is not then for us a series of different women. Her gaiety remains external to an unchanging face. Whereas adolescence precedes this complete solidification, and hence we feel, in the company of young girls, the refreshing sense that is afforded us by the spectacle of forms undergoing an incessant process of change, a play of unstable forces which recalls that perpetual re-creation of the primordial elements of nature which we contemplate when we stand before the sea.

It was not merely a social engagement, a drive with Mme de Villeparisis, that I was prepared to sacrifice to the hide-and-seek or guessing games of my new friends. More than once, Robert de Saint-Loup had sent word that, since I had failed to come to see him at Doncières, he had applied for twenty-four hours' leave which he would spend at Balbec. Each time I wrote back to say that he was on no account to come, offering the excuse that I should be obliged to be away myself that very day, having some duty call to pay with my grandmother on family friends in the neighbourhood. No doubt he thought ill of me when he learned from his aunt in what the "duty call" consisted, and who the persons were who combined to play the part of my grandmother. And yet, perhaps I was not wrong in sacrificing the pleasures not only of society but of friendship to that of spending the whole day in this green garden. People who have the capacity to do so—it is true that such people are artists, and I had long been convinced that I should never be that—also have a duty to live for themselves. And friendship is a dispensation from this duty, an abdication of self. Even conversation, which is friendship's mode of expression, is a superficial digression which gives us nothing worth acquiring. We may talk for a lifetime without doing more than indefinitely repeat the vacuity of a minute, whereas the march of thought in the solitary work of artistic creation proceeds in depth, in the only direction that is not closed to us, along which we are free to advance—though with more effort, it is true—towards a goal of truth. And friendship is not merely devoid of virtue, like conversation, it is fatal to us as well. For the sense of boredom which those of us whose law of development is purely internal cannot help but feel in a friend's company (when, that is to say, we must remain on the surface of ourselves, instead of pursuing our voyage of discovery into the depths)—that first impression of boredom our friendship impels us to correct when we are alone again, to recall with emotion the words which our friend said to us, to look upon them as a valuable addition to our substance, when the fact is that we are not like buildings to which stones can be added from without, but like trees which draw from their own sap the next knot that will appear on their trunks, the spreading roof of their foliage. I was lying to myself, I was interrupting the process of growth in the direction in which I could indeed truly develop and be happy, when I congratulated myself on being liked and admired by so good, so intelligent, so rare a person as Saint-Loup, when I focused my mind, not upon my own obscure impressions which it should have been my duty to unravel, but on the words of my friend, in which, by repeating them to myself—by having them repeated to me by that other self who dwells in us and on to whom we are always so ready to unload the burden of taking thought—I strove to find a beauty very different from that which I pursued in silence when I was really alone, but one that would enhance the merit not only of Robert, but of myself and of my life. In the life which such a friend provided for me, I seemed to myself to be cosily preserved from solitude, nobly desirous of sacrificing myself for him, in short incapable of realising myself. With the girls, on the other hand, if the pleasure which I enjoyed was selfish, at least it was not based on the lie which seeks to make us believe that we are not irremediably alone and prevents us from admitting that, when we chat, it is no longer we who speak, that we are fashioning ourselves then in the likeness of other people and not of a self that differs from them. The words exchanged between the girls of the little band and myself were of little interest; they were, moreover, few, broken by long spells of silence on my part. This did not prevent me from taking as much pleasure in listening to them as in looking at them, in discovering in the voice of each one of them a brightly coloured picture. It was with delight that I listened to their pipings. Loving helps us to discern, to discriminate. The bird-lover in a wood at once distinguishes the twittering of the different species, which to ordinary people sound the same. The devotee of girls knows that human voices vary even more. Each one possesses more notes than the richest instrument of music. And the combinations in which it groups those notes are as inexhaustible as the infinite variety of personalities. When I talked with any one of my young friends I was conscious that the original, the unique portrait of her individuality had been skilfully traced, tyrannically imposed on my mind as much by the inflexions of her voice as by those of her face, and that they were two separate spectacles which expressed, each on its own plane, the same singular reality. No doubt the lines of the voice, like those of the face, were not yet finally fixed; the voice had still to break, as the face to change. Just as infants have a gland the secretion of which enables them to digest milk, a gland which is not found in adults, so there were in the twitterings of these girls notes which women's voices no longer contain. And on this more varied instrument they played with their lips, with all the application and the ardour of Bellini's little angel musicians, qualities which also are an exclusive appanage of youth. Later on these girls would lose that note of enthusiastic conviction which gave a charm to their simplest utterances, whether it were Albertine who, in a tone of authority, repeated puns to which the younger ones listened with admiration, until a paroxysm of giggles took hold of them with the irresistible violence of a sneezing fit, or Andrée who spoke of their school work, even more childish seemingly than the games they played, with an essentially puerile gravity; and their words varied in tone, like the strophes of antiquity when poetry, still hardly differentiated from music, was declaimed on different notes. In spite of everything, the voices of these girls already gave a quite clear indication of the attitude that each of these young people had adopted towards life, an attitude so individual that it would be speaking in far too general terms to say of one: "She treats everything as a joke," of another: "She jumps from assertion to assertion," of a third: "She lives in a state of expectant hesitancy." The features of our face are hardly more than gestures which force of habit has made permanent. Nature, like the destruction of Pompeii, like the metamorphosis of a nymph, has arrested us in an accustomed movement. Similarly, our intonation embodies our philosophy of life, what a person invariably says to himself about things. No doubt these characteristics did not belong only to these girls. They were those of their parents. The individual is steeped in something more general than himself. By this reckoning, our parents furnish us not only with those habitual gestures which are the outlines of our face and voice, but also with certain mannerisms of speech, certain favourite expressions, which, almost as unconscious

as our intonation, almost as profound, indicate likewise a definite point of view towards life. It is true that in the case of girls there are certain of these expressions which their parents do not hand on to them until they have reached a certain age, as a rule not before they are women. They are kept in reserve. Thus, for instance, if one were to speak of the pictures of one of Elstir's friends, Andrée, whose hair was still "down," could not yet personally make use of the expression which her mother and elder sister employed: "It appears the *man* is quite charming!" But that would come in due course, when she was allowed to go to the PalaisRoyal. And not long after her first communion, Albertine had begun to say, like a friend of her aunt: "It sounds to me pretty awful." She had also inherited the habit of making one repeat whatever one said to her, so as to appear to be interested, and to be trying to form an opinion of her own. If you said that an artist's work was good, or his house nice, "Oh, his painting's good, is it?" "Oh, his house is nice, is it?" Finally, and more general still than the family heritage, was the rich layer imposed by the native province from which they derived their voices and of which their inflexions smacked. When Andrée sharply plucked a solemn note she could not prevent the Périgordian string of her vocal instrument from giving back a resonant sound quite in harmony, moreover, with the meridional purity of her features; while to the incessant japing of Rosemonde the substance of her northern face and voice responded willy-nilly in the accent of her province. Between that province and the temperament of the girl that dictated these inflexions, I perceived a charming dialogue. A dialogue, not in any sense a discord. No discord can possibly separate a young girl and her native place. She is herself, and she is still it. Moreover this reaction of local materials on the genius who utilises them and to whose work it imparts an added vigour, does not make the work any less individual, and whether it be that of an architect, a cabinet-maker or a composer, it reflects no less minutely the most subtle shades of the artist's personality, because he has been compelled to work in the millstone of Senlis or the red sandstone of Strasbourg, has respected the knots peculiar to the ash-tree, has borne in mind, when writing his score, the resources and limits of the sonority and range of the flute and the viola.

All this I realised, and yet we talked so little! Whereas with Mme de Villeparisis or Saint-Loup I should have displayed by my words a great deal more pleasure than I should actually have felt, for I was worn out on leaving them, when, on the other hand, I was lying on the grass among these girls, the plenitude of what I felt infinitely outweighed the paucity, the infrequency of our speech, and brimmed over from my immobility and silence in waves of happiness that rippled up to die at the feet of these young roses.

For a convalescent who rests all day long in a flower-garden or an orchard, a scent of flowers or fruit does not more completely pervade the thousand trifles that compose his idle hours than did for me that colour, that fragrance in search of which my eyes kept straying towards the girls, and the sweetness of which finally became incorporated in me. So it is that grapes sweeten in the sun. And by their slow continuity these simple little games had gradually wrought in me also, as in those who do nothing else all day but lie outstretched by the sea, breathing the salt air and sunning themselves, a relaxation, a blissful smile, a vague dazzlement that had spread from brain to eyes.

Now and then a pretty attention from one or another of them would stir in me vibrations which dissipated for a time my desire for the rest. Thus one day Albertine suddenly asked: "Who has a pencil?" Andrée provided one, Rosemonde the paper. Albertine warned them: "Now, young ladies, I forbid you to look at what I write." After carefully tracing each letter, supporting the paper on her knee, she passed it to me, saying: "Take care no one sees." Whereupon I unfolded it and read her message, which was: "I like you."

"But we mustn't sit here scribbling nonsense," she cried, turning with an impulsive and serious air to André and Rosemonde, "I ought to show you the letter I got from Gisèle this morning. What an idiot I am; I've had it in my pocket all this time—and to think how useful it can be to us!"

Gisèle had been moved to copy out for her friend, so that it might be passed on to the others, the essay which she had written in her examination. Albertine's fears as to the difficulty of the subjects set had been more than justified by the two from which Gisèle had had to choose. The first was: "Sophocles, from the *Shades*, writes to Racine to console him for the failure of *Athalie*"; the other: "Suppose that, after the first performance of *Esther*, Mme de Sévigné is writing to Mme de La Fayette to tell her how much she regretted her absence." Now Gisèle, in an excess of zeal which must have touched the examiners' hearts, had chosen the first and more difficult of these two subjects, and had handled it with such remarkable skill that she had been given fourteen marks and had been congratulated by the board. She would have received a "distinction" if she had not "dried up" in the Spanish paper. The essay of which Gisèle had sent a copy to Albertine was immediately read aloud to us by the latter, who, having presently to take the same examination, was anxious to have Andrée's opinion, since she was by far the cleverest of them all and might be able to give her some good tips.

"She did have a bit of luck," Albertine observed. "It's the very subject her French mistress made her swot up while she was here."

The letter from Sophocles to Racine, as drafted by Gisèle, ran as follows:

"My dear friend, you must pardon me the liberty of addressing you when I have not the honour of your personal acquaintance, but your latest tragedy, *Athalie*, shows, does it not, that you have made a thorough study of my own modest works. You have not only put poetry in the mouths of the protagonists, or principal persons of the drama, but you have written other, and, let me tell you without flattery, charming verses for the chorus, a feature which did not work too badly, from what one hears, in Greek tragedy, but is a veritable novelty in France. In addition, your talent, so fluent, so dainty, so seductive, so fine, so delicate, has here acquired an energy on which I congratulate you. *Athalie*, *Joad*—these are figures which your rival Corneille could have wrought no better. The characters are virile, the plot simple and strong. You have given us a

tragedy in which love is not the keynote, and on this I must offer you my sincerest compliments. The most familiar precepts are not always the truest. I will give you an example:

This passion treat, which makes the poet's art  
Fly, as on wings, straight to the listener's heart.

You have shown us that the religious sentiment in which your chorus is steeped is no less capable of moving us. The general public may have been baffled, but true connoisseurs must give you your due. I have felt myself impelled to offer you all my congratulations, to which I would add, my dear brother poet, the expression of my very highest esteem."

Albertine's eyes never ceased to sparkle while she was reading this to us. "Really, you'd think she must have cribbed it somewhere!" she exclaimed when she reached the end. "I'd never have believed Gisèle could cook up an essay like that! And the poetry she brings in! Where on earth can she have pinched that from?"

Albertine's admiration, with a change, it is true, of object, but with no loss—an increase, rather—of intensity, combined with the closest attention to what was being said, continued to make her eyes "start from her head" all the time that Andrée (consulted as being the biggest and cleverest) first of all spoke of Gisèle's essay with a certain irony, then, with a levity of tone which failed to conceal her underlying seriousness, proceeded to reconstruct the letter in her own way.

"It's not bad," she said to Albertine, "but if I were you and had the the same subject set me, which is quite likely, as they set it very often, I shouldn't do it in that way. This is how I would tackle it. In the first place, if I had been Gisèle, I shouldn't have got carried away and I'd have begun by making a rough sketch of what I was going to write on a separate piece of paper. First and foremost, the formulation of the question and the exposition of the subject; then the general ideas to be worked into the development; finally, appreciation, style, conclusion. In that way, with a summary to refer to, you know where you are. But at the very start, with the exposition of the subject, or, if you like, Titine, since it's a letter, with the preamble, Gisèle has made a bloomer. Writing to a person of the seventeenth century, Sophocles ought never to have said 'My dear friend.'"

"Why, of course, she ought to have said 'My dear Racine,' " came impetuously from Albertine. "That would have been much better."

"No," replied Andrée, with a trace of mockery in her tone, "She ought to have put 'Sir.' In the same way, to end up, she ought to have thought of something like, 'Allow me, Sir,' (at the very most, 'Dear Sir') 'to inform you of the high esteem with which I have the honour to be your servant.' Then again, Gisèle says that the chorus in *Athalie* is a novelty. She is forgetting *Esther*, and two tragedies that are not much read now but happen to have been analysed this year by the teacher himself, so that you need only mention them, since they're his hobby-horse, and you're bound to pass. I mean *Les Juives* by Robert Garnier, and Montchrestien's *Aman*."

Andrée quoted these titles without managing quite to conceal a secret sense of benevolent superiority, which found expression in a rather charming smile. Albertine could contain herself no longer.

"Andrée, you really are staggering," she cried. "You must write down those names for me. Just fancy, what luck it would be if I got on to that, even in the oral, I should quote them at once and make a colossal impression."

But in the days that followed, every time that Albertine asked Andrée to tell her again the names of those two plays so that she might write them down, her erudite friend seemed to have forgotten them, and never recalled them for her.

"And another thing," Andrée went on with the faintest note of scorn for companions more childish than herself, though relishing their admiration and attaching to the manner in which she herself would have composed the essay a greater importance than she wished to reveal, "Sophocles in the Shades must be well-informed about all that goes on. He must therefore know that it was not before the general public but before the Sun King and a few privileged courtiers that *Athalie* was first played. What Gisèle says in this connexion of the esteem of the connoisseurs is not at all bad, but she might have gone a little further. Sophocles, now that he is mortal, may quite well have the gift of prophecy and announce that, according to Voltaire, *Athalie* will be the supreme achievement not only of Racine but of the human mind."

Albertine was drinking in every word. Her eyes blazed. And it was with the utmost indignation that she rejected Rosemonde's suggestion that they should have a game.

"Finally," Andrée concluded in the same detached, airy tone, a trifle mocking and at the same time fairly warmly convinced, "if Gisèle had first calmly noted down the general ideas that she was going to develop, it might perhaps have occurred to her to do what I myself should have done, point out what a difference there is between the religious inspiration of Racine's choruses and those of Sophocles. I should have made Sophocles remark that if Racine's choruses are impregnated with religious feeling like those of the Greek tragedians, the gods are not the same. The god of Joad has nothing in common with the god of Sophocles. And that brings us quite naturally, when we have finished developing the subject, to our conclusion: What does it matter if beliefs are different? Sophocles would hesitate to insist upon this point. He would be afraid of wounding Racine's convictions, and so, slipping in a few appropriate words on his masters at Port-Royal, he prefers to congratulate his disciple on the loftiness of his poetic genius."

Admiration and attention had made Albertine so hot that she was sweating profusely. Andrée preserved the unruffled calm of a female dandy. "It would not be a bad thing, either, to quote some of the opinions of famous critics," she added, before they began their game.

"Yes," put in Albertine, "so I've been told. The best ones to quote, on the whole, are Sainte-Beuve and Merlet, aren't they?"

"Well, you're not absolutely wrong," Andrée told her. "Merlet and Sainte-Beuve would do no harm. But above all you ought to mention Deltour and Gasq-Des-fossés."

Meanwhile I had been thinking of the little page torn from a scribbling block which Albertine had handed me. "I like you," she had written. And an hour later, as I scrambled down the paths which led back, a little too vertically for my liking, to Balbec, I said to myself that it was with her that I would have my romance.

The state of being characterised by the presence of all the signs by which we are accustomed to recognise that we are in love, such as the orders which I left in the hotel not to wake me whoever might ask to see me, unless it were one or other of the girls, the throbbing of my heart while I waited for them (whichever of them it might be that I was expecting), and, on those mornings, my fury if I had not succeeded in finding a barber to shave me, and would make an unsightly appearance before Albertine, Rosemonde or Andrée, no doubt this state, recurring for each of them in turn, was as different from what we call love as is from human life the life of the zoophytes, in which existence, individuality if we may so term it, is divided up among several organisms. But natural history teaches us that such an organisation of animal life is indeed to be observed, and that our own life, provided we have outgrown the first phase, is no less positive as to the reality of states hitherto unsuspected by us through which we have to pass, even though we abandon them later. Such was for me this state of love divided among several girls at once. Divided, or rather undivided, for more often than not what was so delicious to me, different from the rest of the world, what was beginning to become so precious to me that the hope of encountering it again the next day was the greatest joy of my life, was rather the whole of the group of girls, taken as they were all together on those afternoons on the cliffs, during those wind-swept hours, upon the strip of grass on which were laid those forms, so exciting to my imagination, of Albertine, of Rosemonde, of Andrée; and that without my being able to say which of them it was that made those scenes so precious to me, which of them I most wanted to love. At the start of a new love as at its ending, we are not exclusively attached to the object of that love, but rather the desire to love from which it will presently arise (and, later on, the memory it leaves behind) wanders voluptuously through a zone of interchangeable charms—simply natural charms, it may be, gratification of appetite, enjoyment of one's surroundings—which are harmonious enough for it not to feel at a loss in the presence of any one of them. Besides, as my perception of them was not yet dulled by familiarity, I still had the faculty of seeing them, that is to say of feeling a profound astonishment every time that I found myself in their presence.

No doubt this astonishment is to some extent due to the fact that the other person on such occasions presents some new facet; but so great is the multiformity of each individual, so abundant the wealth of lines of face and body, so few of which leave any trace, once we are no longer in the presence of the other person, on the arbitrary simplicity of our recollection, since the memory has selected some distinctive feature that had struck us, has isolated it, exaggerated it, making of a woman who has appeared to us tall a sketch in which her figure is elongated out of all proportion, or of a woman who has seemed to be pink-checked and golden-haired a pure "Harmony in pink and gold," that the moment this woman is once again standing before us, all the other forgotten qualities which balance that one remembered feature at once assail us, in their confused complexity, diminishing her height, paling her cheeks, and substituting for what we came exclusively to seek other features which we remember having noticed the first time and fail to understand why we so little expected to find them again. We remembered, we anticipated a peacock, and we find a peony. And this inevitable astonishment is not the only one; for side by side with it comes another, born of the difference, not now between the stylisations of memory and the reality, but between the person whom we saw last time and the one who appears to us today from another angle and shows us a new aspect. The human face is indeed, like the face of the God of some oriental theogony, a whole cluster of faces juxtaposed on different planes so that one does not see them all at once.

But to a great extent our astonishment springs from the fact that the person presents to us also a face that is the same as before. It would require so immense an effort to reconstruct everything that has been imparted to us by things other than ourselves—were it only the taste of a fruit—that no sooner is the impression received than we begin imperceptibly to descend the slope of memory and, without realising it, in a very short time we have come a long way from what we actually felt. So that every fresh glimpse is a sort of rectification, which brings us back to what we in fact saw. Already we no longer had any recollection of it, to such an extent does what we call remembering a person consist really in forgetting him. But as long as we can still see, as soon as the forgotten feature appears we recognise it, we are obliged to correct the straying line, and thus the perpetual and fruitful surprise which made so salutary and invigorating for me these daily outings with the charming damsels of the sea shore consisted fully as much in recollection as in discovery. When there is added to this the agitation aroused by what these girls were to me, which was never quite what I had supposed, and meant that my expectancy of our next meeting resembled not so much my expectancy the time before as the still vibrant memory of our last encounter, it will be realised that each of our excursions brought about a violent change in the course of my thoughts and not at all in the direction which, in the solitude of my own room, I had traced for them at my leisure. That plotted course was forgotten, had ceased to exist, when I returned home buzzing like a bee-hive with remarks which had disturbed me and were still echoing in my brain. Every person is destroyed when we cease to see him; after which his next appearance is a new creation, different from that which immediately preceded it, if not from them all. For the minimum variation that is to be found in these creations is twofold. Remembering a strong and searching glance, a bold manner, it is inevitably, next time, by an almost languid profile, a sort of dreamy gentleness, overlooked by us

in our previous impression, that at the next encounter we shall be astonished, that is to say almost uniquely struck. In confronting our memory with the new reality it is this that will mark the extent of our disappointment or surprise, will appear to us like a revised version of the reality by notifying us that we had not remembered correctly. In its turn, the facial aspect neglected the time before, and for that very reason the most striking this time, the most real, the most corrective, will become a matter for day-dreams and memories. It is a languorous and rounded profile, a gentle, dreamy expression which we shall now desire to see again. And then once more, next time, such resolution, such strength of character as there may be in the piercing eyes, the pointed nose, the tight lips, will come to correct the discrepancy between our desire and the object to which it has supposed itself to correspond. Of course, this fidelity to the first and purely physical impressions experienced anew at each encounter with my young friends did not only concern their facial appearance, since the reader has seen that I was sensitive also to their voices, more disturbing still, perhaps (for not only does a voice offer the same strange and sensuous surfaces as a face, it issues from that unknown, inaccessible region the mere thought of which sets the mind swimming with unattainable kisses), those voices, like the unique sound of a little instrument into which each of them put all of herself and which belonged to her alone. Traced by a casual inflexion, a sudden deep chord in one of these voices would surprise me when I recognised it after having forgotten it. So much so that the corrections which after every fresh meeting I was obliged to make so as to ensure absolute accuracy were as much those of a tuner or singing-master as of a draughtsman.

As for the harmonious cohesion into which, by the resistance that each brought to bear against the expansion of the others, the several waves of feeling induced in me by these girls had become neutralised, it was broken in Albertine's favour one afternoon when we were playing the game of "ferret."<sup>14</sup> It was in a little wood on the cliff. Stationed between two girls, strangers to the little band, whom the band had brought in its train because we wanted that day to have a bigger party than usual, I gazed enviously at Albertine's neighbour, a young man, saying to myself that if I had been in his place I could have been touching my beloved's hands during those unhopd-for moments which perhaps would never recur and which might have taken me a long way. Already, in itself, and even without the consequences which it would probably have involved, the contact of Albertine's hands would have been delicious to me. Not that I had never seen prettier hands than hers. Even in the group of her friends, those of Andrée, slender and far more delicate, had as it were a private life of their own, obedient to the commands of their mistress, but independent, and would often stretch out before her like thoroughbred greyhounds, with lazy pauses, languid reveries, sudden flexings of a finger-joint, seeing which Elstir had made a number of studies of these hands; and in one of them, in which Andrée was to be seen warming them at the fire, they had, with the light behind them, the golden diaphanousness of two autumn leaves. But, plumper than these, Albertine's hands would yield for a moment, then resist the pressure of the hand that clasped them, giving a sensation that was quite peculiar to themselves. The act of pressing Albertine's hand had a sensual sweetness which was in keeping somehow with the pink, almost mauve colouring of her skin. This pressure seemed to allow you to penetrate into the girl's being, to plumb the depths of her senses, like the ringing sound of her laughter, indecent in the way that the cooing of doves or certain animal cries can be. She was one of those women with whom shaking hands affords so much pleasure that one feels grateful to civilisation for having made of the handclasp a lawful act between boys and girls when they meet. If the arbitrary code of good manners had replaced the hand-shake by some other gesture, I should have gazed, day after day, at the untouchable hands of Albertine with a curiosity to know the feel of them as ardent as was my curiosity to learn the savour of her cheeks. But in the pleasure of holding her hand unrestrictedly in mine, had I been next to her at "ferret," I did not envisage that pleasure alone; what avowals, what declarations silenced hitherto by my bashfulness, I could have conveyed by certain pressures of hand on hand; for her part, how easy it would have been, in responding by other pressures, to show me that she accepted; what complicity, what a vista of sensual delight stood open! My love would be able to make more progress in a few minutes spent thus by her side than it had yet made in all the time that I had known her. Feeling that they would last but a short time, were rapidly nearing their end, since presumably we were not going on much longer with this game, and that once it was over it would be too late, I could not stay in my place for another moment. I let myself deliberately be caught with the ring, and, once in the middle, when the ring passed I pretended not to see it but followed its course with my eyes, waiting for the moment when it should come into the hands of the young man next to Albertine, who herself, convulsed with laughter, and in the excitement and pleasure of the game, was flushed pink. "Why, we really are in the Fairy Wood," said Andrée to me, pointing to the trees all round us, with a smile in her eyes which was meant only for me and seemed to pass over the heads of the other players, as though we two alone were intelligent and detached enough to make, in connexion with the game we were playing, a remark of a poetic nature. She even carried the delicacy of her fancy so far as to sing half-unconsciously: "The ferret of the Wood has passed this way, sweet ladies; he has passed by this way, the ferret of Fairy Wood!" like those people who cannot visit Trianon without getting up a party in Louis XVI costume, or think it amusing to have a song sung to its original setting. I should no doubt have been saddened not to see any charm in this realisation, had I had time to think about it. But my thoughts were all elsewhere. The players began to show surprise at my stupidity in never getting the ring. I was looking at Albertine, so pretty, so indifferent, so gay, who, though she little knew it, would be my neighbour when at last I should catch the ring in the right hands, thanks to a stratagem which she did not suspect, and would certainly have resented if she had. In the heat of the game her long hair had become loosened, and fell in curling locks over her cheeks on which it served to intensify, by its dry brownness, the carnation pink. "You have the tresses of Laura Dianti, of Eleanor of Guyenne, and of her descendant so

beloved of Chateaubriand. You ought always to wear your hair half down like that," I murmured in her ear as an excuse for drawing close to her. Suddenly the ring passed to her neighbour. I sprang upon him at once, forced open his hands and seized it; he was obliged now to take my place inside the circle, while I took his beside Albertine. A few minutes earlier I had been envying this young man, when I saw that his hands as they slipped over the string were constantly brushing against hers. Now that my turn had come, too shy to seek, too agitated to savour this contact, I no longer felt anything but the rapid and painful beating of my heart. At one moment Albertine leaned her round pink face towards me with an air of complicity, pretending thus to have the ring in order to deceive the ferret and prevent him from looking in the direction in which it was being passed. I realised at once that it was to this ruse that the insinuations of Albertine's look applied, but I was excited to see thus kindle in her eyes the image—simulated purely for the purposes of the game—of a secret understanding between her and myself which did not exist but which from that moment seemed to me to be possible and would have been divinely sweet. While I was still enraptured by this thought, I felt a slight pressure of Albertine's hand against mine, and her caressing finger slip under my finger along the cord, and I saw her, at the same moment, give me a wink which she tried to make imperceptible to the others. At once, a multitude of hopes, invisible hitherto, crystallised within me. "She's taking advantage of the game to make it clear to me that she likes me," I thought to myself in a paroxysm of joy from which I instantly relapsed on hearing Albertine mutter furiously: "Why can't you take it? I've been shoving it at you for the last hour." Stunned with grief, I let go the cord, the ferret saw the ring and swooped down on it, and I had to go back into the middle, where I stood helpless, in despair, looking at the unbridled rout which continued to circle round me, stung by the jeers of all the players, obliged, in reply, to laugh when I had so little mind for laughter, while Albertine kept on repeating: "People shouldn't play if they won't pay attention and spoil the game for the others. We shan't ask him again when we're going to play, Andrée, or else I shan't come." Andrée, with a mind above the game, still chanting her "Fairy Wood" which, in a spirit of imitation, Rosemonde had taken up too, without conviction, sought to take my mind off Albertine's reproaches by saying to me: "We're quite close to those old Creuniers you wanted so much to see. Look, I'll take you there by a pretty little path, while these idiots play at eight-year-olds." Since Andrée was extremely nice to me, as we went along I said to her everything about Albertine that seemed calculated to endear me to the latter. Andrée replied that she too was very fond of Albertine, and thought her charming; nevertheless my compliments about her friend did not seem altogether to please her. Suddenly, in the little sunken path, I stopped short, touched to the heart by an exquisite memory of my childhood. I had just recognised, from the fretted and glossy leaves which it thrust out towards me, a hawthorn-bush, flowerless, alas, now that spring was over. Around me floated an atmosphere of far-off Months of Mary, of Sunday afternoons, of beliefs, of errors long since forgotten. I wanted to seize hold of it. I stood still for a moment, and Andrée, with a charming divination of what was in my mind, left me to converse with the leaves of the bush. I asked them for news of the flowers, those hawthorn flowers that were like merry little girls, headstrong, provocative, pious. "The young ladies have been gone from here for a long time now," the leaves told me. And perhaps they thought that, for the great friend of those young ladies that I pretended to be, I seemed to have singularly little knowledge of their habits. A great friend, but one who had never been to see them again for all these years, despite his promises. And yet, as Gilberte had been my first love among girls, so these had been my first love among flowers. "Yes, I know, they leave about the middle of June," I answered, "but I'm delighted to see the place where they lived when they were here. They came to see me at Combray, in my room; my mother brought them when I was ill in bed. And we used to meet again on Saturday evenings, at the Month of Mary devotions. Can they go to them here?" "Oh, of course! Why, they make a special point of having our young ladies at Saint-Denis du Désert, the church near here." "So if I want to see them now?" "Oh, not before May next year." "But can I be sure that they will be here?" "They come regularly every year." "Only I don't know whether I'll be able to find the place." "Oh, dear, yes! They are so gay, the young ladies, they stop laughing only to sing hymns together, so that you can't possibly miss them, you can recognise their scent from the other end of the path."

I caught up with Andrée, and began again to sing Albertine's praises. It was inconceivable to me that she would not repeat what I said in view of the emphasis I put into it. And yet I never heard that Albertine had been told. Andrée had, nevertheless, a far greater understanding of the things of the heart, a refinement of sweetness; finding the look, the word, the action that could most ingeniously give pleasure, keeping to herself a remark that might possibly cause pain, making a sacrifice (and making it as though it were no sacrifice at all) of an afternoon's play, or it might be an "at home" or a garden party, in order to stay with a friend who was feeling sad, and thus show him or her that she preferred the simple company of a friend to frivolous pleasures: such were her habitual kindnesses. But when one knew her a little better one would have said it was with her as with those heroic poltroons who wish not to be afraid and whose bravery is especially meritorious; one would have said that deep down in her nature there was none of that kindness which she constantly displayed out of moral distinction, or sensibility, or a noble desire to show herself a true friend. When I listened to all the charming things she said to me about a possible attachment between Albertine and myself it seemed as though she were bound to do everything in her power to bring it to pass. Whereas, by chance perhaps, not even of the slightest opportunity which she had at her command and which might have proved effective in uniting me to Albertine did she ever make use, and I would not swear that my effort to make myself loved by Albertine did not—if not provoke in her friend secret stratagems calculated to thwart it—at any rate arouse in her an anger which however she took good care to hide and against which, out of delicacy of feeling, she may herself have fought. Of the countless refinements of affectionate kindness which Andrée showed, Albertine would have been incapable, and yet I was not certain of the underlying goodness of



the former as I was to be later of the latter's. Showing herself always tenderly indulgent towards the exuberant frivolity of Albertine, Andrée greeted her with words and smiles that were those of a friend; better still, she acted towards her as a friend. I have seen her, day after day, in order to give this penniless friend the benefit of her own wealth, in order to make her happy, without any possibility of advantage to herself, take more pains than a courtier seeking to win his sovereign's favour. She was charmingly gentle and sympathetic, and spoke in sweet and sorrowful terms, when one expressed pity for Albertine's poverty, and took infinitely more trouble on her behalf than she would have taken for a rich friend. But if anyone were to hint that Albertine was perhaps not quite so poor as people made out, a just discernible cloud would overshadow Andrée's eyes and brow; she seemed out of temper. And if one went on to say that after all Albertine might perhaps be less difficult to marry off than people supposed, she would vehemently contradict one, repeating almost angrily: "Oh dear, no, she'll be quite unmarriageable! I'm certain of it, and I feel so sorry for her." As far as I myself was concerned, Andrée was the only one of the girls who would never have repeated to me anything at all disagreeable that might have been said about me by a third person; more than that, if it was I who told her what had been said she would make a pretence of not believing it, or would furnish some explanation which made the remark inoffensive. It is the aggregate of these qualities that goes by the name of tact. It is the attribute of those people who, if we fight a duel, congratulate us and add that there was no necessity to do so, in order to enhance still further in our own eyes the courage of which we have given proof without having been forced. They are the opposite of the people who in similar circumstances say: "It must have been a horrid nuisance for you to have to fight a duel, but on the other hand you couldn't possibly swallow an insult like that—there was nothing else to be done." But as there are pros and cons in everything, if the pleasure or at least the indifference shown by our friends in repeating something offensive that they have heard said about us proves that they do not exactly put themselves inside our skin at the moment of speaking, but thrust in the pinpoint, turn the knife-blade as though it were gold-beater's skin and not human, the art of always keeping hidden from us what might be disagreeable to us in what they have heard said about our actions or in the opinion which those actions have led the speakers themselves to form, proves that there is in the other category of friends, in the friends who are so full of tact, a strong vein of dissimulation. It does no harm if indeed they are incapable of thinking ill of us, and if the ill that is said by other people only makes them suffer as it would make us. I supposed this to be the case with Andrée, without, however, being absolutely sure.

We had left the little wood and had followed a network of unfrequented paths through which Andrée managed to find her way with great skill. "Look," she said to me suddenly, "there are your famous Creuniers, and what's more you're in luck, it's just the time of day and the light is the same as when Elstir painted them." But I was still too wretched at having fallen, during the game of "ferret," from such a pinnacle of hopes. And so it was not with the pleasure which otherwise I should doubtless have felt that I suddenly discerned at my feet, crouching among the rocks for protection against the heat, the marine goddesses for whom Elstir had lain in wait and whom he had surprised there, beneath a dark glaze as lovely as Leonardo would have painted, the marvellous Shadows, sheltering furtively, nimble and silent, ready at the first glimmer of light to slip behind the stone, to hide in a cranny, and prompt, once the menacing ray had passed, to return to the rock or the seaweed over whose torpid slumbers they seemed to be keeping vigil, beneath the sun that crumbled the cliffs and the etiolated ocean, motionless lightfoot guardians darkening the water's surface with their viscous bodies and the attentive gaze of their deep blue eyes.

We went back to the wood to pick up the other girls and go home together. I knew now that I was in love with Albertine; but, alas! I did not care to let her know it. This was because, since the days of the games with Gilberte in the Champs-Élysées, my conception of love had become different, even if the persons to whom my love was successively assigned remained almost identical. For one thing, the avowal, the declaration of my passion to her whom I loved no longer seemed to be one of the vital and necessary stages of love, nor love itself an external reality, but simply a subjective pleasure. And I felt that Albertine would do what was necessary to sustain that pleasure all the more readily if she did not know that I was experiencing it.

As we walked home, the image of Albertine, bathed in the light that streamed from the other girls, was not the only one that existed for me. But as the moon, which is no more than a tiny white cloud of a more definite and fixed shape than other clouds during the day, assumes its full power as soon as daylight fades, so when I was once more in the hotel it was Albertine's sole image that rose from my heart and began to shine. My room seemed to me to have become suddenly a new place. Of course, for a long time past, it had not been the hostile room of my first night in it. All our lives, we go on patiently modifying the surroundings in which we live; and gradually, as habit dispenses us from feeling them, we suppress the noxious elements of colour, shape and smell which objectified our uneasiness. Nor was it any longer the room, still with sufficient power over my sensibility, not certainly to make me suffer, but to give me joy, the well of summer days, like a marble basin in which, half-way up its polished sides, they mirrored an azure surface steeped in light over which glided for an instant, impalpable and white as a wave of heat, the fleeting reflexion of a cloud; nor the purely aesthetic room of the pictorial evening hours; it was the room in which I had been now for so many days that I no longer saw it. And now I was beginning again to open my eyes to it, but this time from the selfish angle which is that of love. I liked to feel that the fine slanting mirror, the handsome glass-fronted bookcases, would give Albertine, if she came to see me, a good impression of me. Instead of a place of transit in which I would stay for a few minutes before escaping to the beach or to Rivebelle, my room became real and dear to me again, fashioned itself anew, for I looked at and appreciated each article of its furniture with the eyes of Albertine.

A few days after the game of "ferret," when, having allowed ourselves to wander rather too far afield, we had been fortunate in finding at Mainville a couple of little "governess-carts" with two seats in each which would enable us to be back in time for dinner, the intensity, already considerable, of my love for Albertine had the effect of making me suggest successively that Andrée and Rosemonde should come with me, and never once Albertine, and then, while still inviting Andrée or Rosemonde for preference, of bringing everyone round, in virtue of secondary considerations connected with time, route, coats and so forth, to decide, as though against my wishes, that the most practical policy after all was that I should take Albertine, to whose company I pretended to resign myself willy-nilly. Unfortunately, since love tends to the complete assimilation of a person, and none is comestible by way of conversation alone, for all that Albertine was as nice as possible on our way home, when I had deposited her at her own door she left me happy but more famished for her even than I had been at the start, and reckoning the moments that we had just spent together as only a prelude, of little importance in itself, to those that were still to come. Nevertheless it had that initial charm which is not to be found again. I had not yet asked anything of Albertine. She could imagine what I wanted, but, not being certain of it, surmise that I was aiming only at relations with no precise objective, in which my beloved would find that delicious vagueness, rich in expected surprises, which is romance.

In the week that followed I scarcely attempted to see Albertine. I made a show of preferring Andrée. Love is born; we wish to remain, for the one we love, the unknown person whom she may love in turn, but we need her, we need to make contact not so much with her body as with her attention, her heart. We slip into a letter some unkind remark which will force the indifferent one to ask for some little kindness in compensation, and love, following an infallible technique, tightens up with an alternating movement the cog-wheels in which we can no longer not love or be loved. I gave to Andrée the hours spent by the others at a party which I knew that she would sacrifice for my sake with pleasure, and would have sacrificed even with reluctance, from moral nicety, in order not to give either the others or herself the idea that she attached any importance to a relatively frivolous amusement. I arranged in this way to have her entirely to myself every evening, not with the intention of making Albertine jealous, but of enhancing my prestige in her eyes, or at any rate not imperilling it by letting Albertine know that it was herself and not Andrée that I loved. Nor did I confide this to Andrée either, lest she should repeat it to her friend. When I spoke of Albertine to Andrée I affected a coldness by which she was perhaps less deceived than I, from her apparent credulity. She made a show of believing in my indifference to Albertine, and of desiring the closest possible union between Albertine and myself. It is probable that, on the contrary, she neither believed in the one nor wished for the other. While I was saying to her that I did not care very greatly for her friend, I was thinking of one thing only, how to become acquainted with Mme Bontemps, who was staying for a few days near Balbec, and whom Albertine was shortly to visit for a few days. Naturally I did not disclose this desire to Andrée, and when I spoke to her of Albertine's family, it was in the most careless manner possible. Andrée's direct answers did not appear to throw any doubt on my sincerity. Why then did she blurt out suddenly one day: "Oh, by the way, I happen to have seen Albertine's aunt"? It is true that she had not said in so many words: "I could see through your casual remarks all right that the one thing you were really thinking of was how you could get to know Albertine's aunt." But it was clearly to the presence in Andrée's mind of some such idea which she felt it more becoming to keep from me that the phrase "happen to" seemed to point. It was of a kind with certain glances, certain gestures which, although they have no logical rational form directly devised for the listener's intelligence, reach him nevertheless in their true meaning, just as human speech, converted into electricity in the telephone, is turned into speech again when it strikes the ear. In order to remove from Andrée's mind the idea that I was interested in Mme Bontemps, I spoke of her thenceforth not only absent-mindedly but with downright malice, saying that I had once met that idiot of a woman, and trusted I should never have that experience again. Whereas I was seeking by every means in my power to meet her.

I tried to induce Elstir (but without mentioning to anyone else that I had asked him) to speak to her about me and to bring us together. He promised to introduce me to her, though he seemed greatly surprised at my wishing it, for he regarded her as a contemptible woman, a born intriguer, as uninteresting as she was self-interested. Reflecting that if I did see Mme Bontemps, Andrée would be sure to hear of it sooner or later, I thought it best to warn her in advance. "The things one tries hardest to avoid are those one finds one cannot escape," I told her. "Nothing in the world could bore me so much as meeting Mme Bontemps again, and yet I can't get out of it. Elstir has arranged to invite us together." "I've never doubted it for a single instant," exclaimed Andrée in a bitter tone, while her eyes, enlarged and altered by her annoyance, focused themselves upon some invisible object. These words of Andrée's were not the most reasoned statement of a thought which might be expressed thus: "I know that you're in love with Albertine, and that you're moving heaven and earth to get to know her family." But they were the shapeless fragments, capable of reconstitution, of that thought which I had caused to explode, by striking it, against Andrée's will. Like her "happen to," these words had no meaning save at one remove, that is to say they were words of the sort which (rather than direct assertions) inspire in us respect or distrust for another person, and lead to a rupture.

If Andrée had not believed me when I told her that Albertine's family left me indifferent, it was because she thought that I was in love with Albertine. And probably she was none too happy in the thought.

She was generally present as a third party at my meetings with her friend. There were however days when I was to see Albertine by herself, days to which I looked forward with feverish impatience, which passed without bringing me any decisive result, without any of them having been that cardinal day whose role I immediately entrusted to the following day, which would prove no more apt to play it; thus there rose and toppled one after another, like waves, those peaks at once replaced by others.

About a month after the day on which we had played "ferret" together, I learned that Albertine was going away next morning to spend a couple of days with Mme Bontemps, and, since she would have to take an early train, was coming to spend the night at the Grand Hotel, from which, by taking the omnibus, she would be able, without disturbing the friends with whom she was staying, to catch the first train in the morning. I mentioned this to Andrée. "I don't believe a word of it," she replied with a look of annoyance. "Anyhow it won't help you at all, for I'm quite sure Albertine won't want to see you if she goes to the hotel by herself. It would be against 'protocol,' " she added, employing an expression which had recently come into favour with her, in the sense of "what is done." "I tell you this because I understand Albertine. What difference do you suppose it makes to me whether you see her or not? Not the slightest, I can assure you!"

We were joined by Octave who had no hesitation in telling Andrée the number of strokes he had gone round in, the day before, at golf, then by Albertine, who came along swinging her diabolos like a nun her rosary. Thanks to this pastime she could remain alone for hours on end without getting bored. As soon as she joined us I became conscious of the impish tip of her nose, which I had omitted from my mental picture of her during the last few days; beneath her dark hair the vertical line of her forehead controverted—and not for the first time—the blurred image that I had preserved of her, while its whiteness made a vivid splash in my field of vision; emerging from the dust of memory, Albertine was built up afresh before my eyes.

Golf gives one a taste for solitary pleasures. The pleasure to be derived from diabolos is undoubtedly one of these. And yet, after she had joined us, Albertine continued to play with it, just as a lady on whom friends have come to call does not on their account stop working at her crochet. "I gather that Mme de Villeparisis," she remarked to Octave, "has been complaining to your father." (I could hear, underlying the "I gather," one of those notes that were peculiar to Albertine; every time I realised that I had forgotten them, I would remember having already caught a glimpse behind them of Albertine's determined and Gallic mien. I could have been blind and yet have detected certain of her qualities, alert and slightly provincial, in those notes just as plainly as in the tip of her nose. They were equivalent and might have been substituted for one another, and her voice was like what we are promised in the photo-telephone of the future: the visual image was clearly outlined in the sound.) "She hasn't written only to your father, either, she wrote to the Mayor of Balbec at the same time, to say that we must stop playing diabolos on the front as somebody hit her in the face with a ball."

"Yes, I was hearing about that," said Octave. "It's ridiculous. There's little enough to do here as it is."

Andrée did not join in the conversation; she was not acquainted, any more than was Albertine or Octave, with Mme de Villeparisis. She did, however, remark: "I can't think why this lady should make such a song about it. Old Mme de Cambremer got hit in the face, and she never complained."

"I'll explain the difference," replied Octave gravely, striking a match as he spoke. "It's my belief that Mme de Cambremer is a society lady, and Mme de Villeparisis is just an upstart. Are you playing golf this afternoon?" And he left us, followed by Andrée. I was alone now with Albertine. "You see," she began, "I'm wearing my hair now the way you like—look at my ringlet. They all laugh at it and nobody knows who I'm doing it for. My aunt will laugh at me too. But I shan't tell her why, either." I had a sidelong view of Albertine's cheeks, which often appeared pale, but, seen thus, were flushed with unclouded blood which lighted them up, gave them that brightness of certain winter mornings when the stones catching the sun seem blocks of pink granite and radiate joy. The joy I felt at this moment at the sight of Albertine's cheeks was as keen, but led to another desire which was not the desire for a walk but for a kiss. I asked her if the report of her plans which I had heard was correct. "Yes," she told me, "I shall be sleeping at your hotel tonight, and in fact as I've got a bit of a cold I shall be going to bed before dinner. You can come and sit by my bed and watch me eat, if you like, and afterwards we'll play at anything that you choose. I should have liked you to come to the station tomorrow morning, but I'm afraid it might look rather odd, I don't say to Andrée who is a sensible person, but to the others who will be there; if my aunt got to know, I should never hear the last of it. But we can spend the evening together, at any rate. My aunt will know nothing about that. I must go and say good-bye to Andrée. Till we meet again then. Come early, so that we can have a nice long time together," she added, smiling.

At these words I was swept back past the days when I loved Gilberte to those when love seemed to me not simply an external entity but one that could be realised. Whereas the Gilberte whom I used to see in the Champs-Élysées was a different Gilberte from the one I found within me when I was alone again, suddenly in the real Albertine, the one I saw every day, whom I supposed to be stuffed with middle-class prejudices and entirely frank with her aunt, the imaginary Albertine had just been embodied, she whom, when I did not yet know her, I had suspected of casting furtive glances at me on the front, she who had worn an air of being reluctant to go home when she saw me making off in the other direction.

I went into dinner with my grandmother. I felt within me a secret which she could never guess. Similarly with Albertine; tomorrow her friends would be with her, not knowing what new experience she and I had in common; and when she kissed her niece on the forehead Mme Bontemps would never imagine that I stood between them, in the shape of that hair arrangement which had for its object, concealed from all the world, to give pleasure to me, to me who had until then so greatly envied Mme Bontemps because, being related to the same people as her niece, she had the same occasions to put on mourning, the same family visits to pay; and now I found myself being more to Albertine than was the aunt herself. When she was with her aunt, it was of me that she would be thinking. What was going to happen that evening, I scarcely knew. In any event, the Grand Hotel and the evening no longer seemed empty to me; they contained my happiness. I rang for the lift-boy to take me up to the room which Albertine had engaged, a room that looked over the valley. The slightest movements, such as that of sitting down on the bench in the lift, were sweet to me, because they were in

direct relation to my heart; I saw in the ropes that drew the cage upwards, in the few stairs that I had still to climb, only the machinery, the materialised stages of my joy. I now had only two or three steps to take along the corridor before coming to that room in which was enshrined the precious substance of that rosy form—that room which, even if there were to be done in it delicious things, would keep that air of changelessness, of being, to a chance visitor who knew nothing of its history, just like any other room, which makes of inanimate things the obstinately mute witnesses, the scrupulous confidants, the inviolable depositaries of our pleasure. Those few steps from the landing to Albertine's door, those few steps which no one could stop, I took with rapture but with prudence, as though plunged in a new and strange element, as if in going forward I had been gently displacing a liquid stream of happiness, and at the same time with a strange feeling of omnipotence, and of entering at last into an inheritance which had belonged to me from time immemorial. Then suddenly I reflected that I was wrong to be in any doubt; she had told me to come when she was in bed. It was as clear as daylight; I pranced for joy, I nearly knocked over Françoise who was standing in my way, and I ran, with sparkling eyes, towards my beloved's room.

I found Albertine in bed. Leaving her throat bare, her white nightdress altered the proportions of her face, which, flushed by being in bed or by her cold or by dinner, seemed pinker; I thought of the colours I had had beside me a few hours earlier on the front, the savour of which I was now at last to taste; her cheek was traversed by one of those long, dark, curling tresses which, to please me, she had undone altogether. She looked at me and smiled. Beyond her, through the window, the valley lay bright beneath the moon. The sight of Albertine's bare throat, of those flushed cheeks, had so intoxicated me (that is to say had so shifted the reality of the world for me away from nature into the torrent of my sensations which I could scarcely contain), that it had destroyed the equilibrium between the immense and indestructible life which circulated in my being and the life of the universe, so puny in comparison. The sea, which was visible through the window as well as the valley, the swelling breasts of the first of the Maineville cliffs, the sky in which the moon had not yet climbed to the zenith—all this seemed less than a featherweight on my eyeballs, which between their lids I could feel dilated, resistant, ready to bear far greater burdens, all the mountains of the world, upon their fragile surface. Their orb no longer found even the sphere of the horizon adequate to fill it. And all the life-giving energy that nature could have brought me would have seemed to me all too meagre, the breathing of the sea all too short to express the immense aspiration that was swelling my breast. I bent over Albertine to kiss her. Death might have struck me down in that moment and it would have seemed to me a trivial, or rather an impossible thing, for life was not outside me but in me; I should have smiled pityingly had a philosopher then expressed the idea that some day, even some distant day, I should have to die, that the eternal forces of nature would survive me, the forces of that nature beneath whose godlike feet I was no more than a grain of dust; that, after me, there would still remain those rounded, swelling cliffs, that sea, that moonlight and that sky! How could it have been possible; how could the world have lasted longer than myself, since I was not lost in its vastness, since it was the world that was enclosed in me, in me whom it fell far short of filling, in me who, feeling that there was room to store so many other treasures, flung sky and sea and cliffs contemptuously into a corner. "Stop it or I'll ring the bell!" cried Albertine, seeing that I was flinging myself upon her to kiss her. But I told myself that not for nothing does a girl invite a young man to her room in secret, arranging that her aunt should not know, and that boldness, moreover, rewards those who know how to seize their opportunities; in the state of exaltation in which I was, Albertine's round face, lit by an inner flame as by a night-light, stood out in such relief that, imitating the rotation of a glowing sphere, it seemed to me to be turning, like those Michelangelo figures which are being swept away in a stationary and vertiginous whirlwind. I was about to discover the fragrance, the flavour which this strange pink fruit concealed. I heard a sound, abrupt, prolonged and shrill. Albertine had pulled the bell with all her might.

I had supposed that my love for Albertine was not based on the hope of carnal possession. And yet, when the lesson to be drawn from my experience that evening was, apparently, that such possession was impossible; when, after having had no doubt, that first day on the beach, that Albertine was licentious, and having passed through various intermediate assumptions, it seemed to me to be established that she was absolutely virtuous; when on her return from her aunt's a week later, she greeted me coldly with: "I forgive you; in fact I'm sorry to have upset you, but you must never do it again"—then in contrast to what I had felt on learning from Bloch that one could have all the women one wanted, and as if, instead of a real girl, I had known a wax doll, my desire to penetrate into her life, to follow her through the places in which she had spent her childhood, to be initiated by her into the sporting life, gradually detached itself from her; my intellectual curiosity as to thoughts on this subject or that did not survive my belief that I might kiss her if I chose. My dreams abandoned her as soon as they ceased to be nourished by the hope of a possession of which I had supposed them to be independent. Thenceforward they found themselves once more at liberty to transfer themselves—according to the attraction that I had found in her on any particular day, above all according to the chances I seemed to detect of my being possibly loved by her—to one or other of Albertine's friends, and to Andrée first of all. And yet, if Albertine had not existed, perhaps I should not have had the pleasure which I began to feel more and more strongly during the days that followed in the kindness that was shown me by Andrée. Albertine told no one of the rebuff which I had received at her hands. She was one of those pretty girls who, from their earliest youth, on account of their beauty, but especially of an attraction, a charm which remains somewhat mysterious and has its source perhaps in reserves of vitality to which others less favoured by nature come to quench their thirst, have always—in their home circle, among their friends, in society—been more sought after than other more beautiful and richer girls; she was one of those people from whom, before the

age of love and much more still after it is reached, more is asked than they themselves ask, more even than they are able to give. From her childhood Albertine had always had round her in an adoring circle four or five little girl friends, among them Andrée who was so far her superior and knew it (and perhaps this attraction which Albertine exerted quite involuntarily had been the origin, had laid the foundations of the little band). This attraction was still potent even at a great social distance, in circles quite brilliant by comparison, where, if there was a pavane to be danced, Albertine would be sent for rather than another girl of better family. The consequence was that, not having a penny to her name, living, not very well, at the expense of M. Bontemps who was said to be a shady individual and was anyhow anxious to be rid of her, she was nevertheless invited, not only to dine but to stay, by people who in Saint-Loup's eyes might not have had much distinction, but to Rosemonde's mother or Andrée's, women who though very rich themselves did not know these people, represented something quite extraordinary. Thus Albertine spent a few weeks every year with the family of one of the Governors of the Bank of France, who was also Chairman of the Board of Directors of a railway company. The wife of this financier entertained prominent people, and had never mentioned her "day" to Andrée's mother, who thought her wanting in politeness, but was nevertheless prodigiously interested in everything that went on in her house. Accordingly she encouraged Andrée every year to invite Albertine down to their villa, because, she said, it was a charitable act to offer a holiday by the sea to a girl who had not herself the means to travel and whose aunt did so little for her. Andrée's mother was probably not prompted by the thought that the banker and his wife, learning that Albertine was made much of by her and her daughter, would form a high opinion of them both; still less did she hope that Albertine, kind and clever as she was, would manage to get her invited, or at least to get Andrée invited, to the financier's garden-parties. But every evening at the dinner-table, while assuming an air of indifference and disdain, she was fascinated by Albertine's accounts of everything that had happened at the big house while she was staying there, and the names of the other guests, almost all of them people whom she knew by sight or by name. Even the thought that she knew them only in this indirect fashion, that is to say did not know them at all (she called this kind of acquaintance knowing people "all my life"), gave Andrée's mother a touch of melancholy while she plied Albertine with questions about them in a lofty and distant tone, with pursed lips, and might have left her doubtful and uneasy as to the importance of her own social position had she not been able to reassure herself, to return safely to the "realities of life," by saying to the butler: "Please tell the chef that his peas aren't soft enough." She then recovered her serenity. And she was quite determined that Andrée was to marry nobody but a man, of the best family of course, rich enough for her too to be able to keep a chef and a couple of coachmen. That was the reality, the practical proof of "position." But the fact that Albertine had dined at the banker's country house with this or that great lady, and that the said great lady had invited her to stay with her next winter, invested the girl, in the eyes of Andrée's mother, with a peculiar esteem which went very well with the pity and even contempt aroused by her lack of fortune, a contempt increased by the fact that M. Bontemps had betrayed his flag and—being even vaguely Panamist, it was said—had rallied to the Government. Not that this deterred Andrée's mother, in her passion for abstract truth, from withering with her scorn the people who appeared to believe that Albertine was of humble origin. "What's that you say? Why, they're one of the best families in the country. Simonet with a single 'n,' you know!" Certainly, in view of the class of society in which all this went on, in which money plays so important a part, and mere charm makes people ask you out but not marry you, an "acceptable" marriage did not appear to be for Albertine a practical outcome of the so distinguished patronage which she enjoyed but which would not have been held to compensate for her poverty. But even in themselves, and with no prospect of any matrimonial consequence, Albertine's "successes" excited the envy of certain spiteful mothers, furious at seeing her received "like one of the family" by the banker's wife, even by Andrée's mother, whom they scarcely knew. They therefore went about telling mutual friends of theirs and of those two ladies that the latter would be very angry if they knew the truth, which was that Albertine repeated to each of them everything that the intimacy to which she was rashly admitted enabled her to spy out in the household of the other, countless little secrets which it must be infinitely unpleasant to the interested party to have made public. These envious women said this so that it might be repeated and might get Albertine into trouble with her patrons. But, as often happens, their machinations met with no success. The spite that prompted them was too apparent, and their only result was to make the women who had perpetrated them appear rather more contemptible than before. Andrée's mother was too firm in her opinion of Albertine to change her mind about her now. She looked upon her as "unfortunate," but the best-natured girl living, and one who was incapable of making anything up except to give pleasure.

If this sort of popularity to which Albertine had attained did not seem likely to lead to any practical result, it had stamped Andrée's friend with the distinctive characteristic of people who, being always sought after, have never any need to offer themselves, a characteristic (to be found also, and for analogous reasons, at the other end of the social scale, among the smartest women) which consists in their not making any display of the successes they have scored, but rather keeping them to themselves. She would never say of anyone: "So-and-so is anxious to meet me," would speak of everyone with the greatest good nature, and as if it was she who ran after, who sought to know other people. If someone mentioned a young man who, a few minutes earlier, had been in private conversation with her, heaping the bitterest reproaches upon her because she had refused him an assignation, so far from proclaiming this in public or betraying any resentment she would stand up for him: "He's such a nice boy!" Indeed it quite annoyed her to be so attractive to people, since it obliged her to disappoint them, whereas her natural instinct was always to give pleasure. So much did she enjoy giving pleasure that she had come to employ a particular kind of falsehood peculiar to certain

utilitarians and men who have "arrived." Existing, incidentally, in an embryonic state in a vast number of people, this form of insincerity consists in not being able to confine the pleasure arising out of a single act of politeness to a single person. For instance, if Albertine's aunt wished her niece to accompany her to a not very amusing party, Albertine by going to it might have found it sufficient to extract from the incident the moral profit of having given pleasure to her aunt. But, being courteously welcomed by her host and hostess, she preferred to say to them that she had been wanting to see them for so long that she had finally seized this opportunity and begged her aunt to take her to their party. Even this was not enough: at the same party there might happen to be one of Albertine's friends who was very unhappy. Albertine would say to her: "I didn't like the thought of your being here by yourself. I felt it might do you good to have me with you. If you would rather leave the party, go somewhere else, I'm ready to do anything you like. What I want above all is to see you look less unhappy" (which, as it happened, was true also). Sometimes it happened however that the fictitious aim destroyed the real one. Thus Albertine, having a favour to ask on behalf of one of her friends, would go to see a certain lady who could help her. But on arriving at the house of this lady—a kind and sympathetic soul—the girl, unconsciously following the principle of the multiple utilisation of a single action, would think it more affectionate to appear to have come there solely on account of the pleasure she knew she would derive from seeing the lady again. The lady would be deeply touched that Albertine should have taken a long journey out of pure friendship. Seeing her almost overcome by emotion, Albertine liked the lady even more. Only, there was this awkward consequence: she now felt so keenly the pleasure of friendship which she pretended to have been her motive in coming, that she was afraid of making the lady suspect the genuineness of sentiments which were actually quite sincere if she now asked her to do the favour for her friend. The lady would think that Albertine had come for that purpose, which was true, but would conclude also that Albertine had no disinterested pleasure in seeing her, which was false. With the result that she came away without having asked the favour, like a man sometimes who has been so kind to a woman, in the hope of winning her favours, that he refrains from declaring his passion in order not to deprive his kindness of its appearance of nobility. In other instances it would be wrong to say that the true object was sacrificed to the subordinate and subsequently conceived idea, but the two were so incompatible that if the person to whom Albertine endeared herself by stating the second had known of the existence of the first, her pleasure would at once have been turned into the deepest pain. At a much later point in this story, we shall have occasion to see this kind of contradiction expressed in clearer terms. Suffice it to say for the present, borrowing an example from a completely different context, that they occur very frequently in the most divergent situations that life has to offer. A husband has established his mistress in the town where he is quartered with his regiment. His wife, left by herself in Paris, and with an inkling of the truth, grows more and more miserable, and writes her husband letters embittered by jealousy. Then the mistress is obliged to go to Paris for the day. The husband cannot resist her entreaties to him to accompany her, and applies for a twenty-four-hour leave. But since he is a good-natured fellow, and hates making his wife unhappy, he goes to see her and tells her, shedding a few quite genuine tears, that, dismayed by her letters, he has found the means of getting away from his duties to come to her and to console her in his arms. He has thus contrived by a single journey to furnish wife and mistress alike with proofs of his love. But if the wife were to learn the reason for which he has come to Paris, her joy would doubtless be turned into grief, unless her pleasure in seeing the faithless wretch outweighed, in spite of everything, the pain that his infidelities had caused her. Among the men who have struck me as practising most consistently this system of killing several birds with one stone must be included M. de Norpois. He would now and then agree to act as intermediary between two of his friends who had quarrelled, and this led to his being called the most obliging of men. But it was not sufficient for him to appear to be doing a service to the friend who had come to him to request it; he would represent to the other the steps which he was taking to effect a reconciliation as undertaken not at the request of the first friend but in the interest of the second, a notion of which he never had any difficulty in persuading an interlocutor influenced in advance by the idea that he had before him the "most obliging of men." In this way, playing both ends against the middle, what in stage parlance is known as "doubling" two parts, he never allowed his influence to be in the slightest degree imperilled, and the services which he rendered constituted not an expenditure of capital but a dividend upon some part of his credit. At the same time every service, seemingly rendered twice over, correspondingly enhanced his reputation as an obliging friend, and, better still, a friend whose interventions were efficacious, one who did not simply beat the air, whose efforts were always justified by success, as was shown by the gratitude of both parties. This duplicity in obligingness was—allowing for disappointments such as are the lot of every human being—an important element in M. de Norpois's character. And often at the Ministry he would make use of my father, who was a simple soul, while making him believe that it was he, M. de Norpois, who was being useful to my father.

Pleasing people more easily than she wished, and having no need to trumpet her conquests abroad, Albertine kept silent about the scene she had had with me by her bedside, which a plain girl would have wished the whole world to know. And yet for her attitude during that scene I could not arrive at any satisfactory explanation. As regards the supposition that she was absolutely chaste (a supposition to which I had first of all attributed the violence with which Albertine had refused to let herself be taken in my arms and kissed, though it was by no means essential to my conception of the kindness, the fundamentally honourable character of my beloved), I could not accept it without a copious revision of its terms. It ran so entirely counter to the hypothesis which I had constructed that day when I saw Albertine for the first time. Then, so many different acts of affectionate sweetness towards myself (a sweetness that was caressing, at times uneasy, alarmed, jealous of my predilection for Andrée) came up on all sides to challenge the brutal gesture with

which, to escape from me, she had pulled the bell. Why then had she invited me to come and spend the evening by her bedside? Why did she speak all the time in the language of affection? What is the basis of the desire to see a friend, to be afraid that he may be fonder of someone else than of you, to seek to please him, to tell him, so romantically, that no one else will ever know that he has spent the evening in your room, if you refuse him so simple a pleasure and if it is no pleasure to you? I could not believe, after all, that Albertine's virtue went as far as that, and I came to wonder whether her violence might not have been due to some reason of vanity, a disagreeable odour, for instance, which she suspected of lingering about her person, and by which she was afraid that I might be repelled, or else of cowardice—if for instance she imagined, in her ignorance of the facts of love, that my state of nervous debility was due to something contagious, communicable to her in a kiss.

She was genuinely distressed by her failure to gratify me, and gave me a little gold pencil, with the virtuous perverseness of people who, touched by your kindness but not prepared to grant what it clamours for, nevertheless want to do something on your behalf—the critic, an article from whose pen would so gratify the novelist, who asks him to dinner instead; the duchess who does not take the snob with her to the theatre but lends him her box on an evening when she will not be using it herself. To such an extent are those who do the minimum, and might easily do nothing, driven by conscience to do something!

I told Albertine that in giving me this pencil she was giving me great pleasure, and yet not so great as I should have felt if, on the night she had spent at the hotel, she had permitted me to kiss her: "It would have made me so happy! What possible harm could it have done you? I'm amazed that you should have refused me."

"What amazes me," she retorted, "is that you should find it amazing. I wonder what sort of girls you must know if my behaviour surprised you."

"I'm sorry to have annoyed you, but even now I cannot say that I think I was in the wrong. What I feel is that all that sort of thing is of no importance really, and I can't understand a girl who could so easily give pleasure not consenting to do so. Let's be quite clear about it," I went on, throwing a sop of sorts to her moral scruples as I recalled how she and her friends had scarified the girl who went about with the actress Léa, "I don't mean to say that a girl can behave exactly as she likes and that there's no such thing as morality. Take, for example, what you were saying the other day about a girl who's staying at Balbec and her relations with an actress. I call that unspeakable, so unspeakable that I feel sure it must all have been made up by some enemies of the girl and that there can't be any truth in the story. It strikes me as improbable, impossible. But to allow oneself to be kissed, or even more, by a friend—since you say that I'm your friend ..."

"So you are, but I've had other friends before now, I've known lots of young men who were every bit as friendly, I can assure you. Well, not one of them would ever have dared to do such a thing. They know they'd get their ears boxed if they tried it on. Besides, they never dreamed of doing so. We would shake hands in a straightforward, friendly sort of way, like good pals, but there was never a word said about kissing, and yet we weren't any the less friends for that. Why, if it's my friendship you're after, you've nothing to complain of; I must be jolly fond of you to forgive you. But I'm sure you don't care two hoots about me, really. Own up now, it's Andrée you're in love with. Besides, you're quite right; she's ever so much nicer than I am, and absolutely ravishing! Oh, you men!"

Despite my recent disappointment, these words so frankly uttered, by giving me a great respect for Albertine, made a very agreeable impression on me. And perhaps this impression was to have serious and vexatious consequences for me later on, for it was around it that there began to form that feeling almost of brotherly intimacy, that moral core which was always to remain at the heart of my love for Albertine. Such a feeling may be the cause of the greatest suffering. For in order really to suffer at the hands of a woman one must have believed in her completely. For the moment, that embryo of moral esteem, of friendship, was left embedded in my soul like a stepping-stone in a stream. It could have availed nothing, by itself, against my happiness if it had remained there without growing, in an inertia which it was to retain the following year, and still more during the final weeks of this first visit to Balbec. It dwelt in me like one of those foreign bodies which it would be wiser when all is said to expel, but which we leave where they are without disturbing them, so harmless for the present does their weakness, their isolation amid a strange environment render them.

My longings were now once more at liberty to concentrate on one or another of Albertine's friends, and returned first of all to Andrée, whose attentions might perhaps have touched me less had I not been certain that they would come to Albertine's ears. Undoubtedly the preference that I had long pretended to feel for Andrée had furnished me—in habits of conversation and declarations of affection—with, so to speak, the material for a ready-made love for her which had hitherto lacked only the complement of a genuine feeling, which my heart, being once more free, was now in a position to supply. But Andrée was too intellectual, too neurotic, too sickly, too like myself for me really to love her. If Albertine now seemed to me to be void of substance, Andrée was filled with something which I knew only too well. I had thought, that first day, that what I saw on the beach was the mistress of some racing cyclist, passionately interested in sport, and now Andrée told me that if she had taken it up, it was on orders from her doctor, to cure her neurasthenia, her digestive troubles, but that her happiest hours were those which she spent translating one of George Eliot's novels. My disappointment, due to an initial mistake as to what Andrée was, had not, in fact, the slightest importance for me. But the mistake was one of the kind which, if they allow love to be born and are not recognised as mistakes until it has ceased to be modifiable, become a cause of suffering. Such mistakes—which may be quite different from mine with regard to Andrée, and even its exact opposite—are frequently due (and this was especially the case here) to the fact that people take on the aspect and the mannerisms of



what they are not but would like to be sufficiently to create an illusion at first sight. To the outward appearance, affectation, imitation, the longing to be admired, whether by the good or by the wicked, add misleading similarities of speech and gesture. There are cynicisms and cruelties which, when put to the test, prove no more genuine than certain apparent virtues and generosityes. Just as we often discover a vain miser beneath the cloak of a man famed for his charity, so her flaunting of vice leads us to surmise a Messalina in a respectable girl with middle-class prejudices. I had thought to find in Andrée a healthy, primitive creature, whereas she was merely a person in search of health, as perhaps were many of those in whom she herself had thought to find it, and who were in reality no more healthy than a burly arthritic with a red face and in white flannels is necessarily a Hercules. Now there are circumstances in which it is not immaterial to our happiness that the person we have loved for what appeared to be so healthy about her is in reality only one of those invalids who receive such health as they possess from others, as the planets borrow their light, as certain bodies are only conductors of electricity.

No matter, Andrée, like Rosemonde and Gisèle, indeed more than they, was, when all was said, a friend of Albertine, sharing her life, imitating her ways, to the point that, on the first day, I had not at once distinguished them from one another. Among these girls, rosesprigs whose principal charm was that they were silhouetted against the sea, the same indivisibility prevailed as at the time when I did not know them, when the appearance of no matter which of them had caused me such violent emotion by heralding the fact that the little band was not far off. And even now the sight of one of them filled me with a pleasure in which was included, to an extent which I should not have found it easy to define, that of seeing the others follow her in due course, and, even if they did not come that day, of speaking about them, and of knowing that they would be told that I had been on the beach.

It was no longer simply the attraction of those first days, it was a genuine wish to love that wavered between them all, to such an extent was each the natural substitute for the others. My greatest sadness would not have been to be abandoned by whichever of these girls I loved best, but I should at once have loved best, because I should have fastened on to her the sum total of the melancholy longings which had been floating vaguely among them all, the one who had abandoned me. It would, moreover, in that event, be the loss of all her friends, in whose eyes I should speedily have forfeited whatever prestige I might possess, that I should, in losing her, have unconsciously regretted, having pledged to them that sort of collective love which the politician and the actor feel for the public for whose desertion of them after they have enjoyed all its favours they can never be consoled. Even those favours which I had failed to win from Albertine I would hope suddenly to receive from one or other who had left me in the evening with a word or glance of ambiguous meaning, thanks to which it was towards her that, for the next day or so, my desire would turn.

It strayed among them all the more voluptuously in that upon those volatile faces a comparative fixity of features had now begun, and had been carried far enough for the eye to distinguish—even if it were to change yet further—each malleable and elusive effigy. The differences that existed between these faces doubtless bore little relation to equivalent differences in the length and breadth of their features, any of which, dissimilar as the girls appeared, might perhaps almost have been lifted from one face and imposed at random upon any other. But our knowledge of faces is not mathematical. In the first place, it does not begin by measuring the parts, it takes as its starting point an expression, a sum total. In Andrée, for instance, the fineness of her gentle eyes seemed to go with the thinness of her nose, as slender as a mere curve which one could imagine having been traced in order to pursue along a single line the notion of delicacy divided higher up between the dual smile of her twin gaze. A line equally fine cut through her hair, as pliant and as deep as the line with which the wind furrows the sand. And there it must have been hereditary; for the snow-white hair of Andrée's mother rippled in the same way, forming here a swelling, there a depression like a snowdrift that rises or sinks according to the irregularities of the land. Certainly, when compared with the fine delineation of Andrée's, Rosemonde's nose seemed to present broad surfaces, like a high tower resting upon massive foundations. Although expression may suffice to make us believe in enormous differences between things that are separated by infinitely little—although that infinitely little may by itself create an expression that is absolutely unique, an individuality—it was not only the infinitely little differences of its lines and the originality of its expression that made these faces appear irreducible to one another. Between my friends' faces their colouring established a separation wider still, not so much by the varied beauty of the tones with which it provided them, so contrasted that I felt when I looked at Rosemonde—suffused with a sulphurous pink that was further modified by the greenish light of her eyes—and then at Andrée—whose white cheeks derived such austere distinction from her black hair—the same kind of pleasure as if I had been looking alternately at a geranium growing by a sunlit sea and a camellia in the night; but principally because the infinitely small differences of their lines were enlarged out of all proportion, the relations between one and another surface entirely changed by this new element of colour which, in addition to being the dispenser of tints, is a great generator or at least modifier of dimensions. So that faces which were perhaps constructed on not dissimilar lines, according as they were lit, by the flames of a shock of red hair, with a pinkish hue, or, by white light, with a matt pallor, grew sharper or broader, became something else, like those properties used in the Russian ballet, consisting sometimes, when they are seen in the light of day, of a mere paper disc, out of which the genius of a Bakst, according to the blood-red or moonlit lighting in which he plunges his stage, makes a hard incrustation, like a turquoise on a palace wall, or something softly blooming, like a Bengal rose in an eastern garden. And so when studying faces, we do indeed measure them, but as painters, not as surveyors.

The same was true of Albertine as of her friends. On certain days, thin, with a grey complexion, a sullen air, a violet transparency slanting across her eyes such as we notice sometimes on the sea, she seemed to be feeling the sorrows of exile. On other days her face, smoother and glossier, drew one's desires on to its varnished surface and prevented them from going further; unless I caught a sudden glimpse of her from the side, for her matt cheeks, like white wax on the surface, were visibly pink beneath, which was what made one so long to kiss them, to reach that different tint which was so elusive. At other times, happiness bathed those cheeks with a radiance so mobile that the skin, grown fluid and vague, gave passage to a sort of subcutaneous glaze which made it appear to be of another colour but not of another substance than the eyes; sometimes, when one looked without thinking at her face punctuated with tiny brown marks among which floated what were simply two larger, bluer stains, it was as though one were looking at a goldfinch's egg, or perhaps at an opalescent agate cut and polished in two places only, where, at the heart of the brown stone, there shone, like the transparent wings of a sky-blue butterfly, the eyes, those features in which the flesh becomes a mirror and gives us the illusion of enabling us, more than through the other parts of the body, to approach the soul. But most often it too showed more colour, and was then more animated; sometimes in her white face only the tip of her nose was pink, and as delicate as that of a mischievous kitten with which one would have liked to play; sometimes her cheeks were so glossy that one's glance slipped, as over the surface of a miniature, over their pink enamel, which was made to appear still more delicate, more private, by the enclosing though half-opened lid of her black hair; or it might happen that the tint of her cheeks had deepened to the mauvish pink of cyclamen, and sometimes even, when she was flushed or feverish, with a suggestion of unhealthiness which lowered my desire to something more sensual and made her glance expressive of something more perverse and unwholesome, to the deep purple of certain roses, a red that was almost black; and each of these Albertines was different, as is each appearance of the dancer whose colours, form, character, are transmuted according to the endlessly varied play of a spotlight. It was perhaps because they were so diverse, the persons whom I used to contemplate in her at this period, that later I developed the habit of becoming myself a different person, according to the particular Albertine to whom my thoughts had turned; a jealous, an indifferent, a voluptuous, a melancholy, a frenzied person, created anew not merely by the accident of the particular memory that had risen to the surface, but in proportion also to the strength of the belief that was lent to the support of one and the same memory by the varying manner in which I appreciated it. For this was the point to which I invariably had to return, to those beliefs which for most of the time occupy our souls unbeknown to us, but which for all that are of more importance to our happiness than is the person whom we see, for it is through them that we see him, it is they that impart his momentary grandeur to the person seen. To be quite accurate, I ought to give a different name to each of the selves who subsequently thought about Albertine; I ought still more to give a different name to each of the Albertines who appeared before me, never the same, like those seas—called by me simply and for the sake of convenience “the sea”—that succeeded one another and against which, a nymph likewise, she was silhouetted. But above all, in the same way as, in telling a story (though to far greater purpose here), people mention what the weather was like on such and such a day, I ought always to give its name to the belief that reigned over my soul and created its atmosphere on any given day on which I saw Albertine, the appearance of people, like that of the sea, being dependent on those clouds, themselves barely visible, which change the colour of everything by their concentration, their mobility, their dissemination, their flight—like that cloud which Elstir had rent one evening by not introducing me to these girls with whom he had stopped to talk, and whose images had suddenly appeared to me more beautiful when they moved away—a cloud that had formed again a few days later when I did get to know them, veiling their brightness, interposing itself frequently between my eyes and them, opaque and soft, like Virgil's *Leucothea*.

No doubt, all their faces had assumed quite new meanings for me since the manner in which they were to be read had been to some extent indicated to me by their talk, talk to which I could ascribe a value all the greater in that, by questioning them, I could prompt it whenever I chose, could vary it like an experimenter who seeks by corroborative proofs to establish the truth of his theory. And it is, after all, as good a way as any of solving the problem of existence to get near enough to the things and people that have appeared to us beautiful and mysterious from a distance to be able to satisfy ourselves that they have neither mystery nor beauty. It is one of the systems of mental hygiene among which we are at liberty to choose our own, a system which is perhaps not to be recommended too strongly, but gives us a certain tranquillity with which to spend what remains of life, and also—since it enables us to regret nothing, by assuring us that we have attained to the best, and that the best was nothing out of the ordinary—with which to resign ourselves to death.

For the contempt for chastity, for the memory of casual everyday affairs, I had substituted, in the minds of these girls, upright principles, liable perhaps to falter, but principles which had hitherto kept unscathed those who had acquired them in their middle-class homes. And yet, when one has been mistaken from the start, even in trifling details, when an error of assumption or recollection makes one seek for the author of a malicious slander, or for the place where one has lost something, in the wrong direction, it frequently happens that one discovers one's error only to substitute for it not the truth but a fresh error. I drew, as regards their manner of life and the conduct to be observed towards them, all the possible conclusions from the word “innocence” which I had read, in talking familiarly with them, upon their faces. But perhaps I had carelessly misread it, and it was no more written there than was the name of Jules Ferry on the programme of the performance at which I had seen Berma for the first time, an omission which had not prevented me from maintaining to M. de Norpois that Jules Ferry, beyond any possibility of doubt, was a person who wrote curtain-raisers.

No matter which of my friends of the little band I thought of, how could the last face that she had shown me not have been the only one that I could recall, since, of our memories with respect to a person, the mind eliminates everything that does not concur with the immediate purpose of our daily relations (even, and especially, if those relations are impregnated with an element of love which, ever unsatisfied, lives always in the moment that is about to come)? It allows the chain of spent days to slip away, holding on only to the very end of it, often of a quite different metal from the links that have vanished in the night, and in the journey which we make through life, counts as real only the place in which we are at present. My very earliest impressions, already so remote, could not find any remedy in my memory against the daily distortion to which they were subjected; during the long hours which I spent in talking, eating, playing with these girls, I did not even remember that they were the same pitiless and sensual virgins whom I had seen, as in a fresco, file past between me and the sea.

Geographers or archaeologists may conduct us over Calypso's island, may excavate the Palace of Minos. Only, Calypso becomes then a mere woman, Minos a mere king with no semblance of divinity. Even the qualities and defects which history then teaches us to have been the attributes of those quite real personages often differ widely from those which we had ascribed to the fabulous beings who bore the same names as they. Thus had there faded and vanished all the lovely oceanic mythology which I had composed in those first days. But it is not altogether a matter of indifference that we do succeed, at any rate now and then, in spending our time in familiar intercourse with what we thought to be unattainable and longed to possess. In our later dealings with people whom at first we found disagreeable there persists always, even amid the factitious pleasure which we have come at length to enjoy in their society, the lingering taint of the defects which they have succeeded in hiding. But, in relations such as I enjoyed with Albertine and her friends, the genuine pleasure which was there at the start leaves that fragrance which no artifice can impart to hothouse fruits, to grapes that have not ripened in the sun. The supernatural creatures which for a little time they had been to me still introduced, even without my being aware of it, a miraculous element into the most commonplace dealings I might have with them, or rather prevented such dealings from ever becoming in the least commonplace. My desire had sought so avidly to learn the meaning of eyes which now knew and smiled at me, but which, that first day, had crossed mine like rays from another universe, it had distributed colour and fragrance so generously, so carefully, so minutely, over the fleshly surfaces of these girls who now, stretched out on the cliff-top, simply offered me sandwiches or played guessing-games, that often, in the afternoon, while I lay there among them—like those painters who, seeking to match the grandeurs of antiquity in modern life, give to a woman cutting her toe-nail the nobility of the *Thorn Puller*, or, like Rubens, make goddesses out of women they know to people some mythological scene—I would gaze at those lovely forms, dark and fair, so dissimilar in type, scattered around me on the grass, without emptying them, perhaps, of all the mediocre content with which my everyday experience had filled them, and yet (without expressly recalling their celestial origin) as if, like young Hercules or Telemachus, I had been playing amid a band of nymphs.

Then the concerts ended, the bad weather began, my friends left Balbec, not all at once, like the swallows, but all in the same week. Albertine was the first to go, abruptly, without any of her friends understanding, then or afterwards, why she had returned suddenly to Paris whither neither her work nor any amusement summoned her. "She said neither why nor wherefore, and with that she left!" muttered Françoise, who, for that matter, would have liked us to do the same. We were, she thought, inconsiderate towards the staff, now greatly reduced in number, but retained on account of the few visitors who were still staying on, and towards the manager who was "just eating up money." It was true that the hotel, which would very soon be closed for the winter, had long since seen most of its patrons depart, and never had it been so agreeable. This view was not shared by the manager; from end to end of the rooms in which we sat shivering, and at the doors of which no page now stood on guard, he paced the corridors, wearing a new frock-coat, so well tended by the barber that his insipid face appeared to be made of some composition in which, for one part of flesh, there were three of cosmetics, and incessantly changing his neckties. (These refinements cost less than having the place heated and keeping on the staff, just as a man who is no longer able to subscribe ten thousand francs to a charity can still parade his generosity without inconvenience to himself by tipping the boy who brings him a telegram with five.) He appeared to be inspecting the empty air, to be seeking, by the smartness of his personal appearance, to give a provisional splendour to the desolation that could now be felt in this hotel where the season had not been good, and walked like the ghost of a monarch who returns to haunt the ruins of what was once his palace. He was particularly annoyed when the little local railway company, finding the supply of passengers inadequate, discontinued its trains until the following spring. "What is lacking here," said the manager, "is the means of commotion." In spite of the deficit which his books showed, he was making plans for the future on a lavish scale. And as he was, after all, capable of retaining an exact memory of fine phrases when they were directly applicable to the hotel-keeping industry and had the effect of enhancing its importance: "I was not adequately supported, although in the dining room I had an efficient squad," he explained, "but the pages left something to be desired. You will see, next year, what a phalanx I shall convene." In the meantime the suspension of the services of the little railway obliged him to send for letters and occasionally to dispatch visitors in a carriage. I would often ask leave to sit by the driver, and in this way I managed to be out in all weathers, as in the winter I had spent at Combray.

Sometimes, however, the driving rain kept my grandmother and me, the Casino being closed, in rooms almost completely deserted, as in the hold of a ship when a storm is raging; and there, day by day, as in the course of a sea-voyage, a new person from among those in whose company we had spent three months without getting to know them, the senior judge from Caen, the president of the Cherbourg bar, an American lady and

her daughters, came up to us, engaged us in conversation, thought up some way of making the time pass less slowly, revealed some talent, taught us a new game, invited us to drink tea or to listen to music, to meet them at a certain hour, to plan together some of those diversions which contain the true secret of giving ourselves pleasure, which is not to aspire to it but merely to help ourselves to pass the time less boringly—in a word, formed with us, at the end of our stay at Balbec, ties of friendship which, in a day or two, their successive departures from the place would sever. I even made the acquaintance of the rich young man, of one of his pair of aristocratic friends and of the actress, who had reappeared for a few days; but their little society was composed now of three persons only, the other friend having returned to Paris. They asked me to come out to dinner with them at their restaurant. I think they were just as well pleased that I did not accept. But they had issued the invitation in the most friendly way imaginable, and although it came in fact from the rich young man, since the others were only his guests, as the friend who was staying with him, the Marquis Maurice de Vaudémont, came of a very good family indeed, instinctively the actress, in asking me whether I would not come, said, to flatter my vanity: "It will give Maurice such pleasure."

And when I met them all three together in the hall of the hotel, it was M. de Vaudémont (the rich young man effacing himself) who said to me: "Won't you give us the pleasure of dining with us?"

On the whole I had derived very little benefit from Balbec, but this only strengthened my desire to return there. It seemed to me that I had not stayed there long enough. This was not the opinion of my friends in Paris, who wrote to ask whether I meant to stay there for the rest of my life. And when I saw that it was the name "Balbec" which they were obliged to put on the envelope, as my window looked out not over a landscape or a street but on to the plains of the seas, as through the night I heard its murmur, to which, before going to sleep, I had entrusted the ship of my dreams, I had the illusion that this life of promiscuity with the waves must effectively, without my knowledge, pervade me with the notion of their charm, like those lessons which one learns by heart while one is asleep.

The manager offered to reserve better rooms for me next year, but I had now become attached to mine, into which I went without ever noticing the scent of vetiver, while my mind, which had once found such difficulty in rising to fill its space, had come now to take its measurements so exactly that I was obliged to submit it to a reverse process when I had to sleep in Paris, in my own room, the ceiling of which was low.

For we had had to leave Balbec at last, the cold and the damp having become too penetrating for us to stay any longer in a hotel which had neither fireplaces in the rooms nor central heating. Moreover, I forgot almost immediately these last weeks of our stay. What I saw almost invariably in my mind's eye when I thought of Balbec were the hours which, every morning during the fine weather, since I was due to go out in the afternoon with Albertine and her friends, my grandmother, following the doctor's orders, insisted on my spending lying down with the room darkened. The manager gave instructions that no noise was to be made on my landing, and came up himself to see that they were obeyed. Because the light outside was so strong, I kept drawn for as long as possible the big violet curtains which had adopted so hostile an attitude towards me the first evening. But since, in spite of the pins with which Françoise fastened them every night so that the light should not enter, and which she alone knew how to unfasten, in spite of the rugs, the red cretonne table-cover, the various fabrics collected here and there which she fitted into her defensive scheme, she never succeeded in making them meet exactly, the darkness was not complete, and they spilled over the carpet as it were a scarlet shower of anemone-petals, which I could not resist the temptation to trample for a moment with my bare feet. And on the wall which faced the window and so was partially lighted, a cylinder of gold with no visible support was placed vertically and moved slowly along like the pillar of fire which went before the Hebrews in the desert. I went back to bed; obliged to taste without moving, in imagination only, and all at once, the pleasures of games, bathing, walks which the morning prompted, joy made my heart beat thunderingly like a machine set going at full speed but fixed to the ground, which can spend its energy only by turning over on itself.

I knew that my friends were on the front, but I did not see them as they passed before the links of the sea's uneven chain, at the far end of which, perched amid its bluish peaks like an Italian citadel, could occasionally be distinguished, in clear weather, the little town of Rivebelle, picked out in minutest detail by the sun. I did not see my friends, but (while there mounted to my belvedere the shout of the newsboys, the "journalists" as Françoise used to call them, the shouts of the bathers and of children at play, punctuating like the cries of sea-birds the sigh of the gently breaking waves) I guessed their presence, I heard their laughter enveloped like the laughter of the Nereids in the soft surge of sound that rose to my ears. "We looked up," said Albertine in the evening, "to see if you were coming down. But your shutters were still closed when the concert began." At ten o'clock, sure enough, it broke out beneath my windows. In the intervals between the blare of the instruments, if the tide were high, the gliding surge of a wave would be heard again, slurred and continuous, seeming to enfold the notes of the violin in its crystal spirals and to be spraying its foam over the intermittent echoes of a submarine music. I grew impatient because no one had yet come with my things, so that I might get up and dress. Twelve o'clock struck, and Françoise arrived at last. And for months on end, in this Balbec to which I had so looked forward because I imagined it only as battered by storms and buried in the mist, the weather had been so dazzling and so unchanging that when she came to open the window I could always, without once being wrong, expect to see the same patch of sunlight folded in the corner of the outer wall, of an unalterable colour which was less moving as a sign of summer than depressing as the colour of a lifeless and factitious enamel. And when Françoise removed the pins from the top of the window-frame, took down the cloths, and drew back the curtains, the summer day which she disclosed seemed as dead, as immemorial,

as a sumptuous millenary mummy from which our old servant had done no more than cautiously unwind the linen wrappings before displaying it, embalmed in its vesture of gold.

## Addenda

Odette was quite prepared to cut short her visit, but could not leave at once since she had only just arrived. Either to get round the difficulty, or as a studied insult to her niece, "I should be most interested to look over your house," Lady Israels had said to Mme de Marsantes, knowing that the latter had a great regard for her and an even greater need of her. Moreover Lady Israels, who was extremely beneficent and upright, was also very haughty. "I shall be delighted to show it to you," Mme de Marsantes had replied, and at once set off with Lady Jacob [sic] as though she felt she had no need to bother about Mme Swann who must be only too happy to be in her house, leaving the unfortunate woman standing there alone, kicking her heels for half an hour. Then Mme de Marsantes had returned and said curtly to Mme Swann: "Excuse me"; whereupon Lady Jacob had raised her lorgnette and looked at Odette as at a person she had not even noticed before and who must have arrived in the meantime, or as yet another feature of the house. This feature no doubt failed to impress her, for it was the only one on which she made no comment, and turning towards Mme de Marsantes she started up a conversation with her in which Odette was not invited to join. "I trust you won't go back there," Swann had said to her afterwards, and this single visit had not encouraged Odette to pursue her offensive in that direction. Let us hasten to add, however, that this was not the world that preoccupied Mme Swann. On matters concerning the nobility, on pedigrees and ducal houses, she lacked even the petty erudition that peaceful bourgeois citizens of Nantes or Tours cultivate night and day, although they may never know anyone from that world. When, as we shall see, it began to flock to the house of the aged Odette, it did not come to fill a void, to gratify a craving induced by the reading of old memoirs and the *Almanach de Gotha*; it was received without the slightest mental preparation. Mme de Guermantes was for Odette no more than a superior Mme Verdurin whom it was "smart" to have to one's house, and she was far less concerned about who the Guermantes family were than a great many people who would never know them ...

So Mme de Villeparisis, who when I used to hear my grandmother talking about her in my childhood had seemed to me to be an old lady of the same sort as her other friends and had always remained so to me—that person who had once given me a box of chocolates held by a duck and was now going out of her way to be agreeable to us—was a member of the powerful Guermantes clan! This change in the value of what we possess, like those old bundles which turn out to be priceless treasures, is one of the things that introduce most wonder, animation, variety and consequently poetry into one's adolescence (that adolescence which, while gradually dwindling until it becomes no more than a thin trickle that often runs dry, is sometimes prolonged throughout the whole course of one's life). The rise or depreciation of one's wealth, the weirdly unexpected reassessments of one's possessions, the misrepresentations of people we know, which make one's youth as fabulous as the metamorphoses of Ovid or even the metempsychoses of the Hindus, derive in part from ignorance—an ignorance that extends to people's names as to everything else. My great-aunt had bought for one of the rooms at Combray some crude painted canvases (perhaps indeed they were only coloured paper) framed in coffee-coloured wood, which represented scenes by Teniers. I had told Bloch in perfectly good faith that we had a room full of Teniers. In the vague world, innocent of any notion of discrimination, that painting was to me then, I could see no difference between a five-franc reproduction and an original work. Similarly in the Army, where one has a captain called Lévy and another called Lévy-Mirepoix: these two names, though the second is longer than the first and therefore a little more ridiculous, appear otherwise interchangeable. When one is a child, certain words placed in front of a name seem funny, except *M. l'abbé* which is respectable; but if Mme Galopin is called Marie-Euphrosine Galopin, or Mme de Villeparisis the Marquise de Villeparisis, this merely adds something rather heteroclit to persons otherwise of the same ilk. For one starts from the impressions one has received, and not from the preconceptions whereby an educated man knows what a painting is, and a man of the world what the Villeparisis are. People have only to present themselves to our eyes in a particularly simple light—which happens especially often with elegant people, like Swann who pushed the piano for my great-aunt and sent her strawberries, or Mme de Villeparisis who had given me a chocolate duck—while being otherwise indistinguishable from the other modest supernumeraries on the family stage, and they will seem to us if anything of a slightly inferior rank. One fine day we are amazed to hear someone we place very high, someone to whose level we seek to aspire, speak of them as people far superior to himself. Thus to ignorance is added, further to mislead us, the homogeneity in one's memory of impressions belonging to the same category, and their heterogeneousness in relation to impressions of another category. This heterogeneousness, in effect, makes it far more difficult for us to calculate value. In order to compare, to subtract, it is first of all necessary to reduce to qualities of the same kind. Those who start from preconceived notions can do so. Childhood, enclosed in its impressions, cannot. Mme de Villeparisis, an old family acquaintance, less brilliant and intimidating than the optician, was further removed from "the Guermantes way" than if she had been confined to "the Méséglise way." But these differences in kind, if they

make the assessment of values impossible, are great sources of poetry (all the more so because those beliefs of our youth, like forces that need room in which to deploy, operate over the great, wide surfaces of time that stretch behind us). When we discover that the easy-going captain whom we treated with less respect than Captain Lévy, and who—not content with being nice to us every day—asked us to dinner before we finished our term of service, was the stepbrother of the Duc de Fezenzac (once we have acquired preconceptions and know who the latter is), this sudden displacement—as of a ray of light shifting on the horizon—of a personage who rapidly switches from the vulgar and charming environment in which we have always situated him into a totally different world, acquires a sort of poetic charm. He had become almost unreal, like everything that we once knew in a place to which we have never returned, in a special life intercalated into our very different life for three years, like the officers in our regiment, or long ago the good people of Combray. To learn that these people, as different from real people as pantomime figures, took the train on Saturday, after removing their uniforms or their country clothes, and went to dine with Mme de Pourtalès—how interesting that makes it for us to know Mme de Pourtalès, how we long to get her to talk to us about them! But what she tells us will no more be able to enlighten us than what we ask of people who knew the real people on whom Mme Bovary or Frédéric Moreau were modelled. How could this information elucidate an inner charm which stems from a certain distortion of memory and certain transformations of reality? Thus Saint-Loup could have spoken to me indefinitely about his family without helping me to get to the bottom of the pleasure I had derived from the fact that suddenly, set free from a homely bourgeois prison that had been spirited away as in a fairy tale, Mme de Villeparisis was embarking—or rather (so swift had been the spell) was already awaiting me—on the Guermantes way.

“But how do you know the Château de Guermantes?” Saint-Loup asked me. “Have you visited it—or perhaps you knew my aunt de Guermantes-La Trémoille who lived there before?” he added, whether because, finding it quite natural that one should know the same people as he did, he failed to realise that I came from a different background, or because he was pretending not to realise out of politeness.

“No ... but ... I’ve heard of the château. They have all the busts of the old lords of Guermantes there, haven’t they?”

“Yes, it’s a fine sight ...”

(*Santois was the name Proust originally gave to the violinist, Morel, who does not make his first appearance until The Guermantes Way.*):

N.B. This, which was originally intended for the last Guermantes party, is for the evening in the Casino at Balbec, but may perhaps be changed. I might split it in two, keeping the quintet for the Guermantes party and the organ for Balbec?

At the back of the Casino’s dance hall was a stage from which some excessively steep and widely spaced steps led up to an organ. The “famous Lepic Quintet,” composed of women, came in to play *a quintet by Franck (insert another name)*. Although this quintet was her favourite piece, the pianist executed it with the same feverish concentration both on the score and on her fingers as she would have shown had she been sight-reading, and with such a striving towards speed that she seemed not so much to be playing the music as catching up with it as fast as she could go. The piano might perhaps be shattered by the end of it, but she would get there. Since she was a distinguished lady, dressed with studied elegance, she gave her feverish attentiveness a knowing air which from a distance seemed almost mischievous; and indeed whenever she played wrong notes—which happened all the time—she smiled as though she were playing a joke on them, as one laughs when one splashes someone in order to pretend that one has done it on purpose. All the people there were sufficiently elegant and musical not to be paying attention to anything but the music, as would have happened at a bourgeois soirée ... *Put in here the remarks made to me by Mme de Cambremer about the quintet, perhaps even put in here, to vary it a bit, my observations on art and love ... and in that case perhaps bring on the man who says “It’s devilish fine,” who will be a character already introduced but who has gone grey. Before putting in Mme de Cambremer’s reflexions during the interval, say:* Nevertheless the minds of all these people were preoccupied less with what they were listening to than with the way they were listening and the impression they were making all round them. They endeavoured with their boas or their fans to give the appearance of knowing what was being played, of judging the performers and waiting for the extremely difficult *allegro vivace* to compose a satisfying ensemble. The minuet set all their heads nodding and wagging, with knowing smiles which signified both “Isn’t it charming!” and “Of course I know it!” Meanwhile my unintentionally ironical smile upset the head-wagging of a few intrepid listeners who replaced the knowing smile with a furious glance and abandoned the head-wagging, though—in order not to appear to be surrendering to a threat—not at once but rather as if under the pressure of Westinghouse brakes, which slow trains down gradually until they come to a complete stop. An artistic gentleman, anxious to show that he knew the quintet, shouted “Bravo, bravo” when he judged that it had reached its conclusion, and began to clap. Unfortunately, what he had taken for the end of the quintet was not even the end of one of its movements but simply a two-bar pause. He consoled himself with the thought that people might imagine that he knew the pianist and had merely wished to encourage her. When the end, longed for by the more musical members of the audience, came at last, I said to Mme de Cambremer ...

Meanwhile the organ recital had begun. At that moment a paralytic old man, who could walk with some difficulty but was utterly incapable of climbing the steps, conceived the strange intention of going to sit on a



chair right at the top beside the organ, and three young men pushed him up. But after a while, as the organ's crisp keyboard notes were executing their pastoral variations, he got up again, with the three young men in hot pursuit. I thought he must have had a stroke, and I admired the obliviousness of the organist who, having ceased to uncoil the spirals of his rustic pipes, covered the descent of the unfortunate paralytic with a thunderous noise. Pushed and carried by the three young men, the old gentleman disappeared into the wings. The pianist, performer turned critic, had now come to sit on the stage. In spite of the suffocating heat, she had donned a white fur coat, of which she was evidently extremely proud. Moreover her hands, so active on the keyboard only a moment before, were buried in an immense white fur muff, either because she simply wanted to show how elegant she was, or in order to enclose the precious relics of her piano-playing in a shrine worthy of them, or to exchange the activity of the keyboard for the motionless but skilful exercise of the muff, which moreover dispensed her from having to applaud her colleagues. No one understood the rôle of this muff, about which Saint-Loup interrogated me in vain. But what surprised me more was that scarcely two minutes had passed before the paralytic old man, evidently warming to the very exercise of which he was all but incapable, returned, pushed by the three young men, to take his useless place beside the organ. He nodded off there for a moment, then awoke and climbed down again, and since the organist was invisible behind his instrument, the stage was to all intents and purposes occupied by the perilous exertions of the clumsy quinquagenarian [sic] squirrel. When the organist came down in his turn to take his bow, it was to him that the thankless task devolved of helping down the impotent dotard, whose every step made the frail executant stumble. But with a wiliness that is often characteristic of the moribund, the old man clung to the organist in such a way that it was he who appeared to be supporting the man who was more or less carrying him, to be protecting him, to be presenting him to the audience, and to be receiving his share of the applause, which out of pure modesty he seemed not to wish to take for himself by pointing to the organist, who, tottering beneath his human burden and afraid of falling down the steep steps, could not make his bow.

Meanwhile, I was looking at the programme to see what the next piece was to be when I was struck by the name of the soloist: Santois. "He has the same name as the son of my uncle's former valet," I thought to myself. I heard someone say: "Look, a soldier." I raised my eyes and at once recognised the young Santois, who was indeed now a soldier for a year, or rather disguised as a soldier, so much did he give the impression of being in fancy dress.

He played well, looking down at his instrument with that charming Gallic face, the open yet pious demeanour of some contemporary of St Louis or Louis XI, with the defiance of the peasant who feels that there would be little point in having had a revolution if one still had to say "Monsieur le Comte." To these agreeable features there was added, after the first two pieces, as though to complete the picture of the traditional young violinist, a symmetrical adjunct to the redness of the neck at the spot where the instrument rests (the product of the *allegro* although it was *non troppo*), a curvaceous lock of hair, as round as if it had been in a locket, ... charming, belated, perhaps not entirely fortuitous, but activated at the appropriate moment by a virtuoso who knew what a contribution it can make to the seductiveness of a performance.

After he had finished playing, I sent a message round to him asking if I could come and pay my compliments. He replied in a few words scribbled on his card saying that he looked forward to seeing me and assuring me of his "amicable regards." I thought of the indignation Françoise would have felt, she who since she had learned, fairly recently it was true, the use of the third person, had prescribed it to the whole of her family, down to the most remote degrees of kinship or descent, every time a young cousin of hers came "to pay her respects to Monsieur." But if I found this deference towards me of the whole of Françoise's family very traditionally domestic, it seemed to me that, although it was at the opposite extreme, there was something no less characteristically French in the cavalier tone of the young Santois, scion of a race that made the Revolution, implying that a peasant's son, educated or not, considers himself nobody's inferior, and when a prince is mentioned insists on showing by his demeanour that such a person seems to him no better than his father or himself—though with a tinge of hauteur in the way he manifests it that betrays the fact that the age when princes were indeed superior is still fairly recent and that he may be afraid that people still remember it.

After the concert I went round to congratulate him, and recognised him without difficulty, not from the face I remembered, since there is always a certain discrepancy, a certain displacement in the memory, but because his appearance accorded with the impression he had made on me in Paris and which I had forgotten. He was doing his military service near Balbec, and he too had immediately recognised me. We had nothing in common save a few mental images, and the memory of the things we had said to one another during the short visit he had paid to me, and which were of little moment. But it would seem that faces are fairly individual, and moreover that the memory is a pretty faithful organ, since we had remembered each other and our meeting.

Santois was presently joined by his colleagues, the other players, for each of whom, as an aeroplane adds wings to an aviator, his instrument was as it were the beak and the throat of a melodious song-bird; a twittering troupe that had gathered for the summer season at this resort and would shortly, with the first frosts, take off elsewhere. I left Santois with his friends, but when I got back to the hotel I regretted not having asked him who the mountaineering paralytic was who had scaled the heights of the organ so many times, and also whether Santois, his father, had ever told him how my uncle had come to have the portrait of Mme Swann by Elstir. I resolved not to forget to ask him these two questions if I saw him again.

BOOK III  
THE GUERMANTES WAY

PART SIX

The twittering of the birds at daybreak sounded insipid to Françoise. Every word uttered by the maids upstairs made her jump; disturbed by all their running about, she kept asking herself what they could be doing. In other words, we had moved. True, the servants had made no less commotion in the attics of our old home; but she knew them, she had made of their comings and goings something friendly and familiar. Now she listened to the very silence with painful attentiveness. And as our new neighbourhood appeared to be as quiet as the boulevard on to which we had hitherto looked had been noisy, the song (distinct even at a distance, when it was still quite faint, like an orchestral motif) of a passer-by brought tears to the eyes of the exiled Françoise. Hence, if I had been tempted to scoff at her when, in her misery at having to leave a house in which one was "so well respected on all sides," she had packed her trunks weeping, in accordance with the rites of Combray, and declaring superior to all possible houses that which had been ours, on the other hand, finding it as hard to assimilate the new as I found it easy to abandon the old, I felt myself drawn towards our old servant when I saw that moving into a building where she had not received from the concierge, who did not yet know us, the marks of respect necessary to her spiritual well-being, had brought her positively to the verge of prostration. She alone could understand what I was feeling; certainly her young footman was not the person to do so; for him, who was as unlike the Combray type as it was possible to conceive, moving house, going to live in another neighbourhood, was like taking a holiday in which the novelty of one's surroundings gave one the same sense of refreshment as if one had actually travelled; he felt he was in the country; and a cold in the head afforded him, as though he had been sitting in a draughty railway carriage, the delicious sensation of having seen something of the world; at each fresh sneeze he rejoiced that he had found so "posh" a situation, having always longed to work for people who travelled a lot. And so, without giving him a thought, I went straight to Françoise, who, in return for my having laughed at her tears over a departure which had left me cold, now showed an icy indifference to my sorrow, because she shared it. The alleged "sensitivity" of neurotic people is matched by their egotism; they cannot abide the flaunting by others of the sufferings to which they pay an ever-increasing attention in themselves. Françoise, who would not allow the least of her own ailments to pass unnoticed, if I were in pain would turn her head away so that I should not have the satisfaction of seeing my sufferings pitied, or so much as observed. It was the same as soon as I tried to speak to her about our new house. Moreover, having been obliged, a day or two later, to return to the house we had just left, to retrieve some clothes which had been overlooked in our removal, while I, as a result of it, still had a "temperature," and like a boa constrictor that has just swallowed an ox felt myself painfully distended by the sight of a long sideboard which my eyes had still to digest, Françoise, with true feminine inconstancy, came back saying that she had really thought she would stifle on our old boulevard, that she had found it quite a day's journey to get there, that never had she seen such stairs, that she would not go back to live there for a king's ransom, not if you were to offer her millions—gratuitous hypotheses—and that *everything* (everything, that is to say, to do with the kitchen and "usual offices") was much better fitted up in our new home. Which, it is high time now that the reader should be told—and told also that we had moved into it because my grandmother, not having been at all well (though we took care to keep this reason from her), was in need of better air—was a flat forming part of the Hôtel de Guermantes.

At the age when Names, offering us an image of the unknowable which we have poured into their mould, while at the same moment connoting for us also a real place, force us accordingly to identify one with the other to such a point that we set out to seek in a city for a soul which it cannot enshrine but which we have no longer the power to expel from its name, it is not only to towns and rivers that they give an individuality, as do allegorical paintings, it is not only the physical universe which they speckle with differences, people with marvels, it is the social universe also; and so every historic house, in town or country, has its lady or its fairy, as every forest has its genie, every stream its deity. Sometimes, hidden in the heart of its name, the fairy is transformed to suit the life of our imagination, by which she lives; thus it was that the atmosphere in which Mme de Guermantes existed in me, after having been for years no more than the reflexion of a magic lantern slide and of a stained-glass window, began to lose its colours when quite other dreams impregnated it with the bubbling coolness of swift-flowing streams.

However, the fairy languishes if we come in contact with the real person to whom her name corresponds, for the name then begins to reflect that person, who contains nothing of the fairy; the fairy may revive if we absent ourselves from the person, but if we remain in the person's presence the fairy ultimately dies and with her the name, as happened to the family of Lusignan which was fated to become extinct on the day when the fairy Mélusine should disappear. Then the Name, beneath the successive retouchings of which we may end by finding the original handsome portrait of a strange woman whom we have never met, becomes no more than the mere identity card photograph to which we refer in order to decide whether we know, whether or not we ought to bow to a person who passes us in the street. But should a sensation from a bygone year—like those recording instruments which preserve the sound and the manner of the various artists who have sung or played into them—enable our memory to make us hear that name with the particular ring with which it then sounded in our ears, we feel at once, though the name itself has apparently not changed, the distance that separates the dreams which at different times its same syllables have meant to us. For a moment, from the clear echo of its warbling in some distant spring-time, we can extract, as from the little tubes used in painting, the exact, forgotten, mysterious, fresh tint of the days which we had believed ourselves to be recalling, when, like a bad painter, we were giving to the whole of our past, spread out on the same canvas, the conventional

and undifferentiated tones of voluntary memory. Whereas, on the contrary, each of the moments that composed it employed, for an original creation, in a unique harmony, the colours of that time which are now lost to us and which, for example, still suddenly enrapture me if by some chance the name "Guermantès," resuming for a moment after all these years the sound, so different from its sound today, which it had for me on the day of Mlle Percepied's marriage, brings back to me that mauve—so soft and smooth but almost too bright, too new—with which the billowy scarf of the young Duchess glowed, and, like two inaccessible, ever-flowering periwinkles, her eyes, sunlit with an azure smile. And the name Guermantès of those days is also like one of those little balloons which have been filled with oxygen or some other gas; when I come to prick it, to extract its contents from it, I breathe the air of the Combray of that year, of that day, mingled with a fragrance of hawthorn blossom blown by the wind from the corner of the square, harbinger of rain, which now sent the sun packing, now let it spread itself over the red woollen carpet of the sacristy, clothing it in a bright geranium pink and in that, so to speak, Wagnerian sweetness and solemnity in joy that give such nobility to a festive occasion. But even apart from rare moments such as these, in which suddenly we feel the original entity quiver and resume its form, carve itself out of syllables now dead, if in the dizzy whirl of daily life, in which they serve only the most practical purpose, names have lost all their colour, like a prismatic top that spins too quickly and seems only grey, when, on the other hand, we reflect upon the past in our day-dreams and seek, in order to recapture it, to slacken, to suspend the perpetual motion by which we are borne along, gradually we see once more appear, side by side but entirely distinct from one another, the tints which in the course of our existence have been successively presented to us by a single name.

What shape was projected in my mind's eye by this name Guermantès when my wet-nurse—knowing no more, probably, than I know today in whose honour it had been composed—sang me to sleep with that old ditty, *Gloire à la Marquise de Guermantès*, or when, some years later, the veteran Maréchal de Guermantès, making my nurserymaid's bosom swell with pride, stopped in the Champs-Élysées to remark: "A fine child, that!" and gave me a chocolate drop from his pocket bonbonnière, I cannot, of course, now say. Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer a part of myself; they are external to me; I can learn nothing of them save—as we learn things that happened before we were born—from the accounts given me by other people. But more recently I find in the period of that name's occupation of me seven or eight different figures. The earliest were the most beautiful: gradually my day-dream, forced by reality to abandon a position that was no longer tenable, established itself anew in one slightly less advanced until it was obliged to retire still further. And, together with Mme de Guermantès, her dwelling was simultaneously transformed; itself also the offspring of that name, fertilised from year to year by some word or other that came to my ears and modified my reveries, that dwelling of hers mirrored them in its very stones, which had become reflectors, like the surface of a cloud or of a lake. A two-dimensional castle, no more indeed than a strip of orange light, from the summit of which the lord and his lady disposed of the lives and deaths of their vassals, had given place—right at the end of that "Guermantès way" along which, on so many summer afternoons, I followed with my parents the course of the Vivonne—to that land of bubbling streams where the Duchess taught me to fish for trout and to know the names of the flowers whose red and purple clusters adorned the walls of the neighbouring gardens; then it had been the ancient heritage, the poetic domain from which the proud race of Guermantès, like a mellow, crenellated tower that traverses the ages, had risen already over France, at a time when the sky was still empty at those points where later were to rise Notre-Dame of Paris and Notre-Dame of Chartres; a time when on the summit of the hill of Laon the nave of its cathedral had not yet been poised like the Ark of the Deluge on the summit of Mount Ararat, crowded with Patriarchs and Judges anxiously leaning from its windows to see whether the wrath of God has yet subsided, carrying with it specimens of the plants that will multiply on the earth, brimming over with animals which have even climbed out through the towers, between which oxen grazing calmly on the roof look down over the plains of Champagne; when the traveller who left Beauvais at the close of day did not yet see, following him and turning with his road, the black, ribbed wings of the cathedral spread out against the golden screen of the western sky. It was, this "Guermantès," like the setting of a novel, an imaginary landscape which I could with difficulty picture to myself and longed all the more to discover, set in the midst of real lands and roads which all of a sudden would become alive with heraldic details, within a few miles of a railway station; I recalled the names of the places round it as if they had been situated at the foot of Parnassus or of Helicon, and they seemed precious to me as the physical conditions—in the realm of topographical science—required for the production of an unaccountable phenomenon. I saw again the escutcheons blazoned beneath the windows of Combray church; their quarters filled, century after century, with all the fiefs which, by marriage or conquest, this illustrious house had appropriated to itself from all the corners of Germany, Italy and France; vast territories in the North, powerful cities in the South, assembled there to group themselves in Guermantès, and, losing their material quality, to inscribe allegorically their sinople keep or castle triple-towered argent upon its azure field. I had heard of the famous tapestries of Guermantès, and could see them, mediaeval and blue, a trifle coarse, stand out like floating clouds against the legendary, amaranthine name at the edge of the ancient forest in which Chilbert so often went hunting; and it seemed to me that, as effectively as by travelling to see them, I might penetrate the secrets of the mysterious reaches of these lands, these vistas of the centuries, simply by coming in contact for a moment in Paris with Mme de Guermantès, the princess paramount of the place and lady of the lake, as if her face and her speech must possess the local charm of forest groves and streams, and the same time-honoured characteristics as the old customs recorded in her archives. But then I had met Saint-Loup; he had told me that the castle had borne the name of Guermantès only since the seventeenth century, when his family had acquired it. They had lived, until then, in the neighbourhood, but their title did not come from those

parts. The village of Guermantes had received its name from the manor round which it had been built, and so that it should not destroy the manorial view, a servitude that was still in force had traced the line of its streets and limited the height of its houses. As for the tapestries, they were by Boucher, bought in the nineteenth century by a Guermantes with a taste for the arts, and hung, interspersed with a number of mediocre sporting pictures which he himself had painted, in a hideous drawing-room upholstered in "adrianople" and plush. By these revelations, Saint-Loup had introduced into the castle elements foreign to the name of Guermantes which made it impossible for me to continue to extract solely from the resonance of the syllables the stone and mortar of its walls. Then in the depths of this name the castle mirrored in its lake had faded, and what now became apparent to me, surrounding Mme de Guermantes as her dwelling, had been her house in Paris, the Hôtel de Guermantes, limpid like its name, for no material and opaque element intervened to interrupt and occlude its transparency. As the word church signifies not only the temple but also the assembly of the faithful, this Hôtel de Guermantes comprised all those who shared the life of the Duchess, but these intimates on whom I had never set eyes were for me only famous and poetic names, and, knowing exclusively persons who themselves too were only names, served to enhance and protect the mystery of the Duchess by extending all round her a vast halo which at the most declined in brilliance as its circumference increased.

In the entertainments which she gave, since I could not imagine the guests as possessing bodies, moustaches, boots, as making any utterance that was commonplace, or even original in a human and rational way, this vortex of names, introducing less material substance than would a phantom banquet or a spectral ball, round that statuette in Dresden china which was Mme de Guermantes, gave her mansion of glass the transparency of a showcase. Then, after Saint-Loup had told me various anecdotes about his cousin's chaplain, her gardeners and the rest, the Hôtel de Guermantes had become—as the Louvre might have been in days gone by—a kind of palace surrounded, in the very heart of Paris, by its own domains, acquired by inheritance, by virtue of an ancient right that had quaintly survived, over which she still enjoyed feudal privileges. But this last dwelling had itself vanished when we came to live near Mme de Villeparisis in one of the apartments adjoining that occupied by Mme de Guermantes in a wing of the Hôtel. It was one of those old town houses, a few of which for all I know may still be found, in which the main courtyard was flanked—alluvial deposits washed there by the rising tide of democracy, perhaps, or a legacy from a more primitive time when the different trades were clustered round the overlord—by little shops and workrooms, a shoemaker's, for instance, or a tailor's, such as we see nestling between the buttresses of those cathedrals which the aesthetic zeal of the restorer has not swept clear of such accretions, and a porter who also did cobbling, kept hens, grew flowers—and, at the far end, in the main house, a "Countess" who, when she drove out in her old carriage and pair, flaunting on her hat a few nasturtiums which seemed to have escaped from the plot by the lodge (with, by the coachman's side on the box, a footman who got down to leave cards at every aristocratic mansion in the neighbourhood), dispensed smiles and little waves of the hand impartially to the porter's children and to any bourgeois tenants who might happen to be passing and whom, in her disdainful affability and her egalitarian arrogance, she found indistinguishable from one another.

In the house in which we had now come to live, the great lady at the end of the courtyard was a Duchess, elegant and still young. She was, in fact, Mme de Guermantes and, thanks to Françoise, I soon came to know all about her household. For the Guermantes (to whom Françoise regularly alluded as the people "below," or "downstairs") were her constant preoccupation from the first thing in the morning when, as she did Mamma's hair, casting a forbidden, irresistible, furtive glance down into the courtyard, she would say: "Look at that, now, a pair of holy Sisters: they'll be for downstairs, surely"; or, "Oh! just look at the fine pheasants in the kitchen window. No need to ask where they've come from: the Duke's been out with his gun!"—until the last thing at night when, if her ear, while she was putting out my night-things, caught the sound of a piano or a few notes of a song, she would conclude: "They're having company down below; gay goings-on"; whereupon, in her symmetrical face, beneath her snow-white hair, a smile from her young days, sprightly but proper, would for a moment set each of her features in its place, arranging them in a prim and prepared order, as though for a quadrille.

But the moment in the life of the Guermantes which excited the keenest interest in Françoise, gave her the most complete satisfaction and at the same time the sharpest annoyance, was that at which, the carriage gates having been flung open, the Duchess stepped into her barouche. It was generally a little while after our servants had finished celebrating that sort of solemn passover which none might disturb, called their midday dinner, during which they were so far "taboo" that my father himself would not have taken the liberty of ringing for them, knowing moreover that none of them would have paid any more attention to the fifth peal than to the first, and that he would thus have committed this impropriety to no purpose, though not without detriment to himself. For Françoise (who, in her old age, lost no opportunity of standing upon her dignity) would not have failed to present him, for the rest of the day, with a face covered with the tiny red cuneiform hieroglyphs by which she made visible—though by no means legible—to the outer world the long tale of her grievances and the underlying causes of her displeasure. She would enlarge upon them, too, in a running "aside," but not so that we could catch her words. She called this practice—which, she imagined, must be shattering for us, "mortifying," "vexing," as she put it—saying "low masses" to us the whole blessed day.

The last rites accomplished, Françoise, who was at one and the same time, as in the primitive church, the celebrant and one of the faithful, helped herself to a final glass, undid the napkin from her throat, folded it after wiping from her lips the vestiges of watered wine and coffee, slipped it into its ring, turned a doleful eye to thank "her" young footman who, to show his zeal in her service, was saying: "Come, ma'am, a few more grapes—they're d'licious," and went straight across to the window, which she flung open, protesting that it was

too hot to breathe in “this wretched kitchen.” Dexterously casting, as she turned the latch and let in the fresh air, a glance of studied indifference into the courtyard below, she furtively ascertained that the Duchess was not yet ready to start, gazed for a moment with scornful and impassioned eyes at the waiting carriage, and, this heed of attention once paid to the things of the earth, raised them towards the heavens, whose purity she had already divined from the sweetness of the air and the warmth of the sun; and let them rest on a corner of the roof, at the place where, every spring, there came to nest, immediately over the chimney of my bedroom, a pair of pigeons like those she used to hear cooing from her kitchen at Combray.

“Ah! Combray, Combray!” she cried. And the almost singing tone in which she declaimed this invocation might, taken with the Arlesian purity of her features, have prompted a stranger to surmise that she was of Southern origin and that the lost homeland she was lamenting was no more than a land of adoption. If so, he would have been wrong, for it seems that there is no province that has not its own South-country; do we not indeed constantly meet Savoyards and Bretons in whose speech we find all those pleasing transpositions of longs and shorts that are characteristic of the Southerner? “Ah, Combray, when will I see you again, poor old place? When will I spend the whole blessed day among your hawthorns, under our own poor lilac trees, hearing the finches sing and the Vivonne making a little noise like someone whispering, instead of that wretched bell from our young master, who can never stay still for half an hour on end without having me run the length of that confounded corridor. And even then he makes out I don’t come quick enough; you’d need to hear the bell before he rung it, and if you’re a minute late, he flies into the most horrible rage. Ah, poor Combray! maybe I’ll only see you when I’m dead, when they drop me like a stone into a hole in the ground. And so, nevermore will I smell your lovely hawthorns, so white. But in the sleep of death I dare say I shall still hear those three peals of the bell which will already have driven me to damnation in this world.”

Her soliloquy was interrupted by the voice of the waistcoat-maker in the courtyard below, the same who had so pleased my grandmother once, long ago, when she had gone to pay a call on Mme de Villeparisis, and now occupied no less high a place in Françoise’s affections. Having raised his head when he heard our window open, he had already been trying for some time to attract his neighbour’s attention, in order to bid her good day. The coquetry of the young girl that Françoise had once been softened and refined for M. Jupien the querulous face of our old cook, dulled by age, ill-temper and the heat of the kitchen stove, and it was with a charming blend of reserve, familiarity and modesty that she bestowed a gracious salutation on the waistcoat-maker, but without making any audible response, for if she infringed Mamma’s injunctions by looking into the courtyard, she would never have dared to go the length of talking from the window, which would have been quite enough (according to her) to bring down on her “a whole chapter” from the Mistress. She pointed to the waiting carriage, as who should say: “A fine pair, eh!” though what she actually muttered was: “What an old rattletrap!”—but principally because she knew that he would be bound to answer, putting his hand to his lips so as to be audible without having to shout: “*You* could have one too if you liked, as good as they have and better, I dare say, only you don’t care for that sort of thing.”

And Françoise, after a modest, evasive and delighted signal, the meaning of which was, more or less: “Tastes differ, you know; simplicity’s the rule in this house,” shut the window again in case Mamma should come in. The “you” who might have had more horses than the Guermantes were ourselves, but Jupien was right in saying “you” since, except for a few purely personal self-gratifications (such as, when she coughed all day long without ceasing and everyone in the house was afraid of catching her cold, that of insisting, with an irritating little titter, that she had not got a cold), Françoise, like those plants that an animal to which they are wholly attached keeps alive with food which it catches, eats and digests for them and of which it offers them the ultimate and easily assimilable residue, lived with us in a symbiotic relationship; it was we who, with our virtues, our wealth, our style of living, must take on ourselves the task of concocting those little sops to her vanity out of which was formed—with the addition of the recognised right to practise freely the cult of the midday dinner according to the traditional custom, which included a gulp of air at the window when the meal was finished, a certain amount of loitering in the street when she went out to do her marketing, and a holiday on Sundays when she paid a visit to her niece—the portion of contentment indispensable to her existence. So it can be understood why Françoise pined in those first days of our migration, a prey—in a house where my father’s claims to distinction were not yet known—to a malady which she herself called “ennui,” ennui in the strong sense in which the word is employed by Corneille, or in the letters of soldiers who end by taking their own lives because they are pining after<sup>1</sup> their sweethearts or their native villages. Françoise’s ennui had soon been cured by none other than Jupien, for he at once procured her a pleasure no less keen and more refined than she would have felt if we had decided to keep a carriage. “Very good class, those Juliens” (for Françoise readily assimilated new names to those with which she was already familiar), “very decent people; you can see it written on their faces.” Jupien was indeed able to understand, and to inform the world, that if we did not keep a carriage it was because we had no wish to do so.

This new friend of Françoise’s was seldom at home, having obtained a post in a Government office. A waistcoat-maker first of all, with the “chit of a girl” whom my grandmother had taken for his daughter, he had lost all interest in the exercise of that calling after the girl (who, when still little more than a child, had shown great skill in darning a torn skirt, that day when my grandmother had gone to call on Mme de Villeparisis) had turned to ladies’ fashions and become a skirt-maker. A prentice hand, to begin with, in a dressmaker’s workroom, employed to stitch a seam, to sew up a flounce, to fasten a button or a press-stud, to fix a waistband with hooks and eyes, she had quickly risen to be second and then chief assistant, and having formed a clientele of her own among ladies of fashion, now worked at home, that is to say in our courtyard, generally with one or two of her young friends from the workroom, whom she had taken on as apprentices.

After this, Jupien's presence had become less essential. No doubt the little girl (a big girl by this time) had often to cut out waistcoats still. But with her friends to assist her she needed no one besides. And so Jupien, her uncle, had sought employment outside. He was free at first to return home at midday; then, when he had definitely succeeded the man whose assistant only he had begun by being, not before dinner-time. His appointment to the "regular establishment" was, fortunately, not announced until some weeks after our arrival, so that his amiability could be brought to bear on Françoise long enough to help her through the first, most difficult phase without undue pain. At the same time, and without underrating his value to Françoise as, so to speak, an interim sedative, I am bound to say that my first impression of Jupien had been far from favourable. From a few feet away, entirely destroying the effect that his plump cheeks and florid complexion would otherwise have produced, his eyes, brimming with a compassionate, mournful, dreamy gaze, led one to suppose that he was seriously ill or had just suffered a great bereavement. Not only was this not so, but as soon as he spoke (quite perfectly as it happened) he was inclined rather to be cold and mocking. There resulted from this discord between his look and his speech a certain falsity which was not attractive, and by which he himself had the air of being made as uncomfortable as a guest who arrives in day clothes at a party where everyone else is in evening dress, or as someone who, having to speak to a royal personage, does not know exactly how he ought to address him and gets round the difficulty by cutting down his remarks to almost nothing. Jupien's (here the comparison ends) were, on the contrary, charming. Indeed, corresponding perhaps to that inundation of the face by the eyes (which one ceased to notice when one came to know him), I soon discerned in him a rare intelligence, one of the most spontaneously literary that it has been my privilege to come across, in the sense that, probably without education, he possessed or had assimilated, with the help only of a few books hastily perused, the most ingenious turns of speech. The most gifted people that I had known had died young. And so I was convinced that Jupien's life would soon be cut short. He was kind and sympathetic, and had the most delicate and the most generous feelings.

His role in Françoise's life had soon ceased to be indispensable. She had learned to stand in for him. Even when a tradesman or servant came to our door with a parcel or message, while seeming to pay no attention to him and merely pointing vaguely to an empty chair, Françoise so skilfully put to the best advantage the few moments that he spent in the kitchen while he waited for Mamma's answer, that it was very seldom that he went away without having ineradicably engraved in his mind the conviction that, if we "did not have" any particular thing, it was because we had "no wish" for it. If she made such a point of other people's knowing that we "had money"<sup>2</sup> (for she knew nothing of what Saint-Loup used to call partitive articles, and said simply "have money," "fetch water"), of their knowing us to be rich, it was not because wealth with nothing else besides, wealth without virtue, was in her eyes the supreme good; but virtue without wealth was not her ideal either. Wealth was for her, so to speak, a necessary condition failing which virtue would lack both merit and charm. She distinguished so little between them that she had come in time to invest each with the other's attributes, to expect some material comfort from virtue, to discover something edifying in wealth.

As soon as she had shut the window again, fairly quickly—otherwise Mamma would, it appeared, have heaped on her "every imaginable insult"—Françoise began with many groans and sighs to put the kitchen table straight.

"There's some Guermentes who stay in the Rue de la Chaise," began my father's valet. "I had a friend used to work there; he was their second coachman. And I know a fellow, not my old pal but his brother-in-law, who did his time in the Army with one of the Baron de Guermentes's grooms. 'And after all, he ain't my father,'"<sup>3</sup> added the valet, who was in the habit, just as he used to hum the popular airs of the season, of peppering his conversation with all the latest witticisms.

Françoise, with the tired eyes of an ageing woman, eyes which moreover saw everything from Combray, in a hazy distance, perceived, not the witticism that underlay these words, but the fact that there must be something witty in them since they bore no relation to the rest of the observation and had been uttered with considerable emphasis by one whom she knew to be a joker. She therefore smiled with an air of dazzled benevolence, as who should say: "Always the same, that Victor?" And she was genuinely pleased, knowing that listening to smart sayings of this sort was akin—if remotely—to those reputable social pleasures for which, in every class of society, people make haste to dress themselves in their best and run the risk of catching cold. Furthermore, she believed the valet to be a friend after her own heart, for he never ceased to denounce with fierce indignation the appalling measures which the Republic was about to enforce against the clergy. Françoise had not yet learned that our cruellest adversaries are not those who contradict and try to convince us, but those who magnify or invent reports which are liable to distress us, taking care not to give them any appearance of justification which might lessen our pain and perhaps give us some slight regard for an attitude which they make a point of displaying to us, to complete our torment, as being at once terrible and triumphant.

"The Duchess must be allied with all that lot," said Françoise, taking up the conversation again at the Guermentes of the Rue de la Chaise, as one resumes a piece of music at the andante. "I can't recall who it was told me one of them married a cousin of the Duke. It's the same kindred, anyway. Ay, they're a great family, the Guermentes!" she added, in a tone of respect, founding the greatness of the family at once on the number of its branches and the brilliance of its connexions, as Pascal founds the truth of Religion on Reason and on the authority of the Scriptures. For since she had only the single word "great" to express both meanings, it seemed to her that they formed a single idea, her vocabulary, like certain cut stones, showing thus on certain of its facets a flaw which projected a ray of darkness into the recesses of her mind.

"I wonder now if it wouldn't be them that have their castle at Guermantes, not a score of miles from Combray; then they must be kin to their cousin in Algiers, too." (My mother and I had wondered for a long time who this cousin in Algiers could be until finally we discovered that Françoise meant by the name "Algiers" the town of Angers. What is far off may be more familiar to us than what is quite near. Françoise, who knew the name "Algiers" from some particularly unpleasant dates that used to be given us at the New Year, had never heard of Angers. Her language, like the French language itself, and especially its toponymy, was thickly strewn with errors.) "I meant to talk to their butler about it ... What is it now they call him?" She broke off as though putting to herself a question of protocol, which she went on to answer with: "Oh, of course, it's Antoine they call him!" as though Antoine had been a title. "He's the one could tell me, but he's quite the gentleman, he is, a great pedant, you'd think they'd cut his tongue out, or that he'd forgotten to learn to speak. He makes no reply when you talk to him," went on Françoise, who said "make reply" like Mme de Sévigné. "But," she added, quite untruthfully, "so long as I know what's boiling in my pot I don't bother my head about what's in other people's. In any case it's not Catholic. And what's more, he's not a courageous man." (This criticism might have led one to suppose that Françoise had changed her mind about physical bravery which according to her, in Combray days, lowered men to the level of wild beasts. But it was not so. "Courageous" meant simply hard-working.) "They do say, too, that he's thievish as a magpie, but it doesn't do to believe all you hear. The staff never stay long there because of the lodge; the porters are jealous and set the Duchess against them. But it's safe to say that he's a real idler, that Antoine, and his Antoinette is no better," concluded Françoise, who, in furnishing the name "Antoine" with a feminine suffix that would designate the butler's wife, was inspired, no doubt, in her act of word-formation by an unconscious memory of the words *chanoine* and *chanoinesse*. If so, she was not far wrong. There is still a street near Notre-Dame called Rue Chanoinesse, a name which must have been given to it (since it was inhabited only by canons) by those Frenchmen of olden days of whom Françoise was in reality the contemporary. She proceeded, moreover, at once to furnish another example of this way of forming feminines, for she added: "But one thing sure and certain is that it's the Duchess that has Guermantes Castle. And it's she that is the Lady Mayoress down in those parts. That's something."

"I should think it is something," said the footman with conviction, having failed to detect the irony.

"You think so, do you, my boy, you think it's something? Why, for folk like them to be Mayor and Mayoress, it's just thank you for nothing. Ah, if it was mine, that Guermantes Castle, you wouldn't see me setting foot in Paris, I can tell you. I'm sure a family who've got something to go on with, like Monsieur and Madame here, must have queer ideas to stay on in this wretched town sooner than get away down to Combray the moment they're free to start, and no one hindering them. Why do they put off retiring when they've got everything they want? Why wait till they're dead? Ah, if only I had a crust of dry bread to eat and a faggot to keep me warm in winter, I'd have been back home long since in my brother's poor old house at Combray. Down there at least you feel you're alive; you don't have all these houses stuck up in front of you, and there's so little noise at night-time you can hear the frogs singing five miles off and more."

"That must be really nice, Madame," exclaimed the young footman with enthusiasm, as though this last attraction had been as peculiar to Combray as the gondola is to Venice. A more recent arrival in the household than my father's valet, he used to talk to Françoise about things which might interest not himself so much as her. And Françoise, whose face wrinkled up in disgust when she was treated as a mere cook, had for the young footman, who referred to her always as the "housekeeper," that peculiar tenderness which certain princes of the second rank feel towards the well-intentioned young men who dignify them with a "Highness."

"At any rate you know what you're about there, and what time of year it is. It isn't like here where you won't find one wretched buttercup flowering at holy Easter any more than you would at Christmas, and I can't hear so much as the tiniest angelus ring when I lift my old bones out of bed in the morning. Down there, you can hear every hour. It's only a poor old bell, but you say to yourself: 'My brother will be coming in from the fields now,' and you watch the daylight fade, and the bell rings to bless the fruits of the earth, and you have time to take a turn before you light the lamp. But here it's day-time and it's night-time, and you go to bed, and you can't say any more than the dumb beasts what you've been about."

"They say Méséglise is a fine place, too, Madame," broke in the young footman, who found that the conversation was becoming a little too abstract for his liking, and happened to remember having heard us, at table, mention Méséglise.

"Oh! Méséglise, is it?" said Françoise with the broad smile which one could always bring to her lips by uttering any of those names—Méséglise, Combray, Tansonville. They were so intimate a part of her life that she felt, on meeting them outside it, on hearing them used in conversation, a hilarity more or less akin to that which a teacher excites in his class by making an allusion to some contemporary personage whose name the pupils had never supposed could possibly greet their ears from the height of the academic rostrum. Her pleasure arose also from the feeling that these places meant something to her which they did not to the rest of the world, old companions with whom one has shared many an outing; and she smiled at them as if she found in them something witty, because there was in them a great part of herself.

"Yes, you may well say so, son, it's a pretty enough place is Méséglise," she went on with a tinkling laugh, "but how did you ever come to hear tell of Méséglise?"

"How did I hear of Méséglise? But it's a well-known place. People have told me about it oftentimes," he assured her with that criminal inexactitude of the informant who, whenever we attempt to form an impartial estimate of the importance that a thing which matters to us may have for other people, makes it impossible for us to do so.



"Ah! I can tell you it's better down there under the cherry trees than standing in front of the kitchen stove all day."

She spoke to them even of Eulalie as a good person. For since Eulalie's death Françoise had completely forgotten that she had loved her as little in her lifetime as she loved anyone whose cupboard was bare, who was "perishing poor" and then came, like a good for nothing, thanks to the bounty of the rich, to "put on airs." It no longer pained her that Eulalie had so skilfully managed, Sunday after Sunday, to secure her "tip" from my aunt. As for the latter, Françoise never ceased to sing her praises.

"So it was at Combray itself that you used to be, with a cousin of Madame?" asked the young footman.

"Yes, with Mme Octave—ah, a real saintly woman, I can tell you, and a house where there was always more than enough, and all of the very best—a good woman, and no mistake, who didn't spare the partridges, or the pheasants, or anything. You might turn up five to dinner or six, it was never the meat that was lacking, and of the first quality too, and white wine, and red wine, and everything you could wish." (Françoise used the word "spare" in the same sense as La Bruyère.)<sup>4</sup> "It was she that always paid the damages, even if the family stayed for months and years." (This reflexion was not really meant as a slur upon us, for Françoise belonged to an epoch when the word "damages" was not restricted to a legal use and meant simply expense.) "Ah, I can tell you people didn't go away empty from that house. As his reverence the Curé impressed on us many's the time, if there ever was a woman who could count on going straight before the Throne of God, it was her. Poor Madame, I can still hear her saying in that faint little voice of hers: 'You know, Françoise, I can eat nothing myself, but I want it all to be just as nice for the others as if I could.' They weren't for her, the victuals, you may be quite sure. If you'd only seen her, she weighed no more than a bag of cherries; there wasn't that much of her. She would never listen to a word I said, she'd never send for the doctor. Ah, it wasn't in that house that you'd have to gobble down your dinner. She liked her servants to be fed properly. Here, it's been just the same again today; we've hardly had time for a snack. Everything has to be done on the run."

What exasperated her more than anything were the slices of thin toast that my father used to eat. She was convinced that he indulged in them simply to give himself airs and to keep her "dancing." "I can tell you frankly," the young footman assured her, "that I never saw the like." He said this as if he had seen everything, and as if for him the range of an inexhaustible experience extended over all countries and their customs, among which was nowhere to be found the custom of eating slices of toast. "Yes, yes," the butler muttered, "but that may all be changed; the workers are going on strike in Canada, and the Minister told Monsieur the other evening that he's clearing two hundred thousand francs out of it." There was no note of censure in his tone, not that he was not himself entirely honest, but since he regarded all politicians as shady, the crime of peculation seemed to him less serious than the pettiest larceny. He did not even stop to ask himself whether he had heard this historic utterance aright, and seemed not to have been struck by the improbability that such a thing should have been said by the guilty party himself to my father without my father's immediately turning him out of the house. But the philosophy of Combray made it impossible for Françoise to expect that the strikes in Canada could have any repercussion on the consumption of toast. "Ah, well, as long as the world goes round, there'll be masters to keep us on the trot, and servants to do their bidding." In disproof of this theory of perpetual trotting, for the last quarter of an hour my mother (who probably did not employ the same measures of time as Françoise in reckoning the duration of the latter's dinner) had been saying: "What on earth can they be doing? They've been at table for at least two hours." And she rang timidly three or four times. Françoise, "her" footman and the butler heard the bell ring, not as a summons to themselves, and with no thought of answering it, but rather as the first sounds of the instruments being tuned when the next part of a concert will soon begin, and one knows that there will be only a few minutes more of interval. And so, when the peals were repeated and became more urgent, our servants began to pay attention, and, judging that they had not much time left and that the resumption of work was at hand, at a peal somewhat louder than the rest gave a collective sigh and went their several ways, the footman slipping downstairs to smoke a cigarette outside the door, Françoise, after a string of reflexions on ourselves, such as: "They've got the jumps today all right," going up to tidy her attic, while the butler, having supplied himself first with note-paper from my bedroom, polished off the arrears of his private correspondence.

Despite the arrogant air of their butler, Françoise had been in a position, from the first, to inform me that the Guermantes occupied their mansion by virtue not of an immemorial right but of a quite recent tenancy, and that the garden over which it looked on the side that I did not know was quite small and just like all the neighbouring gardens, and I realised at last that there were not to be seen there pit and gallows or fortified mill, secret chamber, pillared dovecote, manorial bakehouse, tithe-barn or fortress, drawbridge or fixed bridge or even flying or toll bridge, charters, muniments, ramparts or commemorative mounds. But just as Elstir, when the bay of Balbec, losing its mystery, had become for me simply a portion, interchangeable with any other, of the total quantity of salt water distributed over the earth's surface, had suddenly restored to it a personality of its own by telling me that it was the gulf of opal painted by Whistler in his *Harmonies in Blue and Silver*, so the name Guermantes had seen the last of the dwellings that had issued from its syllables perish under Françoise's blows, when one day an old friend of my father said to us, speaking of the Duchess: "She has the highest position in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; hers is the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain." No doubt the most exclusive drawing-room, the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain was little or nothing after all those other mansions of which in turn I had dreamed. And yet this one too (and it was to be the last of the series), however humble it was, possessed something, quite apart from its material components, that amounted to an obscure differentiation.

And it became all the more essential that I should be able to explore in the "salon" of Mme de Guermites, among her friends, the mystery of her name, since I did not find it in her person when I saw her leave the house in the morning on foot, or in the afternoon in her carriage. Once before, indeed, in the church at Combray, she had appeared to me in the blinding flash of a transfiguration, with cheeks that were irreducible to, impervious to the colour of the name Guermites and of afternoons on the banks of the Vivonne, taking the place of my shattered dream, like a swan or a willow into which a god or nymph has been changed, and which henceforward, subjected to natural laws, will glide over the water or be shaken by the wind. And yet scarcely had I left her presence than those glittering fragments had reassembled like the green and roseate reflexions of the sunset behind the oar that has broken them, and in the solitude of my thoughts the name had quickly appropriated to itself my impression of the face. But now, frequently, I saw her at her window, in the courtyard, in the street, and for myself at least, if I did not succeed in integrating into the living woman the name Guermites, in thinking of her as Mme de Guermites, I could cast the blame on the impotence of my mind to carry through the act that I demanded of it; but she herself, our neighbour, seemed to commit the same error, commit it without discomfiture moreover, without any of my scruples, without even suspecting that it was an error. Thus Mme de Guermites showed in her dresses the same anxiety to follow the fashion as if, believing herself to have become a woman like any other, she had aspired to that elegance in her attire in which ordinary women might equal and perhaps surpass her; I had seen her in the street gaze admiringly at a well-dressed actress; and in the morning, before she sallied forth on foot, as if the opinion of the passers-by, whose vulgarity she accentuated by parading familiarly through their midst her inaccessible life, could be a tribunal competent to judge her, I would see her in front of the glass playing, with a conviction free from all pretence or irony, with passion, with ill-humour, with conceit, like a queen who has consented to appear as a servant-girl in theatricals at court, the role, so unworthy of her, of a fashionable woman; and in this mythological obliviousness of her native grandeur, she checked whether her veil was hanging properly, smoothed her cuffs, adjusted her cloak, as the divine swan performs all the movements natural to his animal species, keeps his eyes painted on either side of his beak without putting into them any glint of life, and darts suddenly after a button or an umbrella, as a swan would, without remembering that he is a god. But as the traveller, disappointed by his first impression of a strange town, tells himself that he will doubtless succeed in penetrating its charm if he visits its museums and galleries, strikes up an acquaintance with its people, works in its libraries, so I assured myself that, had I been given the right of entry into Mme de Guermites's house, were I one of her friends, were I to penetrate into her life, I should then know what, within its glowing amber envelope, her name enclosed in reality, objectively, for other people, since, after all, my father's friend had said that the Guermites set was in a class of its own in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

The life which I supposed them to lead there flowed from a source so different from anything in my experience, and must, I felt, be so out of the ordinary, that I could not have imagined the presence at the Duchess's parties of people in whose company I myself had already been, of people who really existed. For, not being able suddenly to change their nature, they would have carried on conversations there of the sort that I knew; their partners would perhaps have stooped to reply to them in the same human speech; and, in the course of an evening spent in the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, there would have been moments identical with moments that I had already lived. Which was impossible. It is true that my mind was perplexed by certain difficulties, and the presence of the body of Jesus Christ in the host seemed to me no more obscure a mystery than this leading house in the Faubourg being situated on the right bank of the river and so near that from my bedroom in the morning I could hear its carpets being beaten. But the line of demarcation that separated me from the Faubourg Saint-Germain seemed to me all the more real because it was purely ideal; I sensed that it was already part of the Faubourg when I saw, spread out on the other side of that Equator, the Guermites doormat of which my mother had ventured to say, having like myself caught a glimpse of it one day when their door stood open, that it was in a shocking state. Besides, how could their dining-room, their dim gallery upholstered in red plush, into which I could see sometimes from our kitchen window, have failed to possess in my eyes the mysterious charm of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to form an essential part of it, to be geographically situated within it, since to have been entertained to dinner in that dining-room was to have gone into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to have breathed its atmosphere, since the people who, before going to table, sat down beside Mme de Guermites on the leather-covered sofa in that gallery were all of the Faubourg Saint-Germain? No doubt elsewhere than in the Faubourg, at certain parties, one might see now and then, majestically enthroned amid the vulgar herd of fashion, one of those men who are no more than names and who alternately assume, when one tries to picture them to oneself, the aspect of a tourney or of a royal forest. But here, in the leading salon in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, in the dim gallery, there was no one but them. They were the columns, wrought of precious materials, that upheld the temple. Even for small and intimate gatherings it was from among them only that Mme de Guermites could choose her guests, and in the dinners for twelve, assembled around the dazzling napery and plate, they were like the golden statues of the apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle, symbolic, dedicative pillars before the Lord's Table. As for the tiny strip of garden that stretched between high walls at the back of the house, where in summer Mme de Guermites had liqueurs and orangeade brought out after dinner, how could I not have felt that to sit there of an evening, between nine and eleven, on its iron chairs—endowed with a magic as potent as the leather sofa—without inhaling at the same time the breezes peculiar to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was as impossible as to take a siesta in the oasis of Figuig without thereby being necessarily in Africa? Only imagination and belief can differentiate from the rest certain objects, certain people, and create an atmosphere. Alas, those picturesque sites, those natural features, those local curiosities, those works of art of

the Faubourg Saint-Germain, doubtless I should never be permitted to set my feet among them. And I must content myself with a shiver of excitement as I sighted from the open sea (and without the least hope of ever landing there), like a prominent minaret, like the first palm, like the first signs of some exotic industry or vegetation, the well-trodden doormat of its shore.

But if the Hôtel de Guermantes began for me at its hall-door, its dependencies must be regarded as extending a long way further, in the estimation of the Duke, who, looking on all the tenants as peasants, yokels, appropriators of national assets, whose opinion was of no account, shaved himself every morning in his nightshirt at the window, came down into the courtyard, according to the warmth or coldness of the day, in his shirt-sleeves, in pyjamas, in a plaid jacket of startling colours with a shaggy nap, in little light-coloured topcoats shorter than his jacket, and made one of his grooms lead past him at a trot some horse that he had just bought. More than once, indeed, the horse damaged Jupien's shop-front, whereupon Jupien, to the Duke's indignation, demanded compensation. "If it were only in consideration of all the good that Madame la Duchesse does in the house here and in the parish," said M. de Guermantes, "it's an outrage on this fellow's part to claim a sou from us." But Jupien had stuck to his guns, apparently not having the faintest idea what "good" the Duchess had ever done. And yet she did do good, but—since one cannot do good to everybody at once—the memory of the benefits that we have heaped on one person is a valid reason for our abstaining from helping another, whose discontent we thereby arouse the more. From other points of view than that of philanthropy, the quarter appeared to the Duke—and this over a considerable area—to be merely an extension of his courtyard, a longer track for his horses. After seeing how a new acquisition trotted by itself he would have it harnessed and taken through all the neighbouring streets, the groom running beside the carriage holding the reins, making it pass to and fro before the Duke who stood on the pavement, erect, gigantic, enormous in his vivid clothes, a cigar between his teeth, his head in the air, his eyeglass quizzical, until the moment when he sprang on to the box, drove the horse up and down for a little to try it, then set off with his new turn-out to pick up his mistress in the Champs-Élysées. M. de Guermantes would bid good day in the courtyard to two couples who belonged more or less to his world: the first, some cousins of his who, like working-class parents, were never at home to look after their children, since every morning the wife went off to the Schola Cantorum to study counterpoint and fugue, and the husband to his studio to carve wood and tool leather; and then the Baron and Baroness de Norpois, always dressed in black, she like a pew-opener and he like an undertaker, who emerged several times daily on their way to church. They were the nephew and niece of the old Ambassador whom we knew, and whom my father had in fact met at the foot of the staircase without realising where he was coming from; for my father supposed that so considerable a personage, one who had come in contact with the most eminent men in Europe and was probably quite indifferent to the empty distinctions of social rank, was hardly likely to frequent the society of these obscure, clerical and narrow-minded nobles. They had not been long in the place; Jupien, who had come out into the courtyard to say a word to the husband just as he was greeting M. de Guermantes, called him "M. Norpois," not being certain of his name.

"Monsieur Norpois, indeed! Oh, that really is good! Just wait a little! This individual will be calling you Citizen Norpois next?" exclaimed M. de Guermantes, turning to the Baron. He was at last able to vent his spleen against Jupien who addressed him as "Monsieur" instead of "Monsieur le Duc."

One day when M. de Guermantes required some information upon a matter of which my father had professional knowledge, he had introduced himself to him with great courtesy. After that, he had often some neighbourly service to ask of my father and, as soon as he saw him coming downstairs, his mind occupied with his work and anxious to avoid any interruption, the Duke, leaving his stable-boys, would come up to him in the courtyard, straighten the collar of his greatcoat with the obliging deftness inherited from a line of royal body-servants, take him by the hand, and, holding it in his own, stroking it even, to prove to him, with the shamelessness of a courtesan, that he did not begrudge him the privilege of contact with the ducal flesh, would steer him, extremely irked and thinking only how he might escape, through the carriage entrance out into the street. He had given us a sweeping bow one day when he had passed us as he was setting out in the carriage with his wife; he was bound to have told her my name, but what likelihood was there of her remembering it, or my face either? And besides, what a feeble recommendation to be pointed out simply as being one of her tenants! Another, more valuable, would have been to meet the Duchess at the house of Mme de Villeparisis, who, as it happened, had sent word by my grandmother that I was to go and see her, and, remembering that I had been intending to go in for literature, had added that I should meet several authors there. But my father felt that I was still a little young to go into society, and as the state of my health continued to cause him disquiet he was reluctant to allow me unnecessary occasions for renewed outings.

As one of Mme de Guermantes's footmen was in the habit of gossiping with Françoise, I picked up the names of several of the houses which she frequented, but formed no impression of any of them: the moment they were a part of her life, of that life which I saw only through the veil of her name, were they not inconceivable?

"Tonight there's a big party with a shadow-theatre show at the Princesse de Parme's," said the footman, "but we shan't be going, because at five o'clock Madame is taking the train to Chantilly, to spend a few days with the Duc d'Aumale; but it'll be the lady's-maid and valet that go with her. I'm to stay here. She won't be at all pleased, the Princesse de Parme won't, that's four times already she's written to Madame la Duchesse."

"Then you won't be going down to Guermantes Castle this year?"

"It's the first time we shan't be going there: it's because of Monsieur le Duc's rheumatics, the doctor says he's not to go there till the radiators are in, but we've been there every year till now, right on to January. If

the radiators aren't ready, perhaps Madame will go for a few days to Cannes to the Duchesse de Guise, but nothing's settled yet."

"And do you ever go to the theatre?"

"We go now and then to the Opéra, usually on the evenings when the Princesse de Parme has her box, that's once a week. It seems it's a fine show they give there, plays, operas, everything. Madame refused to rent a box herself, but we go all the same to the boxes Madame's friends take, now one, now another, often the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duke's cousin's lady. She's sister to the Duke of Bavaria ... And so you've got to run upstairs again now, have you?" went on the footman, who, though identified with the Guermantes, looked upon "masters" in general as a political estate, a view which allowed him to treat Françoise with as much respect as if she too were in service with a duchess. "You enjoy good health, ma'am."

"Oh, if it wasn't for these cursed legs of mine! On the plain I can still get along" ("on the plain" meant in the courtyard or in the streets, where Françoise was not averse from walking, in other words on flat ground), "but it's these confounded stairs. Good day to you. Perhaps we'll meet again this evening."

She was all the more anxious to continue her conversations with the footman after learning from him that the sons of dukes often bore a princely title which they retained until their fathers were dead. Evidently the cult of the nobility, blended with and accommodating itself to a certain spirit of revolt against it, must, springing hereditarily from the soil of France, be very strongly implanted still in her people. For Françoise, to whom you might speak of the genius of Napoleon or of wireless telegraphy without succeeding in attracting her attention, and without her pausing for a moment in the job she was doing, whether clearing the grate or laying the table, if she learnt of these peculiarities and that the younger son of the Duc de Guermantes was generally called the Prince d'Oléron, would exclaim: "Now isn't that nice!" and stand there bemused, as though in front of a stained-glass window.

Françoise learned also from the Prince d'Agriente's valet, who had become friends with her by often calling round with notes for the Duchess, that he had been hearing a great deal of talk in society about the marriage of the Marquis de Saint-Loup to Mlle d'Ambresac, and that it was practically settled.

That villa, that opera-box, into which Mme de Guermantes transfused the current of her life, must, it seemed to me, be places no less magical than her home. The names of Guise, of Parme, of Guermantes-Bavière, differentiated from all possible others the holiday places to which the Duchess resorted, the daily festivities which the track of her carriage wheels linked to her mansion. If they told me that the life of Mme de Guermantes consisted of a succession of such holidays and such festivities, they brought no further light to bear on it. Each of them gave to the life of the Duchess a different determination, but merely brought it a change of mystery without allowing any of its own mystery to evaporate, so that it simply floated, protected by a watertight covering, enclosed in a bell, amid the waves of others' lives. The Duchess might have lunch on the shore of the Mediterranean at Carnival time, but in the villa of Mme de Guise, where the queen of Parisian society was no more, in her white piqué dress, among numberless princesses, than a guest like any other, and on that account more moving still to me, more herself by being thus made new, like a star of the ballet who in the intricacies of a dance figure takes the place of each of her humbler sisters in succession; she might look at shadow-theatre shows, but at a party given by the Princesse de Parme; listen to tragedy or opera, but from the Princesse de Guermantes's box.

Since we localise in the body of a person all the potentialities of his or her life, the memory of the people he or she knows and has just left or is on the way to join, if, having learned from Françoise that Mme de Guermantes was going on foot to luncheon with the Princesse de Parme, I saw her emerge from the house about midday in a gown of flesh-coloured satin above which her face was of the same shade, like a cloud at sunset, it was all the pleasures of the Faubourg Saint-Germain that I saw before me, contained in that small compass, as though between the glossy pearl-pink valves of a shell.

My father had a friend at the Ministry, one A. J. Moreau, who, to distinguish himself from the other Moreaus, took care always to prefix his name with these two initials, with the result that people called him "A.J." for short. For some reason or other, this A.J. found himself in possession of a stall for a gala night at the Opéra. He sent the ticket to my father, and since Berma, whom I had not seen again since my first disappointment, was to give an act of *Phèdre*, my grandmother persuaded my father to pass it on to me.

Truth to tell, I set little store by this opportunity of seeing and hearing Berma which, a few years earlier, had plunged me into such a state of agitation. And it was not without a sense of melancholy that I registered to myself my indifference to what at one time I had put before health, comfort, everything. It was not that there had been any diminution in my desire to be able to contemplate at first hand the precious particles of reality which my imagination envisioned. But it no longer located them in the diction of a great actress; since my visits to Elstir, it was on to certain tapestries, certain modern paintings that I had transferred the inner faith I had once had in the acting, the tragic art of Berma; my faith and my desire no longer coming forward to pay incessant worship to the diction and the presence of Berma, the "double" that I possessed of them in my heart had gradually shrivelled, like those other "doubles" of the dead in ancient Egypt which had to be fed continually in order to maintain their originals in eternal life. That art had become a poor and pitiable thing. It was no longer inhabited by a deep-rooted soul.

That evening, as, armed with the ticket my father had received from his friend, I was climbing the grand staircase of the Opéra, I saw in front of me a man whom I took at first for M. de Charlus, whose bearing he had; when he turned his head to ask some question of an attendant I saw that I had been mistaken, but I nevertheless had no hesitation in placing the stranger in the same class of society, from the way not only in which he was dressed but in which he spoke to the man who took the tickets and to the box-openers who

were keeping him waiting. For, apart from individual characteristics, there was still at this period a very marked difference between any rich and well-dressed man of that section of the aristocracy and any rich and well-dressed man of the world of finance or "big business." Where one of the latter would have thought he was giving proof of his exclusiveness by adopting a sharp and haughty tone in speaking to an inferior, the nobleman, affable and mild, gave the impression of considering, of practising an affectation of humility and patience, a pretence of being just an ordinary member of the audience, as a prerogative of his good breeding. It is probable that on seeing him thus dissemble behind a smile overflowing with good nature the inaccessible threshold of the little world apart which he carried in his person, more than one wealthy banker's son, entering the theatre at that moment, would have taken this nobleman for a person of humble condition if he had not remarked in him an astonishing resemblance to the portrait that had recently appeared in the illustrated papers of a nephew of the Austrian Emperor, the Prince of Saxony, who happened to be in Paris at the time. I knew him to be a great friend of the Guermantes. As I myself reached the ticket attendant I heard the Prince of Saxony (or his double) say with a smile: "I don't know the number. My cousin told me I had only to ask for her box."

He may well have been the Prince of Saxony; it was perhaps the Duchesse de Guermantes (whom, in that event, I should be able to watch in the process of living one of the moments of her unimaginable life in her cousin's box) that he saw in his mind's eye when he referred to "my cousin who told me I had only to ask for her box," so much so that that distinctive smiling gaze and those so simple words caressed my heart (far more than any abstract reverie would have done) with the alternative antennae of a possible happiness and a vague glamour. At least, in uttering this sentence to the attendant, he grafted on to a commonplace evening in my everyday life a potential entry into a new world; the passage to which he was directed after having spoken the word "box" and along which he now proceeded was moist and fissured and seemed to lead to subaqueous grottoes, to the mythological kingdom of the water-nymphs. I had before me a gentleman in evening dress who was walking away from me, but I kept playing upon and around him, as with a badly fitting projector, without ever succeeding in focusing it on him exactly, the idea that he was the Prince of Saxony and was on his way to join the Duchesse de Guermantes. And for all that he was alone, that idea, external to himself, impalpable, immense, unsteady as a searchlight beam, seemed to precede and guide him like that deity, invisible to the rest of mankind, who stands beside the Greek warrior in the hour of battle.

I took my seat, trying to recapture a line from *Phèdre* which I could not quite remember. In the form in which I repeated it to myself it did not have the right number of feet, but as I made no attempt to count them, between its unwieldiness and a classical line of poetry it seemed as though no common measure could exist. It would not have surprised me to learn that I must subtract at least half a dozen syllables from that portentous phrase to reduce it to alexandrine dimensions. But suddenly I remembered it, the irremediable asperities of an inhuman world vanished as if by magic; the syllables of the line at once filled up the requisite measure, and what there was in excess floated off with the ease, the dexterity of a bubble of air that rises to burst on the surface of the water. And, after all, this excrescence with which I had been struggling consisted of only a single foot.

A certain number of orchestra stalls had been offered for sale at the box office and bought, out of snobbishness or curiosity, by such as wished to study the appearance of people whom they might not have another opportunity of seeing at close quarters. And it was indeed a fragment of their true social life, ordinarily concealed, that one could examine here in public, for, the Princesse de Parme having herself distributed among her friends the seats in stalls, balconies and boxes, the house was like a drawing-room in which everyone changed places, went to sit here or there, next to friends.

Next to me were some vulgar people who, not knowing the regular seat-holders, were anxious to show that they were capable of identifying them and named them aloud. They went on to remark that these "regulars" behaved there as though they were in their own drawing-rooms, meaning that they paid no attention to what was being played. In fact it was the opposite that took place. A budding genius who has taken a stall in order to see Berma thinks only of not soiling his gloves, of not disturbing, of conciliating the neighbour whom chance has put beside him, of pursuing with an intermittent smile the fleeting glance, and avoiding with apparent want of politeness the intercepted glance, of a person of his acquaintance whom he has discovered in the audience and to whom, after endless indecisions, he makes up his mind to go and talk just as the three knocks from the stage, resounding before he has had time to reach his friend, force him to take flight, like the Hebrews in the Red Sea, through a heaving tide of spectators and spectatresses whom he has forced to rise to their feet and whose dresses he tears and boots he crushes as he passes. On the other hand, it was because the society people sat in their boxes (behind the tiered circle) as in so many little suspended drawing-rooms, the fourth walls of which had been removed, or in so many little cafés to which one might go for refreshment without letting oneself be intimidated by the mirrors in gilt frames or the red plush seats, in the Neapolitan style, of the establishment—it was because they rested an indifferent hand on the gilded shafts of the columns which upheld this temple of the lyric art—it was because they remained unmoved by the extravagant honours which seemed to be being paid them by a pair of carved figures which held out towards the boxes branches of palm and laurel, that they alone would have had the equanimity of mind to listen to the play, if only they had had minds.

At first there were only vague shadows, in which one suddenly caught—like the gleam of a precious stone which one cannot see—the phosphorescence of a pair of famous eyes, or, like a medallion of Henri IV on a dark background, the bent profile of the Duc d'Aumale, to whom an invisible lady was exclaiming "Your Royal Highness must allow me to take his coat," to which the prince replied, "Oh, come, come! Really, Madame

d'Ambresac." She took it, in spite of this vague demurral, and was envied by one and all for being thus honoured.

But in the other boxes, almost everywhere, the white deities who inhabited those sombre abodes had taken refuge against their shadowy walls and remained invisible. Gradually, however, as the performance went on, their vaguely human forms detached themselves languidly one after the other from the depths of the night which they embroidered, and, raising themselves towards the light, allowed their half-naked bodies to emerge into the chiaroscuro of the surface where their gleaming faces appeared behind the playful, frothy undulations of their ostrich-feather fans, beneath their hyacinthine, pearl-studded headdresses which seemed to bend with the motion of the waves. Beyond began the orchestra stalls, abode of mortals for ever separated from the sombre and transparent realm to which here and there, in their smooth liquid surface, the limpid, reflecting eyes of the water-goddesses served as frontier. For the folding seats on its shore and the forms of the monsters in the stalls were mirrored in those eyes in simple obedience to the laws of optics and according to their angle of incidence, as happens with those two sections of external reality to which, knowing that they do not possess any soul, however rudimentary, that can be considered analogous to our own, we should think ourselves insane to address a smile or a glance: namely, minerals and people to whom we have not been introduced. Within the boundaries of their domain, however, the radiant daughters of the sea were constantly turning round to smile up at the bearded tritons who clung to the anfractuosités of the cliff, or towards some aquatic demi-god whose skull was a polished stone on to which the tide had washed a smooth covering of seaweed, and his gaze a disc of rock crystal. They leaned towards these creatures, offering them sweetmeats; from time to time the flood parted to admit a new nereid who, belated, smiling, apologetic, had just floated into blossom out of the shadowy depths; then, the act ended, having no further hope of hearing the melodious sounds of earth which had drawn them to the surface, plunging back all at once, the several sisters vanished into the night. But of all these retreats to the thresholds of which their frivolous desire to behold the works of man brought the curious goddesses who let none approach them, the most famous was the cube of semi-darkness known to the world as the stage box of the *Princesse de Guermantes*.

Like a tall goddess presiding from afar over the frolics of the lesser deities, the Princess had deliberately remained somewhat in the background on a sofa placed sideways in the box, red as a coral reef, beside a large vitreous expanse which was probably a mirror and suggested a section, perpendicular, opaque and liquid, cut by a ray of sunlight in the dazzling crystal of the sea. At once plume and corolla, like certain subaqueous growths, a great white flower, downy as the wing of a bird, hung down from the Princess's forehead along one of her cheeks, the curve of which it followed with coquettish, amorous, vibrant suppleness, as if half enclosing it like a pink egg in the softness of a halcyon's nest. Over her hair, reaching in front to her eyebrows and caught back lower down at the level of her throat, was spread a net composed of those little white shells which are fished up in certain southern seas and which were intermingled with pearls, a marine mosaic barely emerging from the waves and at moments plunged back again into a darkness in the depths of which even then a human presence was revealed by the glittering motility of the Princess's eyes. The beauty which set her far above all the other fabulous daughters of the twilight was not altogether materially and comprehensively inscribed in the nape of her neck, in her shoulders, her arms, her waist. But the exquisite, unfinished line of the last was the exact starting-point, the inevitable focus of invisible lines into which the eye could not help prolonging them—lines marvellously engendered round the woman like the spectre of an ideal figure projected against the darkness.

"That's the *Princesse de Guermantes*," said my neighbour to the gentleman beside her, taking care to begin the word "*Princesse*" with a string of 'P's, to show that the designation was absurd. "She hasn't been sparing with her pearls. I'm sure if I had as many as that I wouldn't make such a display of them; it doesn't look at all genteel to my mind."

And yet, when they caught sight of the Princess, all those who were looking round to see who was in the audience felt the rightful throne of beauty rise up in their hearts. The fact was that, with the *Duchesse de Luxembourg*, with *Mme de Morienvale*, with *Mme de Saint-Euverte*, with any number of others, what enabled one to identify their faces would be the juxtaposition of a big red nose and a hare-lip, or of a pair of wrinkled cheeks and a faint moustache. These features were moreover sufficient in themselves to charm the eye, since, having merely the conventional value of a specimen of handwriting, they gave one to read a famous and impressive name; but also, in the long run, they gave one the idea that ugliness had something aristocratic about it, and that it was immaterial whether the face of a great lady, provided it possessed distinction, was beautiful as well. But like certain artists who, instead of the letters of their names, set at the foot of their canvases a figure that is beautiful in itself, a butterfly, a lizard, a flower, so it was the figure of a delicious face and body that the Princess affixed at the corner of her box, thereby showing that beauty can be the noblest of signatures; for the presence there of *Mme de Guermantes-Bavière*, who brought to the theatre only such persons as at other times formed part of her intimate circle, was in the eyes of connoisseurs of the aristocracy the best possible certificate of the authenticity of the picture which her box presented, a sort of evocation of a scene from the intimate and exclusive life of the Princess in her palaces in Munich and in Paris.

Our imagination being like a barrel-organ out of order, which always plays some other tune than that shown on its card, every time I had heard any mention of the *Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière*, a recollection of certain sixteenth-century masterpieces had begun singing in my brain. I was obliged to rid myself of this association now that I saw her engaged in offering crystallised fruit to a stout gentleman in tails. Certainly I was very far from concluding that she and her guests were mere human beings like the rest of the audience. I understood that what they were doing there was only a game, and that as a prelude to the acts of their real

life (of which, presumably, this was not where they lived the important part) they had arranged, in obedience to a ritual unknown to me, to pretend to offer and decline sweets, a gesture robbed of its ordinary significance and regulated beforehand like the steps of a dancer who alternately raises herself on her toes and circles around a scarf. For all I knew, perhaps at the moment of offering him her sweets, the goddess was saying, with that note of irony in her voice (for I saw her smile): "Will you have a sweet?" What did it matter to me? I should have found a delicious refinement in the deliberate dryness, in the style of Mérimée or Meilhac, of these words addressed by a goddess to a demi-god who knew what sublime thoughts they both had in their minds, in reserve, doubtless, for the moment when they would begin again to live their real life, and, joining in the game, answered with the same mysterious playfulness: "Thanks, I should like a cherry." And I should have listened to this dialogue with the same avidity as to a scene from *Le Mari de la Débutante*, where the absence of poetry, of lofty thoughts, things which were so familiar to me and which, I suppose, Meilhac would have been eminently capable of putting into it, seemed to me in itself a refinement, a conventional refinement and therefore all the more mysterious and instructive.

"That fat fellow is the Marquis de Ganançay," came in a knowing tone from the man next to me, who had not quite caught the name whispered in the row behind.

The Marquis de Palancy, his face bent downwards at the end of his long neck, his round bulging eye glued to the glass of his monocle, moved slowly around in the transparent shade and appeared no more to see the public in the stalls than a fish that drifts past, unconscious of the press of curious gazers, behind the glass wall of an aquarium. Now and again he paused, venerable, wheezing, moss-grown, and the audience could not have told whether he was in pain, asleep, swimming, about to spawn, or merely taking breath. No one aroused in me so much envy as he, on account of his apparent familiarity with this box and the indifference with which he allowed the Princess to hold out to him her box of sweets, throwing him as she did so a glance from her fine eyes, cut from a diamond which at such moments intelligence and friendliness seemed to liquefy, whereas, when they were in repose, reduced to their purely material beauty, to their mineral brilliance alone, if the least reflected light displaced them ever so slightly, they set the depths of the pit ablaze with their inhuman, horizontal and resplendent fires. But now, because the act of *Phèdre* in which Berma was playing was due to start, the Princess came to the front of the box; whereupon, as if she herself were a theatrical apparition, in the different zone of light which she traversed, I saw not only the colour but the material of her adornments change. And in the box, now drained dry, emergent, no longer a part of the watery realm, the Princess, ceasing to be a nereid, appeared turbaned in white and blue like some marvellous tragic actress dressed for the part of Zaire, or perhaps of Orosmane; then, when she had taken her place in the front row, I saw that the halcyon's nest which tenderly shielded the pearly pink of her cheeks was an immense bird of paradise, soft, glittering and velvety.

But now my gaze was diverted from the Princesse de Guermantes's box by an ill-dressed, plain little woman who came in, her eyes ablaze with indignation, followed by two young men, and sat down a few seats away from me. Then the curtain rose. I could not help being saddened by the reflexion that there remained now no trace of my former predispositions in regard to Berma and the dramatic art, at the time when, in order to miss nothing of the extraordinary phenomenon which I would have gone to the ends of the earth to see, I kept my mind prepared like the sensitive plates which astronomers take out to Africa or the West Indies with a view to the scrupulous observation of a comet or an eclipse; when I trembled for fear lest some cloud (a fit of ill-humour on the artist's part or an incident in the audience) should prevent the spectacle from taking place with the maximum of intensity; when I should not have believed that I was watching it in the best conditions had I not gone to the very theatre which was consecrated to her like an altar, in which I then felt to be an inseparable if accessory part of her appearance from behind the little red curtain, the officials with their white carnations appointed by her, the vaulted balcony over a pit filled with a shabbily dressed crowd, the women selling programmes bearing her photograph, the chestnut-trees in the square outside, all those companions, those confidants of my impressions of those days which seemed to me to be inseparable from them. *Phèdre*, the "Declaration Scene," Berma, had had then for me a sort of absolute existence. Standing aloof from the world of current experience, they existed by themselves, I must go out to meet them, I would penetrate what I could of them, and if I opened my eyes and my soul to their fullest extent I would still absorb only too little of them. But how pleasant life seemed to me! The insignificance of the form of it that I myself was leading mattered nothing, no more than the time we spend on dressing, on getting ready to go out, since beyond it there existed in an absolute form, difficult to approach, impossible to possess in their entirety, those more solid realities, *Phèdre* and the way in which Berma spoke her lines. Steeped in these dreams of perfection in the dramatic art (a strong dose of which anyone who had at that time subjected my mind to analysis at any moment of the day or even the night would have been able to extract from it), I was like a battery that accumulates and stores up electricity. And a time had come when, ill as I was, even if I had believed that I should die of it, I should still have been compelled to go and hear Berma. But now, like a hill which from a distance seems azure-clad but as we draw nearer returns to its place in our commonplace vision of things, all this had left the world of the absolute and was no more than a thing like other things, of which I took cognisance because I was there; the actors were people of the same substance as the people I knew, trying to declaim as well as possible these lines of *Phèdre* which themselves no longer formed a sublime and individual essence, distinct from everything else, but were simply more or less effective lines ready to slip back into the vast corpus of French poetry, of which they were merely a part. I felt a despondency that was all the more profound in that, if the object of my headstrong and active desire no longer existed, on the other hand the same tendency to indulge in an obsessional day-dream, which varied from year to year but led me



always to sudden impulses, regardless of danger, still persisted. The evening on which I rose from my bed of sickness and set out to see a picture by Elstir or a mediaeval tapestry in some country house or other was so like the day on which I ought to have set out for Venice, or that on which I had gone to see Berma or left for Balbec, that I felt in advance that the immediate object of my sacrifice would leave me cold after a very short while, that then I might pass close by the place without stopping even to look at that picture or those tapestries for which I would at this moment risk so many sleepless nights, so many hours of pain. I discerned in the instability of its object the vanity of my effort, and at the same time its immensity, which I had not noticed before, like one of those neurasthenics whose exhaustion is doubled when it is pointed out to them that they are exhausted. In the meantime my musings gave a certain glamour to anything that might be related to them. And even in my most carnal desires, orientated always in a particular direction, concentrated round a single dream, I might have recognised as their primary motive an idea, an idea for which I would have laid down my life, at the innermost core of which, as in my day-dreams while I sat reading all afternoon in the garden at Combray, lay the notion of perfection.

I no longer felt the same indulgence as on the former occasion for the scrupulous efforts to express tenderness or anger which I had then remarked in the delivery and gestures of Aricie, Ismène and Hippolyte. It was not that the players—they were the same—did not still seek, with the same intelligent application, to impart now a caressing inflexion or a calculated ambiguity to their voices, now a tragic amplitude or a suppliant gentleness to their movements. Their tones bade the voice: “Be gentle, sing like a nightingale, caress,” or on the contrary: “Make yourself furious,” and then hurled themselves upon it, trying to carry it along with them in their frenzy. But it, mutinous, independent of their diction, remained unalterably their natural voice with its material defects or charms, its everyday vulgarity or affectation, and thus presented a complex of acoustic or social phenomena which the sentiment contained in the lines they were declaiming was powerless to alter.

Similarly the gestures of the players said to their arms, to their garments: “Be majestic.” But the unsubmitive limbs allowed a biceps which knew nothing of the part to flaunt itself between shoulder and elbow; they continued to express the triviality of everyday life and to bring into prominence, instead of fine shades of Racinian meaning, mere muscular relationships; and the draperies which they held up fell back again along vertical lines in which the natural law that governs falling bodies was challenged only by an insipid textile pliancy. At this point the little woman who was sitting near me exclaimed:

“Not a clap! And did you ever see such a get-up? She’s too old; she can’t do it any more; she ought to give up.”

Amid a sibilant protest from their neighbours the two young men with her quietened her down and her fury raged now only in her eyes. This fury could be prompted only by the notion of success and fame, for Berma, who had earned so much money, was overwhelmed with debts. Since she was always making business or social appointments which she was prevented from keeping, she had messengers flying with apologies along every street in Paris, hotel suites booked in advance which she would never occupy, oceans of scent to bathe her dogs, heavy penalties for breaches of contract with all her managers. Failing any more serious expenses, and being less voluptuous than Cleopatra, she would have found the means of squandering provinces and kingdoms on telegrams and hired carriages. But the little woman was an actress who had never tasted success, and had vowed a deadly hatred against Berma. The latter had just come on to the stage. And then, miraculously, like those lessons which we have laboured in vain to learn overnight and find intact, got by heart, on waking up next morning, and like those faces of dead friends which the impassioned efforts of our memory pursue without recapturing and which, when we are no longer thinking of them, are there before our eyes just as they were in life, the talent of Berma, which had evaded me when I sought so greedily to grasp its essence, now, after these years of oblivion, in this hour of indifference, imposed itself on my admiration with the force of self-evidence. Formerly, in my attempts to isolate this talent, I deducted, so to speak, from what I heard, the part itself, a part, the common property of all the actresses who appeared as Phèdre, which I myself had studied beforehand so that I might be capable of subtracting it, of gleaning as a residuum Mme Berma’s talent alone. But this talent which I sought to discover outside the part itself was indissolubly one with it. So with a great musician (it appears that this was the case with Vinteuil when he played the piano), his playing is that of so fine a pianist that one is no longer aware that the performer is a pianist at all, because (by not interposing all that apparatus of digital effort, crowned here and there with brilliant effects, all that spattering shower of notes in which at least the listener who does not quite know where he is thinks that he can discern talent in its material, tangible reality) his playing has become so transparent, so imbued with what he is interpreting, that one no longer sees the performer himself—he is simply a window opening upon a great work of art. I had been able to distinguish the intentions underlying the voices and the mime of Aricie, Ismène and Hippolyte, but Phèdre had interiorised hers, and my mind had not succeeded in wresting from her diction and attitudes, in apprehending in the miserly simplicity of their unbroken surfaces, those inventions, those effects of which no sign emerged, so completely had they been absorbed into it. Berma’s voice, in which there subsisted not one scrap of inert matter refractory to the mind, betrayed no visible sign of that surplus of tears which, because they had been unable to soak into it, one could feel trickling down the voice of Aricie or of Ismène, but had been delicately refined down to its smallest cells like the instrument of a master violinist in whom, when one says that he produces a beautiful sound, one means to praise not a physical peculiarity but a superiority of soul; and, as in the classical landscape where in the place of a vanished nymph there is an inanimate spring, a discernible and concrete intention had been transformed into a certain limpidity of tone, strange, appropriate and cold. Berma’s arms, which the lines of verse themselves, by the same emissive force

that made the voice issue from her lips, seemed to raise on to her bosom like leaves displaced by a gush of water; her stage presence, her poses, which she had gradually built up, which she was to modify yet further, and which were based upon reasonings altogether more profound than those of which traces could be seen in the gestures of her fellow-actors, but reasonings that had lost their original deliberation, had melted into a sort of radiance whereby they sent throbbing, round the person of the heroine, rich and complex elements which the fascinated spectator nevertheless took not for a triumph of dramatic artistry but for a manifestation of life; those white veils themselves, which, tenuous and clinging, seemed to be of a living substance and to have been woven by the suffering, half-pagan, half-Jansenist, around which they drew themselves like a frail and shrinking cocoon—all these, voice, posture, gestures, veils, round this embodiment of an idea which a line of poetry is (an embodiment that, unlike our human bodies, is not an opaque screen, but a purified, spiritualised garment), were merely additional envelopes which, instead of concealing, showed up in greater splendour the soul that had assimilated them to itself and had spread itself through them, lava-flows of different substances, grown translucent, the superimposition of which causes only a richer refraction of the imprisoned, central ray that pierces through them, and makes more extensive, more precious and more beautiful the flame-drenched matter in which it is enshrined. So Berma's interpretation was, around Racine's work, a second work, quickened also by genius.

My impression, to tell the truth, though more agreeable than on the earlier occasion, was not really different. Only, I no longer confronted it with a pre-existent, abstract and false idea of dramatic genius, and I understood now that dramatic genius was precisely this. It had just occurred to me that if I had not derived any pleasure from my first encounter with Berma, it was because, as earlier still when I used to meet Gilberte in the Champs-Élysées, I had come to her with too strong a desire. Between my two disappointments there was perhaps not only this resemblance, but another, deeper one. The impression given us by a person or a work (or an interpretation of a work) of marked individuality is peculiar to that person or work. We have brought with us the ideas of "beauty," "breadth of style," "pathos" and so forth which we might at a pinch have the illusion of recognising in the banality of a conventional face or talent, but our critical spirit has before it the insistent challenge of a form of which it possesses no intellectual equivalent, in which it must disengage the unknown element. It hears a sharp sound, an oddly interrogative inflexion. It asks itself: "Is that good? Is what I am feeling now admiration? Is that what is meant by richness of colouring, nobility, strength?" And what answers it again is a sharp voice, a curiously questioning tone, the despotic impression, wholly material, caused by a person whom one does not know, in which no scope is left for "breadth of interpretation." And for this reason it is the really beautiful works that, if we listen to them with sincerity, must disappoint us most keenly, because in the storehouse of our ideas there is none that responds to an individual impression.

This was precisely what Berma's acting showed me. This was indeed what was meant by nobility, by intelligence of diction. Now I could appreciate the merits of a broad, poetical, powerful interpretation, or rather it was to this that those epithets were conventionally applied, but only as we give the names of Mars, Venus, Saturn to planets which have nothing mythological about them. We feel in one world, we think, we give names to things in another; between the two we can establish a certain correspondence, but not bridge the gap. It was to some extent this gap, this fault, that I had to cross when, that afternoon on which I first went to see Berma, having strained my ears to catch every word, I had found some difficulty in correlating my ideas of "nobility of interpretation," of "originality," and had broken out in applause only after a moment of blankness and as if my applause sprang not from my actual impression but was connected in some way with my preconceived ideas, with the pleasure that I found in saying to myself: "At last I am listening to Berma." And the difference which exists between a person or a work of art that are markedly individual and the idea of beauty exists just as much between what they make us feel and the idea of love or of admiration. Wherefore we fail to recognise them. I had found no pleasure in listening to Berma (any more than, when I loved her, in seeing Gilberte). I had said to myself: "Well, I don't admire her." But meanwhile I was thinking only of mastering the secret of Berma's acting, I was preoccupied with that alone, I was trying to open my mind as wide as possible to receive all that her acting contained. I realised now that that was precisely what admiration meant.

Was this genius, of which Berma's interpretation was only the revelation, solely the genius of Racine?

I thought so at first. I was soon to be undeceived, when the act from *Phèdre* came to an end, after enthusiastic curtain-calls during which my furious old neighbour, drawing her little body up to its full height, turning sideways in her seat, stiffened the muscles of her face and folded her arms over her bosom to show that she was not joining the others in their applause, and to make more noticeable a protest which to her appeared sensational though it passed unperceived. The piece that followed was one of those novelties which at one time I had expected, since they were not famous, to be inevitably trivial and of no general application, devoid as they were of any existence outside the performance that was being given of them at the moment. But also I did not have, as with a classic, the disappointment of seeing the eternity of a masterpiece occupy no more space or time than the width of the footlights and the length of a performance which would accomplish it as effectively as an occasional piece. Then at each set speech which I felt that the audience liked and which would one day be famous, in the absence of the celebrity it could not have won in the past I added the fame it would enjoy in the future, by a mental process the converse of that which consists in imagining masterpieces on the day of their first frail appearance, when it seemed inconceivable that a title which no one had ever heard before could one day be set, bathed in the same mellow light, beside those of the author's other works. And this role would eventually figure in the list of her finest impersonations, next to that of *Phèdre*. Not that in itself it was not destitute of all literary merit; but Berma was as sublime in it as in *Phèdre*. I realised then

that the work of the playwright was for the actress no more than the raw material, more or less irrelevant in itself, for the creation of her masterpiece of interpretation, just as the great painter whom I had met at Balbec, Elstir, had found the inspiration for two pictures of equal merit in a school building devoid of character and a cathedral which was itself a work of art. And as the painter dissolves houses, carts, people, in some broad effect of light which makes them homogeneous, so Berma spread out great sheets of terror or tenderness over the words which were equally blended, all planed down or heightened, and which a lesser artist would have carefully detached from one another. Of course each of them had an inflexion of its own, and Berma's diction did not prevent one from distinguishing the lines. Is it not already a first element of ordered complexity, of beauty, when, on hearing a rhyme, that is to say something that is at once similar to and different from the preceding rhyme, which is prompted by it, but introduces the variety of a new idea, one is conscious of two systems overlapping each other, one intellectual, the other prosodic? But Berma at the same time made the words, the lines, whole speeches even, flow into an ensemble vaster than themselves, at the margins of which it was a joy to see them obliged to stop, to break off; thus it is that a poet takes pleasure in making the word which is about to spring forth pause for a moment at the rhyming point, and a composer in merging the various words of the libretto in a single rhythm which runs counter to them and yet sweeps them along. Thus into the prose of the modern playwright as into the verse of Racine, Berma contrived to introduce those vast images of grief, nobility, passion, which were the masterpieces of her own personal art, and in which she could be recognised as, in the portraits which he has made of different sitters, we recognise a painter.

I had no longer any desire, as on the former occasion, to be able to arrest Berma's poses, or the beautiful effect of colour which she gave for a moment only in a beam of limelight which at once faded never to reappear, or to make her repeat a single line a hundred times over. I realised that my original desire had been more exacting than the intentions of the poet, the actress, the great decorative artist who directed the production, and that the charm which floated over a line as it was spoken, the shifting poses perpetually transformed into others, the successive tableaux, were the fleeting result, the momentary object, the mobile masterpiece which the art of the theatre intended and which the attentiveness of a too-enraptured audience would destroy by trying to arrest. I did not even wish to come back another day and hear Berma again; I was satisfied with her; it was when I admired too keenly not to be disappointed by the object of my admiration, whether that object was Gilberte or Berma, that I demanded in advance, of the impression to be received on the morrow, the pleasure that yesterday's impression had denied me. Without seeking to analyse the joy which I had just felt, and might perhaps have turned to some more profitable use, I said to myself, as in the old days some of my schoolfellows used to say: "Certainly, I put Berma first," not without a confused feeling that Berma's genius was not perhaps very accurately represented by this affirmation of my preference and this award to her of a "first" place, whatever the peace of mind that they might incidentally restore to me.

Just as the curtain was rising on this second play I looked up at Mme de Guermantes's box. The Princess, with a movement that called into being an exquisite line which my mind pursued into the void, had just turned her head towards the back of her box; the guests were all on their feet, and also turned towards the door, and between the double hedge which they thus formed, with all the triumphant assurance, the grandeur of the goddess that she was, but with an unwonted meekness due to her feigned and smiling embarrassment at arriving so late and making everyone get up in the middle of the performance, the Duchesse de Guermantes entered, enveloped in white chiffon. She went straight up to her cousin, made a deep curtsy to a young man with fair hair who was seated in the front row, and turning towards the amphibian monsters floating in the recesses of the cavern, gave to these demi-gods of the Jockey Club—who at that moment, and among them all M. de Palancy in particular, were the men I should most have liked to be—the familiar "good evening" of an old friend, an allusion to her day-to-day relations with them during the last fifteen years. I sensed but could not decipher the mystery of that smiling gaze which she addressed to her friends, in the azure brilliance with which it glowed while she surrendered her hand to them one after another, a gaze which, could I have broken up its prism, analysed its crystallisations, might perhaps have revealed to me the essence of the unknown life which was apparent in it at that moment. The Duc de Guermantes followed his wife, the gay flash of his monocle, the gleam of his teeth, the whiteness of his carnation or of his pleated shirt-front relegating, to make room for their light, the darkness of his eyebrows, lips and coat; with a wave of his outstretched hand which he let fall on to their shoulders, vertically, without moving his head, he commanded the inferior monsters who were making way for him to resume their seats, and made a deep bow to the fair young man. It was as though the Duchess had guessed that her cousin, of whom, it was rumoured, she was inclined to make fun for what she called her "exaggerations" (a noun which, from her point of view, so wittily French and restrained, was instantly applicable to the poetry and enthusiasm of the Teuton), would be wearing this evening one of those costumes in which the Duchess considered her "dressed up," and that she had decided to give her a lesson in good taste. Instead of the wonderful downy plumage which descended from the crown of the Princess's head to her throat, instead of her net of shells and pearls, the Duchess wore in her hair only a simple aigrette which, surmounting her arched nose and prominent eyes, reminded one of the crest on the head of a bird. Her neck and shoulders emerged from a drift of snow-white chiffon, against which fluttered a swansdown fan, but below this her gown, the bodice of which had for its sole ornament innumerable spangles (either little sticks and beads of metal, or brilliants), moulded her figure with a precision that was positively British. But different as their two costumes were, after the Princess had given her cousin the chair in which she herself had previously been sitting, they could be seen turning to gaze at one another in mutual appreciation.

Perhaps Mme de Guermantes would smile next day when she referred to the headdress, a little too complicated, which the Princess had worn, but certainly she would declare that the latter had been none the less quite lovely and marvellously got up; and the Princess, whose own tastes found something a little cold, a little austere, a little "tailor-made" in her cousin's way of dressing, would discover in this strict sobriety an exquisite refinement. Moreover, the harmony that existed between them, the universal and pre-established gravitational pull of their upbringing, neutralised the contrasts not only in their apparel but in their attitude. At those invisible magnetic longitudes which the refinement of their manners traced between them, the natural expansiveness of the Princess died away, while towards them the formal correctness of the Duchess allowed itself to be attracted and loosened, turned to sweetness and charm. As, in the play which was now being performed, to realise how much personal poetry Berma extracted from it one had only to entrust the part which she was playing, which she alone could play, to any other actress, so the spectator who raised his eyes to the balcony would have seen in two smaller boxes there how an "arrangement" intended to suggest that of the Princesse de Guermantes simply made the Baronne de Morienvall appear eccentric, pretentious and ill-bred, while an effort as painstaking as it must have been costly to imitate the clothes and style of the Duchesse de Guermantes only made Mme de Cambremer look like some provincial schoolgirl, mounted on wires, rigid, erect, desiccated, angular, with a plume of raven's feathers stuck vertically in her hair. Perhaps this lady was out of place in a theatre in which it was only with the brightest stars of the season that the boxes (even those in the highest tier, which from below seemed like great hampers studded with human flowers and attached to the ceiling of the auditorium by the red cords of their plush-covered partitions) composed an ephemeral panorama which deaths, scandals, illnesses, quarrels would soon alter, but which this evening was held motionless by attentiveness, heat, dizziness, dust, elegance and boredom, in the sort of eternal tragic instant of unconscious expectancy and calm torpor which, in retrospect, seems always to have preceded the explosion of a bomb or the first flicker of a fire.

The explanation for Mme de Cambremer's presence on this occasion was that the Princesse de Parme, devoid of snobbishness as are most truly royal personages, and by contrast eaten up with a pride in and passion for charity which rivalled her taste for what she believed to be the Arts, had bestowed a few boxes here and there upon women like Mme de Cambremer who were not numbered among the highest aristocratic society but with whom she was in communication with regard to charitable undertakings. Mme de Cambremer never took her eyes off the Duchesse and Princesse de Guermantes, which was all the easier for her since, not being actually acquainted with either, she could not be suspected of angling for a sign of recognition. Inclusion in the visiting lists of these two great ladies was nevertheless the goal towards which she had been striving for the last ten years with untiring patience. She had calculated that she might possibly reach it in five years more. But having been smitten by a fatal disease, the inexorable character of which—for she prided herself upon her medical knowledge—she thought she knew, she was afraid that she might not live so long. This evening she was happy at least in the thought that all these women whom she scarcely knew would see in her company a man who was one of their own set, the young Marquis de Beausergent, Mme d'Argencourt's brother, who moved impartially in both worlds and whom the women of the second were very keen to parade before the eyes of those of the first. He was seated behind Mme de Cambremer on a chair placed at an angle, so that he might be able to scan the other boxes. He knew everyone in them and to bow to his friends, with the exquisite elegance of his delicately arched figure, his fine features and fair hair, he half-raised his upright torso, a smile brightening his blue eyes, with a blend of deference and detachment, a picture etched with precision in the rectangle of the oblique plane in which he was placed, like one of those old prints which portray a great nobleman in his courtly pride. He often accepted these invitations to go to the theatre with Mme de Cambremer. In the auditorium, and, on the way out, in the lobby, he stood gallantly by her side amid the throng of more brilliant friends whom he saw about him, and to whom he refrained from speaking, to avoid any awkwardness, just as though he had been in doubtful company. If at such moments the Princesse de Guermantes swept by, lightfoot and fair as Diana, trailing behind her the folds of an incomparable cloak, making every head turn round and followed by all eyes (and, most of all, by Mme de Cambremer's), M. de Beausergent would become engrossed in conversation with his companion, acknowledging the friendly and dazzling smile of the Princess only with constraint, and with the well-bred reserve, the considerate coldness of a person whose friendliness might have become momentarily embarrassing.

Had not Mme de Cambremer known already that the box belonged to the Princess, she could still have told that the Duchesse de Guermantes was the guest from the air of greater interest with which she was surveying the spectacle of stage and auditorium, out of politeness to her hostess. But simultaneously with this centrifugal force, an equal and opposite force generated by the same desire to be sociable drew her attention back to her own attire, her plume, her necklace, her bodice and also to that of the Princess herself, whose subject, whose slave her cousin seemed to proclaim herself, come there solely to see her, ready to follow her elsewhere should the titular holder of the box have taken it into her head to get up and go, and regarding the rest of the house as composed merely of strangers, worth looking at simply as curiosities, though she numbered among them many friends to whose boxes she regularly repaired on other evenings and with regard to whom she never failed on those occasions to demonstrate a similar loyalty, exclusive, relativistic and weekly. Mme de Cambremer was surprised to see her there that evening. She knew that the Duchess stayed on very late at Guermantes, and had supposed her to be there still. But she had been told that sometimes, when there was some special function in Paris which she considered it worth her while to attend, Mme de Guermantes would order one of her carriages to be brought round as soon as she had taken tea with the guns, and, as the sun was setting, drive off at a spanking pace through the gathering darkness of the forest, then

along the high road, to join the train at Combray and so be in Paris the same evening. "Perhaps she has come up from Guermantes especially to see Berma," thought Mme de Cambremer, and marvelled at the thought. And she remembered having heard Swann say in that ambiguous jargon which he shared with M. de Charlus: "The Duchess is one of the noblest souls in Paris, the cream of the most refined, the choicest society." For myself, who derived from the names Guermantes, Bavaria and Condé what I imagined to be the lives and the thoughts of the two cousins (I could no longer do so from their faces, having seen them), I would rather have had their opinion of *Phèdre* than that of the greatest critic in the world. For in his I should have found merely intelligence, an intelligence superior to my own but similar in kind. But what the Duchesse and Princesse de Guermantes might think, an opinion which would have furnished me with an invaluable clue to the nature of these two poetic creatures, I imagined with the aid of their names, I endowed with an irrational charm, and, with the thirst and the longing of a fever-stricken patient, what I demanded that their opinion of *Phèdre* should yield to me was the charm of the summer afternoons that I had spent wandering along the Guermantes way.

Mme de Cambremer was trying to make out how exactly the two cousins were dressed. For my own part, I never doubted that their garments were peculiar to themselves, not merely in the sense in which the livery with red collar or blue facings had once belonged exclusively to the houses of Guermantes and Condé, but rather as for a bird its plumage which, as well as being a heightening of its beauty, is an extension of its body. The costumes of these two ladies seemed to me like the materialisation, snow-white or patterned with colour, of their inner activity, and, like the gestures which I had seen the Princesse de Guermantes make and which, I had no doubt, corresponded to some latent idea, the plumes which swept down from her forehead and her cousin's dazzling and spangled bodice seemed to have a special meaning, to be to each of these women an attribute which was hers, and hers alone, the significance of which I should have liked to know: the bird of paradise seemed inseparable from its wearer as her peacock is from Juno, and I did not believe that any other woman could usurp that spangled bodice, any more than the fringed and flashing shield of Minerva. And when I turned my eyes to their box, far more than on the ceiling of the theatre, painted with lifeless allegories, it was as though I had seen, thanks to a miraculous break in the customary clouds, the assembly of the Gods in the act of contemplating the spectacle of mankind, beneath a crimson canopy, in a clear lighted space, between two pillars of Heaven. I gazed on this momentary apotheosis with a perturbation which was partly soothed by the feeling that I myself was unknown to the Immortals; the Duchess had indeed seen me once with her husband, but could surely have kept no memory of that, and I was not distressed that she should find herself, owing to the position that she occupied in the box, gazing down upon the nameless, collective madrepores of the audience in the stalls, for I was happily aware that my being was dissolved in their midst, when, at the moment in which, by virtue of the laws of refraction, the blurred shape of the protozoon devoid of any individual existence which was myself must have come to be reflected in the impassive current of those two blue eyes, I saw a ray illumine them: the Duchess, goddess turned woman, and appearing in that moment a thousand times more lovely, raised towards me the white-gloved hand which had been resting on the balustrade of the box and waved it in token of friendship; my gaze was caught in the spontaneous incandescence of the flashing eyes of the Princess, who had unwittingly set them ablaze merely by turning her head to see who it might be that her cousin was thus greeting; and the latter, who had recognised me, poured upon me the sparkling and celestial shower of her smile.

Now, every morning, long before the hour at which she left her house, I went by a devious route to post myself at the corner of the street along which she generally came, and, when the moment of her arrival seemed imminent, I strolled back with an air of being absorbed in something else, looking the other way, and raised my eyes to her face as I drew level with her, but as though I had not in the least expected to see her. Indeed, for the first few mornings, so as to be sure of not missing her, I waited in front of the house. And every time the carriage gate opened (letting out one after another so many people who were not the one for whom I was waiting) its grinding rattle prolonged itself in my heart in a series of oscillations which took a long time to subside. For never was devotee of a famous actress whom he does not know, kicking his heels outside the stage door, never was angry or idolatrous crowd, gathered to insult or to carry in triumph through the streets the condemned assassin or the national hero whom it believes to be on the point of coming whenever a sound is heard from the inside of the prison or the palace, never were these so stirred by emotion as I was, awaiting the emergence of this great lady who in her simple attire was able, by the grace of her movements (quite different from the gait she affected on entering a drawing-room or a box), to make of her morning walk—and for me there was no one in the world but she out walking—a whole poem of elegant refinement and the loveliest ornament, the rarest flower of the season. But after the third day, so that the porter should not discover my stratagem, I betook myself much further afield, to some point upon the Duchess's usual route. Often before that evening at the theatre I had made similar little excursions before lunch, when the weather was fine; if it had been raining, at the first gleam of sunshine I would hasten downstairs to take a stroll, and if, suddenly, coming towards me along the still wet pavement, changed by the sun into a golden lacquer, in the transformation scene of a crossroads powdered with mist which the sun tanned and bleached, I caught sight of a schoolgirl followed by her governess or of a dairy-maid with her white sleeves, I stood motionless, my hand pressed to my heart which was already leaping towards an unexplored life; I tried to bear in mind the street, the time, the number of the door through which the girl (whom I followed sometimes) had vanished and failed to reappear. Fortunately the fleeting nature of these cherished images, which I promised myself that I would make an effort to see again, prevented them from

fixing themselves with any vividness in my memory. No matter, I was less depressed now at the thought of my own ill health, of my never having summoned up the energy to set to work, to begin a book, for the world appeared to me a pleasanter place to live in, life a more interesting experience to go through, now that I had learned that the streets of Paris, like the roads round Balbec, were in bloom with those unknown beauties whom I had so often sought to conjure from the woods of Méséglise, each of whom aroused a voluptuous longing which she alone seemed capable of assuaging.

On coming home from the Opéra, I had added for the following morning, to those whom for some days past I had been hoping to meet again, the image of Mme de Guermantes, tall, with her high-piled crown of silky, golden hair, with the tenderness promised by the smile which she had directed at me from her cousin's box. I would follow the route which Françoise had told me that the Duchess generally took, and I would try at the same time, in the hope of meeting two girls whom I had seen a few days earlier, not to miss the coming out of a class or a catechism. But meanwhile, from time to time, the scintillating smile of Mme de Guermantes, and the warm feeling it had engendered, came back to me. And without exactly knowing what I was doing, I tried to find a place for them (as a woman studies the effect a certain kind of jewelled buttons that have just been given her might have on a dress) beside the romantic ideas which I had long held and which Albertine's coldness, Gisèle's premature departure, and before them my deliberate and too long sustained separation from Gilberte had set free (the idea for instance of being loved by a woman, of having a life in common with her); then it was the image of one or other of the two girls seen in the street that I coupled with those ideas, to which immediately afterwards I tried to adapt my memory of the Duchess. Compared with those ideas, the memory of Mme de Guermantes at the Opéra was a very insignificant thing, a tiny star twinkling beside the long tail of a blazing comet; moreover I had been quite familiar with the ideas long before I came to know Mme de Guermantes; whereas the memory of her I possessed but imperfectly; at moments it escaped me; it was during the hours when, from floating vaguely in my mind in the same way as the images of various other pretty women, it gradually developed into a unique and definitive association—exclusive of every other feminine image—with those romantic ideas of mine which were of so much longer standing than itself, it was during those few hours in which I remembered it most clearly, that I ought to have taken steps to find out exactly what it was; but I did not then know the importance it was to assume for me; I cherished it simply as a first private meeting with Mme de Guermantes inside myself; it was the first, the only accurate sketch, the only one made from life, the only one that was really Mme de Guermantes; during the few hours in which I was fortunate enough to retain it without giving it any conscious thought, it must have been charming, though, that memory, since it was always to it, freely still at that moment, without haste, without strain, without the slightest compulsion or anxiety, that my ideas of love returned; then, as gradually those ideas fixed it more permanently, it acquired from them a greater strength but itself became more vague; presently I could no longer recapture it; and in my dreams I no doubt distorted it completely, for whenever I saw Mme de Guermantes I realised the disparity—always, as it happened, different—between what I had imagined and what I saw. True, every morning now, at the moment when Mme de Guermantes emerged from her doorway at the top of the street, I saw again her tall figure, her face with its bright eyes and crown of silken hair—all the things for which I was waiting there; but, on the other hand, a minute or two later, when, having first turned my eyes away so as to appear not to be expecting this encounter which I had come to seek, I raised them to look at the Duchess at the moment in which we converged, what I saw then were red patches (as to which I did not know whether they were due to the fresh air or to a blotchy skin) on a sullen face which with the curtest of nods, a long way removed from the affability of the *Phèdre* evening, acknowledged the greeting which I addressed to her daily with an air of surprise and which did not seem to please her. And yet, after a few days during which the memory of the two girls fought against heavy odds for the mastery of my amorous feelings with that of Mme de Guermantes, it was in the end the latter which, as though of its own accord, generally prevailed while its competitors withdrew; it was to it that I finally found myself, on the whole voluntarily still and as though from choice and with pleasure, to have transferred all my thoughts of love. I had ceased to dream of the little girls coming from their catechism, or of a certain dairy-maid; and yet I had also lost all hope of encountering in the street what I had come to seek, either the affection promised to me at the theatre in a smile, or the profile, the bright face beneath its pile of golden hair which were so only when seen from afar. Now I should not even have been able to say what Mme de Guermantes was like, what I recognised her by, for every day, in the picture which she presented as a whole, the face was as different as were the dress and the hat.

Why, on such and such a morning, when I saw advancing towards me beneath a violet hood a sweet, smooth face whose charms were symmetrically arranged about a pair of blue eyes and into which the curve of the nose seemed to have been absorbed, did I gauge from a joyous commotion in my breast that I was not going to return home without having caught a glimpse of Mme de Guermantes? Why did I feel the same perturbation, affect the same indifference, turn away my eyes with the same abstracted air as on the day before, at the appearance in profile in a side street, beneath a navy-blue toque, of a beak-like nose alongside a red cheek with a piercing eye, like some Egyptian deity? Once it was not merely a woman with a bird's beak that I saw but almost the bird itself; Mme de Guermantes's outer garments, even her toque, were of fur, and since she thus left no cloth visible, she seemed naturally furred, like certain vultures whose thick, smooth, tawny, soft plumage looks like a sort of animal's coat. In the midst of this natural plumage, the tiny head arched out its beak and the bulging eyes were piercing and blue.

One day I would be pacing up and down the street for hours on end without seeing Mme de Guermantes when suddenly, inside a dairy shop tucked in between two of the mansions of this aristocratic and plebeian

quarter, there would emerge the vague and unfamiliar face of a fashionably dressed woman who was asking to see some *petits suisses*, and before I had had time to distinguish her I would be struck, as by a flash of light reaching me sooner than the rest of the image, by the glance of the Duchess; another time, having failed to meet her and hearing midday strike, realising that it was not worth my while to wait for her any longer, I would be mournfully making my way homewards absorbed in my disappointment and gazing absent-mindedly at a receding carriage, when suddenly I realised that the nod which a lady had given through the carriage window was meant for me, and that this lady, whose features, relaxed and pale, or alternatively tense and vivid, composed, beneath a round hat or a towering plume, the face of a stranger whom I had supposed that I did not know, was Mme de Guermantes, by whom I had let myself be greeted without so much as an acknowledgement. And sometimes I would come upon her as I entered the carriage gate, standing outside the lodge where the detestable porter whose inquisitive eyes I loathed was in the act of making her a profound obeisance and also, no doubt, his daily report. For the entire staff of the Guermantes household, hidden behind the window curtains, would tremble with fear as they watched a conversation which they were unable to overhear, but which meant as they very well knew that one or other of them would certainly have his day off stopped by the Duchess to whom this Cerberus had betrayed him.

In view of the succession of different faces which Mme de Guermantes displayed thus one after another, faces that occupied a relative and varying expanse, sometimes narrow, sometimes large, in her person and attire as a whole, my love was not attached to any particular one of those changeable elements of flesh and fabric which replaced one another as day followed day, and which she could modify and renew almost entirely without tempering my agitation because beneath them, beneath the new collar and the strange cheek, I felt that it was still Mme de Guermantes. What I loved was the invisible person who set all this outward show in motion, the woman whose hostility so distressed me, whose approach threw me into a turmoil, whose life I should have liked to make my own, chasing away her friends. She might flaunt a blue feather or reveal an inflamed complexion, and her actions would still lose none of their importance for me.

I should not myself have felt that Mme de Guermantes was irritated at meeting me day after day, had I not learned it indirectly by reading it on the face, stiff with coldness, disapproval and pity, which Françoise wore when she was helping me to get ready for these morning walks. The moment I asked her for my outdoor things I felt a contrary wind arise in her worn and shrunken features. I made no attempt to win her confidence, for I knew that I should not succeed. She had a power, the nature of which I have never been able to fathom, for at once becoming aware of anything unpleasant that might happen to my parents and myself. Perhaps it was not a supernatural power, but could have been explained by sources of information that were peculiar to herself: as it may happen that the news which often reaches a savage tribe several days before the post has brought it to the European colony has really been transmitted to them not by telepathy but from hill-top to hill-top by beacon fires. Thus, in the particular instance of my morning walks, possibly Mme de Guermantes's servants had heard their mistress say how tired she was of running into me every day without fail wherever she went, and had repeated her remarks to Françoise. My parents might, it is true, have attached some servant other than Françoise to my person, but I should have been no better off. Françoise was in a sense less of a servant than the others. In her way of feeling things, of being kind and compassionate, harsh and disdainful, shrewd and narrow-minded, of combining a white skin with red hands, she was still the village girl whose parents had had "a place of their own" but having come to grief had been obliged to put her into service. Her presence in our household was the country air, the social life of a farm of fifty years ago transported into our midst by a sort of holiday journey in reverse whereby it is the countryside that comes to visit the traveller. As the glass cases in a local museum are filled with specimens of the curious handiwork which the peasants still carve or embroider in certain parts of the country, so our flat in Paris was decorated with the words of Françoise, inspired by a traditional and local sentiment and governed by extremely ancient laws. And she could trace her way back as though by clues of coloured thread to the birds and cherry trees of her childhood, to the bed in which her mother had died, and which she still saw. But in spite of all this wealth of background, once she had come to Paris and had entered our service she had acquired—as, *a fortiori*, anyone else would have done in her place—the ideas, the system of interpretation used by the servants on the other floors, compensating for the respect which she was obliged to show to us by repeating the rude words that the cook on the fourth floor had used to her mistress, with a servile gratification so intense that, for the first time in our lives, feeling a sort of solidarity with the detestable occupant of the fourth floor flat, we said to ourselves that possibly we too were employers after all. This alteration in Françoise's character was perhaps inevitable. Certain ways of life are so abnormal that they are bound to produce certain characteristic faults; such was the life led by the King at Versailles among his courtiers, a life as strange as that of a Pharaoh or a Doge—and, far more even than his, the life of his courtiers. The life led by servants is probably of an even more monstrous abnormality, which only its familiarity can prevent us from seeing. But it was actually in details more intimate still that I should have been obliged, even if I had dismissed Françoise, to keep the same servant. For various others were to enter my service in the years to come; already endowed with the defects common to all servants, they underwent nevertheless a rapid transformation with me. As the laws of attack govern those of riposte, in order not to be worsted by the asperities of my character, all of them effected in their own an identical withdrawal, always at the same point, and to make up for this took advantage of the gaps in my line to thrust out advanced posts. Of these gaps I knew nothing, any more than of the salients to which they gave rise, precisely because they were gaps. But my servants, by gradually becoming spoiled, taught me of their existence. It was from the defects which they invariably acquired that I learned what were my own natural and invariable shortcomings; their character offered me a sort of negative of my own. We had always laughed, my mother and I, at Mme



Sazerat, who used, in speaking of servants, to say "that race," "that species." But I am bound to admit that what made it useless to think of replacing Françoise by anyone else was that her successor would inevitably have belonged just as much to the race of servants in general and to the class of my servants in particular.

To return to Françoise, I never in my life experienced a humiliation without having seen beforehand on her face the signs of ready-made condolences, and when in my anger at the thought of being pitied by her I tried to pretend that on the contrary I had scored a distinct success, my lies broke feebly against the wall of her respectful but obvious unbelief and the consciousness that she enjoyed of her own infallibility. For she knew the truth. She refrained from uttering it, and made only a slight movement with her lips as if she still had her mouth full and was finishing a tasty morsel. She refrained from uttering it? So at least I long believed, for at that time I still supposed that it was by means of words that one communicated the truth to others. Indeed the words that people said to me recorded their meaning so unalterably on the sensitive plate of my mind that I could no more believe it possible that someone who had professed to love me did not love me than Françoise herself could have doubted when she had read in the paper that some priest or gentleman or other was prepared, on receipt of a stamped envelope, to furnish us free of charge with an infallible remedy for every known complaint or with the means of multiplying our income a hundredfold. (If, on the other hand, our doctor were to prescribe for her the simplest cure for a cold in the head, she, so stubborn to endure the keenest suffering, would complain bitterly of what she had been made to sniff, insisting that it tickled her nose and that life was not worth living.) But she was the first person to prove to me by her example (which I was not to understand until long afterwards, when it was given me afresh and more painfully, as will be seen in the later volumes of this work, by a person who was dearer to me) that the truth has no need to be uttered to be made apparent, and that one may perhaps gather it with more certainty, without waiting for words and without even taking any account of them, from countless outward signs, even from certain invisible phenomena, analogous in the sphere of human character to what atmospheric changes are in the physical world. I might perhaps have suspected this, since it frequently occurred to me at that time to say things myself in which there was no vestige of truth, while I made the real truth plain by all manner of involuntary confidences expressed by my body and in my actions (which were only too accurately interpreted by Françoise); I ought perhaps to have suspected it, but to do so I should first have had to be conscious that I myself was occasionally mendacious and deceitful. Now mendacity and deceitfulness were with me, as with most people, called into being in so immediate, so contingent a fashion, in the defence of some particular interest, that my mind, fixed on some lofty ideal, allowed my character to set about those urgent, sordid tasks in the darkness below and did not look down to observe them.

When Françoise, in the evening, was nice to me, and asked my permission to sit in my room, it seemed to me that her face became transparent and that I could see the kindness and honesty that lay beneath. But Jupien, who had lapses into indiscretion of which I learned only later, revealed afterwards that she had told him that I was not worth the price of a rope to hang me, and that I had tried to do her every conceivable harm. These words of Jupien's set up at once before my eyes, in new and strange colours, a print of my relations with Françoise so different from the one which I often took pleasure in contemplating and in which, without the least shadow of doubt, Françoise adored me and lost no opportunity of singing my praises, that I realised that it is not only the physical world that differs from the aspect in which we see it; that all reality is perhaps equally dissimilar from what we believe ourselves to be directly perceiving and which we compose with the aid of ideas that do not reveal themselves but are none the less efficacious, just as the trees, the sun and the sky would not be the same as what we see if they were apprehended by creatures having eyes differently constituted from ours, or else endowed for that purpose with organs other than eyes which would furnish equivalents of trees and sky and sun, though not visual ones. However that might be, this sudden glimpse that Jupien afforded me of the real world appalled me. And yet it concerned only Françoise, about whom I cared little. Was it the same with all one's social relations? And into what depths of despair might this not some day plunge me, if it were the same with love? That was the future's secret. For the present only Françoise was concerned. Did she sincerely believe what she had said to Jupien? Had she said it to embroil Jupien with me, possibly so that we should not appoint Jupien's girl as her successor? At any rate I realised the impossibility of obtaining any direct and certain knowledge of whether Françoise loved or hated me. And thus it was she who first gave me the idea that a person does not, as I had imagined, stand motionless and clear before our eyes with his merits, his defects, his plans, his intentions with regard to ourselves (like a garden at which we gaze through a railing with all its borders spread out before us), but is a shadow which we can never penetrate, of which there can be no such thing as direct knowledge, with respect to which we form countless beliefs, based upon words and sometimes actions, neither of which can give us anything but inadequate and as it proves contradictory information—a shadow behind which we can alternately imagine, with equal justification, that there burns the flame of hatred and of love.

I was genuinely in love with Mme de Guermantes. The greatest happiness that I could have asked of God would have been that he should send down on her every imaginable calamity, and that ruined, despised, stripped of all the privileges that separated her from me, having no longer any home of her own or people who would condescend to speak to her, she should come to me for asylum. I imagined her doing so. And indeed on those evenings when some change in the atmosphere or in my own state of health brought to the surface of my consciousness some forgotten scroll on which were recorded impressions of other days, instead of profiting by the forces of renewal that had been generated in me, instead of using them to unravel in my own mind thoughts which as a rule escaped me, instead of setting myself at last to work, I preferred to relate aloud, to excogitate in a lively, external manner, with a flow of invention as useless as was my declamation of

it, a whole novel crammed with adventure, in which the Duchess, fallen upon misfortune, came to implore assistance from me—who had become, by a converse change of circumstances, rich and powerful. And when I had thus spent hours on end imagining the circumstances, rehearsing the sentences with which I should welcome the Duchess beneath my roof, the situation remained unaltered; I had, alas, in reality, chosen to love the woman who in her own person combined perhaps the greatest possible number of different advantages; in whose eyes, accordingly, I could not hope to cut any sort of figure; for she was as rich as the richest commoner—and noble also; not to mention that personal charm which set her at the pinnacle of fashion, made her among the rest a sort of queen.

I felt that I displeased her by crossing her path every morning; but even if I had had the heart to refrain from doing so for two or three days consecutively, Mme de Guermantes might not have noticed that abstention, which would have represented so great a sacrifice on my part, or might have attributed it to some obstacle beyond my control. And indeed I could not have brought myself to cease to dog her footsteps except by arranging that it should be impossible for me to do so, for the perpetually recurring need to meet her, to be for a moment the object of her attention, the person to whom her greeting was addressed, was stronger than my fear of arousing her displeasure. I should have had to go away for some time; and for that I had not the heart. I did think of it more than once. I would then tell Françoise to pack my boxes, and immediately afterwards to unpack them. (And as the spirit of imitation, the desire not to appear behind the times, alters the most natural and most positive form of oneself, Françoise, borrowing the expression from her daughter's vocabulary, used to remark that I was "dippy.") She did not approve of my tergiversations; she said that I was always "balancing," for when she was not aspiring to rival the moderns, she employed the very language of Saint-Simon. It is true that she liked it still less when I spoke to her authoritatively. She knew that this was not natural to me, and did not suit me, a condition which she expressed in the phrase "where there isn't a will." I should never have had the heart to leave Paris except in a direction that would bring me closer to Mme de Guermantes. This was by no means an impossibility. Would I not indeed find myself nearer to her than I was in the morning, in the street, solitary, humiliated, feeling that not a single one of the thoughts which I should have liked to convey to her ever reached her, in that weary marking time of my daily walks, which might go on indefinitely without getting me any further, if I were to go miles away from Mme de Guermantes, but to someone of her acquaintance, someone whom she knew to be particular in the choice of his friends and who appreciated me, who might speak to her about me, and if not obtain from her at least make her aware of what I wanted, someone thanks to whom at all events, simply because I should discuss with him whether or not it would be possible for him to convey this or that message to her, I should give to my solitary and silent meditations a new form, spoken, active, which would seem to me an advance, almost a realisation? What she did during the mysterious daily life of the "Guermantes" that she was—this was the constant object of my thoughts; and to break into that life, even by indirect means, as with a lever, by employing the services of a person who was not excluded from the Duchess's house, from her parties, from prolonged conversation with her, would not that be a contact more distant but at the same time more effective than my contemplation of her every morning in the street?

The friendship and admiration that Saint-Loup had shown me seemed to me undeserved and had hitherto left me unmoved. All at once I set great store by them; I would have liked him to disclose them to Mme de Guermantes, was quite prepared even to ask him to do so. For when we are in love, we long to be able to divulge to the woman we love all the little privileges we enjoy, as the deprived and the tiresome do in everyday life. We are distressed by her ignorance of them and we seek to console ourselves with the thought that precisely because they are never visible she has perhaps added to the opinion which she already has of us this possibility of further undisclosed virtues.

Saint-Loup had not for a long time been able to come to Paris, either, as he himself claimed, because of his military duties, or, as was more likely, because of the trouble he was having with his mistress, with whom he had twice now been on the point of breaking off. He had often told me what a pleasure it would be to him if I came to visit him in that garrison town the name of which, a couple of days after his leaving Balbec, had caused me so much joy when I had read it on the envelope of the first letter I had received from my friend. Not so far from Balbec as its wholly inland surroundings might have led one to think, it was one of those little fortified towns, aristocratic and military, set in a broad expanse of country over which on fine days there floats so often in the distance a sort of intermittent blur of sound which—as a screen of poplars by its sinuosities outlines the course of a river which one cannot see—indicates the movements of a regiment on manoeuvre that the very atmosphere of its streets, avenues and squares has been gradually tuned to a sort of perpetual vibrancy, musical and martial, and the most commonplace sound of cartwheel or tramway is prolonged in vague trumpet calls, indefinitely repeated, to the hallucinated ear, by the silence. It was not too far away from Paris for me to be able, if I took the express, to return to my mother and grandmother and sleep in my own bed. As soon as I realised this, troubled by a painful longing, I had too little will-power to decide not to return to Paris but rather to stay in the little town; but also too little to prevent a porter from carrying my luggage to a cab and not to adopt, as I walked behind him, the destitute soul of a traveller looking after his belongings with no grandmother in attendance, not to get into the carriage with the complete detachment of a person who, having ceased to think of what it is that he wants, has the air of knowing what he wants, and not to give the driver the address of the cavalry barracks. I thought that Saint-Loup might come and sleep that night in the hotel at which I should be staying, in order to make the first shock of contact with this strange town less painful for me. One of the guard went to find him, and I waited at the barracks gate, in front of that huge ship of stone, booming with the November wind, out of which, every moment, for it was now six o'clock,

men were emerging in pairs into the street, staggering as if they were coming ashore in some exotic port where they found themselves temporarily anchored.

Saint-Loup appeared, moving like a whirlwind, his monocle spinning in the air before him. I had not given my name, and was eager to enjoy his surprise and delight.

"Oh, what a bore!" he exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of me, and blushing to the tips of his ears. "I've just had a week's leave, and I shan't be off duty again for another week."

And, preoccupied by the thought of my having to spend this first night alone, for he knew better than anyone my bed-time agonies, which he had often noticed and soothed at Balbec, he broke off his lamentation to turn and look at me, coax me with little smiles, with tender though unsymmetrical glances, half of them coming directly from his eye, the other half through his monocle, but both sorts alike testifying to the emotion that he felt on seeing me again, testifying also to that important matter which I still did not understand but which now vitally concerned me, our friendship.

"I say, where are you going to sleep? Really, I can't recommend the hotel where we mess; it's next to the Exhibition ground, where there's a show just starting; you'll find it beastly crowded. No, you'd better go to the Hôtel de Flandre; it's a little eighteenth-century palace with old tapestries. It's quite the (*ça fait assez*) 'old historical dwelling.'"

Saint-Loup employed in every connexion the verb *faire* for "have the air of," because the spoken language, like the written, feels from time to time the need of these alterations in the meanings of words, these refinements of expression. And just as journalists often have not the least idea what school of literature the "turns of phrase" they use originate from, so the vocabulary, the very diction of Saint-Loup were formed in imitation of three different aesthetes none of whom he knew but whose modes of speech had been indirectly inculcated into him. "Besides," he concluded, "the hotel I mean is more or less adapted to your auditory hyperaesthesia. You will have no neighbours. I quite see that it's a slender advantage, and as, after all, another guest may arrive tomorrow, it would not be worth your while to choose that particular hotel on such precarious grounds. No, it's for its appearance that I recommend it. The rooms are rather attractive, all the furniture is old and comfortable; there's something reassuring about it." But to me, less of an artist than Saint-Loup, the pleasure that an attractive house might give one was superficial, almost non-existent, and could not calm my incipient anguish, as painful as that which I used to feel long ago at Combray when my mother did not come upstairs to say good night, or that which I felt on the evening of my arrival at Balbec in the room with the unnaturally high ceiling, which smelt of vetiver. Saint-Loup read all this in my fixed stare.

"A lot you care, though, about this charming palace, my poor fellow; you're quite pale; and here am I like a great brute talking to you about tapestries which you won't even have the heart to look at. I know the room they'll put you in; personally I find it most cheerful, but I can quite understand that it won't have the same effect on you with your sensitive nature. You mustn't think I don't understand you. I don't feel the same myself, but I can put myself in your place."

At that moment a sergeant who was exercising a horse on the square, entirely absorbed in making the animal jump, disregarding the salutes of passing troopers, but hurling volleys of oaths at such as got in his way, turned with a smile to Saint-Loup and, seeing that he had a friend with him, saluted us. But his horse, frothing, at once reared. Saint-Loup flung himself at its head, caught it by the bridle, succeeded in quieting it and returned to my side.

"Yes," he resumed, "I assure you that I fully understand and sympathise with what you are going through. I feel wretched," he went on, laying his hand affectionately on my shoulder, "when I think that if I could have stayed with you tonight, I might have been able, by chatting to you till morning, to relieve you of a little of your unhappiness. I could lend you some books, but you won't want to read if you're feeling like that. And I shan't be able to get anyone else to stand in for me here: I've done it twice running because my girl came down to see me."

And he knitted his brows with vexation and also in the effort to decide, like a doctor, what remedy he might best apply to my disease.

"Run along and light the fire in my quarters," he called to a trooper who passed by. "Hurry up; get a move on!"

Then, once more, he turned towards me, and once more his monocle and his peering, myopic gaze testified to our great friendship.

"No, really, you here, in these barracks where I've thought so much about you, I can scarcely believe my eyes, I feel I must be dreaming! But how is your health on the whole? A little better, I hope. You must tell me all about yourself presently. We'll go up to my room; we mustn't hang about too long on the square, there's the devil of a wind. I don't feel it now myself, but you aren't accustomed to it, I'm afraid of your catching cold. And what about your work? Have you settled down to it yet? No? You are an odd fellow! If I had your talent I'm sure I should be writing morning, noon and night. It amuses you more to do nothing. What a pity it is that it's the second-raters like me who are always ready to work, while the ones who could, don't want to! There, and I've clean forgotten to ask you how your grandmother is. Her Proudhon never leaves me."

A tall, handsome, majestic officer emerged with slow and solemn steps from the foot of a staircase. Saint-Loup saluted him and arrested the perpetual mobility of his body for the time it took him to hold his hand against the peak of his cap. But he had flung himself into the action with such force, straightening himself with so sharp a movement, and, the salute ended, brought his hand down with so abrupt a release, altering all the positions of shoulder, leg and monocle, that this moment was one not so much of immobility as of a vibrant tension in which the excessive movements which he had just made and those on which he was about

to embark were neutralised. Meanwhile the officer, without coming any nearer, calm, benevolent, dignified, imperial, representing, in short, the direct opposite of Saint-Loup, also raised his hand, but unhurriedly, to the peak of his cap.

"I must just say a word to the Captain," whispered Saint-Loup. "Be a good fellow, and go and wait for me in my room. It's the second on the right, on the third floor. I'll be with you in a minute."

And setting off at the double, preceded by his monocle which fluttered in every direction, he made straight for the slow and stately captain whose horse had just been brought round and who, before preparing to mount, was giving orders with a studied nobility of gesture as in some historical painting, and as though he were setting forth to take part in some battle of the First Empire, whereas he was simply going to ride home, to the house which he had taken for the period of his service at Doncières, and which stood in a square that was named, as though in an ironical anticipation of the arrival of this Napoleonid, Place de la République. I started to climb the staircase, nearly slipping on each of its nail-studded steps, catching glimpses of barrack-rooms, their bare walls bordered with a double line of beds and kits. I was shown Saint-Loup's room. I stood for a moment outside its closed door, for I could hear movement—something stirring, something being dropped. I felt the room was not empty, that there was somebody there. But it was only the freshly lighted fire beginning to burn. It could not keep quiet; it kept shifting its logs about, and very clumsily. As I entered the room, it let one roll into the fender and set another smoking. And even when it was not moving, like an ill-bred person it made noises all the time, which, from the moment I saw the flames rising, revealed themselves to me as noises made by a fire, although if I had been on the other side of a wall I should have thought that they came from someone who was blowing his nose and walking about. I sat down in the room and waited. Liberty hangings and old German stuffs of the eighteenth century preserved it from the smell exuded by the rest of the building, a coarse, stale, mouldy smell like that of wholemeal bread. It was here, in this charming room, that I could have dined and slept with a calm and happy mind. Saint-Loup seemed almost to be present in it by reason of the text-books which littered his table, between his photographs, among which I recognised my own and that of the Duchesse de Guermantes, by reason of the fire which had at length grown accustomed to the grate, and, like an animal crouching in an ardent, noiseless, faithful watchfulness, merely let fall now and then a smouldering log which crumbled into sparks, or licked with a tongue of flame the sides of the chimney. I heard the tick of Saint-Loup's watch, which could not be far away. This tick changed place every moment, for I could not see the watch; it seemed to come from behind, from in front of me, from my right, from my left, sometimes to die away as though it were a long way off. Suddenly I caught sight of the watch on the table. Then I heard the tick in a fixed place from which it did not move again. That is to say, I thought I heard it at this place; I did not hear it there, I saw it there, for sounds have no position in space. At least we associate them with movements, and in that way they serve the purpose of warning us of those movements, of appearing to make them necessary and natural. True, it sometimes happens that a sick man whose ears have been stopped with cotton-wool ceases to hear the noise of a fire such as was crackling at that moment in Saint-Loup's fireplace, labouring at the formation of brands and cinders, which it then dropped into the fender, nor would he hear the passage of the tram-cars whose music rose at regular intervals over the main square of Doncières. Then, if the sick man reads, the pages will turn silently as though fingered by a god. The ponderous rumble of a bath being filled becomes thin, faint and distant, like a celestial twittering. The withdrawal of sound, its dilution, rob it of all its aggressive power; alarmed a moment ago by hammer-blows which seemed to be shattering the ceiling above our head, we take pleasure now in receiving them, light, caressing, distant, like the murmur of leaves playing by the roadside with the passing breeze. We play games of patience with cards which we do not hear, so much so that we imagine that we have not touched them, that they are moving of their own accord, and, anticipating our desire to play with them, have begun to play with us. And in this connexion we may wonder whether, in the case of love (to which we may even add the love of life and the love of fame, since there are, it appears, persons who are acquainted with these latter sentiments), we shouldn't act like those who, when a noise disturbs them, instead of praying that it may cease, stop their ears; and, in emulation of them, bring our attention, our defences, to bear on ourselves, give them as an object to subdue not the external being whom we love, but our capacity for suffering through that being.

To return to the problem of sound, we have only to thicken the wads which close the aural passages, and they confine to a pianissimo the girl who has been playing a boisterous tune overhead; if we go further, and steep one of these wads in grease, at once the whole household must obey its despotic rule; its laws extend even beyond our portals. Pianissimo is no longer enough; the wad instantly closes the piano and the music lesson is abruptly ended; the gentleman who was walking up and down in the room above breaks off in the middle of his beat; the movement of carriages and trams is interrupted as though a sovereign were expected to pass. And indeed this attenuation of sounds sometimes disturbs our sleep instead of protecting it. Only yesterday the incessant noise in our ears, by describing to us in a continuous narrative all that was happening in the street and in the house, succeeded at length in sending us to sleep like a boring book; today, on the surface of silence spread over our sleep, a shock louder than the rest manages to make itself heard, gentle as a sigh, unrelated to any other sound, mysterious; and the demand for an explanation which it exhales is sufficient to awaken us. On the other hand, take away for a moment from the sick man the cotton-wool that has been stopping his ears and in a flash the broad daylight, the dazzling sun of sound dawns afresh, blinding him, is born again in the universe; the multitude of exiled sounds comes hastening back; we are present, as though it were the chanting of choirs of angels, at the resurrection of the voice. The empty streets are filled for a moment with the whirr of the swift and recurrent wings of the singing tram-cars. In the bedroom itself the sick man has created, not, like Prometheus, fire, but the sound of fire. And when we increase or reduce the

wads of cotton-wool, it is as though we were pressing alternately one and then the other of the two pedals which we have added to the sonority of the outer world.

Only there are also suppressions of sound which are not temporary. The man who has become completely deaf cannot even hear a pan of milk by his bedside without having to keep an eye open to watch, on the tilted lid, for the white hyperborean reflexion, like that of a coming snowstorm, which is the premonitory sign it is wise to obey by cutting off (as the Lord stilled the waves) the electric current; for already the fitfully swelling egg of the boiling milk is reaching its climax in a series of sidelong undulations, puffs out and fills a few drooping sails that had been puckered by the cream, sending a nacreous spinnaker bellying out in the hurricane, until the cutting off of the current, if the electric storm is exorcised in time, will make them all twirl round on themselves and scatter like magnolia petals. But should the sick man not have been quick enough in taking the necessary precautions, presently, his drowned books and watch scarcely emerging from the milky tidal wave, he will be obliged to call the old nurse, who, for all that he is an eminent statesman or a famous writer, will tell him that he has no more sense than a child of five. At other times in the magic chamber, standing inside the closed door, a person who was not there a moment ago will have made his appearance; it is a visitor who has entered unheard, and who merely gesticulates, like a figure in one of those little puppet theatres, so restful for those who have taken a dislike to the spoken tongue. And for this stone-deaf man, since the loss of a sense adds as much beauty to the world as its acquisition, it is with ecstasy that he walks now upon an earth become almost an Eden, in which sound has not yet been created. The highest waterfalls unfold for his eyes alone their sheets of crystal, stiller than the glassy sea, pure as the cascades of Paradise. Since sound was for him, before his deafness, the perceptible form which the cause of a movement assumed, objects moved soundlessly now seem to be moved without cause; deprived of the quality of sound, they show a spontaneous activity, seem to be alive. They move, halt, become alight of their own accord. Of their own accord they vanish in the air like the winged monsters of prehistory. In the solitary and neighbourless house of the deaf man, the service which, before his infirmity was complete, was already showing more reserve, was being executed silently, is now carried out, with a sort of surreptitious deftness, by mutes, as at the court of a fairy-tale king. And again as on the stage, the building which the deaf man looks out on from his window—whether barracks, church, or town hall—is only so much scenery. If one day it should fall to the ground, it may emit a cloud of dust and leave visible ruins; but, less substantial even than a palace on the stage, though it has not the same exiguity, it will subside in the magic universe without letting the fall of its heavy blocks of stone tarnish the chastity of the prevailing silence with the vulgarity of noise.

The silence, altogether more relative, which reigned in the little barrack-room where I sat waiting was now broken. The door opened and Saint-Loup rushed in, dropping his monocle.

"Ah, Robert, how comfortable it is here," I said to him. "How good it would be if one were allowed to dine and sleep here."

And indeed, had it not been against the regulations, what repose untinged by sadness I could have enjoyed there, guarded by that atmosphere of tranquillity, vigilance and gaiety which was maintained by a thousand ordered and untroubled wills, a thousand carefree minds, in that great community called a barracks where, time having taken the form of action, the sad bell that tolled the hours outside was replaced by the same joyous clarion of those martial calls, the ringing memory of which was kept perpetually alive in the paved streets of the town, like the dust that floats in a sunbeam—a voice sure of being heard, and musical because it was the command not only of authority to obedience but of wisdom to happiness.

"So you'd rather stay with me and sleep here, would you, than go to the hotel by yourself?" Saint-Loup asked me, smiling.

"Oh, Robert, it's cruel of you to be sarcastic about it," I answered. "You know it's not possible, and you know how wretched I shall be over there."

"Well, you flatter me!" he replied. "Because it actually occurred to me that you'd rather stay here tonight. And that is precisely what I went to ask the Captain."

"And he has given you leave?" I cried.

"He hadn't the slightest objection."

"Oh! I adore him!"

"No, that would be going too far. But now, let me just get hold of my batman and tell him to see about our dinner," he went on, while I turned away to hide my tears.

We were several times interrupted by the entry of one or other of Saint-Loup's comrades. He drove them all out again.

"Get out of here. Buzz off!"

I begged him to let them stay.

"No, really, they would bore you stiff. They're absolutely uncouth people who can talk of nothing but racing or stable shop. Besides, I don't want them here either; they would spoil these precious moments I've been looking forward to. Mind you, when I tell you that these fellows are brainless, it isn't that everything military is devoid of intellectuality. Far from it. We have a major here who's an admirable man. He's given us a course in which military history is treated like a demonstration, like a problem in algebra. Even from the aesthetic point of view there's a curious beauty, alternately inductive and deductive, about it which you couldn't fail to appreciate."

"That's not the officer who's given me leave to stay here tonight?"

"No, thank God! The man you 'adore' for so very trifling a service is the biggest fool that ever walked the face of the earth. He's perfect at looking after messing, and at kit inspections; he spends hours with the senior

sergeant and the master tailor. There you have his mentality. Besides, he has a vast contempt, like everyone here, for the excellent major in question, whom no one speaks to because he's a freemason and doesn't go to confession. The Prince de Borodino would never have an outsider like that in his house. Which is pretty fair cheek, when all's said and done, from a man whose great-grandfather was a small farmer, and who would probably be a small farmer himself if it hadn't been for the Napoleonic wars. Not that he isn't a little aware of his own rather ambiguous position in society, neither flesh nor fowl. He hardly ever shows his face at the Jockey, it makes him feel so deuced awkward, this so-called Prince," added Robert, who, having been led by the same spirit of imitation to adopt the social theories of his teachers and the worldly prejudices of his relatives, unconsciously combined a democratic love of humanity with a contempt for the nobility of the Empire.

I looked at the photograph of his aunt, and the thought that, since Saint-Loup had this photograph in his possession, he might perhaps give it to me, made me cherish him all the more and long to do him a thousand services, which seemed to me a very small exchange for it. For this photograph was like a supplementary encounter added to all those that I had already had with Mme de Guermantes; better still, a prolonged encounter, as if, by a sudden stride forward in our relations, she had stopped beside me, in a garden hat, and had allowed me for the first time to gaze at my leisure at that rounded cheek, that arched neck, that tapering eyebrow (veiled from me hitherto by the swiftness of her passage, the bewilderment of my impressions, the imperfection of memory); and the contemplation of them, as well as of the bare throat and arms of a woman whom I had never seen save in a high-necked and long-sleeved dress, was to me a voluptuous discovery, a priceless favour. Those forms, which had seemed to me almost a forbidden spectacle, I could study there as in a text-book of the only geometry that had any value for me. Later on, looking at Robert, it struck me that he too was a little like the photograph of his aunt, by a mysterious process which I found almost as moving, since, if his face had not been directly produced by hers, the two had nevertheless a common origin. The features of the Duchesse de Guermantes, which were pinned to my vision of Combray, the nose like a falcon's beak, the piercing eyes, seemed to have served also as a pattern for the cutting out—in another copy analogous and slender, with too delicate a skin—of Robert's face, which might almost be superimposed upon his aunt's. I looked longingly at those features of his so characteristic of the Guermantes, of that race which had remained so individual in the midst of a world in which it remained isolated in its divinely ornithological glory, for it seemed to have sprung, in the age of mythology, from the union of a goddess with a bird.

Robert, without being aware of its cause, was touched by my evident affection. This was moreover increased by the sense of well-being inspired in me by the heat of the fire and by the champagne which simultaneously bedewed my forehead with beads of sweat and my eyes with tears; it washed down some young partridges which I ate with the wonderment of a layman, of whatever sort he may be, who finds in a way of life with which he is not familiar what he has supposed it to exclude—the wonderment, for instance, of an atheist who sits down to an exquisitely cooked dinner in a presbytery. And next morning, when I awoke, I went over to Saint-Loup's window, which being at a great height overlooked the whole countryside, curious to make the acquaintance of my new neighbour, the landscape which I had not been able to see the day before, having arrived too late, at an hour when it was already sleeping beneath the outspread cloak of night. And yet, early as it had awoken, I could see it, when I opened the window and looked out, only as though from the window of a country house overlooking the lake, shrouded still in its soft white morning gown of mist which scarcely allowed me to make out anything at all. But I knew that, before the troopers who were busy with their horses in the square had finished grooming them, it would have cast its gown aside. In the meantime, I could see only a bare hill, raising its lean and rugged flanks, already swept clear of darkness, over the back of the barracks. Through the translucent screen of hoar-frost I could not take my eyes from this stranger who was looking at me too for the first time. But when I had formed the habit of coming to the barracks, my consciousness that the hill was there, more real, consequently, even when I did not see it, than the hotel at Balbec, than our house in Paris, of which I thought as of absent—or dead—friends, that is to say scarcely believing any longer in their existence, caused its reflected form, even without my realising it, to be silhouetted against the slightest impressions that I formed at Doncières, and among them, to begin with this first morning, the pleasing impression of warmth given me by the cup of chocolate, prepared by Saint-Loup's batman in this comfortable room, which seemed like a sort of optical centre from which to look out at the hill—the idea of doing anything else but just gaze at it, the idea of actually climbing it, being rendered impossible by this same mist. Imbued with the shape of the hill, associated with the taste of hot chocolate and with the whole web of my fancies at that particular time, this mist, without my having given it the least thought, came to infuse all my thoughts of that time, just as a massive and unmelting lump of gold had remained allied to my impressions of Balbec, or as the proximity of the outside steps of sandstone gave a greyish background to my impressions of Combray. It did not, however, persist late into the day; the sun began by hurling at it in vain a few darts which sprinkled it with brilliants, then finally overcame it. The hill might expose its grizzled rump to the sun's rays, which, an hour later, when I went into the town, gave to the russet tints of the autumn leaves, to the reds and blues of the election posters pasted on the walls, an exaltation which raised my spirits also and made me stamp, singing as I went, on the paving-stones from which I could hardly keep myself from jumping in the air for joy.

But after that first night I had to sleep at the hotel. And I knew beforehand that I was doomed to find sadness there. It was like an unbreathable aroma which all my life long had been exhaled for me by every new bedroom, that is to say by every bedroom—for in the one which I usually occupied I was not present, my mind remained elsewhere and sent mere Habit to take its place. But I could not employ this servant, less

sensitive than myself, to look after things for me in a new place, where I preceded him, where I arrived alone, where I must bring into contact with its environment that "Self" which I rediscovered only at year-long intervals, but always the same, not having grown at all since Combray, since my first arrival at Balbec, weeping inconsolably on the edge of an unpacked trunk.

As it happened, I was mistaken. I had no time to be sad, for I was not alone for an instant. The fact of the matter was that there remained of the old palace a surplus refinement of structure and decoration, out of place in a modern hotel, which, released from any practical assignment, had in its long spell of leisure acquired a sort of life: passages winding about in all directions, which one was continually crossing in their aimless wanderings, lobbies as long as corridors and as ornate as drawing-rooms, which had the air rather of dwelling there themselves than of forming part of the dwelling, which could not be induced to enter and settle down in any of the rooms but roamed about outside mine and came up at once to offer me their company—neighbours of a sort, idle but never noisy, menial ghosts of the past who had been granted the privilege of staying quietly by the doors of the rooms which were let to visitors, and who whenever I came across them greeted me with a silent deference. In short, the idea of a lodging, a mere container for our present existence, simply shielding us from the cold and from the sight of other people, was absolutely inapplicable to this dwelling, an assembly of rooms, as real as a colony of people, living, it was true, in silence, but which one was obliged to encounter, to avoid, to greet when one came in. One tried not to disturb, and one could not look at without respect, the great drawing-room which had formed, far back in the eighteenth century, the habit of stretching itself at its ease among its hangings of old gold beneath the clouds of its painted ceiling. And one was seized with a more personal curiosity as regards the smaller rooms which, without the least concern for symmetry, ran all round it, innumerable, startled, fleeing in disorder as far as the garden, to which they had so easy an access down three broken steps.

If I wished to go out or come in without taking the lift or being seen on the main staircase, a smaller private staircase, no longer in use, offered me its steps so skilfully arranged, one close above another, that there seemed to exist in their gradation a perfect proportion of the same kind as those which, in colours, scents, savours, often arouse in us a peculiar sensuous pleasure. But the pleasure to be found in going up and downstairs was one I had had to come here to learn, as once in an alpine resort I had found that the act—as a rule not noticed—of breathing can be a perpetual delight. I received that dispensation from effort which is granted to us only by the things to which long use has accustomed us, when I set my feet for the first time on those steps, familiar before ever I knew them, as if they possessed, stored up, incorporated in them perhaps by the masters of old whom they used to welcome every day, the prospective charm of habits which I had not yet contracted and which indeed could only dwindle once they had become my own. I went into a room; the double doors closed behind me, the hangings let in a silence in which I felt myself invested with a sort of exhilarating royalty; a marble fireplace with ornaments of wrought brass—of which one would have been wrong to think that its sole idea was to represent the art of the Directory—offered me a fire, and a little easy chair on short legs helped me to warm myself as comfortably as if I had been sitting on the hearthrug. The walls held the room in a close embrace, separating it from the rest of the world and, to let into it, to enclose in it what made it complete, parted to make way for the bookcase, reserved a place for the bed, on either side of which columns airily upheld the lofty ceiling of the alcove. And the room was prolonged in depth by two closets as wide as itself, one of which had hanging from its wall, to scent the occasion on which one had recourse to it, a voluptuous rosary of orris-roots; the doors, if I left them open when I withdrew into this innermost retreat, were not content with tripling its dimensions without spoiling its harmonious proportions, and not only allowed my eyes to enjoy the delights of extension after those of concentration, but added further to the pleasure of my solitude—which, while still inviolable, was no longer shut in—the sense of liberty. This closet gave on to a courtyard, a solitary fair stranger whom I was glad to have for a neighbour when next morning my eyes fell on her, a captive between her high walls in which no other window opened, with nothing but two yellowing trees which contrived to give a mauve softness to the pure sky above.

Before going to bed I left the room to explore the whole of my enchanted domain. I walked down a long gallery which displayed to me successively all that it had to offer me if I could not sleep, an armchair placed in a corner, a spinet, a blue porcelain vase filled with cinerarias on a console table, and, in an old frame, the phantom of a lady of long ago with powdered hair mingled with blue flowers, holding in her hand a bunch of carnations. When I came to the end, the bare wall in which no door opened said to me simply: "Now you must go back, but you see, you are at home here," while the soft carpet, not to be outdone, added that if I could not sleep that night I could perfectly well come in my bare feet, and the unshuttered windows looking out over the countryside assured me that they would keep a sleepless vigil and that, at whatever hour I chose to come, I need not be afraid of disturbing anyone. And behind a hanging curtain I came upon a little closet which, stopped by the outer wall and unable to escape, had hidden itself there shamefacedly and gave me a frightened stare from its little round window, glowing blue in the moonlight. I went to bed, but the presence of the eiderdown, of the slim columns, of the little fireplace, by screwing up my attention to a pitch beyond that of Paris, prevented me from surrendering to the habitual routine of my musings. And as it is this particular state of attention that enfolds our slumbers, acts upon them, modifies them, brings them into line with this or that series of past impressions, the images that filled my dreams that first night were borrowed from a memory entirely distinct from that on which I was in the habit of drawing. If I had been tempted while asleep to let myself be swept back into my usual current of remembrance, the bed to which I was not accustomed, the careful attention which I was obliged to pay to the position of my limbs when I turned over, were sufficient to adjust or maintain the new thread of my dreams. It is the same with sleep as with our



perception of the external world. It needs only a modification in our habits to make it poetic, it is enough that while undressing we should have dozed off involuntarily on top of the bed for the dimensions of sleep to be altered and its beauty felt. We wake up, look at our watch and see "four o'clock"; it is only four o'clock in the morning, but we imagine that the whole day has gone by, so vividly does this unsolicited nap of a few minutes appear to have come down to us from heaven, by virtue of some divine right, huge and solid as an Emperor's orb of gold. In the morning, worried by the thought that my grandfather was ready and they were waiting for me to set out for our walk along the Méséglise way, I was awakened by the blare of a regimental band which passed every day beneath my windows. But two or three times—and I say this because one cannot properly describe human life unless one bathes it in the sleep into which it plunges night after night and which sweeps round it as a promontory is encircled by the sea—the intervening layer of sleep was resistant enough to withstand the impact of the music and I heard nothing. On other mornings it gave way for a moment; but my consciousness, still muffled from sleep (like those organs by which, after a preliminary anaesthetic, a cauterisation, not perceived at first, is felt only at the very end and then as a faint smarting), was touched only gently by the shrill points of the fifes which caressed it with a vague, cool, matutinal warbling; and after this fragile interruption in which the silence had turned to music it relapsed into my slumber before even the dragoons had finished passing, depriving me of the last blossoming sheafs of the surging bouquet of sound. And the zone of my consciousness which its springing stems had brushed was so narrow, so circumscribed with sleep that later on, when Saint-Loup asked me whether I had heard the band, I was not certain that the sound of its brasses had not been as imaginary as that which I heard during the day echoing, after the slightest noise, from the paved streets of the town. Perhaps I had heard it only in my dreams, prompted by my fear of being awakened, or else of not being awakened and so not seeing the regiment march past. For often when I remained asleep at the moment when on the contrary I had supposed that the noise would awaken me, for the next hour I imagined that I was awake, while still dozing, and I enacted to myself with tenuous shadow-shapes on the screen of my slumber the various scenes of which it deprived me but at which I had the illusion of looking on.

Indeed, what one has meant to do during the day it turns out, sleep intervening, that one accomplishes only in one's dreams, that is to say after it has been diverted by drowsiness into following a different path from that which one would have chosen when awake. The same story branches off and has a different ending. When all is said, the world in which we live when we are asleep is so different that people who have difficulty in going to sleep seek first of all to escape from the waking world. After having desperately, for hours on end, with their eyes closed, revolved in their minds thoughts similar to those which they would have had with their eyes open, they take heart again on noticing that the preceding minute has been weighed down by a line of reasoning in strict contradiction to the laws of logic and the reality of the present, this brief "absence" signifying that the door is now open through which they may perhaps presently be able to escape from the perception of the real, to advance to a resting-place more or less remote from it, which will mean their having a more or less "good" night. But already a great stride has been made when we turn our backs on the real, when we reach the outer caves in which "auto-suggestions" prepare—like witches—the hell-broth of imaginary illnesses or of the recurrence of nervous disorders, and watch for the hour when the spasms which have been building up during the unconsciousness of sleep will be unleashed with sufficient force to make sleep cease.

Not far thence is the secret garden in which the kinds of sleep, so different one from another, induced by datura, by Indian hemp, by the multiple extracts of ether—the sleep of belladonna, of opium, of valerian—grow like unknown flowers whose petals remain closed until the day when the predestined stranger comes to open them with a touch and to liberate for long hours the aroma of their peculiar dreams for the delectation of an amazed and spellbound being. At the end of the garden stands the convent with open windows through which we hear voices repeating the lessons learned before we went to sleep, which we shall know only at the moment of awakening; while, presaging that moment, our inner alarm-clock ticks away, so well regulated by our preoccupation that when our housekeeper comes in and tells us it is seven o'clock she will find us awake and ready. The dim walls of that chamber which opens upon our dreams and within which the sorrows of love are wrapped in that oblivion whose incessant toil is interrupted and annulled at times by a nightmare heavy with reminiscences, but quickly resumed, are hung, even after we are awake, with the memories of our dreams, but they are so murky that often we catch sight of them for the first time only in the broad light of the afternoon when the ray of a similar idea happens by chance to strike them; some of them, clear and harmonious while we slept, already so distorted that, having failed to recognise them, we can but hasten to lay them in the earth, like corpses too quickly decomposed or relics so seriously damaged, so nearly crumbling into dust that the most skilful restorer could not give them back a shape or make anything of them.

Near the gate is the quarry to which our heavier slumbers repair in search of substances which coat the brain with so unbreakable a glaze that, to awaken the sleeper, his own will is obliged, even on a golden morning, to smite him with mighty blows, like a young Siegfried. Beyond this, again, are nightmares, of which the doctors foolishly assert that they tire us more than does insomnia, whereas on the contrary they enable the thinker to escape from the strain of thought—nightmares with their fantastic picture-books in which our relatives who are dead are shown meeting with serious accidents which at the same time do not preclude their speedy recovery. Until then we keep them in a little rat-cage, in which they are smaller than white mice and, covered with big red spots out of each of which a feather sprouts, regale us with Ciceronian speeches. Next to this picture-book is the revolving disc of awakening, by virtue of which we submit for a moment to the tedium of having to return presently to a house which was pulled down fifty years ago, the image of which is

gradually effaced by a number of others as sleep recedes, until we arrive at the image which appears only when the disc has ceased to revolve and which coincides with the one we shall see with opened eyes.

Sometimes I had heard nothing, being in one of those slumbers into which we fall as into a pit from which we are heartily glad to be drawn up a little later, heavy, overfed, digesting all that has been brought to us (as by the nymphs who fed the infant Hercules) by those agile vegetative powers whose activity is doubled while we sleep.

We call that a leaden sleep, and it seems as though, even for a few moments after such a sleep is ended, one has oneself become a simple figure of lead. One is no longer a person. How then, searching for one's thoughts, one's personality, as one searches for a lost object, does one recover one's own self rather than any other? Why, when one begins again to think, is it not a personality other than the previous one that becomes incarnate in one? One fails to see what dictates the choice, or why, among the millions of human beings one might be, it is on the being one was the day before that unerringly one lays one's hand. What is it that guides us, when there has been a real interruption—whether it be that our unconsciousness has been complete or our dreams entirely different from ourselves? There has indeed been death, as when the heart has ceased to beat and a rhythmical traction of the tongue revives us. No doubt the room, even if we have seen it only once before, awakens memories to which other, older memories cling, or perhaps some were dormant in us, of which we now become conscious. The resurrection at our awakening—after that beneficent attack of mental alienation which is sleep—must after all be similar to what occurs when we recall a name, a line, a refrain that we had forgotten. And perhaps the resurrection of the soul after death is to be conceived as a phenomenon of memory.

When I had finished sleeping, tempted by the sunlit sky but held back by the chill of those last autumn mornings, so luminous and so cold, which herald winter, in order to look at the trees on which the leaves were indicated now only by a few strokes of gold or pink which seemed to have been left in the air, on an invisible web, I raised my head from the pillow and stretched my neck, keeping my body still hidden beneath the bedclothes; like a chrysalis in the process of metamorphosis, I was a dual creature whose different parts were not adapted to the same environment; for my eyes colour was sufficient, without warmth; my chest on the other hand was anxious for warmth and not for colour. I got up only after my fire had been lighted, and studied the picture, so delicate and transparent, of the pink and golden morning, to which I had now added by artificial means the element of warmth that it lacked, poking my fire which burned and smoked like a good pipe and gave me, as a pipe would have given me, a pleasure at once coarse because it was based upon a material comfort and delicate because behind it were the soft outlines of a pure vision. The walls of my dressing-room were papered in a violent red, sprinkled with black and white flowers to which it seemed that I should have some difficulty in growing accustomed. But they succeeded only in striking me as novel, in forcing me to enter not into conflict but into contact with them, in modulating the gaiety and the songs of my morning ablutions; they succeeded only in imprisoning me in the heart of a sort of poppy, out of which to look at a world which I saw quite otherwise than in Paris, from the gay screen which was this new dwelling-place, of a different aspect from the house of my parents, and into which flowed a purer air.

On certain days, I was agitated by the desire to see my grandmother again or by the fear that she might be ill, or else by the memory of some business left half-finished in Paris, which seemed to have made no progress, or sometimes, again, by some difficulty in which, even here, I had managed to become involved. One or other of these anxieties would have prevented me from sleeping, and I would be powerless to face up to my depression, which in an instant would fill the whole of my existence. Then I would send a messenger from the hotel to the barracks with a note for Saint-Loup, telling him that if it was physically possible—I knew that it was extremely difficult for him—I should be most grateful if he would look in for a minute. An hour later he would arrive; and on hearing his ring at the door I felt myself liberated from my obsessions. I knew that, if they were stronger than I, he was stronger than they, and my attention was diverted from them and turned towards him, who would know how to settle them. On entering the room he would at once envelop me in the fresh air in which from early morning he had been active and busy, a vital atmosphere very different from that of my room, to which I at once adapted myself by appropriate reactions.

"I hope you weren't angry with me for bothering you. There is something that's worrying me, as you probably guessed."

"Not at all. I just supposed you wanted to see me, and I thought it very nice of you. I was delighted that you sent for me. But what's the trouble? Things not going well? What can I do to help?"

He would listen to my explanations, and give precise answers; but before he uttered a word he would have transformed me to his own likeness; compared with the important occupations which kept him so busy, so alert, so happy, the worries which a moment ago I had been unable to endure for another instant seemed to me as negligible as they did to him. I was like a man who, having been unable to open his eyes for some days, sends for a doctor, who neatly and gently raises his eyelid, removes from beneath it a grain of sand, and shows it to him; the sufferer is healed and comforted. All my cares resolved themselves in a telegram which Saint-Loup undertook to dispatch. Life seemed to me so different, so delightful, I was flooded with such a surfeit of strength, that I longed for action.

"What are you doing now?" I asked him.

"I must leave you, I'm afraid. We're going on a route march in three quarters of an hour, and I have to be on parade."

"Then it's been a great bother to you, coming here?"

"No, no bother at all, the Captain was very good about it. He told me that if it was for you I must go at once. But I don't like to seem to be abusing the privilege."

"But if I got up and dressed quickly and went by myself to the place where you'll be training, it would interest me immensely, and I could perhaps talk to you during the breaks."

"I shouldn't advise you to do that. You've been lying awake, fretting about something that I assure you is not of the slightest importance, but now that it has ceased to worry you, you should turn over and go to sleep—you'll find it an excellent antidote to the demineralisation of your nerve-cells. Only you mustn't go to sleep too soon, because our band-boys will be coming along under your windows. But as soon as they've passed I think you'll be left in peace, and we shall meet again this evening at dinner."

But soon I was constantly going to see the regiment doing field manoeuvres, when I began to take an interest in the military theories which Saint-Loup's friends used to expound over the dinner-table, and when it had become the chief desire of my life to see at close quarters their various leaders, just as a person who makes music his principal study and spends his life in the concert halls finds pleasure in frequenting the cafés in which one can share the life of the members of the orchestra. To reach the training ground I used to have to make long journeys on foot. In the evening after dinner the longing for sleep made my head droop every now and then as in a fit of vertigo. Next morning I realised that I had not heard the band any more than, at Balbec, after the evenings on which Saint-Loup had taken me to dinner at Rivebelle, I used to hear the concert on the beach. And when I wanted to get up I had a delicious sensation of being incapable of doing so; I felt myself fastened to a deep, invisible soil by the articulations (of which my tiredness made me conscious) of muscular and nutritious roots. I felt myself full of strength; life seemed to extend more amply before me; for I had reverted to the healthy tiredness of my childhood at Combray on mornings after the days when we had taken the Guermantes walk. Poets claim that we recapture for a moment the self that we were long ago when we enter some house or garden in which we used to live in our youth. But these are most hazardous pilgrimages, which end as often in disappointment as in success. It is in ourselves that we should rather seek to find those fixed places, contemporaneous with different years. And great fatigue followed by a good night's rest can to a certain extent help us to do so. For in order to make us descend into the most subterranean galleries of sleep, where no reflexion from overnight, no gleam of memory comes to light up the interior monologue—if the latter does not itself cease—fatigue followed by rest will so thoroughly turn over the soil and penetrate the bedrock of our bodies that we discover down there, where our muscles plunge and twist in their ramifications and breathe in new life, the garden where we played in our childhood. There is no need to travel in order to see it again; we must dig down inwardly to discover it. What once covered the earth is no longer above but beneath it; a mere excursion does not suffice for a visit to the dead city: excavation is necessary also. But we shall see how certain fugitive and fortuitous impressions carry us back even more effectively to the past, with a more delicate precision, with a more light-winged, more immaterial, more headlong, more unerring, more immortal flight, than these organic dislocations.

Sometimes my exhaustion was greater still. I had followed the manoeuvres for several days on end without being able to go to bed. How blissful then was my return to the hotel! As I got into bed I seemed to have escaped at last from the hands of enchanters and sorcerers like those who people the "romances" beloved of our forebears in the seventeenth century. My sleep that night and the lazy morning that followed it were no more than a charming fairy tale. Charming; beneficent perhaps also. I reminded myself that the worst sufferings have their place of sanctuary, that one can always, when all else fails, find rest. These thoughts carried me far.

On days when, although there was no parade, Saint-Loup had to stay in barracks, I used often to go and visit him there. It was a long way; I had to leave the town and cross the viaduct, from either side of which I had an immense view. A strong breeze blew almost always over this high ground, and swept round the buildings erected on three sides of the barrack-square, which howled incessantly like a cave of the winds. While I waited for Robert—he being engaged on some duty or other—outside the door of his room or in the mess, talking to some of his friends to whom he had introduced me (and whom later I came to see from time to time, even when he was not going to be there), looking down from the window at the countryside three hundred feet below me, bare now except where recently sown fields, often still soaked with rain and glittering in the sun, showed a few strips of green, of the brilliance and translucent limpidity of enamel, I often heard him discussed by the others, and I soon learned what a popular favourite he was. Among many of the volunteers, belonging to other squadrons, sons of rich business or professional men who looked at aristocratic high society only from outside and without penetrating its enclosure, the attraction which they naturally felt towards what they knew of Saint-Loup's character was reinforced by the glamour that attached in their eyes to the young man whom, on Saturday evenings, when they went on pass to Paris, they had seen supping in the Café de la Paix with the Duc d'Uzès and the Prince d'Orléans. And on that account they associated his handsome face, his casual way of walking and saluting, the perpetual dance of his monocle, the jaunty eccentricity of his service dress—the caps always too high, the breeches of too fine a cloth and too pink a shade—with a notion of elegance and "tone" which, they averred, was lacking in the best turned-out officers in the regiment, even the majestic Captain to whom I had been indebted for the privilege of sleeping in barracks, who seemed, in comparison, too pompous and almost common.

One of them mentioned that the Captain had bought a new horse. "He can buy as many horses as he likes. I passed Saint-Loup on Sunday morning in the Allée des Acacias. He's got altogether more style on a horse!" replied his companion with the knowledge of experience, for these young men belonged to a class which, if it does not frequent the same houses and know the same people, yet, thanks to money and leisure, does not

differ from the nobility in its experience of all those refinements of life which money can procure. At most their elegance, in the matter of clothes, for instance, had something more studied, more impeccable about it than that relaxed and careless elegance which had so delighted my grandmother in Saint-Loup. It gave quite a thrill to these sons of big stockbrokers or bankers, as they sat eating oysters after the theatre, to see Sergeant Saint-Loup at an adjoining table. And what a tale there was to tell in barracks on Monday night, after a week-end leave, by one of them who was in Robert's squadron, and to whom he had said how d'ye do "most civilly," while another, who was not in the same squadron, was quite positive that in spite of this Saint-Loup had recognised him, for two or three times he had put up his monocle and stared in the speaker's direction.

"Yes, my brother saw him at the Paix," said another, who had been spending the day with his mistress. "Apparently his dress coat was cut too loose and didn't fit him."

"What was the waistcoat like?"

"He wasn't wearing a white waistcoat; it was purple, with sort of palms on it—smashing!"

To the "old soldiers" (sons of the soil who had never heard of the Jockey Club and simply put Saint-Loup in the category of ultra-rich non-commissioned officers, in which they included all those who, whether bankrupt or not, lived in a certain style, whose income or debts ran into several figures, and who were generous towards their men), the gait, the monocle, the breeches, the caps of Saint-Loup, even if they saw in them nothing particularly aristocratic, furnished nevertheless just as much interest and meaning. They recognised in these peculiarities the character, the style which they had assigned once and for all to this most popular of the "stripes" in the regiment, manners like no one else's, scornful indifference to what his superior officers might think, which seemed to them the natural corollary of his kindness to his subordinates. The morning cup of coffee in the canteen, the afternoon rest in the barrack-room, seemed pleasanter when some old soldier fed the greedy and idle squad with some savoury tit-bit about a cap of Saint-Loup's.

"It was the height of my pack."

"Come off it, old chap, you're having us on, it couldn't have been the height of your pack," interrupted a young college graduate who hoped by using these slang terms not to appear a greenhorn, and by venturing on this contradiction to obtain confirmation of a fact which enchanted him.

"Oh, so it wasn't the height of my pack, wasn't it? You measured it, I suppose! I tell you this much, the CO glared at him as if he'd have liked to put him in clink. But you needn't think the great Saint-Loup was rattled, oh no, he came and he went, and down with his head and up with his head, and always that trick with the monocle. We'll see what the Cap'n has to say when he hears. Oh, very likely he'll say nothing, but you may be sure he won't be pleased. But there's nothing so wonderful about that cap. I hear he's got thirty of 'em and more at home in town."

"How come you heard about it, old man? From our blasted Corp?" asked the young graduate, pedantically displaying the new grammatical forms which he had only recently acquired and with which he took a pride in garnishing his conversation.

"How come I heard it? From his batman of course!"

"Ah, there's a bloke who knows when he's well off!"

"I should think so! He's got more brass than I have, that's for sure! And besides he gives him all his own belongings and everything. He wasn't getting enough grub in the canteen, he says. So along comes de Saint-Loup and gives cooky hell: 'I want him to be properly fed, d'you hear,' he says, 'and I don't care what it costs.'"

The old soldier made up for the triviality of the words quoted by the emphasis of his tone, in a feeble imitation of the speaker which had an immense success.

On leaving the barracks I would take a stroll, and then, to fill up the time before I went, as I did every evening, to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel in which he and his friends had established their mess, I walked back to my own, as soon as the sun went down, so as to have a couple of hours in which to rest and read. In the square, the evening sky bedecked the pepper-pot turrets of the castle with little pink clouds which matched the colour of the bricks, and completed the harmony by softening the tone of the latter with a sunset glow. So strong a current of vitality coursed through my veins that no movement on my part could exhaust it; each step I took, after touching a paving-stone of the square, rebounded off it. I seemed to have the wings of Mercury growing on my heels. One of the fountains was filled with a ruddy glow, while in the other the moonlight had already begun to turn the water opalescent. Between them were children at play, uttering shrill cries, wheeling in circles, obeying some necessity of the hour, like swifts or bats. Next door to the hotel, the old law-courts and the Louis XVI orangery, in which were now installed the savings bank and the Army Corps headquarters, were lit from within by the palely gilded globes of their gas-jets which, already aglow though it was still daylight outside, suited those vast, tall, eighteenth-century windows from which the last gleams of the setting sun had not yet departed, as a head-dress of yellow tortoise-shell might suit a complexion heightened with rouge, and persuaded me to seek out my fireside and the lamp which, alone in the shadowy façade of my hotel, was striving to resist the gathering darkness, and for the sake of which I went indoors before it was quite dark, for pleasure, as to an appetising meal. I retained, in my lodgings, the same fullness of sensation that I had felt outside. It gave such an apparent convexity of surface to things which as a rule seem flat and insipid—to the yellow flame of the fire, the coarse blue paper of the sky on which the setting sun had scribbled corkscrews and whirligigs like a schoolboy with a piece of red chalk, the curiously patterned cloth on the round table on which a ream of essay paper and an inkpot lay in readiness for me together with one of Bergotte's novels—that ever since then these things have continued to seem to me to abound in a richly particular form of existence which I feel that I should be able to extract from them if it were granted me to set

eyes on them again. I thought with joy of the barracks I had just left and of its weather-cock turning with every wind that blew. Like a diver breathing through a pipe which rises above the surface of the water, I felt that I was in some sense linked to a healthy, open-air life through my connexion with those barracks, that towering observatory dominating a countryside furrowed with strips of green enamel, into whose various buildings I esteemed it a priceless privilege, which I hoped would last, to be free to go whenever I chose, always certain of a welcome.

At seven o'clock I dressed and went out again to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel where he took his meals. I liked to go there on foot. It was by now pitch dark, and after the third day of my visit, as soon as night had fallen an icy wind began blowing which seemed a harbinger of snow. As I walked, I ought not, one might have supposed, to have ceased for a moment to think of Mme de Guermantes; it was only in an attempt to draw nearer to her that I had come to visit Robert's garrison. But memories and griefs are fleeting things. There are days when they recede so far that we are barely conscious of them, we think that they have gone for ever. Then we pay attention to other things. And the streets of this town had not yet become for me what streets are in the place where one is accustomed to live, simply means of getting from one place to another. The life led by the inhabitants of this unknown world must, it seemed to me, be a thing of wonder, and often the lighted windows of some dwelling kept me standing for a long while motionless in the dark by laying before my eyes the actual and mysterious scenes of an existence into which I might not penetrate. Here the fire-spirit displayed to me in a crimson tableau a chestnut-seller's booth in which a couple of non-commissioned officers, their belts slung over the backs of chairs, were playing cards, never dreaming that a magician's wand was conjuring them out of the night like an apparition on the stage and presenting them as they actually were at that very moment to the eyes of a spellbound passer-by whom they could not see. In a little curio shop a half-spent candle, projecting its warm glow over an engraving, reprinted it in sanguine, while, battling against the darkness, the light of a big lamp bronzed a scrap of leather, inlaid a dagger with glittering spangles, spread a film of precious gold like the patina of time or the varnish of an old master on pictures which were only bad copies, made in fact of the whole hovel, in which there was nothing but pinch-beck rubbish, a marvellous composition by Rembrandt. Sometimes I lifted my eyes to gaze at some huge old dwelling-house whose shutters had not been closed and in which amphibious men and women, adapting themselves anew each evening to living in a different element from their day-time one, floated slowly to and fro in the rich liquid that after nightfall rose incessantly from the wells of the lamps to fill the rooms to the very brink of their outer walls of stone and glass, the displacement of their bodies sending oleaginous golden ripples through it. I proceeded on my way, and often, in the dark alley that ran past the cathedral, as long ago on the road to Méséglise, the force of my desire caught and held me; it seemed that a woman must be on the point of appearing, to satisfy it; if, in the darkness, I suddenly felt a skirt brush past me, the violence of the pleasure which I then felt made it impossible for me to believe that the contact was accidental and I attempted to seize in my arms a terrified stranger. This Gothic alley meant for me something so real that if I had been successful in picking up and enjoying a woman there, it would have been impossible for me not to believe that it was the ancient charm of the place that was bringing us together, even if she were no more than a common street-walker, stationed there every evening, whom the wintry night, the strange place, the darkness, the mediaeval atmosphere had invested with their mysterious glamour. I thought of what might be in store for me; to try to forget Mme de Guermantes seemed to me to be painful, but sensible, and for the first time possible, even perhaps easy. In the absolute quiet of this neighbourhood I could hear ahead of me shouted words and laughter which must come from tipsy revellers staggering home. I waited to see them; I stood peering in the direction from which I had heard the noise. But I was obliged to wait for some time, for the surrounding silence was so intense that it had allowed sounds that were still a long way off to penetrate it with the utmost clarity and force. Finally the revellers did appear; not, as I had supposed, in front of me, but far behind. Whether because the intersection of side streets and the interposition of buildings had, by reverberation, brought about this acoustic error, or because it is very difficult to locate a sound when its position is unknown to us, I had been as mistaken about direction as about distance.

The wind grew stronger. It was grainy and bristling with coming snow. I returned to the main street and jumped on board the little tram, from the platform of which an officer was acknowledging, without seeming to see them, the salutes of the uncouth soldiers who trudged past along the pavement, their faces daubed crimson by the cold, reminding me, in this little town which the sudden leap from autumn into early winter seemed to have transported further north, of the rubicund faces which Breughel gives to his merry, junketing, frostbound peasants.

And indeed at the hotel where I was to meet Saint-Loup and his friends and to which the festive season now beginning attracted a number of people from near and far, I found, as I hurried across the courtyard with its glimpses of glowing kitchens in which chickens were turning on spits, pigs were roasting, lobsters were being flung alive into what the landlord called the "everlasting fire," an influx (worthy of some *Numbering of the People at Bethlehem* such as the Old Flemish masters used to paint) of new arrivals who assembled there in groups, asking the landlord or one of his staff (who, if they did not like the look of them, would recommend lodgings elsewhere in the town) for bed and board, while a scullion hurried past holding a struggling fowl by the neck. And similarly, in the big dining-room which I passed through on the first day before coming to the little room where my friend was waiting for me, it was of some Biblical repast portrayed with mediaeval naïvety and Flemish exaggeration that one was reminded by the quantity of fish, chickens, grouse, woodcock, pigeons, brought in dressed and garnished and piping hot by breathless waiters who slid along the polished floor for greater speed and set them down on the huge sideboard where they were carved at once, but where—

for many diners were finishing when I arrived—they piled up untouched, as though their profusion and the haste of those who brought them were inspired far less by a desire to meet the requirements of the diners than by respect for the sacred text, scrupulously followed in the letter but naïvely illustrated with real details borrowed from local custom, and by an aesthetic and religious anxiety to make evident to the eye the splendour of the feast by the profusion of the victuals and the assiduity of the servers. One of these stood lost in thought by a sideboard at the far end of the room; and to find out from him, who alone appeared calm enough to be capable of answering me, in which room our table had been laid, I made my way forward among the chafing-dishes that had been lighted here and there to keep the late-comers' plates from growing cold (which did not, however, prevent the dessert, in the centre of the room, from being piled in the outstretched hands of a huge mannikin, sometimes supported on the wings of a duck, apparently of crystal but really of ice, carved afresh every day with a hot iron by a sculptor-cook, quite in the Flemish manner), and, at the risk of being knocked down by his colleagues, went straight towards this servitor in whom I felt I recognised a character traditionally present in these sacred subjects, for he reproduced with scrupulous accuracy the simple, snub-nosed, ill-drawn features and dreamy expression, already half aware of the miracle of a divine presence which the others have not yet begun to suspect. In addition—doubtless in view of the coming festivities—the cast was reinforced by a celestial contingent recruited entirely from a reserve of cherubim and seraphim. A young angel musician, with fair hair framing a fourteen-year-old face, was not, it was true, playing an instrument, but stood musing before a gong or a pile of plates, while other less infantile angels flew swiftly across the boundless expanse of the room, beating the air with the ceaseless fluttering of the napkins which dangled from them like the wings in primitive paintings, with pointed ends. Fleeing those ill-defined regions, screened by a hedge of palms, from which the angelic servitors looked, at a distance, as though they had floated down out of the empyrean, I forced my way through to the smaller room in which Saint-Loup's table was laid. I found there several of his friends who dined with him regularly, nobles except for one or two commoners in whom the young nobles had, as early as their school-days, detected likely friends, and with whom they readily fraternised, proving thereby that they were not in principle hostile to the middle classes, even if they were Republican, provided they had clean hands and went to mass. On the first of these evenings, before we sat down to dinner, I drew Saint-Loup into a corner and, in front of all the rest but so that they should not hear me, said to him:

"Robert, this is hardly the time or the place for what I am going to say, but I shan't be a second. I keep forgetting to ask you when I'm in the barracks: isn't that Mme de Guermantes's photograph that you have on your table?"

"Why, yes, she's my dear aunt."

"Of course she is; what a fool I am. I used to know that, but I'd never thought about it. I say, your friends will be getting impatient, we must be quick, they're looking at us. Or another time will do; it isn't at all important."

"That's all right, carry on. They can wait."

"No, no, I do want to be polite to them; they're so nice. Besides, it doesn't really matter in the least, I assure you."

"Do you know the worthy Oriane, then?"

This "worthy Oriane," as he might have said "the good Oriane," did not imply that Saint-Loup regarded Mme de Guermantes as especially good. In this instance the words "good," "excellent," "worthy," are mere reinforcements of the definite article indicating a person who is known to both parties and of whom the speaker does not quite know what to say to someone outside the family circle. The word "good" does duty as a stop-gap and keeps the conversation going for a moment until the speaker has hit upon "Do you see much of her?" or "I haven't set eyes on her for months," or "I shall be seeing her on Tuesday," or "She must be getting on, now, you know."

"I can't tell you how funny it is that it should be her photograph, because we're living in her house now, and I've been hearing the most astounding things about her" (I should have been hard put to it to say what) "which have made me immensely interested in her, only from a literary point of view, you understand, from a—how shall I put it—from a Balzacian point of view. You're so clever you can see what I mean without my having to explain. But we must hurry up. What on earth will your friends think of my manners?"

"They'll think absolutely nothing. I've told them you're sublime, and they're a great deal more nervous than you are."

"You really are too kind. But listen, what I want to say is this: I suppose Mme de Guermantes hasn't any idea that I know you, has she?"

"I can't say. I haven't seen her since the summer, because I haven't had any leave since she's been in town."

"The fact of the matter is, I've been told that she regards me as an absolute idiot."

"That I do not believe. Oriane isn't exactly a genius, but all the same she's by no means stupid."

"You know that as a rule I'm not at all keen on your advertising the good opinion you're kind enough to hold of me; I'm not conceited. That's why I'm sorry you should have said flattering things about me to your friends here (whom we'll join in two seconds). But Mme de Guermantes is different. If you could let her know—even with a bit of exaggeration—what you think of me, you would give me great pleasure."

"Why, of course I will. If that's all you want me to do, it's not very difficult. But what difference can it possibly make to you what she thinks of you? I suppose you think her no end of a joke, really. Anyhow, if that's all you want we can discuss it in front of the others or when we're by ourselves; I'm afraid of your tiring

yourself if you stand talking, especially in such awkward conditions, when we have heaps of opportunities of being alone together.”

It was precisely these awkward conditions that had given me courage to approach Robert; the presence of the others was for me a pretext that justified my giving my remarks a brief and disjointed form, under cover of which I could more easily dissemble the falsehood of my saying to my friend that I had forgotten his connexion with the Duchess, and also for not giving him time to frame—with regard to my reasons for wishing Mme de Guermantes to know that I was his friend, was clever, and so forth—questions which would have been all the more disturbing in that I should not have been able to answer them.

“Robert, I’m surprised that a man of your intelligence should fail to understand that one doesn’t discuss the things that will give one’s friends pleasure; one does them. Now I, if you were to ask me no matter what—and indeed I only wish you would ask me to do something for you—I can assure you I shouldn’t demand any explanations. I’ve gone further than I really meant; I have no desire to know Mme de Guermantes, but just to test you I ought to have said that I was anxious to dine with Mme de Guermantes and I’m sure you would never have done it.”

“Not only would I have done it, but I will do it.”

“When?”

“Next time I’m in Paris, three weeks from now, I expect.”

“We shall see. I dare say she won’t want to see me, though. I can’t tell you how grateful I am.”

“Not at all, it’s nothing.”

“Don’t say that; it’s tremendous, because now I can see what a friend you are. Whether what I ask you to do is important or not, disagreeable or not, whether I mean it truly or only to test you, it makes no difference: you say you will do it, and there you show the fineness of your mind and heart. A stupid friend would have argued.”

This was exactly what he had just been doing; but perhaps I wanted to flatter his self-esteem; perhaps also I was sincere, the sole touchstone of merit seeming to me to be the extent to which a friend could be useful in respect of the one thing that seemed to me to have any importance, my love. Then I added, perhaps out of duplicity, perhaps in a genuine access of affection inspired by gratitude, by self-interest, and by all the similarities with Mme de Guermantes’s very features which nature had reproduced in her nephew Robert:

“But now we must really join the others, and I’ve mentioned only one of the two things I wanted to ask you, the less important; the other is more important to me, but I’m afraid you’ll never consent. Would it annoy you if we were to call each other *tu*?”

“Annoy me? My dear fellow! *Joy! Tears of joy! Undreamed-of happiness!*”<sup>5</sup>

“How can I thank you? ... After you! It’s such a pleasure to me that you needn’t do anything about Mme de Guermantes if you’d rather not, saying *tu* and *toi* is enough.”

“I can do both.”

“I say, Robert! Listen to me a minute,” I said to him later during dinner. “Oh, it’s really too absurd, this conversation in fits and starts, I can’t think why—you remember the lady I was speaking to you about just now.”



"Yes."

"You're quite sure you know who I mean?"

"Why, what do you take me for, a village idiot?"

"You wouldn't care to give me her photograph, I suppose?"

I had meant to ask him only for the loan of it. But as I was about to speak I was overcome with shyness, feeling that the request was indiscreet, and in order to hide my confusion I formulated it more bluntly and amplified it, as if it had been quite natural.

"No, I should have to ask her permission first," was his answer.

He blushed as he spoke. I could see that he had a reservation in his mind, that he attributed one to me as well, that he would further my love only partially, subject to certain moral principles, and for this I hated him.

At the same time I was touched to see how differently Saint-Loup behaved towards me now that I was no longer alone with him, and that his friends formed an audience. His increased affability would have left me cold had I thought that it was deliberately assumed; but I could feel that it was spontaneous and simply consisted of all that he was wont to say about me in my absence and refrained as a rule from saying when I was alone with him. True, in our private conversations I could detect the pleasure that he found in talking to me, but that pleasure almost always remained unexpressed. Now, at the same remarks of mine which ordinarily he enjoyed without showing it, he watched from the corner of his eye to see whether they produced on his friends the effect on which he had counted and which evidently corresponded to what he had promised them beforehand. The mother of a debutante could be no more anxiously attentive to her daughter's repartee and to the attitude of the audience. If I had made some remark at which, alone in my company, he would merely have smiled, he was afraid that the others might not have seen the point, and kept saying "What? What?" to make me repeat what I had said, to attract their attention, and turning at once to his friends with a hearty laugh, making himself willy-nilly the fogleman of their laughter, presented me for the first time with the opinion that he had of me and must often have expressed to them. So that I caught sight of myself suddenly from the outside, like someone who reads his name in a newspaper or sees himself in a mirror.

It occurred to me on one of these evenings to tell a mildly amusing story about Mme Blandais, but I stopped at once, remembering that Saint-Loup knew it already, and that when I had started to tell it to him the day after my arrival he had interrupted me with: "You told me that before, at Balbec." I was surprised, therefore, to find him begging me to go on and assuring me that he did not know the story and that it would amuse him immensely. "You've forgotten it for the moment," I said to him, "but you'll soon remember." "No, really, I swear to you, you're mistaken. You've never told it to me. Do go on." And throughout the story he kept his feverish and enraptured gaze fixed alternately on myself and on his friends. I realised only after I had finished, amid general laughter, that it had struck him that this story would give his comrades a good idea of my wit, and that it was for this reason that he had pretended not to know it. Such is the stuff of friendship.

On the third evening, one of his friends, to whom I had not had an opportunity of speaking before, conversed with me at great length; and at one point I overheard him telling Saint-Loup how much he was enjoying himself. And indeed we sat talking together almost the entire evening, leaving our glasses of Sauterne untouched on the table before us, separated, sheltered from the others by the imposing veils of one of those instinctive likings between men which, when they are not based on physical attraction, are the only kind that is altogether mysterious. Of such an enigmatic nature had seemed to me to be, at Balbec, the feeling which Saint-Loup had for me, a feeling not to be confused with the interest of our conversations, free from any material association, invisible, intangible, and yet of whose presence in himself like a sort of combustible gas he had been sufficiently conscious to refer to with a smile. And perhaps there was something more surprising still in this fellow-feeling born here in a single evening, like a flower that had blossomed in a few minutes in the warmth of this little room.

I could not help asking Robert when he spoke to me about Balbec whether it was really settled that he was to marry Mlle d'Ambresac. He assured me that not only was it not settled, but that there had never been any question of such a match, that he had never seen her, that he did not know who she was. If at that moment I had happened to see any of the social gossips who had told me of this coming event, they would promptly have announced the engagement of Mlle d'Ambresac to someone who was not Saint-Loup and that of Saint-Loup to someone who was not Mlle d'Ambresac. I should have surprised them greatly had I reminded them of their incompatible and still so recent predictions. In order that this little game should continue, and should multiply false reports by attaching the greatest possible number to every name in turn, nature has furnished those who play it with a memory as short as their credulity is long.

Saint-Loup had spoken to me of another of his comrades who was present also, one with whom he was on particularly good terms since in this environment they were the only two to champion the reopening of the Dreyfus case.

"That fellow? Oh, he's not like Saint-Loup, he's a tub-thumper," my new friend told me. "He's not even sincere. At first he used to say: 'Just wait a little, there's a man I know well, a very shrewd and kind-hearted fellow, General de Boisdeffre; you need have no hesitation in accepting his opinion.' But as soon as he heard that Boisdeffre had pronounced Dreyfus guilty, Boisdeffre ceased to count: clericalism, the prejudices of the General Staff, prevented him from forming a candid opinion, although there is, or rather was, before this Dreyfus business, no one as clerical as our friend. Next he told us that in any event we were to get the truth, because the case had been put in the hands of Saussier, and he, a Republican soldier (our friend coming of an ultra-monarchist family, if you please), was a man of steel, with a stern unyielding conscience. But when

Saussier pronounced Esterhazy innocent, he found fresh reasons to account for the verdict, reasons damaging not to Dreyfus but to General Saussier. Saussier was blinded by the militarist spirit (and our friend, by the way, is as militarist as he is clerical, or at least was; I don't know what to make of him any more). His family are broken-hearted at seeing him possessed by such ideas."

"Don't you think," I suggested, half turning towards Saint-Loup so as not to appear to be cutting myself off from him, and in order to bring him into the conversation, "that the influence we ascribe to environment is particularly true of an intellectual environment. Each of us is conditioned by an idea. There are far fewer ideas than men, therefore all men with similar ideas are alike. As there is nothing material in an idea, the people who are only materially connected to the man with an idea in no way modify it."

At this point I was interrupted by Saint-Loup, because another of the young soldiers had leaned across to him with a smile and, pointing to me, exclaimed: "Duroc! Duroc all over!" I had no idea what this might mean, but I felt the expression on the shy young face to be more than friendly.

Saint-Loup was not satisfied with this comparison. In an ecstasy of joy, no doubt intensified by the joy he felt in making me shine before his friends, with extreme volubility, he reiterated, stroking and patting me as though I were a horse that had just come first past the post: "You're the cleverest man I know, do you hear?" He corrected himself, and added: "Together with Elstir.—You don't mind my bracketing him with you, I hope? Scrupulous accuracy, don't you know. As one might have said to Balzac, for example: 'You're the greatest novelist of the century—together with Stendhal.' Scrupulous to a fault, you see, but nevertheless, immense admiration. No? You don't agree about Stendhal?" he went on, with a naïve confidence in my judgment which found expression in a charming, smiling, almost childish glance of interrogation from his green eyes. "Oh, good! I see you're on my side. Bloch can't stand Stendhal. I think it's idiotic of him. The *Chartreuse* is after all a stunning work, don't you think? I'm so glad you agree with me. What is it you like best in the *Chartreuse*? Answer me," he urged with boyish impetuosity. And the menace of his physical strength made the question almost terrifying. "Mosca? Fabrice?" I answered timidly that Mosca reminded me a little of M. de Norpois. Whereupon there were peals of laughter from the young Siegfried Saint-Loup. And no sooner had I added: "But Mosca is far more intelligent, not so pedantic," than I heard Robert exclaim "Bravo," actually clapping his hands, and, helpless with laughter, gasp: "Oh, perfect! Admirable! You really are astounding."

While I was speaking, even the approbation of the others seemed supererogatory to Saint-Loup; he insisted on silence. And just as a conductor stops his orchestra with a rap from his baton because someone has made a noise, so he rebuked the author of this disturbance: "Gibergue, you must be silent when people are speaking. You can tell us about it afterwards." And to me: "Please go on."

I gave a sigh of relief, for I had been afraid that he was going to make me begin all over again.

"And as an idea," I went on, "is a thing that cannot partake of human interests and would be incapable of deriving any benefit from them, the men who are governed by an idea are not swayed by self-interest."

When I had finished speaking, "That stops your gob, doesn't it, my boys," exclaimed Saint-Loup, who had been following me with his eyes with the same anxious solicitude as if I had been walking a tight-rope. "What were you going to say, Gibergue?"

"I was just saying that your friend reminded me of Major Duroc. I could almost hear him speaking."

"Why, I've often thought so myself," replied Saint-Loup. "They have several points in common, but you'll find that this one has all kinds of qualities Duroc hasn't."

Just as a brother of this friend of Saint-Loup, who had been trained at the Schola Cantorum, thought about every new musical work not at all what his father, his mother, his cousins, his club-mates thought, but exactly what the other students at the Schola thought, so this non-commissioned nobleman (of whom Bloch formed an extraordinary opinion when I told him about him, because, touched to hear that he was on the same side as himself, he nevertheless imagined him, on account of his aristocratic birth and religious and military upbringing, to be as different as possible, endowed with the romantic attraction of a native of a distant country) had a "mentality," as people were now beginning to say, analogous to that of the whole body of Dreyfusards in general and of Bloch in particular, on which the traditions of his family and the interests of his career could retain no hold whatever. (Similarly, one of Saint-Loup's cousins had married a young Eastern princess who was said to write poetry quite as fine as Victor Hugo's or Alfred de Vigny's, and in spite of this was presumed to have a different type of mind from what could normally be imagined, the mind of an Eastern princess immured in an *Arabian Nights* palace. It was left to the writers who had the privilege of meeting her to savour the disappointment, or rather the joy, of listening to conversation which gave the impression not of Scheherazade but of a person of genius of the type of Alfred de Vigny or Victor Hugo.)<sup>6</sup>

I took a particular pleasure in talking to my new friend, as for that matter to all Robert's comrades and to Robert himself, about the barracks, the officers of the garrison, and the Army in general. Thanks to the immensely exaggerated scale on which we see the things, however petty they may be, in the midst of which we eat, and talk, and lead our real life; thanks to that formidable enlargement which they undergo, and the effect of which is that the rest of the world, not being present, cannot compete with them, and assumes in comparison the insubstantiality of a dream, I had begun to take an interest in the various personalities of the barracks, in the officers whom I saw in the square when I went to visit Saint-Loup, or, if I was awake then, when the regiment passed beneath my windows. I should have liked to know more about the major whom Saint-Loup so greatly admired, and about the course in military history which would have appealed to me "even aesthetically." I knew that all too often Robert indulged in a rather hollow verbalism, but at other times gave evidence of the assimilation of profound ideas which he was fully capable of grasping. Unfortunately, in respect of Army matters Robert was chiefly preoccupied at this time with the Dreyfus case. He spoke little

about it, since he alone of the party at table was a Dreyfusard; the others were violently opposed to the idea of a fresh trial, except my other neighbour, my new friend, whose opinions appeared to be somewhat wavering. A firm admirer of the colonel, who was regarded as an exceptionally able officer and had denounced the current agitation against the Army in several of his regimental orders which had earned him the reputation of being an anti-Dreyfusard, my neighbour had heard that his commanding officer had let fall certain remarks leading to suppose that he had his doubts as to the guilt of Dreyfus and retained his admiration for Picquart. On this last point at any rate, the rumour of the colonel's relative Dreyfusism was ill-founded, as are all the rumours, springing from no one knows where, which float around any great scandal. For, shortly afterwards, this colonel having been detailed to interrogate the former Chief of the Intelligence Branch, had treated him with a brutality and contempt the like of which had never been known before. However this might be (and although he had not taken the liberty of making a direct inquiry of the colonel), my neighbour had been kind enough to tell Saint-Loup—in the tone in which a Catholic lady might tell a Jewish lady that her parish priest denounced the pogroms in Russia and admired the generosity of certain Jews—that their colonel was not, with regard to Dreyfusism—to a certain kind of Dreyfusism, at least—the fanatical, narrow opponent that he had been made out to be.

"I'm not surprised," was Saint-Loup's comment, "as he's a sensible man. But in spite of everything he's blinded by the prejudices of his caste, and above all, by his clericalism. By the way," he turned to me, "Major Duroc, the lecturer on military history I was telling you about—there's a man who is whole-heartedly in support of our views, or so I'm told. And I should have been surprised to hear that he wasn't, for he's not only a brilliantly clever man, but a Radical-Socialist and a freemason."

Partly out of courtesy to his friends, to whom Saint-Loup's professions of Dreyfusard faith were painful, and also because the subject was of more interest to me, I asked my neighbour if it were true that this major gave a demonstration of military history which had a genuine aesthetic beauty.

"It's absolutely true."

"But what do you mean by that?"

"Well, all that you read, let us say, in the narrative of a military historian, the smallest facts, the most trivial happenings, are only the outward signs of an idea which has to be elucidated and which often conceals other ideas, like a palimpsest. So that you have a field of study as intellectual as any science you care to name, or any art, and one that is satisfying to the mind."

"Give me an example or two, if you don't mind."

"It's not very easy to explain," Saint-Loup broke in. "You read, let us say, that this or that corps has tried ... but before we go any further, the serial number of the corps, its order of battle, are not without their significance. If it isn't the first time that the operation has been attempted, and if for the same operation we find a different corps being brought up, it's perhaps a sign that the previous corps has been wiped out or has suffered heavy casualties in the said operation, that it's no longer in a fit state to carry it through successfully. Next, we must ask ourselves what this corps which is now out of action consisted of; if it was made up of shock troops, held in reserve for big attacks, a fresh corps of inferior quality will have little chance of succeeding where the first has failed. Furthermore, if we are not at the start of a campaign, this fresh corps may itself be a composite formation of odds and ends drawn from other corps, and this provides an indication of the strength of the forces the belligerent still has at its disposal, and the proximity of the moment when its forces will definitely be inferior to the enemy's, which puts the operation on which this corps is about to engage in a different perspective, because, if it is no longer in a condition to make good its losses, its successes themselves will, with arithmetical certainty, only bring it nearer to its ultimate destruction. Moreover, the serial number of the corps that it has facing it is of no less significance. If, for instance, it is a much weaker unit, which has already accounted for several important units of the attacking force, the whole nature of the operation is changed, since, even if it should end in the loss of the position which the defending force has been holding, simply to have held it for any length of time may be a great success if a very small defending force has been sufficient to destroy considerable forces on the other side. You can understand that if, in the analysis of the various corps engaged on both sides, there are all these points of importance, the study of the position itself, of the roads and railways which it commands, of the supply lines which it protects, is of even greater consequence. One must study what I may call the whole geographical context," he added with a laugh. (And indeed he was so delighted with this expression that, every time he employed it, even months afterwards, it was always accompanied by the same laugh.) "While the operation is being prepared by one of the belligerents, if you read that one of its patrols has been wiped out in the neighbourhood of the position by the other belligerent, one of the conclusions which you are entitled to draw is that one side was attempting to reconnoitre the defensive works with which the other intended to resist the attack. An exceptional burst of activity at a given point may indicate the desire to capture that point, but equally well the desire to hold the enemy in check there, not to retaliate at the point at which he has attacked you; or it may indeed be only a feint, intended to cover by an intensification of activity withdrawals of troops in that sector. (This was a classic feint in Napoleon's wars.) On the other hand, to appreciate the significance of a manoeuvre, its probable object, and, as a corollary, other manoeuvres by which it will be accompanied or followed, it is not immaterial to consult, not so much the announcements issued by the High Command, which may be intended to deceive the enemy, to mask a possible setback, as the manual of field operations in use in the country in question. We are always entitled to assume that the manoeuvre which an army has attempted to carry out is that prescribed by the rules in force for analogous circumstances. If, for instance, the rules lay down that a frontal attack should be accompanied by a flank attack and if, this flank attack having failed, the

High Command claims that it had no connexion with the main attack and was merely a diversion, there is a strong likelihood that the truth will be found by consulting the field regulations rather than the statements issued from Headquarters. And there are not only the regulations governing each army to be considered, but their traditions, their habits, their doctrines. The study of diplomatic activity, which is constantly acting or reacting upon military activity, must not be neglected either. Incidents apparently insignificant, misinterpreted at the time, will explain to you how the enemy, counting on support which these incidents prove to have been denied him, was able to carry out only a part of his strategic plan. So that, if you know how to read your military history, what is a confused jumble for the ordinary reader becomes a chain of reasoning as rational as a painting is for the picture-lover who knows how to look and can see what the person portrayed is wearing, what he has in his hands, whereas the average visitor to a gallery is bewildered by a blur of colour which gives him a headache. But just as with certain pictures it isn't enough to observe that the figure is holding a chalice, but one must know why the painter chose to place a chalice in his hands, what it's intended to symbolise, so these military operations, quite apart from their immediate objective, are habitually modelled, in the mind of the general who is directing the campaign, on earlier battles which represent, so to speak, the past, the literature, the learning, the etymology, the aristocracy of the battles of today. Mind you, I'm not speaking for the moment of the local, the (what shall I call it?) spatial identity of battles. That exists also. A battlefield has never been, and never will be throughout the centuries, simply the ground upon which a single battle has been fought. If it has been a battlefield, that was because it combined certain conditions of geographical position, of geological formation, even of certain defects calculated to hinder the enemy (a river, for instance, cutting it in two), which made it a good battlefield. And so what it has been it will continue to be. You don't make an artist's studio out of any old room; so you don't make a battlefield out of any old piece of ground. There are predestined sites. But, once again, that's not what I was talking about so much as the type of battle a general takes as his model, a sort of strategic carbon copy, a tactical pastiche, if you like. Battles like Ulm, Lodi, Leipzig, Cannae. I don't know whether there'll ever be another war, or what nations will fight in it, but, if a war does come, you may be sure that it will include (and deliberately, on the commander's part) a Cannae, an Austerlitz, a Rossbach, a Waterloo, to mention a few. Some people make no bones about it. Marshal von Schlieffen and General von Falkenhausen have planned in advance a Battle of Cannae against France, in the Hannibal style, pinning their enemy down along his whole front, and advancing on both flanks, especially on the right through Belgium, while Bernhardt prefers the oblique advance of Frederick the Great, Leuthen rather than Cannae. Others expound their views less crudely, but I can tell you one thing, my boy, and that is that Beauconseil, the squadron commander I introduced you to the other day and who's an officer with a very great future before him, has swotted up a little Pratzen attack of his own which he knows inside out and is keeping up his sleeve, and if he ever has an opportunity to put it into practice he won't miss the boat but will let us have it good and proper. The breakthrough in the centre at Rivoli, too—that will crop up again if there's ever another war. It's no more obsolete than the *Iliad*. I may add that we're more or less condemned to frontal attacks, because we can't afford to repeat the mistake we made in '70; we must assume the offensive, nothing but the offensive. The only thing that troubles me is that although I see only the slower, more antiquated minds among us opposing this splendid doctrine, nevertheless one of the youngest of my masters, who is a genius, I mean Mangin, feels that there ought to be a place, provisional of course, for the defensive. It isn't very easy to answer him when he cites the example of Austerlitz, where the defensive was simply a prelude to attack and victory."

The enunciation of these theories by Saint-Loup was cheering. They gave me to hope that perhaps I was not being led astray, in my life at Doncières, with regard to these officers whom I heard being discussed as I sat sipping a Sauterne which bathed them in its charming golden glint, by the same magnifying power that had blown up to such huge dimensions in my eyes, while I was at Balbec, the King and Queen of the South Seas, the little group of the four gastronomes, the young gambler, and Legrandin's brother-in-law, who were now so shrunken as to appear non-existent. What gave me pleasure today would not perhaps leave me indifferent tomorrow, as had always happened hitherto; the person that I still was at this moment was not perhaps doomed to imminent destruction, since to the ardent and fugitive passion which I felt on these few evenings for everything that concerned the military life, Saint-Loup, by what he had just been saying to me about the art of war, added an intellectual foundation, of a permanent character, capable of gripping me so strongly that I could believe, without any attempt at self-deception, that after I had left Doncières I should continue to take an interest in the work of my friends there, and should not be long in coming to pay them another visit. However, in order to be quite sure that this art of war was indeed an art in the artistic sense of the word, I said to Saint-Loup:

"You interest me enormously. But tell me, there's one point that puzzles me. I feel that I could become passionately involved in the art of war, but first I should want to be sure that it is not so very different from the other arts, that knowing the rules is not everything. You tell me that battles are reproduced. I do find something aesthetic, just as you said, in seeing beneath a modern battle the plan of an older one; I can't tell you how attractive the idea sounds. But then, does the genius of the commander count for nothing? Does he really do no more than apply the rules? Or, granted equal knowledge, are there great generals as there are great surgeons, who, when the symptoms exhibited by two cases of illness are identical to the outward eye, nevertheless feel, for some infinitesimal reason, founded perhaps on their experience, but interpreted afresh, that in one case they ought to do this, in another case that; that in one case it is better to operate, in another to wait?"

"But of course! You'll find Napoleon not attacking when all the rules demanded that he should attack, but some obscure divination warned him not to. For instance, look at Austerlitz, or, in 1806, his instructions to Lannes. But you will find certain generals slavishly imitating one of Napoleon's manoeuvres and arriving at a diametrically opposite result. There are a dozen examples of that in 1870. But even as regards the interpretation of what the enemy *may* do, what he actually does is only a symptom which may mean any number of different things. Each of them has an equal chance of being the right one, if you confine yourself to logic and science, just as in certain difficult cases all the medical science in the world will be powerless to decide whether the invisible tumour is malignant or not, whether or not the operation ought to be performed. It is his flair, his divination, his crystal-gazing (if you know what I mean) which decides, in the case of the great general as of the great doctor. Thus I explained to you, to take one instance, what a reconnaissance on the eve of a battle might signify. But it may mean a dozen other things, such as making the enemy think you're going to attack him at one point whereas you intend to attack him at another, putting up a screen which will prevent him from seeing the preparations for your real operation, forcing him to bring up fresh troops, to fix them there, to immobilise them in a different place from where they are needed, forming an estimate of the forces at his disposal, sounding him out, forcing him to show his hand. Sometimes, even, the fact that you deploy an immense number of troops in an operation is by no means a proof that that is your true objective; for you may carry it out in earnest, even if it is only a feint, so that the feint may have a better chance of deceiving the enemy. If I had time now to go through the Napoleonic wars from this point of view, I assure you that these simple classic movements which we study here, and which you'll come and see us practising in the field, just for the pleasure of an outing, you young rotter (no, I know you're not well, I'm sorry!), well, in a war, when you feel behind you the vigilance, the judgment, the profound study of the High Command, you're as moved by them as by the beam of a lighthouse, a purely physical light but none the less an emanation of the mind, sweeping through space to warn ships of danger. In fact I may perhaps be wrong in speaking to you only of the literature of war. In reality, as the formation of the soil, the direction of wind and light tell us which way a tree will grow, so the conditions in which a campaign is fought, the features of the country through which you manoeuvre, prescribe, to a certain extent, and limit the number of the plans among which the general has to choose. Which means that along a mountain range, through a system of valleys, over certain plains, it's almost with the inevitability and the grandiose beauty of an avalanche that you can predict the line of an army on the march."

"Now you deny me that freedom of choice in the commander, that power of divination in the enemy who is trying to read his intentions, which you allowed me a moment ago."

"Not at all. You remember that book of philosophy we read together at Balbec, the richness of the world of possibilities compared with the real world. Well, it's exactly the same with the art of war. In a given situation there will be four plans that apply and among which the general may choose, as a disease may take various courses for which the doctor has to be prepared. And there again human weakness and human greatness are fresh causes of uncertainty. For of these four plans let us assume that contingent reasons (such as the attainment of minor objectives, or the time factor, or numerical inferiority and inadequate supplies) lead the general to prefer the first, which is less perfect but less costly and swifter to execute, and has for its terrain a richer country for feeding his troops. He may, after having begun with this plan, which the enemy, uncertain at first, will soon detect, find that success lies beyond his grasp, the difficulties being too great (that is what I call the element of human weakness), abandon it and try the second or third or fourth. But it may equally be that he has tried the first plan (and this is what I call human greatness) merely as a feint to pin down the enemy, so as to surprise him later at a point where he has not been expecting an attack. Thus at Ulm, Mack, who expected the enemy to attack from the west, was encircled from the north where he thought he was perfectly safe. My example is not a very good one, as a matter of fact. Actually Ulm is a better example of the battle of encirclement, which the future will see reproduced because it is not only a classic example from which generals will draw inspiration, but a form that is to some extent logically necessary (like several others, thus leaving room for choice and variety) like a type of crystallisation. But it doesn't much matter really, because these conditions are after all artificial. To go back to our philosophy book; it's like the rules of logic or scientific laws, reality conforms to them more or less, but remember the great mathematician Poincaré: he's by no means certain that mathematics is a rigorously exact science. As to the rules themselves, which I mentioned to you, they are of secondary importance really, and besides they're altered from time to time. We cavalrymen, for instance, live by the *Field Service* of 1895, which may be said to be out of date since it is based on the old and obsolete doctrine which maintains that cavalry action has little more than a psychological effect by creating panic in the enemy ranks. Whereas the more intelligent of our teachers, all the best brains in the cavalry, and particularly the major I was telling you about, consider on the contrary that the issue will be decided in a real free-for-all with sabre and lance and the side that can hold out longer will be the winner, not merely psychologically, by creating panic, but physically."

"Saint-Loup is quite right, and it's likely that the next *Field Service* will reflect this new school of thought," my neighbour observed.

"I'm glad to have your support, since your opinions seem to make more impression upon my friend than mine," said Saint-Loup with a smile, whether because the growing liking between his comrade and myself annoyed him slightly or because he thought it graceful to solemnise it with this official acknowledgement. "Perhaps I may have underestimated the importance of the rules. They do change, that must be admitted. But in the meantime they control the military situation, the plans of campaign and troop concentration. If they reflect a false conception of strategy they may be the initial cause of defeat. All this is a little too technical for

you," he remarked to me. "Always remember that, when all's said and done, what does most to accelerate the evolution of the art of war is wars themselves. In the course of a campaign, if it is at all long, you will see one belligerent profiting by the lessons provided by the enemy's successes and mistakes, perfecting the methods of the latter, who will improve on them in turn. But all that is a thing of the past. With the terrible advance of artillery, the wars of the future, if there are to be any more wars, will be so short that, before we have had time to think of putting our lessons into practice, peace will have been signed."

"Don't be so touchy," I told Saint-Loup, reverting to the first words of this speech. "I was listening to you quite avidly!"

"If you will kindly not take offence, and will allow me to speak," his friend went on, "I shall add to what you've just been saying that if battles reproduce themselves indistinguishably it isn't merely due to the mind of the commander. It may happen that a mistake on his part (for instance, his failure to appreciate the strength of the enemy) will lead him to call upon his men for extravagant sacrifices, sacrifices which certain units will make with an abnegation so sublime that the part they play will be analogous to that of some other unit in some other battle, and they'll be quoted in history as interchangeable examples: to stick to 1870, we have the Prussian Guard at Saint-Privat, and the Turcos at Froeschviller and Wissembourg."

"Ah, interchangeable; precisely! Excellent! The lad has brains," was Saint-Loup's comment.

I was not insensible to these last examples, as always when, beneath the particular instance, I was afforded a glimpse of the general law. What really interested me, however, was the genius of the commander; I was anxious to discover in what it consisted, how, in given circumstances, when the commander who lacked genius could not withstand the enemy, the inspired commander would set about restoring his jeopardised position, which, according to Saint-Loup, was quite possible and had been done several times by Napoleon. And to understand what good generalship meant I asked for comparisons between the various commanders whom I knew by name, which of them had most markedly the character of a leader, the gifts of a tactician—at the risk of boring my new friends, who however showed no signs of boredom, but continued to answer me with an inexhaustible good-nature.

I felt cut off—not only from the great icy darkness which stretched out into the distance and in which we could hear from time to time the whistle of a train which only accentuated the pleasure of being there, or the chimes of an hour still happily distant from that at which these young men would have to buckle on their sabres and go—but also from all external preoccupations, almost from the memory of Mme de Guermantes, by the kindness of Saint-Loup, to which that of his friends, reinforcing it, gave, so to speak, a greater solidity; by the warmth, too, of that little dining-room, by the savour of the exquisite dishes that were set before us. These gave as much pleasure to my imagination as to my palate; sometimes the little piece of nature from which they had been extracted, the rugged holy-water stoup of the oyster in which lingered a few drops of brackish water, or the gnarled stem, the yellowed branches of a bunch of grapes, still enveloped them, inedible, poetic and distant as a landscape, evoking as we dined successive images of a siesta in the shade of a vine or of an excursion on the sea; on other evenings it was the cook alone who brought out these original properties of the viands, presenting them in their natural setting, like works of art, and a fish cooked in a court-bouillon was brought in on a long earthenware platter, on which, standing out in relief on a bed of bluish herbs, intact but still contorted from having been dropped alive into boiling water, surrounded by a ring of satellite shell-fish, of animalcules, crabs, shrimps and mussels, it had the appearance of a ceramic dish by Bernard Palissy.

"I'm furiously jealous," Saint-Loup said to me, half laughing, half in earnest, alluding to the interminable conversations apart which I had been having with his friend. "Is it because you find him more intelligent than me? Do you like him better than me? Ah, well, I suppose he's everything now, and no one else is to have a look in!" (Men who are enormously in love with a woman, who live in a society of woman-lovers, allow themselves pleasantries which others, seeing less innocence in them, would never dare to contemplate.)

When the conversation became general, the subject of Dreyfus was avoided for fear of offending Saint-Loup. A week later, however, two of his friends remarked how curious it was that, living in so military an environment, he was so keen a Dreyfusard, almost an anti-militarist. "The reason is," I suggested, not wishing to enter into details, "that the influence of environment is not so important as people think ..." I intended of course to stop at this point, and not to reiterate the observations which I had made to Saint-Loup a week earlier. Since, however, I had made this particular remark almost word for word, I was about to excuse myself by adding: "Just as I was saying the other day ..." But I had reckoned without the reverse side of Robert's cordial admiration for myself and certain other people. That admiration was complemented by so entire an assimilation of their ideas that after a day or two, he would have completely forgotten that those ideas were not his own. And so, in the matter of my modest thesis, Saint-Loup, for all the world as though it had always dwelt in his own brain, and as though I was merely poaching on his preserves, felt it incumbent upon him to greet my discovery with warm approval.

"Why, yes; environment is of no importance."

And with as much vehemence as if he were afraid I might interrupt or fail to understand him:

"The real influence is that of the intellectual environment! One is conditioned by an idea!"

He paused for a moment, with the satisfied smile of one who has digested his dinner, dropped his monocle, and, fixing me with a gimlet-like stare, said to me challengingly:

"All men with similar ideas are alike."

No doubt he had completely forgotten that I myself had said to him only a few days earlier what on the other hand he had remembered so well.

I did not arrive at Saint-Loup's restaurant every evening in the same state of mind. If a memory, or a sorrow that weighs on us, are capable of leaving us, to the extent that we no longer notice them, they can also return and sometimes remain with us for a long time. There were evenings when, as I passed through the town on my way to the restaurant, I felt so keen a longing for Mme de Guermantes that I could scarcely breathe; it was as though part of my breast had been cut out by a skilled anatomist and replaced by an equal part of immaterial suffering, by its equivalent in nostalgia and love. And however neatly the wound may have been stitched together, one lives rather uncomfortably when regret for the loss of another person is substituted for one's entrails; it seems to be occupying more room than they; one feels it perpetually; and besides, what a contradiction in terms to be obliged to *think* a part of one's body. Only it seems that we are worth more, somehow. At the whisper of a breeze we sigh, with oppression but also with languor. I would look up at the sky. If it was clear, I would say to myself: "Perhaps she is in the country; she's looking at the same stars; and, for all I know, when I arrive at the restaurant Robert may say to me: 'Good news! I've just heard from my aunt. She wants to meet you, she's coming down here.'" It was not the firmament alone that I associated with the thought of Mme de Guermantes. A passing breath of air, more fragrant than the rest, seemed to bring me a message from her, as, long ago, from Gilberte in the wheatfields of Méséglise. We do not change; we introduce into the feeling which we associate with a person many slumbering elements which it awakens but which are foreign to it. Besides, with these feelings for particular people, there is always something in us that strives to give them a larger truth, that is to say, to absorb them in a more general feeling, common to the whole of humanity, with which individuals and the suffering that they cause us are merely a means to enable us to communicate. What mixed a certain pleasure with my pain was that I knew it to be a tiny fragment of universal love. True, from the fact that I seemed to recognise the same sorts of sadness that I had felt on Gilberte's account, or else when in the evenings at Combray Mamma did not stay in my room, and also the memory of certain pages of Bergotte, in the suffering which I now felt and to which Mme de Guermantes, her coldness, her absence, were not clearly linked as cause is to effect in the mind of a philosopher, I did not conclude that Mme de Guermantes was not that cause. Is there not such a thing as a diffused bodily pain, extending, radiating out into other parts, which, however, it leaves, to vanish altogether, if the practitioner lays his finger on the precise spot from which it springs? And yet, until that moment, its extension made it seem to us so vague and sinister that, powerless to explain or even to locate it, we imagined that there was no possibility of its being healed. As I made my way to the restaurant I said to myself: "A fortnight already since I last saw Mme de Guermantes" (a fortnight, which did not appear so enormous an interval except to me, who, where Mme de Guermantes was concerned, counted in minutes). For me it was no longer the stars and the breeze alone, but the arithmetical divisions of time that assumed a dolorous and poetic aspect. Each day now was like the mobile crest of an indistinct hill, down one side of which I felt that I could descend towards forgetfulness, but down the other was carried along by the need to see the Duchess again. And I was continually inclining one way or the other, having no stable equilibrium. One day I said to myself: "Perhaps there'll be a letter tonight"; and on entering the dining-room I found courage to ask Saint-Loup:

"You don't happen to have had any news from Paris?"

"Yes," he replied gloomily, "bad news."

I breathed a sigh of relief when I realised that it was only he who had cause for unhappiness, and that the news was from his mistress. But I soon saw that one of its consequences would be to prevent Robert for a long time from taking me to see his aunt.

I learned that a quarrel had broken out between him and his mistress, through the post presumably, unless she had come down to pay him a flying visit between trains. And the quarrels, even when relatively slight, which they had previously had, had always seemed as though they must prove insoluble. For she had a violent temper, and would stamp her foot and burst into tears for reasons as incomprehensible as those that make children shut themselves into dark cupboards, not come out for dinner, refuse to give any explanation, and only redouble their sobs when, our patience exhausted, we give them a slap.

To say that Saint-Loup suffered terribly from this estrangement would be an oversimplification, would give a false impression of his grief. When he found himself alone, with nothing else to think about but his mistress parting from him with the respect for him which she had felt on seeing him so full of energy and vigour, the agony he had experienced during the first few hours at first gave way before the irreparable, and the cessation of pain is such a relief that the rupture, once it was certain, assumed for him something of the same kind of charm as a reconciliation. What he began to suffer from a little later was a secondary and accidental grief, the tide of which flowed incessantly from within himself, at the idea that perhaps she would have been glad to make it up, that it was not inconceivable that she was waiting for a word from him, that in the meantime, by way of revenge, she would perhaps on a certain evening, in a certain place, do a certain thing, and that he had only to telegraph to her that he was coming for it not to happen, that others perhaps were taking advantage of the time which he was letting slip, and that in a few days it would be too late to get her back, for she would be already bespoken. Among all these possibilities he was certain of nothing; his mistress preserved a silence which wrought him up to such a frenzy of grief that he began to ask himself whether she might not be in hiding at Doncières, or have set sail for the Indies.

It has been said that silence is strength; in a quite different sense it is a terrible strength in the hands of those who are loved. It increases the anxiety of the one who waits. Nothing so tempts us to approach another person as what is keeping us apart; and what barrier is so insurmountable as silence? It has been said also that silence is torture, capable of goading to madness the man who is condemned to it in a prison cell. But what an even greater torture than that of having to keep silence it is to have to endure the silence of the

person one loves! Robert said to himself: "What can she be doing, to keep so silent as this? Obviously she's being unfaithful to me with others." He also said to himself: "What have I done that she should be so silent? Perhaps she hates me, and will go on hating me for ever." And he reproached himself. Thus silence indeed drove him mad with jealousy and remorse. Besides, more cruel than the silence of prisons, that kind of silence is in itself a prison. It is an intangible enclosure, true, but an impenetrable one, this interposed slice of empty atmosphere through which nevertheless the visual rays of the abandoned lover cannot pass. Is there a more terrible form of illumination than that of silence, which shows us not one absent love but a thousand, and shows us each of them in the act of indulging in some new betrayal? Sometimes, in a sudden slackening of tension, Robert would imagine that this silence was about to cease, that the letter was on its way. He saw it, it had arrived, he started at every sound, his thirst was already quenched, he murmured: "The letter! The letter!" After this glimpse of a phantom oasis of tenderness, he found himself once more toiling across the real desert of a silence without end.

He suffered in anticipation, without missing a single one, all the griefs and pains of a rupture which at other moments he fancied he might somehow contrive to avoid, like people who put all their affairs in order with a view to an expatriation which will never take place, and whose minds, no longer certain where they will find themselves living next day, flutter momentarily, detached from them, like a heart that is taken out of a dying man and continues to beat, though separated from the rest of his body. At all events, this hope that his mistress would return gave him courage to persevere in the rupture, as the belief that one may return alive from the battle helps one to face death. And inasmuch as habit is, of all the plants of human growth, the one that has least need of nutritious soil in order to live, and is the first to appear on the most seemingly barren rock, perhaps had he begun by thinking of the rupture as a feint he would in the end have become genuinely accustomed to it. But his uncertainty kept him in a state which, linked with the memory of the woman herself, was akin to love. He forced himself, nevertheless, not to write to her, thinking perhaps that it was a less cruel torment to live without his mistress than with her in certain conditions, or else that, after the way in which they had parted, it was essential to wait for her apologies if she was to retain what he believed her to feel for him in the way, if not of love, at any rate of esteem and regard. He contented himself with going to the telephone, which had recently been installed at Doncières, and asking for news from, or giving instructions to, a lady's-maid whom he had hired for his mistress. These communications were complicated and time-consuming, since, influenced by what her literary friends preached to her about the ugliness of the capital, but principally for the sake of her animals, her dogs, her monkey, her canaries and her parakeet, whose incessant din her Paris landlord had ceased to tolerate, Robert's mistress had taken a little house in the neighbourhood of Versailles. Meanwhile he, at Doncières, no longer slept a wink all night. Once, in my room, overcome by exhaustion, he dozed off for a while. But suddenly he began to speak, tried to get up and run to stop something from happening, said: "I hear her; you shan't ... you shan't ..." He awoke. He had been dreaming, he told me, that he was in the country with the senior sergeant. His host had tried to keep him away from a certain part of the house. Saint-Loup had discovered that the senior sergeant had staying with him a subaltern, extremely rich and extremely vicious, whom he knew to have a violent passion for his mistress. And suddenly in his dream he had distinctly heard the intermittently regular cries which his mistress was in the habit of uttering at the moment of gratification. He had tried to force the senior sergeant to take him to the room in which she was. And the other had held on to him to keep him from going there, with an air of annoyance at such a want of discretion in a guest which, Robert said, he would never be able to forget.

"It was an idiotic dream," he concluded, still quite out of breath.

All the same I could see that, during the hour that followed, he was more than once on the point of telephoning to his mistress to beg for a reconciliation. My father now had the telephone, but I doubt whether that would have been of much use to Saint-Loup. Besides, it hardly seemed to me quite proper to make my parents, or even a mechanical instrument installed in their house, play pander between Saint-Loup and his mistress, however ladylike and high-minded the latter might be. His bad dream began to fade from his memory. With a fixed and absent stare, he came to see me on each of those cruel days which traced in my mind as they followed one after the other the splendid sweep of a staircase painfully forged, from the steps of which Robert stood asking himself what decision his beloved was going to take.

At length she wrote to ask whether he would consent to forgive her. As soon as he realised that a definite rupture had been avoided he saw all the disadvantages of a reconciliation. Besides, he had already begun to suffer less acutely, and had almost accepted a grief of which, in a few months perhaps, he would have to suffer the sharp bite again if their liaison were to be resumed. He did not hesitate for long. And perhaps he hesitated only because he was now certain of being able to recover his mistress, of being able to do so and therefore of doing so. However, she asked him, so that she might have time to recover her equanimity, not to come to Paris at the New Year. And he did not have the heart to go to Paris without seeing her. On the other hand, she had declared her willingness to go abroad with him, but for that he would need to make a formal application for leave, which Captain de Borodino was unwilling to grant.

"I'm sorry about it because of our visit to my aunt, which will have to be put off. I dare say I shall be in Paris at Easter."

"We shan't be able to call on Mme de Guermantes then, because I shall have gone to Balbec. But, really, it doesn't matter in the least, I assure you."

"To Balbec? But you didn't go there till August."

"I know, but next year I'm being sent there earlier, for my health."



His main fear was that I might form a bad impression of his mistress after what he had told me. "She is violent simply because she's too frank, too headstrong in her feelings. But she's a sublime creature. You can't imagine the poetic delicacy there is in her. She goes every year to spend All Souls' Day at Bruges. Rather good, don't you think? If you ever meet her you'll see what I mean: she has a sort of greatness ..." And, as he was infected with certain of the linguistic mannerisms current in the literary circles in which the lady moved: "There's something astral about her, in fact something vatic. You know what I mean, the poet merging into the priest."

I searched all through dinner for a pretext which would enable Saint-Loup to ask his aunt to see me without my having to wait until he came to Paris. Such a pretext was finally furnished me by the desire I cherished to see some more pictures by Elstir, the famous painter whom Saint-Loup and I had met at Balbec—a pretext behind which there was, moreover, an element of truth, for if, on my visits to Elstir, I had asked of his painting that it should lead me to the understanding and love of things better than itself, a real thaw, an authentic square in a country town, live women on a beach (at most I would have commissioned from him portraits of realities I had not been able to fathom, such as a hedge of hawthorns, not so much that it might perpetuate their beauty for me as that it might reveal that beauty to me), now, on the contrary, it was the originality, the seductive attraction of those paintings that aroused my desire, and what I wanted above all else was to look at other pictures by Elstir.

It seemed to me, moreover, that the least of his pictures were something quite different from the masterpieces even of greater painters than himself. His work was like a realm apart, with impenetrable frontiers, peerless in substance. Eagerly collecting the infrequent periodicals in which articles on him and his work had appeared, I had learned that it was only recently that he had begun to paint landscape and still life, and that he had started with mythological subjects (I had seen photographs of two of these in his studio), and had then been for long under the influence of Japanese art.

Several of the works most characteristic of his various manners were scattered about the provinces. A certain house at Les Andelys, in which there was one of his finest landscapes, seemed to me as precious, gave me as keen a desire to go there, as might a village near Chartres among whose millstone walls was enshrined a glorious stained-glass window; and towards the possessor of this treasure, towards the man who, inside his rough-hewn house, on the main street, closeted like an astrologer, sat questioning one of those mirrors of the world which Elstir's pictures were, and who had perhaps bought it for many thousands of francs, I felt myself borne by that instinctive sympathy which joins the very hearts, the inmost natures of those who think alike upon a vital subject. Now three important works by my favourite painter were described in one of these articles as belonging to Mme de Guermantes. So that it was on the whole quite sincerely that, on the evening on which Saint-Loup told me of his lady's projected visit to Bruges, I was able, during dinner, in front of his friends, to say to him casually, as though on the spur of the moment:

"I say, if you don't mind, just one last word on the subject of the lady we were speaking about. You remember Elstir, the painter I met at Balbec?"

"Why, of course I do."

"You remember how much I admired his work?"

"I do, very well; and the letter we sent him."

"Well, one of the reasons—not one of the chief reasons, an incidental reason—why I should like to meet the said lady—you do know who I mean, don't you?"

"Of course I do. All these digressions!"

"Is that she has in her house at least one very fine picture by Elstir."

"Really, I never knew that."

"Elstir will probably be at Balbec at Easter; you know he now spends almost the entire year on that coast. I should very much like to have seen this picture before I leave Paris. I don't know whether you're on sufficiently intimate terms with your aunt: but couldn't you manage, somehow, giving her so good an impression of me that she won't refuse, to ask her to let me come and see the picture without you, since you won't be there?"

"Certainly. I'll answer for her; leave it to me."

"Oh, Robert, I do like you."

"It's very nice of you to like me, but it would be equally nice if you were to call me *tu*, as you promised, and as you began to do."

"I hope it's not your departure that you two are plotting together," one of Robert's friends said to me. "You know, if Saint-Loup does go on leave, it needn't make any difference, we shall still be here. It will be less amusing for you, perhaps, but we'll do all we can to make you forget his absence!"

The fact was that, just when it had been generally assumed that Robert's mistress would be going to Bruges alone, the news came that Captain de Borodino, hitherto obdurate in his refusal, had given authority for Sergeant Saint-Loup to proceed on long leave to Bruges. What had happened was this. The Prince, extremely proud of his luxuriant head of hair, was an assiduous customer of the principal hairdresser in the town, who had started life as an apprentice to Napoleon III's barber. Captain de Borodino was on the best of terms with the hairdresser, being, in spite of his majestic airs, extremely simple in his dealings with his inferiors. But the hairdresser, through whose books the Prince's account had been running without payment for at least five years, swollen no less by bottles of "Portugal" and "Eau des Souverains," curlingtongs, razors, and strops, than by the ordinary charges for shampooing, haircutting and the like, had a greater respect for Saint-Loup, who always paid on the nail and kept several carriages and saddle-horses. Having learned of Saint-Loup's vexation

at not being able to go with his mistress, he had spoken warmly about it to the Prince at a moment when he was trussed up in a white surplice with his head held firmly over the back of the chair and his throat menaced by a razor. This account of a young man's amatory adventures won from the princely Captain a smile of Bonapartist indulgence. It is hardly probable that he thought of his unpaid bill, but the barber's recommendation inclined him to good humour as much as a duke's would have inclined him to bad. While his chin was still smothered in soap, the leave was promised and the warrant was signed that evening. As for the hairdresser, who was in the habit of boasting incessantly, and in order to be able to do so laid claim, with an astonishing faculty for lying, to exploits that were entirely fictitious, having for once rendered a signal service to Saint-Loup, not only did he refrain from publicly claiming credit for it, but, as if vanity were obliged to lie, and when there is no call to do so gives way to modesty, he never mentioned the matter to Robert again.

All Robert's friends assured me that, as long as I stayed at Doncières, or if I should come there again at any time, even though Robert was away, their horses, their quarters, their free time would be at my disposal, and I felt that it was with the greatest cordiality that these young men put their comfort and youth and strength at the service of my weakness.

"Why at any rate," they went on after insisting that I should stay, "don't you come down here every year? You see how our humble life appeals to you! Besides, you're so keen about everything that goes on in the regiment: quite the old soldier."

For I continued to ask them eagerly to classify the different officers whose names I knew according to the degree of admiration which they felt them to deserve, just as, in the old days, I used to make my schoolfriends classify the actors of the Théâtre-Français. If, in the place of one of the generals whom I had always heard mentioned at the head of the list, such as Galliffet or Négrier, one of Saint-Loup's friends remarked, "But Négrier is one of the feeblest of our general officers," and put in the new, untarnished, appetising name of Pau or Geslin de Bourgogne, I felt the same happy surprise as long ago when the outworn names of Thiron or Febvre were ousted by the sudden blossoming of the unfamiliar name of Amaury. "Better even than Négrier? But in what respect? Give me an example." I should have liked there to exist profound differences even among the junior officers of the regiment, and I hoped, in the reason for these differences, to grasp the essence of what constituted military superiority. One of those whom I should have been most interested to hear discussed, because he was the one whom I had most often seen, was the Prince de Borodino. But neither Saint-Loup nor his friends, while giving him credit for being a fine officer who kept his squadron up to an incomparable pitch of efficiency, liked the man. Without speaking of him, naturally, in the same tone as of certain other officers, rankers and freemasons, who did not fraternise much with the rest and had, in comparison, an uncouth, barrack-room manner, they seemed not to include M. de Borodino among the other officers of noble birth, from whom indeed he differed considerably in his attitude even towards Saint-Loup. These, taking advantage of the fact that Robert was only an NCO, and that therefore his influential relatives might be grateful were he invited to the houses of superior officers on whom otherwise they would have looked down, lost no opportunity of having him to dine when any bigwig was expected who might be of use to a young cavalry sergeant. Captain de Borodino alone confined himself to his official relations (which for that matter were always excellent) with Robert. The fact was that the Prince, whose grandfather had been made a Marshal and a Prince-Duke by the Emperor, into whose family he had subsequently married, and whose father had then married a cousin of Napoleon III and had twice been a minister after the coup d'état, felt that in spite of all this he did not count for much with Saint-Loup and the Guermantes set, who in turn, since he did not look at things from the same point of view as they, counted for very little with him. He suspected that, for Saint-Loup, he—a kinsman of the Hohenzollerns—was not a true noble but the grandson of a farmer, but at the same time he regarded Saint-Loup as the son of a man whose countship had been confirmed by the Emperor—one of what were known in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as "touched-up" counts—and who had besought him first for a Prefecture, then for some other post a long way down the list of subordinates to His Highness the Prince de Borodino, Minister of State, who was styled on his letters "Monseigneur" and was a nephew of the sovereign.

More than a nephew, possibly. The first Princesse de Borodino was reputed to have bestowed her favours on Napoleon I, whom she followed to the Isle of Elba, and the second hers on Napoleon III. And if, in the Captain's placid countenance, one caught a trace of Napoleon I—if not his actual features, at least the studied majesty of the expression—the officer had, particularly in his melancholy and kindly gaze, in his drooping moustache, something that reminded one also of Napoleon III; and this in so striking a fashion that, when he asked leave, after Sedan, to join the Emperor in captivity, and was shown the door by Bismarck, before whom he had been brought, the latter, happening to look up at the young man who was preparing to leave the room, was instantly struck by the likeness and, reconsidering his decision, recalled him and gave him the authorisation which, in common with everyone else, he had just been refused.

If the Prince de Borodino was not prepared to make overtures either to Saint-Loup or to the other representatives of the Faubourg Saint-Germain in the regiment (whereas he frequently invited two subalterns of plebeian origin who were pleasant companions) it was because, looking down on them all from the height of his Imperial grandeur, he drew between these two classes of inferiors the distinction that one set consisted of inferiors who knew themselves to be such and with whom he was delighted to consort, being beneath his outward majesty of a simple, jovial nature, and the other of inferiors who thought themselves his superiors, a claim which he could not allow. And so, while all the other officers of the regiment made much of Saint-Loup, the Prince de Borodino, to whom the young man had been recommended by Marshal X—, confined himself to being kindly towards him in the matter of military duty, where Saint-Loup was in fact exemplary, but never

had him to his house, except on one special occasion when he found himself practically compelled to invite him, and, since this occurred during my stay at Doncières, asked him to bring me too. I had no difficulty that evening, as I watched Saint-Loup sitting at his Captain's table, in distinguishing, in their respective manners and refinements, the difference that existed between the two aristocracies: the old nobility and that of the Empire. The product of a caste whose faults, even if he repudiated them with all the force of his intellect, had been absorbed into his blood, a caste which, having ceased to exert any real authority for at least a century, no longer saw in the patronising affability which was part and parcel of its education anything more than an exercise, like horsemanship or fencing, cultivated without any serious purpose, as a diversion, Saint-Loup, on meeting representatives of that middle class which the old nobility so far despised as to believe that they were flattered by its intimacy and would be honoured by its informality, would cordially shake hands with any bourgeois to whom he was introduced, and whose name he had probably failed to catch, and as he talked to him (constantly crossing and uncrossing his legs, flinging himself back in his chair in an attitude of abandon, one foot in the palm of his hand) would call him "my dear fellow." Belonging, on the other hand, to a nobility whose titles still preserved their meaning, possessed as they still were of the rich emoluments given in reward for glorious services and bringing to mind the record of high offices in which one is in command of numberless men and must know how to deal with men, the Prince de Borodino—not perhaps very distinctly or in the personal awareness of his conscious mind, but at any rate in his body, which revealed it by its attitudes and manners—regarded his rank as a prerogative that was still effective; those same commoners whom Saint-Loup would have slapped on the shoulder and taken by the arm he addressed with a majestic affability, in which a reserve instinct with grandeur tempered the smiling good-fellowship that came naturally to him, in a tone marked at once by a genuine kindness and a stiffness deliberately assumed. This was due, no doubt, to his being not so far removed from the chancelleries and the Court itself, at which his father had held the highest posts, and where the manners of Saint-Loup, his elbow on the table and his foot in his hand, would not have been well received; but principally it was due to the fact that he was less contemptuous of the middle class since it was the great reservoir from which the first Emperor had chosen his marshals and his nobles and in which the second had found a Rouher or a Fould.

Son or grandson of an Emperor though he might be, with nothing more important to do than to command a squadron, the preoccupations of his putative father and grandfather could not, of course, for want of an object on which to fasten themselves, survive in any real sense in the mind of M. de Borodino. But as the spirit of an artist continues, for many years after he is dead, to model the statue which he carved, so those preoccupations had taken shape in him, were materialised, incarnate in him, it was them that his face reflected. It was with the sharpness of the first Emperor in his voice that he addressed a reprimand to a corporal, with the dreamy melancholy of the second that he exhaled a puff of cigarette-smoke. When he passed in plain clothes through the streets of Doncières, a certain glint in his eyes, issuing from under the brim of his bowler hat, surrounded the Captain with the aura of a regal incognito; people trembled when he strode into the senior sergeant's office, followed by the sergeant-major and the quartermaster, as though by Berthier and Masséna. When he chose the cloth for his squadron's breeches, he fastened on the master-tailor a look capable of baffling Talleyrand and deceiving Alexander; and at times, in the middle of a kit inspection, he would pause, a dreamy look in his handsome blue eyes, and twist his moustache with the air of one building up a new Prussia and a new Italy. But a moment later, reverting from Napoleon III to Napoleon I, he would point out that the equipment was not properly polished, and insist on tasting the men's rations. And at home, in his private life, it was for the wives of middle-class officers (provided they were not freemasons) that he would bring out not only a dinner service of royal blue Sèvres, fit for an ambassador (which had been given to his father by Napoleon, and appeared even more priceless in the commonplace house he inhabited on the avenue, like those rare porcelains which tourists admire with a special delight in the rustic china-cupboard of some old manor that has been converted into a comfortable and prosperous farmhouse), but other gifts of the Emperor also: those noble and charming manners, which too would have done wonders in a diplomatic post abroad (if for some it did not mean a lifelong condemnation to the most unjust form of ostracism merely to have a "name"), the easy gestures, the kindness, the grace, and, enclosing images of glory in an enamel that was also royal blue, the mysterious, illuminated, living reliquary of his gaze.

And in regard to the social relations with the middle classes which the Prince had at Doncières, it may be appropriate to add the following. The lieutenant-colonel played the piano beautifully; the senior medical officer's wife sang like a Conservatoire medallist. This latter couple, as well as the lieutenant-colonel and his wife, used to dine every week with M. de Borodino. They were certainly flattered, knowing that when the Prince went to Paris on leave he dined with Mme de Pourtalès, with the Murats and suchlike. "But," they said to themselves, "he's just a captain, after all; he's only too glad to get us to come. Still, he's a real friend to us." But when M. de Borodino, who had long been pulling every possible wire to secure an appointment nearer Paris, was posted to Beauvais, he packed up and went, and forgot the two musical couples as completely as he forgot the Doncières theatre and the little restaurant to which he used often to send out for his lunch, and, to their great indignation, neither the lieutenant-colonel nor the senior medical officer, who had so often sat at his table, ever had so much as a single word from him for the rest of their lives.

One morning, Saint-Loup confessed to me that he had written to my grandmother to give her news of me and to suggest to her that, since there was a telephone service functioning between Paris and Doncières, she might make use of it to speak to me. In short, that very day she was to give me a call, and he advised me to be at the post office at about a quarter to four. The telephone was not yet at that date as commonly in use as it is today. And yet habit requires so short a time to divest of their mystery the sacred forces with which we are in

contact, that, not having had my call at once, my immediate thought was that it was all very long and very inconvenient, and I almost decided to lodge a complaint. Like all of us nowadays, I found too slow for my liking, in its abrupt changes, the admirable sorcery whereby a few moments are enough to bring before us, invisible but present, the person to whom we wish to speak, and who, while still sitting at his table, in the town in which he lives (in my grandmother's case, Paris), under another sky than ours, in weather that is not necessarily the same, in the midst of circumstances and preoccupations of which we know nothing and of which he is about to inform us, finds himself suddenly transported hundreds of miles (he and all the surroundings in which he remains immured) within reach of our ear, at the precise moment which our fancy has ordained. And we are like the person in the fairy-tale for whom a sorceress, at his express wish, conjures up, in a supernatural light, his grandmother or his betrothed in the act of turning over a book, of shedding tears, of gathering flowers, close by the spectator and yet very far away, in the place where she actually is at the moment. We need only, so that the miracle may be accomplished, apply our lips to the magic orifice and invoke—occasionally for rather longer than seems to us necessary, I admit—the Vigilant Virgins to whose voices we listen every day without ever coming to know their faces and who are our guardian angels in the dizzy realm of darkness whose portals they so jealously guard; the All-Powerful by whose intervention the absent rise up at our side, without our being permitted to set eyes on them; the Danaïds of the unseen who incessantly empty and fill and transmit to one another the urns of sound; the ironic Furies who, just as we were murmuring a confidence to a loved one, in the hope that no one could hear us, cry brutally: "I'm listening!"; the ever-irritable hand-maidens of the Mystery, the umbrageous priestesses of the Invisible, the Young Ladies of the Telephone.

And as soon as our call has rung out, in the darkness filled with apparitions to which our ears alone are unsealed, a tiny sound, an abstract sound—the sound of distance overcome—and the voice of the dear one speaks to us.

It is she, it is her voice that is speaking, that is there. But how far away it is! How often have I been unable to listen without anguish, as though, confronted by the impossibility of seeing, except after long hours of travel, the woman whose voice was so close to my ear, I felt more clearly the illusoriness in the appearance of the most tender proximity, and at what a distance we may be from the persons we love at the moment when it seems that we have only to stretch out our hands to seize and hold them. A real presence, perhaps, that voice that seemed so near—in actual separation! But a premonition also of an eternal separation! Many are the times, as I listened thus without seeing her who spoke to me from so far away, when it has seemed to me that the voice was crying to me from the depths out of which one does not rise again, and I have felt the anxiety that was one day to wring my heart when a voice would thus return (alone and attached no longer to a body which I was never to see again), to murmur in my ear words I longed to kiss as they issued from lips for ever turned to dust.

That afternoon, alas, at Doncières, the miracle did not occur. When I reached the post office, my grandmother's call had already been received. I stepped into the booth; the line was engaged; someone was talking who probably did not realise that there was nobody to answer him, for when I raised the receiver to my ear, the lifeless piece of wood began to squeak like Punchinello; I silenced it, as one silences a puppet, by putting it back on its hook, but, like Punchinello, as soon as I picked it up again it resumed its gabblings. At length, giving up in despair and hanging up the receiver once and for all, I stifled the convulsions of this vociferous stump which kept up its chatter until the last moment, and went in search of the telephonist, who told me to wait a while; then I spoke, and after a few seconds of silence, suddenly I heard that voice which I mistakenly thought I knew so well; for always until then, every time that my grandmother had talked to me, I had been accustomed to follow what she said on the open score of her face, in which the eyes figured so largely; but her voice itself I was hearing this afternoon for the first time. And because that voice appeared to me to have altered in its proportions from the moment that it was a whole, and reached me thus alone and without the accompaniment of her face and features, I discovered for the first time how sweet that voice was; perhaps indeed it had never been so sweet as it was now, for my grandmother, thinking of me as being far away and unhappy, felt that she might abandon herself to an outpouring of tenderness which, in accordance with her principles of upbringing, she usually restrained and kept hidden. It was sweet, but also how sad it was, first of all on account of its very sweetness, a sweetness drained almost—more than any but a few human voices can ever have been—of every element of hardness, of resistance to others, of selfishness! Fragile by reason of its delicacy, it seemed constantly on the verge of breaking, of expiring in a pure flow of tears; then, too, having it alone beside me, seen without the mask of her face, I noticed in it for the first time the sorrows that had cracked it in the course of a lifetime.

Was it, however, solely the voice that, because it was alone, gave me this new impression which tore my heart? Not at all; it was rather that this isolation of the voice was like a symbol, an evocation, a direct consequence of another isolation, that of my grandmother, for the first time separated from me. The commands or prohibitions which she constantly addressed to me in the ordinary course of life, the tedium of obedience or the fire of rebellion which neutralised the affection that I felt for her, were at this moment eliminated and indeed might be eliminated for ever (since my grandmother, no longer insisting on having me with her under her control, was in the act of expressing her hope that I would stay at Doncières altogether, or would at any rate extend my visit for as long as possible, since both my health and my work might benefit by the change); and so, what I held compressed in this little bell at my ear was our mutual affection, freed from the conflicting pressures which had daily counteracted it, and henceforth irresistible, uplifting me entirely. My grandmother, by telling me to stay, filled me with an anxious, an insensate longing to return. This freedom she

was granting me henceforward, and to which I had never dreamed that she would consent, appeared to me suddenly as sad as my freedom of action might be after her death (when I should still love her and she would for ever have abandoned me). "Granny!" I cried to her, "Granny!" and I longed to kiss her, but I had beside me only the voice, a phantom as palpable as the one that would perhaps come back to visit me when my grandmother was dead. "Speak to me!" But then, suddenly, I ceased to hear the voice, and was left even more alone. My grandmother could no longer hear me; she was no longer in communication with me; we had ceased to be close to each other, to be audible to each other; I continued to call her, groping in the empty darkness, feeling that calls from her must also be going astray. I quivered with the same anguish which I had felt once before in the distant past, when, as a little child, I had lost her in a crowd, an anguish due less to my not finding her than to the thought that she must be searching for me, must be saying to herself that I was searching for her, an anguish not unlike that which I was later to feel, on the day when we speak to those who can no longer reply and when we long for them at least to hear all the things we never said to them, and our assurance that we are not unhappy. It seemed to me as though it was already a beloved ghost that I had allowed to lose herself in the ghostly world, and, standing alone before the instrument, I went on vainly repeating: "Granny! Granny!" as Orpheus, left alone, repeats the name of his dead wife. I decided to leave the post office, and go and find Robert at his restaurant in order to tell him that, as I was half expecting a telegram which would oblige me to return to Paris, I wanted, just in case, to know the times of the trains. And yet, before reaching this decision, I felt I must make one more attempt to invoke the Daughters of the Night, the Messengers of the Word, the faceless divinities; but the capricious Guardians had not deigned once again to open the miraculous portals, or, more probably, had been unable to do so; untiringly though they invoked, as was their custom, the venerable inventor of printing and the young prince, collector of Impressionist paintings and driver of motor-cars (who was Captain de Borodino's nephew), Gutenberg and Wagram, those telephone exchanges, left their supplications unanswered, and I came away, feeling that the Invisible would continue to turn a deaf ear.

When I joined Robert and his friends, I withheld the confession that my heart was no longer with them, that my departure was now irrevocably fixed. Saint-Loup appeared to believe me, but I learned afterwards that he had from the first moment realised that my uncertainty was feigned and that he would not see me again next day. While he and his friends, letting their plates grow cold, searched through the time-table for a train which would take me to Paris, and while the whistling of the locomotives in the cold, starry night could be heard on the line, I certainly no longer felt the same peace of mind as on so many evenings I had derived from the friendship of the former and the latter's distant passage. And yet they did not fail, this evening, to perform the same office in a different form. My departure oppressed me less when I was no longer obliged to think of it alone, when I felt that the more normal and healthy exertions of my energetic friends, Robert's brothers-in-arms, were being applied to what was to be done, and of those other strong creatures, the trains, whose comings and goings, morning and night, between Doncières and Paris, broke up in retrospect what had been too compact and unendurable in my long isolation from my grandmother into daily possibilities of return.

"I don't doubt the truth of what you say, and that you aren't thinking of leaving us just yet," said Saint-Loup, smiling, "but pretend you are going, and come and say good-bye to me tomorrow morning early, otherwise there's a risk of my not seeing you. I'm going out to lunch, I've got leave from the Captain, but I shall have to be back in barracks by two, as we are to be on the march all afternoon. I suppose the man to whose house I'm going, a couple of miles out, will manage to get me back in time."

Scarcely had he uttered these words than a messenger came for me from my hotel: the post office had asked for me on the telephone. I ran there, for it was nearly closing time. The word "trunks" recurred incessantly in the answers given me by the clerks. I was in a fever of anxiety, for it was my grandmother who had asked for me. The post office was closing for the night. Finally I got my connexion. "Is that you, Granny?" A woman's voice, with a strong English accent, answered: "Yes, but I don't recognise your voice." Neither did I recognise the voice that was speaking to me; besides, my grandmother called me *tu*, and not *vous*. And then all was explained. The young man for whom his grandmother had called on the telephone had a name almost identical with mine, and was staying in an annex of my hotel. This call coming on the very day on which I had been telephoning to my grandmother, I had never for a moment doubted that it was she who was asking for me. Whereas it was by pure coincidence that the post office and the hotel had combined to make a twofold error.

The following morning I was late, and failed to catch Saint-Loup, who had already left for the country house where he was invited to lunch. About half past one, having decided to go to the barracks so as to be there as soon as he returned, I was crossing one of the avenues on the way there when I noticed, coming behind me in the same direction as myself, a tilbury which, as it overtook me, obliged me to jump out of its way. An NCO was driving it, wearing a monocle; it was Saint-Loup. By his side was the friend whose guest he had been at lunch, and whom I had met once before at the hotel where we dined. I did not dare shout to Robert since he was not alone, but, in the hope that he would stop and pick me up, I attracted his attention with a sweep of my hat which was by way of being motivated by the presence of a stranger. I knew that Robert was short-sighted, but I should have supposed that if he saw me at all he could not fail to recognise me. He did indeed see my salute, and returned it, but without stopping; driving on at full speed, without a smile, without moving a muscle of his face, he confined himself to keeping his hand raised for a minute to the peak of his cap, as though he were acknowledging the salute of a trooper whom he did not know. I ran to the barracks, but it was a long way; when I arrived, the regiment was forming up on the square, where I was not allowed to remain, and I was heart-broken at not having been able to say good-bye to Saint-Loup. I went up to his room, but there

was no sign of him. I inquired after him from a group of sick troopers—recruits who had been excused route marches, the young graduate, one of the “old soldiers,” who were watching the regiment form up.

“You haven’t seen Sergeant Saint-Loup, by any chance?” I asked.

“He’s already gone down, sir,” said the old soldier.

“I never saw him,” said the graduate.

“You never saw him,” exclaimed the old soldier, losing all interest in me, “you never saw our famous Saint-Loup, the figure he’s cutting with his new breeches! When the Cap’n sees that, officer’s cloth, my word!”

“Oh, that’s a good one, officer’s cloth,” replied the young graduate, who, having reported sick, was excused marching and ventured, not without some trepidation, to make bold with the veterans. “It isn’t officer’s cloth, it’s just ordinary cloth.”

“Monsieur?” inquired the old soldier angrily.

He was indignant that the young graduate should question his assertion that the breeches were made of officer’s cloth, but, being a Breton, born in a village that went by the name of Penguern-Stereden, and having learned French with as much difficulty as if it had been English or German, whenever he felt himself overcome by emotion he would go on saying “Monsieur?” to give himself time to find words, then, after this preparation, let loose his eloquence, confining himself to the repetition of certain words which he knew better than others, but without haste, taking every precaution to gloss over his unfamiliarity with the pronunciation.

“Ah! so it’s just ordinary cloth?” he broke out eventually with a fury whose intensity increased in direct proportion to the sluggishness of his speech. “Ah! so it’s just ordinary cloth! When I tell you that it is officer’s cloth, when-I-tell-you, since-I-tell-you, it’s because I know, I would think. You’d better not spin your cock-and-bull yarns here.”

“Oh, well, if you say so,” replied the young graduate, overcome by the force of this argument.

“There, look, there’s the Cap’n coming along. No, but just look at Saint-Loup, the way he throws his leg out, and his head. Would you call that a non-com? And his eyeglass—it’s all over the shop.”

I asked these troopers, who did not seem at all embarrassed by my presence, whether I too might look out of the window. They neither objected to my doing so nor moved to make room for me. I saw Captain de Borodino go majestically by, putting his horse into a trot, and seemingly under the illusion that he was taking part in the Battle of Austerlitz. A few loiterers had stopped by the gate to see the regiment file out. Erect on his charger, his face rather plump, his cheeks of an Imperial fullness, his eye clear-sighted, the Prince must have been the victim of some hallucination, as I was myself whenever, after the tram-car had passed, the silence that followed its rumble seemed to me crossed and striated by a vaguely musical palpitation.

I was wretched at having failed to say good-bye to Saint-Loup, but I went nevertheless, for my only concern was to return to my grandmother; always until then, in this little country town, when I thought of what my grandmother must be doing by herself, I had pictured her as she was when with me, but eliminating myself without taking into account the effects on her of such an elimination; now, I had to free myself at the first possible moment, in her arms, from the phantom, hitherto unsuspected and suddenly called into being by her voice, of a grandmother really separated from me, resigned, having (something I had never yet thought of her as having) a definite age, who had just received a letter from me in the empty house in which I had already imagined Mamma when I had left her to go to Balbec.

Alas, it was this phantom that I saw when, entering the drawing-room before my grandmother had been told of my return, I found her there reading. I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence, and, like a woman whom one surprises at a piece of needlework which she will hurriedly put aside if anyone comes in, she was absorbed in thoughts which she had never allowed to be seen by me. Of myself—thanks to that privilege which does not last but which gives one, during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one’s own absence—there was present only the witness, the observer, in travelling coat and hat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that automatically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph. We never see the people who are dear to us save in the animated system, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which, before allowing the images that their faces present to reach us, seizes them in its vortex and flings them back upon the idea that we have always had of them, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it. How, since into the forehead and the cheeks of my grandmother I had been accustomed to read all the most delicate, the most permanent qualities of her mind, how, since every habitual glance is an act of necromancy, each face that we love a mirror of the past, how could I have failed to overlook what had become dulled and changed in her, seeing that in the most trivial spectacles of our daily life, our eyes, charged with thought, neglect, as would a classical tragedy, every image that does not contribute to the action of the play and retain only those that may help to make its purpose intelligible. But if, instead of our eyes, it should happen to be a purely physical object, a photographic plate, that has watched the action, then what we see, in the courtyard of the Institute, for example, instead of the dignified emergence of an Academician who is trying to hail a cab, will be his tottering steps, his precautions to avoid falling on his back, the parabola of his fall, as though he were drunk or the ground covered in ice. So it is when some cruel trick of chance prevents our intelligent and pious tenderness from coming forward in time to hide from our eyes what they ought never to behold, when it is forestalled by our eyes, and they, arriving first in the field and having it to themselves, set to work mechanically, like films, and show us, in place of the beloved person who has long ago ceased to exist but whose death our tenderness has always hitherto kept concealed from us, the new person whom a hundred

times daily it has clothed with a loving and mendacious likeness. And—like a sick man who, not having looked at his own reflexion for a long time, and regularly composing the features which he never sees in accordance with the ideal image of himself that he carries in his mind, recoils on catching sight in the glass, in the middle of an arid desert of a face, of the sloping pink protuberance of a nose as huge as one of the pyramids of Egypt—I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had never seen her save in my own soul, always in the same place in the past, through the transparency of contiguous and overlapping memories, suddenly, in our drawing-room which formed part of a new world, that of Time, that which is inhabited by the strangers of whom we say “He’s begun to age a good deal,” for the first time and for a moment only, since she vanished very quickly, I saw, sitting on the sofa beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and vulgar, sick, day-dreaming, letting her slightly crazed eyes wander over a book, an overburdened old woman whom I did not know.

My request to be allowed to inspect the Elstirs in Mme de Guermantes’s collection had been met by Saint-Loup with: “I’ll answer for her.” And indeed, unfortunately, it was he and he alone who did answer. We answer readily enough for other people when, setting our mental stage with the little puppets that represent them, we manipulate these to suit our fancy. No doubt even then we take into account the difficulties due to another person’s nature being different from our own, and we do not fail to appeal to motives with the power to influence that nature—self-interest, persuasion, emotion—which will neutralise any contrary tendencies. But it is still our own nature which imagines these divergences from our nature; it is we who remove these difficulties; it is we who measure these compelling motives. And when we wish to see the other person perform in real life the actions which in our mind’s eye we have made him rehearse, the case is altered, we come up against unseen resistances which may prove insuperable. One of the strongest is doubtless that which may be developed in a woman who does not love, by the rank and unconquerable repulsion she feels for the man who loves her: during the long weeks in which Saint-Loup still did not come to Paris, his aunt, to whom I had no doubt of his having written begging her to do so, never once asked me to call at her house to see the Elstirs.

I perceived signs of coldness on the part of another occupant of the building. This was Jupien. Did he consider that I ought to have gone in and said good-day to him, on my return from Doncières, before even going upstairs to our own flat? My mother said that it was nothing to be surprised about. Françoise had told her that he was like that, subject to sudden fits of ill-humour, without any cause. These invariably passed off after a while.

Meanwhile the winter was drawing to an end. One morning, after several weeks of showers and storms, I heard in my chimney—instead of the formless, elastic, sombre wind which stirred in me a longing to go to the sea—the cooing of the pigeons, nesting in the wall outside; shimmering and unexpected like a first hyacinth gently tearing open its nutritious heart to release its flower of sound, mauve and satin-soft, letting into my still dark and shuttered bedroom as through an opened window the warmth, the brightness, the fatigue of a first fine day. That morning, I caught myself humming a music-hall tune which had never entered my head since the year when I had been due to go to Florence and Venice—so profoundly, and so unpredictably, does the atmosphere act on our organism and draw from dim reserves where we had forgotten them the melodies written there which our memory has failed to decipher. Presently a more conscious dreamer accompanied this musician to whom I was listening inside myself, without even having recognised at first what he was playing.

I realised that it was not for any reason peculiar to Balbec that on my arrival there I had failed to find in its church the charm which it had had for me before I knew it; that in Florence or Parma or Venice my imagination could no more take the place of my eyes when I looked at the sights there. I realised this; similarly, one New Year’s evening at nightfall, standing before a column of playbills, I had discovered the illusion that lies in our thinking that certain feast-days differ essentially from the other days in the calendar. And yet I could not prevent my memory of the time during which I had looked forward to spending Easter in Florence from continuing to make that festival the atmosphere, so to speak, of the City of Flowers, to give at once to Easter Day something Florentine and to Florence something paschal. Easter was still a long way off; but in the range of days that stretched out before me the days of Holy Week stood out more clearly at the end of those that came between. Touched by a ray, like certain houses in a village which one sees from a distance when the rest are in shadow, they had caught and kept all the sun.

The weather had now become milder. And my parents themselves, by urging me to take more exercise, gave me an excuse for continuing my morning walks. I had wanted to give them up, since they meant my meeting Mme de Guermantes. But it was for that very reason that I kept thinking all the time of those walks, and this induced me to go on finding fresh reasons for taking them, reasons which had no connexion with Mme de Guermantes and which easily convinced me that, had she never existed, I should still have gone for a walk at that hour every morning.

Alas, if for me meeting any person other than herself would have been a matter of indifference, I felt that, for her, meeting anyone in the world except myself would have been only too endurable. It happened that, in the course of her morning walks, she received the salutations of plenty of fools whom she regarded as such. But the appearance of these in her path seemed to her, if not to hold out any promise of pleasure, to be at any rate the result of mere accident. And she stopped them at times, for there are moments in which one wants to escape from oneself, to accept the hospitality offered by the soul of another, provided always that this soul, however modest and plain it may be, is a different soul, whereas in my heart she felt with exasperation that

what she would have found was herself. And so, even when I had another reason for taking the same route than my desire to see her, I trembled like a guilty man as she came past; and sometimes, in order to neutralise what might seem to be excessive in my overtures, I would barely acknowledge her salute, or would stare at her without raising my hat, and succeed only in irritating her even more and making her begin to regard me as insolent and ill-bred besides.

She was now wearing lighter, or at any rate brighter clothes, and would come strolling down the street in which already, as though it were spring, in front of the narrow shops that were squeezed in between the spacious fronts of the old aristocratic mansions, over the booths of the butter-woman and the fruit-woman and the vegetable-woman, awnings were spread to protect them from the sun. I told myself that the woman whom I could see in the distance, walking, opening her sunshade, crossing the street, was, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, the greatest living exponent of the art of performing those movements and of making of them something exquisite. Meanwhile she advanced towards me, and, unconscious of this widespread reputation, her narrow, refractory body, which had absorbed nothing of it, was arched forward under a scarf of violet silk; her clear, sullen eyes looked absently in front of her, and had perhaps caught sight of me; she was biting the corner of her lip; I watched her adjust her muff, give alms to a beggar, buy a bunch of violets from a flower-seller, with the same curiosity that I should have felt in watching the brush-strokes of a great painter. And when, as she passed me, she gave me a bow that was accompanied sometimes by a faint smile, it was as though she had sketched for me, adding a personal dedication, a water-colour that was a masterpiece of art. Each of her dresses seemed to me her natural and necessary setting, like the projection of a particular aspect of her soul. On one of these Lenten mornings, when she was on her way out to lunch, I met her wearing a dress of bright red velvet, cut slightly low at the neck. Her face appeared dreamy beneath its pile of fair hair. I was less sad than usual because the melancholy of her expression, the sort of clausturation which the startling hue of her dress set between her and the rest of the world, made her seem somehow lonely and unhappy, and this comforted me. The dress struck me as being the materialisation round about her of the scarlet rays of a heart which I did not recognise in her and might perhaps have been able to console; sheltered in the mystical light of the garment with its soft folds, she reminded me of some saint of the early ages of Christianity. After which I felt ashamed of inflicting my presence on this holy martyr. "But, after all, the streets belong to everybody."

The streets belong to everybody, I repeated to myself, giving a different meaning to the words, and marvelling that indeed in the crowded street, often soaked with rain, which gave it a precious lustre like the streets, at times, in the old towns of Italy, the Duchesse de Guermantes mingled with the public life of the world moments of her own secret life, showing herself thus in all her mystery to everyone, jostled by all and sundry, with the splendid gratuitousness of the greatest works of art. As I often went out in the morning after staying awake all night, in the afternoon my parents would tell me to lie down for a little and try to get some sleep. There is no need, when one is trying to find sleep, to give much thought to the quest, but habit is very useful, and even the absence of thought. But in these afternoon hours I lacked both. Before going to sleep, I devoted so much time to thinking that I should be unable to do so that even after I was asleep a little of my thought remained. It was no more than a glimmer in the almost total darkness, but it was enough to cast a reflexion in my sleep, first of the idea that I could not sleep, and then, a reflexion of this reflexion, that it was in my sleep that I had had the idea that I was not asleep, then, by a further refraction, my awakening ... to a fresh doze in which I was trying to tell some friends who had come into my room that, a moment earlier, when I was asleep, I had imagined that I was not asleep. These shadows were barely distinguishable; it would have required a keen—and quite useless—delicacy of perception to seize them. Similarly, in later years, in Venice, long after the sun had set, when it seemed to be quite dark, I have seen, thanks to the echo, itself imperceptible, of a last note of light held indefinitely on the surface of the canals as though by the effect of some optical pedal, the reflexions of the palaces displayed as though for all time in a darker velvet on the crepuscular greyness of the water. One of my dreams was the synthesis of what my imagination had often sought to depict, in my waking hours, of a certain seagirt place and its mediaeval past. In my sleep I saw a Gothic city rising from a sea whose waves were stilled as in a stained-glass window. An arm of the sea divided the town in two; the green water stretched to my feet; on the opposite shore it washed round the base of an oriental church, and beyond it houses which existed already in the fourteenth century, so that to go across to them would have been to ascend the stream of time. This dream in which nature had learned from art, in which the sea had turned Gothic, this dream in which I longed to attain, in which I believed that I was attaining to the impossible, was one that I felt I had often dreamed before. But as it is the nature of what we imagine in sleep to multiply itself in the past, and to appear, even when new, to be familiar, I supposed that I was mistaken. I noticed, however, that I did indeed frequently have this dream.

The diminutions, too, that characterise sleep were reflected in mine, but in a symbolic manner; I could not in the darkness make out the faces of the friends who were in the room, for we sleep with our eyes shut; I, who could carry on endless verbal arguments with myself while I dreamed, as soon as I tried to speak to these friends felt the words stick in my throat, for we do not speak distinctly in our sleep; I wanted to go to them, and I could not move my limbs, for we do not walk when we are asleep either; and, suddenly, I was ashamed to be seen by them, for we sleep without our clothes. So, my eyes blinded, my lips sealed, my limbs fettered, my body naked, the image of sleep which my sleep itself projected had the appearance of those great allegorical figures where Giotto has portrayed Envy with a serpent in her mouth, and which Swann had given me.



Saint-Loup came to Paris for a few hours only. While affirming that he had not yet had an opportunity of speaking to his cousin, "She's not at all nice, Oriane," he told me with innocent self-betrayal. "She's not my old Oriane any longer, they've gone and changed her, I assure you it's not worth while bothering your head about her. You pay her far too great a compliment. You wouldn't care to meet my cousin Poitiers?" he went on, without stopping to reflect that this could not possibly give me any pleasure. "There's an intelligent young woman whom you'd like. She's married to my cousin, the Duc de Poitiers, who is a good fellow, but a bit slow for her. I've told her about you. She said I was to bring you to see her. She's much prettier than Oriane, and younger, too. She's a really nice person, you know, a really excellent person." Then there were expressions newly—and all the more ardently—adopted by Robert, which meant that the person in question had a delicate nature. "I don't go so far as to say she's a Dreyfusard, you must remember her background; still, she did say to me: 'If he was innocent, how ghastly for him to have been shut up on Devil's Island.' You see what I mean, don't you? And then she's the sort of woman who does a tremendous lot for her old governesses; she's given orders that they're never to be made to use the servants' staircase. She's a very good sort, I assure you. Oriane doesn't really like her because she feels she's more intelligent."

Although completely absorbed in the pity which she felt for one of the Guermantes footmen—who could not go to see his girl, even when the Duchess was out, because it would immediately have been reported to her from the lodge—Françoise was heartbroken at not having been in the house at the moment of Saint-Loup's visit, but this was because now she herself paid visits too. She never failed to go out on the days when I most needed her. It was always to see her brother, her niece and, more particularly, her own daughter, who had recently come to live in Paris. The family nature of these visits itself increased the irritation that I felt at being deprived of her services, for I foresaw that she would speak of them as being among those duties which could not be avoided, according to the laws laid down at Saint-André-des-Champs. And so I never listened to her excuses without an ill humour which was highly unjust to her, and was brought to a head by Françoise's way of saying not: "I've been to see my brother," or "I've been to see my niece," but: "I've been to see the brother," "I just looked in to say good-day to the niece" (or "to my niece the butcheress"). As for her daughter, Françoise would have been glad to see her return to Combray. But the latter, who went in for abbreviations like a woman of fashion, though hers were of a vulgar kind, protested that the week she was shortly going to spend at Combray would seem quite long enough without so much as a sight of "the *Intran*."<sup>7</sup> She was even less willing to go to Françoise's sister, who lived in a mountainous region, for "mountains aren't really interesting," said the daughter, giving to the adjective a new and terrible meaning. She could not make up her mind to go back to Méséglise, where "the people are so stupid," where in the market the gossips at their stalls would claim cousinhood with her and say "Why, it's never poor Bazireau's daughter?" She would sooner die than go back and bury herself down there, now that she had "tasted the life of Paris," and Françoise, traditionalist as she was, smiled complacently nevertheless at the spirit of innovation embodied in this new "Parisian" when she said: "Very well, mother, if you don't get your day off, you've only to send me a wire."

The weather had turned chilly again. "Go out? What for? To catch your death?" said Françoise, who preferred to remain in the house during the week which her daughter and brother and the butcher-niece had gone to spend at Combray. Being, moreover, the last adherent in whom survived obscurely the doctrine of my aunt Léonie in matters of natural philosophy, Françoise would add, speaking of this unseasonable weather: "It's the remains of the wrath of God!" But I responded to her complaints only with a languid smile; all the more indifferent to these predictions in that whatever happened it would be fine for me; already, I could see the morning sun shining on the slope of Fiesole, and I warmed myself smilingly in its rays; their strength obliged me to half-open and half-shut my eyelids, which, like alabaster lamps, were filled with a roseate glow. It was not only the bells that came from Italy, Italy had come with them. My faithful hands would not lack flowers to honour the anniversary of the pilgrimage which I ought to have made long ago, for since, here in Paris, the weather had turned cold again as in another year at the time of our preparations for departure at the end of Lent, in the liquid, freezing air which bathed the chestnuts and planes on the boulevards and the tree in the courtyard of our house, the narcissi, the jonquils, the anemones of the Ponte Vecchio were already opening their petals as in a bowl of pure water.

My father had informed us that he now knew, through his friend A.J., where M. de Norpois went when he met him about the place.

"It's to see Mme de Villeparisis. They're great friends; I never knew anything about it. It seems she's a delightful person, a most superior woman. You ought to go and call on her," he told me. "Another thing that surprised me very much: he spoke to me of M. de Guermantes as a most distinguished man; I'd always taken him for a boor. It seems he knows an enormous amount, and has perfect taste, only he's very proud of his name and his connexions. But as a matter of fact, according to Norpois, he has a tremendous position, not only here but all over Europe. It appears the Austrian Emperor and the Tsar treat him just like one of themselves. Old Norpois told me that Mme de Villeparisis had taken quite a fancy to you, and that you meet all sorts of interesting people in her house. He praised you very highly. You'll see him if you go there, and he may have some good advice for you even if you are going to be a writer. For I can see you won't do anything else. It might turn out quite a good career; it's not what I should have chosen for you myself, but you'll be a man in no time now, we shan't always be here to look after you, and we mustn't prevent you from following your vocation."

If only I had been able to start writing! But, whatever the conditions in which I approached the task (as, too, alas, the undertakings not to touch alcohol, to go to bed early, to sleep, to keep fit), whether it was with enthusiasm, with method, with pleasure, in depriving myself of a walk, or postponing it and keeping it in

reserve as a reward for industry, taking advantage of an hour of good health, utilising the inactivity forced on me by a day's illness, what always emerged in the end from all my efforts was a virgin page, undefiled by any writing, ineluctable as that forced card which in certain tricks one invariably is made to draw, however carefully one may first have shuffled the pack. I was merely the instrument of habits of not working, of not going to bed, of not sleeping, which must somehow be realised at all costs; if I offered them no resistance, if I contented myself with the pretext they seized from the first opportunity that the day afforded them of acting as they chose, I escaped without serious harm, I slept for a few hours after all towards morning, I read a little, I did not over-exert myself; but if I attempted to thwart them, if I decided to go to bed early, to drink only water, to work, they grew restive, they adopted strong measures, they made me really ill, I was obliged to double my dose of alcohol, did not lie down in bed for two days and nights on end, could not even read, and I vowed that another time I would be more reasonable, that is to say less wise, like the victim of an assault who allows himself to be robbed for fear, should he offer resistance, of being murdered.

My father, in the meantime, had met M. de Guermantes once or twice, and, now that M. de Norpois had told him that the Duke was a remarkable man, had begun to pay more attention to what he said. As it happened, they met in the courtyard and discussed Mme de Villeparisis. "He tells me she's his aunt; 'Viparisi,' he pronounces it. He tells me, too, she's an extraordinarily able woman. In fact he said she kept a School of Wit," my father added, impressed by the vagueness of this expression, which he had indeed come across now and then in volumes of memoirs, but without attaching to it any definite meaning. My mother had so much respect for him that when she saw that he did not dismiss as of no importance the fact that Mme de Villeparisis kept a School of Wit, she decided that this must be of some consequence. Although she had always known through my grandmother the Marquise's intellectual worth, it was immediately enhanced in her eyes. My grandmother, who was not very well just then, was not in favour at first of the suggested visit, and afterwards lost interest in the matter. Since we had moved into our new flat, Mme de Villeparisis had several times asked my grandmother to call upon her. And invariably my grandmother had replied that she was not going out just at present, in one of those letters which, by a new habit of hers which we did not understand, she no longer sealed herself but employed Françoise to stick down for her. As for myself, without any very clear picture in my mind of this School of Wit, I should not have been greatly surprised to find the old lady from Balbec installed behind a desk, as, for that matter, I eventually did.

My father would in addition have been glad to know whether the Ambassador's support would be worth many votes to him at the *Institut*, for which he had thoughts of standing as an independent candidate. To tell the truth, while he did not venture to doubt that he would have M. de Norpois's support, he was by no means certain of it. He had thought it merely malicious gossip when he was told at the Ministry that M. de Norpois, wishing to be himself the only representative there of the *Institut*, would put every possible obstacle in the way of my father's candidature, which would moreover embarrass him at the moment since he was supporting another candidate. And yet, when M. Leroy-Beaulieu had first advised him to stand, and had calculated his chances, my father had been struck by the fact that, among the colleagues upon whom he could count for support, the eminent economist had not mentioned M. de Norpois. He dared not ask the Ambassador point-blank, but hoped that I would return from my visit to Mme de Villeparisis with his election as good as secured. This visit was now imminent. M. de Norpois's endorsement, capable of ensuring my father the votes of at least two thirds of the Academy,<sup>8</sup> seemed to him all the more probable since the Ambassador's willingness to oblige was proverbial, those who liked him least admitting that no one else took such pleasure in being of service. And besides, at the Ministry, his patronage was extended to my father far more markedly than to any other official.

My father had another encounter about this time, which caused him extreme indignation as well as astonishment. One day he ran into Mme Sazerat, whose life in Paris was restricted by her comparative poverty to occasional visits to a friend. There was no one who bored my father quite so intensely as did Mme Sazerat, so much so that Mamma was obliged, once a year, to intercede with him in sweet and suppliant tones: "My dear, I really must invite Mme Sazerat to the house, just once; she won't stay long"; and even: "Listen, dear, I'm going to ask you to make a great sacrifice; do go and call on Mme Sazerat. You know I hate bothering you, but it would be so nice of you." He would laugh, raise various objections, and go to pay the call. And so, for all that Mme Sazerat did not appeal to him, on catching sight of her in the street my father went towards her, doffing his hat; but to his profound astonishment Mme Sazerat confined her greeting to the frigid bow enforced by politeness towards a person who is guilty of some disgraceful action or has been condemned to live henceforth in another hemisphere. My father had come home speechless with rage. Next day my mother met Mme Sazerat in someone's house. She did not offer my mother her hand, but merely smiled at her with a vague and melancholy air as one smiles at a person with whom one used to play as a child, but with whom one has since severed all connexions because she has led an abandoned life, has married a jailbird or (what is worse still) a divorced man. Now, from time immemorial my parents had accorded to Mme Sazerat, and inspired in her, the most profound respect. But (and of this my mother was ignorant) Mme Sazerat, alone of her kind at Combray, was a Dreyfusard. My father, a friend of M. Méline,<sup>9</sup> was convinced that Dreyfus was guilty. He had sharply sent about their business those colleagues who had asked him to sign a petition for a retrial. He refused to speak to me for a week after learning that I had chosen to take a different line. His opinions were well known. He came near to being looked upon as a Nationalist. As for my grandmother, who alone of the family seemed likely to be stirred by a generous doubt, whenever anyone spoke to her of the possible innocence of Dreyfus, she gave a shake of her head the meaning of which we did not at the time understand, but which was like the gesture of a person who has been interrupted while thinking of more

serious things. My mother, torn between her love for my father and her hope that I might turn out to have brains, preserved an impartiality which she expressed by silence. Finally my grandfather, who adored the Army (albeit his duties with the National Guard had been the bugbear of his riper years), could never see a regiment march past the garden railings at Combray without baring his head as the colonel and the colours passed. All this was quite enough to make Mme Sazerat, who was thoroughly aware of the disinterestedness and integrity of my father and grandfather, regard them as pillars of Injustice. We forgive the crimes of individuals, but not their participation in a collective crime. As soon as she knew my father to be an anti-Dreyfusard she put continents and centuries between herself and him. Which explains why, across such an interval of time and space, her greeting had been imperceptible to my father, and why it had not occurred to her to shake hands or to say a few words which would never have carried across the worlds that lay between.

Saint-Loup, who was due to come to Paris, had promised to take me to Mme de Villeparisis's, where I hoped, though I had not said so to him, that we might meet Mme de Guermantes. He invited me to lunch in a restaurant with his mistress, whom we were afterwards to accompany to a rehearsal. We were to go out in the morning and call for her at her home on the outskirts of Paris.

I had asked Saint-Loup if the restaurant to which we went for lunch (in the lives of young noblemen with money to spend the restaurant plays as important a part as do bales of merchandise in Arabian tales) could for preference be the one to which Aimé had told me that he would be going as head waiter until the Balbec season opened. It was a great attraction to me who dreamed of so many journeys and made so few to see again someone who formed part not merely of my memories of Balbec but of Balbec itself, who went there year after year and, when ill health or my studies compelled me to stay in Paris, would be watching just the same, during the long July afternoons while he waited for the guests to come in to dinner, the sun creep down the sky and set in the sea, through the glass panels of the great dining-room behind which, at the hour when the light died, the motionless wings of vessels, smoky blue in the distance, looked like exotic and nocturnal butterflies in a show-case. Himself magnetised by his contact with the powerful lodestone of Balbec, this head waiter became in turn a magnet for me. I hoped by talking to him to enter in advance into communication with Balbec, to have realised here in Paris something of the delights of travel.

I set out first thing, leaving Françoise at home to moan over the affianced footman who had once again been prevented, the evening before, from going to see his betrothed. Françoise had found him in tears; he had been itching to go and strike the porter, but had restrained himself, for he valued his place.

Before reaching Saint-Loup's, where he was to be waiting for me at the door, I ran into Legrandin, of whom we had lost sight since our Combray days, and who, though now quite grey, had preserved his air of youthful candour. Seeing me, he stopped.

"Ah! so it's you," he exclaimed, "a man of fashion, and in a frock-coat too! That is a livery in which my independent spirit would be ill at ease. It is true that you are a man of the world, I suppose, and go out paying calls! In order to go and meditate, as I do, beside some half-ruined tomb, my bow-tie and jacket are not out of place. You know how I admire the charming quality of your soul; that is why I tell you how deeply I regret that you should go forth and betray it among the Gentiles. By being capable of remaining for a moment in the nauseating atmosphere of the salons—for me, unbreathable—you pronounce on your own future the condemnation, the damnation of the Prophet. I can see it all: you frequent the frivolous-minded, the gracious livers—that is the vice of our contemporary bourgeoisie. Ah, those aristocrats! The Terror was greatly to blame for not cutting the heads off every one of them. They are all disreputable scum, when they are not simply dreary idiots. Still, my poor boy, if that sort of thing amuses you! While you are on your way to some *tea-party* your old friend will be more fortunate than you, for alone in an outlying suburb he will be watching the pink moon rise in a violet sky. The truth is that I scarcely belong to this earth upon which I feel myself such an exile; it takes all the force of the law of gravity to hold me here, to keep me from escaping into another sphere. I belong to a different planet. Good-bye; do not take amiss the old-time frankness of the peasant of the Vivonne, who has also remained a peasant of the Danube. To prove my sincere regard for you, I shall send you my latest novel. But you will not care for it; it is not deliquescent enough, not *fin de siècle* enough for you; it is too frank, too honest. What you want is Bergotte, you have confessed it, gamy stuff for the jaded palates of refined voluptuaries. I suppose I am looked upon, in your set, as an old stick-in-the-mud; I make the mistake of putting my heart into what I write: that is no longer done; besides, the life of the people is not distinguished enough to interest your little snobbicules. Go, get you gone, try to recall at times the words of Christ: 'This do, and thou shalt live.' Farewell, friend."

It was not with any particular ill-humour against Legrandin that I parted from him. Certain memories are like friends in common, they can bring about reconciliations; set down amid fields of buttercups strewn with the ruins of feudal battlements, the little wooden bridge still joined us, Legrandin and me, as it joined the two banks of the Vivonne.

After coming out of a Paris in which, although spring had begun, the trees on the boulevards had hardly put on their first leaves, it was a marvel to Saint-Loup and myself, when the circle train had set us down at the suburban village in which his mistress was living, to see each little garden decked with the huge festal altars of the fruit-trees in blossom. It was like one of those peculiar, poetic, ephemeral, local festivals which people travel long distances to attend on certain fixed occasions, but this one was given by Nature. The blossom of the cherry-tree is stuck so close to its branches, like a white sheath, that from a distance, among the other trees that showed as yet scarcely a flower or leaf, one might on this day of sunshine that was still so cold have taken it for snow that had remained clinging there, having melted everywhere else. But the tall pear-trees enveloped each house, each modest courtyard, in a more spacious, more uniform, more dazzling whiteness, as

if all the dwellings, all the enclosed spaces in the village, were on their way to make their first communion on the same solemn day.

These villages in the environs of Paris still have at their gates parks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which were the “folies” of the stewards and mistresses of the great. A market gardener had utilised one of these, which was situated on low ground beside the road, for his fruit-trees (or had simply, perhaps, preserved the plan of an immense orchard of former days). Laid out in quincunxes, these pear-trees, more spaced-out and less advanced than those that I had seen, formed great quadrilaterals—separated by low walls—of white blossom, on each side of which the light fell differently, so that all these airy roofless chambers seemed to belong to a Palace of the Sun, such as one might find in Crete; and they reminded one also of the different ponds of a reservoir, or of those parts of the sea which man has subdivided for some fishery, or to plant oyster-beds, when one saw, according to their orientation, the light play upon the espaliers as upon springtime waters, and coax into unfolding here and there, gleaming amid the open-work, azure-panelled trellis of the branches, the foaming whiteness of a creamy, sunlit flower.

It had been a country village, and still had its old *mairie*, sunburned and mellow, in front of which, in the place of maypoles and streamers, three tall pear-trees were elegantly beflagged with white satin as though for some local civic festival.

Never had Robert spoken to me more tenderly of his mistress than he did during this journey. She alone had taken root in his heart; to his future career in the Army, his position in society, his family, he was not, of course, indifferent, but they counted for nothing beside the smallest thing that concerned his mistress. That alone had any importance in his eyes, infinitely more importance than the Guermentes and all the kings of the earth put together. I do not know whether he formulated to himself the notion that she was of a superior essence to the rest of the world, but he was exclusively preoccupied and concerned with what affected her. Through her and for her he was capable of suffering, of being happy, perhaps of killing. There was really nothing that interested, that could excite him except what his mistress wanted, what she was going to do, what was going on, discernible at most in fleeting changes of expression, in the narrow expanse of her face and behind her privileged brow. So nice-minded in all else, he looked forward to the prospect of a brilliant marriage, solely in order to be able to continue to maintain and keep her. If one had asked oneself what was the value that he set on her, I doubt whether one could ever have imagined a figure high enough. If he did not marry her, it was because a practical instinct warned him that as soon as she had nothing more to expect from him she would leave him, or would at least live as she pleased, and that he must retain his hold on her by keeping her in expectation. For he admitted the possibility that she did not love him. No doubt the general malady called love must have forced him—as it forces all men—to believe at times that she did. But in his heart of hearts he felt that her love for him was not inconsistent with her remaining with him only on account of his money, and that as soon as she had nothing more to expect from him she would make haste (the dupe of her literary friends and their theories, and yet still loving him, he thought) to leave him.

“Today, if she’s nice,” he confided to me, “I’m going to give her a present that will make her very happy. It’s a necklace she saw at Boucheron’s. It’s rather too much for me just at present—thirty thousand francs. But, poor puss, she doesn’t have much pleasure in her life. She will be jolly pleased with it, I know. She mentioned it to me and told me she knew somebody who would perhaps give it to her. I don’t believe it’s true, but just in case, I arranged with Boucheron, who is our family jeweller, to reserve it for me. I’m so happy to think that you’re going to meet her. She’s nothing so very wonderful to look at, you know” (I could see that he thought just the opposite and had said this only to make my admiration the greater). “What she has above all is marvellous judgment: she’ll perhaps be afraid to talk much in front of you, but I rejoice in advance over what she’ll say to me about you afterwards. You know she says things one can go on thinking about for hours; there’s really something about her that’s quite Pythian.”

On our way to her house we passed a row of little gardens, and I was obliged to stop, for they were all dazzlingly aflour with pear and cherry blossom; as empty, no doubt, and lifeless only yesterday as a house that is still to let, they were suddenly peopled and adorned by these newcomers, arrived overnight, whose beautiful white garments could be seen through the railings along the garden paths.

“I’ll tell you what—I can see you’d rather stop and look at all that and be poetical,” said Robert, “so don’t budge from here, will you—my friend’s house is quite close, and I’ll go and fetch her.”

While I waited I strolled up and down the road, past these modest gardens. If I raised my head I could see now and then girls sitting at the windows, but outside, in the open air, at the height of a half-landing, dangling here and there among the foliage, light and pliant in their fresh mauve frocks, clusters of young lilacs swayed in the breeze without heeding the passer-by who raised his eyes towards their green arbour. I recognised in them the purple-clad platoons posted at the entrance to M. Swann’s park in the warm spring afternoons, like an enchanting rustic tapestry. I took a path which led me into a meadow. A cold wind swept through it, as at Combray, but in the middle of this rich, moist, rural land, which might have been on the banks of the Vivonne, there had nevertheless arisen, punctual at the trysting place like all its band of brothers, a great white pear-tree which waved smilingly in the sun’s face, like a curtain of light materialised and made palpable, its flowers shaken by the breeze but polished and glazed with silver by the sun’s rays.

Suddenly Saint-Loup appeared, accompanied by his mistress, and then, in this woman who was for him the epitome of love, of all the sweet things of life, whose personality, mysteriously enshrined as in a tabernacle, was the object that occupied incessantly his toiling imagination, whom he felt that he would never really know, as to whom he asked himself what could be her secret self, behind the veil of eyes and flesh—in this woman I recognised instantaneously “Rachel when from the Lord,” she who, but a few years since (women

change their situation so rapidly in that world, when they do change) used to say to the procuress: "Tomorrow evening, then, if you want me for someone, you'll send round for me, won't you?"

And when they had "come round" for her, and she found herself alone in the room with the "someone," she knew so well what was required of her that after locking the door, as a womanly precaution or a ritual gesture, she would quickly remove all her clothes, as one does before the doctor who is going to examine one, and did not pause in the process unless the "someone," not caring for nudity, told her that she might keep on her shift, as specialists do sometimes, who, having an extremely fine ear and being afraid of their patient's catching a chill, are satisfied with listening to his breathing and the beating of his heart through his shirt. I sensed that on this woman—whose whole life, whose every thought, whose entire past and all the men by whom at one time or another she had been had, were to me so utterly unimportant that if she had told me about them I should have listened only out of politeness and scarcely have heard—the anxiety, the torment, the love of Saint-Loup had been concentrated in such a way as to make, out of what was for me a mechanical toy, the cause of endless suffering, the very object and reward of existence. Seeing these two elements separately (because I had known "Rachel when from the Lord" in a house of ill fame), I realised that many women for the sake of whom men live, suffer, take their own lives, may be in themselves or for other people what Rachel was for me. The idea that anyone could be tormented by curiosity with regard to her life amazed me. I could have told Robert of any number of her unchastities, which seemed to me the most uninteresting things in the world. And how they would have pained him! And what had he not given to learn them, without avail!

I realised then how much a human imagination can put behind a little scrap of a face, such as this woman's was, if it is the imagination that has come to know it first; and conversely into what wretched elements, crudely material and utterly valueless, something that had been the inspiration of countless dreams might be decomposed if, on the contrary, it had been perceived in the opposite manner, by the most casual and trivial acquaintance. I saw that what had appeared to me to be not worth twenty francs when it had been offered to me for twenty francs in the brothel, where it was then for me simply a woman desirous of earning twenty francs, might be worth more than a million, more than family affection, more than all the most coveted positions in life, if one had begun by imagining her as a mysterious being, interesting to know, difficult to seize and to hold. No doubt it was the same thin and narrow face that we saw, Robert and I. But we had arrived at it by two opposite ways which would never converge, and we would never both see it from the same side. That face, with its looks, its smiles, the movements of its mouth, I had known from the outside as being that of a woman of the sort who for twenty francs would do anything that I asked. And so her looks, her smiles, the movements of her mouth had seemed to me expressive merely of generalised actions with no individual quality, and beneath them I should not have had the curiosity to look for a person. But what to me had in a sense been offered at the start, that consenting face, had been for Robert an ultimate goal towards which he had made his way through endless hopes and doubts, suspicions and dreams. Yes, he had given more than a million francs in order to have, in order that others should not have, what had been offered to me, as to all and sundry, for twenty. That he too should not have had her at that price may have been due to the chance of a moment, the instant in which she who seemed ready to give herself suddenly jibs, having perhaps an assignation elsewhere, some reason which makes her more difficult of access that day. If the man in question is a sentimentalist, then, even if she has not noticed it, but infinitely more if she has, the direst game begins. Unable to swallow his disappointment, to make himself forget about the woman, he pursues her afresh, she rebuffs him, until a mere smile for which he no longer dared to hope is bought at a thousand times what should have been the price of the last favours. It sometimes even happens in such a case, when a man has been led by a mixture of naïvety of judgment and cowardice in the face of suffering to commit the crowning folly of making an inaccessible idol of a whore, that he never obtains these ultimate favours, or even the first kiss, and no longer even ventures to ask for them in order not to belie his assurances of Platonic love. And it is then a bitter anguish to leave the world without ever having experienced the embraces of the woman one has most passionately loved. As for Rachel's favours, however, Saint-Loup had fortunately succeeded in winning them all. True, if he had now learned that they had been offered to all the world for a louis, he would have suffered terribly, but would still have given a million francs to keep them, for nothing that he might have learned could have diverted him (what is beyond man's power can only happen in spite of him, through the action of some great natural law) from the path he had taken and from which that face could appear to him only through the web of the dreams that he had already spun. The immobility of that thin face, like that of a sheet of paper subjected to the colossal pressure of two atmospheres, seemed to me to be held in equilibrium by two infinities which converged on her without meeting, for she held them apart. Indeed, looking at her, Robert and I, the two of us did not see her from the same side of the mystery.

It was not "Rachel when from the Lord," who seemed to me of little significance, it was the power of the human imagination, the illusion on which were based the pains of love, that I found so striking. Robert noticed that I seemed moved. I turned my eyes to the pear and cherry trees of the garden opposite, so that he might think that it was their beauty that had touched me. And it did touch me in somewhat the same way; it also brought close to me things of the kind which we not only see with our eyes but feel also in our hearts. In likening those trees that I had seen in the garden to strange deities, had I not been mistaken like Magdalene when, in another garden, on a day whose anniversary was soon to come, she saw a human form, "supposing him to be the gardener"? Treasurers of our memories of the golden age, keepers of the promise that reality is not what we suppose, that the splendour of poetry, the wonderful radiance of innocence may shine in it and may be the recompense which we strive to earn, were they not, these great white creatures miraculously

bowed over that shade so propitious for rest, for angling or for reading, were they not rather angels? I exchanged a few words with Saint-Loup's mistress. We cut across the village. Its houses were sordid. But by each of the most wretched, of those that looked as though they had been scorched and branded by a rain of brimstone, a mysterious traveller, halting for a day in the accursed city, a resplendent angel, stood erect, stretching over it the dazzling protection of his widespread wings of innocence in flower: it was a pear-tree. Saint-Loup drew me a little way ahead to explain:

"I should have liked you and me to have been able to stay together, in fact I'd much rather have had lunch just with you, and stayed with you until it was time to go to my aunt's. But this poor girl of mine here, it gives her so much pleasure, and she's so nice to me, don't you know, I hadn't the heart to refuse her. In any case you'll like her, she's literary, so responsive, and besides it's such a pleasure to be with her in a restaurant, she's so charming, so simple, always delighted with everything."

I fancy nevertheless that, on that precise morning, and probably for the first and only time, Robert detached himself for a moment from the woman whom out of successive layers of tenderness he had gradually created, and suddenly saw at some distance from himself another Rachel, the double of his but entirely different, who was nothing more nor less than a little whore. We had left the blossoming orchard and were making for the train which was to take us back to Paris when, at the station, Rachel, who was walking by herself, was recognised and hailed by a pair of common little "tarts" like herself, who first of all, thinking that she was alone, called out: "Hello, Rachel, why don't you come with us? Lucienne and Germaine are in the train, and there's room for one more. Come on, we'll all go to the rink together." They were just going to introduce to her two counter-jumpers, their lovers, who were accompanying them, when, noticing that she seemed a little ill at ease, they looked up and beyond her, caught sight of us, and with apologies bade her a good-bye to which she responded in a somewhat embarrassed but none the less friendly tone. They were two poor little tarts with collars of sham otter-skin, looking more or less as Rachel must have looked when Saint-Loup first met her. He did not know them, or their names even, and seeing that they appeared to be on intimate terms with his mistress, he could not help wondering whether she too might not once have had, had not still, perhaps, her place in an unsuspected life, utterly different from the life she led with him, a life in which one had women for a louis apiece. He not only glimpsed this life, but saw also in the thick of it a Rachel quite different from the one he knew, a Rachel like those two little tarts, a twenty-franc Rachel. In short, Rachel had for the moment duplicated herself in his eyes; he had seen, at some distance from his own Rachel, the little tart Rachel, the real Rachel, if it can be said that Rachel the tart was more real than the other. It may then have occurred to Robert that from the hell in which he was living, with the prospect and the necessity of a rich marriage, of the sale of his name, to enable him to go on giving Rachel a hundred thousand francs a year, he might easily perhaps have escaped, and have enjoyed the favours of his mistress, as the two counter-jumpers enjoyed those of their girls, for next to nothing. But how was it to be done? She had done nothing blameworthy. Less generously rewarded, she would be less nice to him, would stop saying and writing the things that so deeply touched him, things which he would quote, with a touch of boastfulness, to his comrades, taking care to point out how nice it was of her to say them, but omitting to mention that he was maintaining her in the most lavish fashion, or even that he ever gave her anything at all, that these inscriptions on photographs, or tender greetings at the end of telegrams, were but the transmutation of gold in its most exiguous but most precious form. If he took care not to admit that these rare kindnesses on Rachel's part were handsomely paid for, it would be wrong to say—and yet this oversimplification is applied, absurdly, to every lover who has to pay cash, and to a great many husbands—that this was from self-esteem or vanity. Saint-Loup was intelligent enough to realise that all the pleasures of vanity were freely available to him in society, thanks to his historic name and handsome face, and that his liaison with Rachel had on the contrary tended to cut him off from society, had led to his being less sought after. No; this pride which seeks to appear to be getting for nothing the apparent marks of predilection of the woman one loves is simply a consequence of love, the need to figure in one's own eyes and in other people's as being loved by the person whom one loves so much. Rachel rejoined us, leaving the two tarts to get into their compartment; but, no less than their sham otter-skins and the self-conscious appearance of their young men, the names Lucienne and Germaine kept the new Rachel alive for a moment longer. For a moment Robert imagined a Place Pigalle existence with unknown associates, sordid pick-ups, afternoons spent in simple pleasures, in that Paris in which the sunny brightness of the streets from the Boulevard de Clichy onwards did not seem the same as the solar radiance in which he himself strolled with his mistress, for love, and suffering that is inseparable from it, have, like intoxication, the power to differentiate things for us. It was almost another Paris in the heart of Paris itself that he suspected; his liaison appeared to him like the exploration of a strange life, for if when with him Rachel was somewhat similar to himself, it was nevertheless a part of her real life that she lived with him, indeed the most precious part in view of his reckless expenditure on her, the part that made her so greatly envied by her friends and would enable her one day to retire to the country or to establish herself in the leading theatres, when she had made her pile. Robert longed to ask her who Lucienne and Germaine were, what they would have said to her if she had joined them in their compartment, how they would all have spent a day which would perhaps have ended, as a supreme diversion, after the pleasures of the skating-rink, at the Olympia Tavern, if Robert and I had not been there. For a moment the purlieu of the Olympia, which until then had seemed to him dead, stirred his curiosity and anguish, and the sunshine of this spring day beating down on the Rue Caumartin where, possibly, if she had not known Robert, Rachel might have gone that afternoon and have earned a louis, filled him with a vague longing. But what would be the use of plying Rachel with questions when he already knew that her answer would be merely silence, or a lie, or something

extremely painful for him to hear, which would yet explain nothing. The porters were shutting the doors; we hurriedly climbed into a first-class carriage; Rachel's magnificent pearls reminded Robert that she was a woman of great price; he caressed her, restored her to her place in his heart where he could contemplate her, interiorised, as he had always done hitherto—save during this brief instant in which he had seen her in the Place Pigalle of an Impressionist painter—and the train moved off.

It was true that she was "literary." She never stopped talking to me about books, Art Nouveau and Tolstoyism, except to rebuke Saint-Loup for drinking too much wine:

"Ah! if you could live with me for a year, we'd see a fine change. I should keep you on water and you'd be much better for it."

"Right you are. Let's go away."

"But you know quite well I have a great deal of work to do" (for she took her dramatic art very seriously). "Besides, what would your family say?"

And she began to abuse his family to me in terms which seemed to me highly justified, and with which Saint-Loup, while disobeying Rachel in the matter of champagne, entirely concurred. I, who was so afraid of the effect of wine on him, and felt the good influence of his mistress, was quite prepared to advise him to let his family go hang. Tears sprang to the young woman's eyes when I was rash enough to mention Dreyfus.

"The poor martyr!" she almost sobbed; "it will be the death of him in that dreadful place."

"Don't upset yourself, Zézette, he'll come back, he'll be acquitted all right, they'll admit they made a mistake."

"But long before then he'll be dead! Ah well, at least his children will bear a stainless name. But just think of the agony he must be going through: that's what I can't stand! And would you believe that Robert's mother, a pious woman, says that he ought to be left on Devil's Island even if he's innocent. Isn't that appalling?"

"Yes, it's absolutely true, she does say that," Robert assured me. "She's my mother, I can't contradict her, but it's quite clear she hasn't got a sensitive nature like Zézette."

In reality these luncheons which were said to be "such a pleasure" always led to trouble. For as soon as Saint-Loup found himself in a public place with his mistress, he would imagine that she was looking at every other man in the room, and his brow would darken; she would notice his ill-humour, which she perhaps took pleasure in fanning, but which more probably, out of stupid pride, feeling wounded by his tone, she did not wish to appear to be seeking to disarm; she would pretend not to be able to take her eyes off some man or other, and indeed this was not always purely for fun. In fact the man who happened to be sitting next to them in a theatre or a café, or, to go no further, the driver of the cab they had engaged, need only have something attractive about him, and Robert, his perception quickened by jealousy, would have noticed it before his mistress; he would see in him immediately one of those foul creatures whom he had denounced to me at Balbec, who corrupted and dishonoured women for their own amusement, and would beg his mistress to avert her eyes from the man, thereby drawing her attention to him. And sometimes she found that Robert had shown such good taste in his suspicions that after a while she even left off teasing him in order that he might calm down and consent to go off by himself on some errand which would give her time to enter into conversation with the stranger, often to make an assignation, sometimes even to bring matters to a head there and then.

I could see as soon as we entered the restaurant that Robert was looking troubled. For he had at once observed—what had escaped our notice at Balbec—that among his coarser colleagues Aimé exuded not only a modest distinction but, quite unconsciously of course, that air of romance which emanates for a certain number of years from fine hair and a Grecian nose, features thanks to which he stood out among the crowd of other waiters. These, almost all of them well on in years, presented a series of types, extraordinarily ugly and pronounced, of hypocritical priests, sanctimonious confessors, more numerous of actors of the old school whose sugarloaf foreheads are scarcely to be seen nowadays outside the collections of portraits that hang in the humbly historic green-rooms of antiquated little theatres, where they are represented in the roles of servants or pontiffs, though this restaurant seemed, thanks to selective recruiting and perhaps to some system of hereditary nomination, to have preserved their solemn type in a sort of College of Augurs. As ill luck would have it, Aimé having recognised us, it was he who came to take our order, while the procession of operatic high-priests swept past us to other tables. Aimé inquired after my grandmother's health; I asked for news of his wife and children. He gave it to me with feeling, for he was a family man. He had an intelligent and vigorous but respectful air. Robert's mistress began to gaze at him with a strange attentiveness. But Aimé's sunken eyes, to which a slight short-sightedness gave a sort of veiled depth, betrayed no sign of awareness in his still face. In the provincial hotel in which he had served for many years before coming to Balbec, the charming sketch, now a trifle discoloured and faded, which was his face, and which, for all those years, like some engraved portrait of Prince Eugène, had been visible always in the same place, at the far end of a dining-room that was almost always empty, had probably not attracted many curious looks. He had thus for long remained, doubtless for want of connoisseurs, in ignorance of the artistic value of his face, and moreover but little inclined to draw attention to it, for he was temperamentally cold. At most some passing Parisian lady, stopping for some reason in the town, had raised her eyes to his, had asked him perhaps to serve her in her room before she took the train again, and, in the pellucid, monotonous, profound void of the existence of this good husband and provincial hotel servant, had buried the secret of a short-lived whim which no one would ever bring to light. And yet Aimé must have been conscious of the insistence with which the eyes of the young actress were fastened upon him now. At all events it did not escape Robert, beneath whose skin I saw a flush



begin to gather, not vivid like that which burned his cheeks when he felt sudden emotion, but faint and diffused.

"Anything specially interesting about that waiter, Zézette?" he inquired, after sharply dismissing Aimé. "One would think you were making a study of him."

"There we go again; I knew it would happen!"

"You knew what would happen, my dear girl? If I was mistaken, I'm quite prepared to take it all back. But I have after all the right to warn you against that flunkey whom I know all about from Balbec (otherwise I shouldn't give a damn), and who is the biggest scoundrel that ever walked the face of the earth."

She seemed anxious to pacify Robert and began to engage me in a literary conversation in which he joined. I did not find her boring to talk to, for she had a thorough knowledge of the works I admired, and her opinion of them agreed more or less with mine; but since I had heard Mme de Villeparisis declare that she had no talent, I attached little importance to this evidence of culture. She discoursed wittily on all manner of topics, and would have been genuinely entertaining had she not affected to an irritating degree the jargon of the coteries and studios. She extended it, moreover, to everything under the sun; for instance, having acquired the habit of saying of a picture, if it were Impressionist, or an opera, if Wagnerian, "Ah! that's *good*," one day when a young man had kissed her on the ear, and, touched by her pretence of being thrilled, had affected modesty, she said: "But really, as a sensation I call it distinctly *good*." But what most surprised me was that the expressions peculiar to Robert (which in any case had probably come to him from literary men whom she knew) were used by her to him and by him to her as though they had been a necessary form of speech, and without any conception of the pointlessness of an originality that is universal.

She was so clumsy with her hands when eating that one felt she must appear extremely awkward on the stage. She recovered her dexterity only when making love, with that touching prescience of women who love the male so intensely that they immediately guess what will give most pleasure to that body which is yet so different from their own.

I ceased to take part in the conversation when it turned upon the theatre, for on that topic Rachel was too malicious for my liking. She did, it was true, take up in a tone of commiseration—against Saint-Loup, which proved that he was accustomed to hearing Rachel attack her—the defence of Berma, saying: "Oh, no, she's a remarkable woman really. Of course, the things she does no longer appeal to us, they don't correspond quite to what we're after, but one must think of her at the time when she made her first appearance; we owe her a great deal. She has done good work, you know. And, besides she's such a splendid woman, she has such a good heart. Naturally she doesn't care about the things that interest us, but in her time she had, as well as a rather moving face, quite a shrewd intelligence." (Our fingers, by the way, do not play the same accompaniment to all our aesthetic judgments. If it is a picture that is under discussion, to show that it is a fine piece of work, painted with a full brush, it is enough to stick out one's thumb. But the "shrewd intelligence" is more exacting. It requires two fingers, or rather two fingernails, as though one were trying to flick away a particle of dust.) But, with this single exception, Saint-Loup's mistress spoke of the best-known actresses in a tone of ironical superiority which annoyed me because I believed—quite mistakenly, as it happened—that it was she who was inferior to them. She was clearly aware that I must regard her as an indifferent actress and conversely have a great regard for those she despised. But she showed no resentment, because there is in all great talent while it is still, as hers was then, unrecognised, however sure it may be of itself, a vein of humility, and because we make the consideration that we expect from others proportionate not to our latent powers but to the position to which we have attained. (An hour or so later, at the theatre, I was to see Saint-Loup's mistress show a great deal of deference towards those very artists whom she now judged so harshly.) And so, however little doubt my silence may have left her in, she insisted none the less on our dining together that evening, assuring me that never had anyone's conversation delighted her so much as mine. If we were not yet in the theatre, to which we were to go after lunch, we had the sense of being in a green-room hung with portraits of old members of the company, so markedly were the waiters' faces of a kind that seems to have perished with a whole generation of outstanding actors. They had a look, too, of Academicians: one of them, standing in front of a sideboard, was examining a dish of pears with the expression of detached curiosity that M. de Jussieu<sup>10</sup> might have worn. Others, on either side of him, were casting about the room the sort of gaze, instinct with curiosity and coldness, with which Members of the Institute who have arrived early scrutinise the audience, while they exchange a few murmured words which one fails to catch. They were faces well known to all the regular customers. One of them, however, was being pointed out, a newcomer with a wrinkled nose and sanctimonious lips who had an ecclesiastical air, and everyone gazed with interest at this newly elected candidate. But presently, perhaps to drive Robert away so that she might be alone with Aimé, Rachel began to make eyes at a young student who was lunching with a friend at a neighbouring table.

"Zézette, would you mind not looking at that young man like that," said Saint-Loup, on whose face the hesitant flush of a moment ago had gathered now into a scarlet cloud which dilated and darkened his swollen features. "If you must make an exhibition of us I shall go and lunch elsewhere and join you at the theatre afterwards."

At this point a messenger came up to tell Aimé that a gentleman wished him to go and speak to him at the door of his carriage. Saint-Loup, ever uneasy, and afraid now that it might be some message of an amorous nature that was to be conveyed to his mistress, looked out of the window and saw there, sitting in the back of his brougham, his hands tightly buttoned in white gloves with black seams and a flower in his buttonhole, M. de Charlus.



"There, you see!" he said to me in a low voice, "my family hunt me down even here. Will you, please—I can't very well do it myself—but since you know the head waiter well, ask him not to go to the carriage. He's certain to give us away. Ask him to send some other waiter who doesn't know me. I know my uncle; if they tell him I'm not known here, he'll never come inside to look for me, he loathes this sort of place. Really, it's pretty disgusting that an old womaniser like him, who's still at it, too, should be perpetually lecturing me and coming to spy on me!"

Aimé, on receiving my instructions, sent one of his underlings to explain that he was busy and could not come out at the moment, and (should the gentleman ask for the Marquis de Saint-Loup) that they did not know any such person. Presently the carriage departed. But Saint-Loup's mistress, who had failed to catch our whispered conversation and thought that it was about the young man whom Robert had been reproaching her for making eyes at, broke out in a torrent of abuse.

"Ah, so that's it! So it's the young man over there, now, is it? Thank you for telling me; it's a real pleasure to have this sort of thing with one's meals! Don't pay any attention to him," she added, turning to me, "he's a bit piqued today, and anyway he just says these things because he thinks it's smart and rather aristocratic to appear to be jealous."

And she began to drum her feet and her fingers in nervous irritation.

"But, Zézette, it's for me that it's unpleasant. You're making us ridiculous in the eyes of that fellow, who will begin to imagine you're making advances to him, and who looks an impossible bounder, too."

"Oh, no, I think he's charming. For one thing, he's got the most adorable eyes, and a way of looking at women—you can feel he must love them."

"If you've lost your senses, you can at least keep quiet until I've left the room," cried Robert. "Waiter, my things."

I did not know whether I was expected to follow him.

"No, I need to be alone," he told me in the same tone in which he had just been addressing his mistress, and as if he were quite as furious with me. His anger was like a single musical phrase to which in an opera several lines of dialogue are sung which are entirely different from one another in meaning and character in the libretto, but which the music gathers into a common sentiment. When Robert had gone, his mistress called Aimé and asked him various questions. She then wanted to know what I thought of him.

"He has an amusing expression, hasn't he? You see, what would amuse me would be to know what he really thinks about things, to have him wait on me often, to take him travelling. But that would be all. If we were expected to love all the people we find attractive, life would be pretty ghastly, wouldn't it? It's silly of Robert to imagine things. It all begins and ends in my head: Robert has nothing to worry about." She was still gazing at Aimé. "Do look what dark eyes he has. I should love to know what goes on behind them."

Presently she received a message that Robert was waiting for her in a private room, to which he had gone by another door to finish his lunch without having to pass through the restaurant again. I thus found myself alone, until I too was summoned by Robert. I found his mistress stretched out on a sofa laughing under the kisses and caresses that he was showering on her. They were drinking champagne. "Hallo, you!" she said to him from time to time, having recently picked up this expression which seemed to her the last word in affection and wit. I had had little lunch, I was extremely uncomfortable, and, though Legrandin's words had no bearing on the matter, I was sorry to think that I was beginning this first afternoon of spring in a back room in a restaurant and would finish it in the wings of a theatre. Looking first at the time to see that she was not making herself late, Rachel offered me a glass of champagne, handed me one of her Turkish cigarettes and unpinned a rose for me from her bodice. Whereupon I said to myself: "I needn't regret my day too much, after all. These hours spent in this young woman's company are not wasted, since I have had from her—charming gifts which cannot be bought too dear—a rose, a scented cigarette and a glass of champagne." I told myself this because I felt that it would endow with an aesthetic character, and thereby justify and rescue, these hours of boredom. I ought perhaps to have reflected that the very need which I felt of a reason that would console me for my boredom was sufficient to prove that I was experiencing no aesthetic sensation. As for Robert and his mistress, they appeared to have no recollection of the quarrel which had been raging between them a few minutes earlier, or of my having been a witness to it. They made no allusion to it, offered no excuse for it, any more than for the contrast with it which their present conduct provided. By dint of drinking champagne with them, I began to feel a little of the intoxication that had come over me at Rivebelle, though probably not quite the same. Not only every kind of intoxication, from that which we get from the sun or from travelling to that which is induced by exhaustion or wine, but every degree of intoxication—and each should have a different "reading," like fathoms on a chart—lays bare in us, at the precise depth which it has reached; a different kind of man. The room which Saint-Loup had taken was small, but the single mirror which decorated it was of such a kind that it seemed to reflect a score of others in an endless vista; and the electric bulb placed at the top of the frame must at night, when it was lit, followed by the procession of twenty or more reflexions similar to its own, give to the drinker, even when alone, the idea that the surrounding space was multiplying itself simultaneously with his sensations, heightened by intoxication, and that, shut up by himself in this little cell, he was reigning nevertheless over something far more extensive in its indefinite luminous curve than a passage in the "Jardin de Paris." Being then myself at this moment the said drinker, suddenly, looking for him in the glass, I caught sight of him, a hideous stranger, staring at me. The joy of intoxication was stronger than my disgust; from gaiety or bravado, I gave him a smile which he returned. And I felt myself so much under the ephemeral and potent sway of the minute in which our sensations are so strong, that I am not sure whether

my sole regret was not at the thought that the hideous self whom I had just caught sight of in the glass was perhaps on his last legs, and that I should never meet that stranger again for the rest of my life.

Robert was annoyed only because I did not seem to want to shine more in the eyes of his mistress.

"What about that fellow you met this morning who combines snobbery with astronomy? Do tell her about him, I've forgotten the story," and he watched her out of the corner of his eye.

"But, my dear boy, there's nothing more to say than what you've just said."

"What a bore you are. Then tell her about Françoise in the Champs-Élysées. She'll enjoy that."

"Oh, do! Bobby has told me so much about Françoise." And taking Saint-Loup by the chin, she said once more, for want of anything more original, drawing the said chin nearer to the light: "Hallo, you!"

Since actors had ceased to be for me exclusively the depositaries, in their diction and playing, of an artistic truth, they had begun to interest me in themselves; I was amused, imagining that I was contemplating the characters in some old comic novel, to see the heroine of the play, struck by the new face of the young man who had just come into the stalls, listen abstractedly to the declaration of love which the juvenile lead was addressing to her, while he, through the running fire of his impassioned speech, still kept a gleaming eye fixed on an old lady seated in a stage box, whose magnificent pearls had caught his fancy; and thus, thanks mainly to the information that Saint-Loup had given me as to the private lives of actors, I saw another drama, mute but expressive, enacted beneath the words of the spoken drama which in itself, although of little merit, interested me too; for I could feel germinating and blossoming within it for an hour in the glare of the footlights, created out of the agglutination on the face of an actor of another face of grease-paint and pasteboard, and on his individual soul of the words of a part, those robust if ephemeral, and rather captivating, personalities which are the characters in a play, whom one loves, admires, pities, whom one would like to see again after one has left the theatre, but who by that time have already disintegrated into an actor who is no longer in the situation which was his in the play, into a text which no longer shows the actor's face, into a coloured powder which a handkerchief wipes off, who have returned, in short, to elements that contain nothing of them, because of their dissolution, effected as soon as the play is over—a dissolution which, like that of a loved one, causes one to doubt the reality of the self and to meditate on the mystery of death.

One number in the programme I found extremely painful. A young woman whom Rachel and some of her friends disliked was to make her debut with a recital of old songs—a debut on which she had based all her hopes for the future of herself and her family. This young woman was possessed of an unduly, almost grotesquely prominent rump and a pretty but too slight voice, reduced still further by her nervousness and in marked contrast to her muscular development. Rachel had posted among the audience a certain number of friends, male and female, whose business it was by their sarcastic comments to disconcert the novice, who was known to be timid, and to make her lose her head so that her recital should prove a complete fiasco, after which the manager would refuse to give her a contract. At the first notes uttered by the wretched woman, several of the male spectators, recruited for that purpose, began pointing to her hindquarters with jocular comments, several of the women who were also in the plot laughed out loud, and each fluty note from the stage increased the deliberate hilarity until it verged on the scandalous. The unhappy woman, sweating with anguish under her grease-paint, tried for a little longer to hold out, then stopped and gazed round the audience with a look of misery and rage which succeeded only in increasing the uproar. The instinct to imitate others, the desire to show off their own wit and daring, added to the party several pretty actresses who had not been forewarned but now exchanged with the others glances charged with malicious connivance, and gave vent to such violent peals of laughter that at the end of the second song, although there were still five more on the programme, the stage manager rang down the curtain. I did my utmost to pay no more heed to the incident than I had paid to my grandmother's sufferings when my great-uncle, to tease her, used to give my grandfather brandy, the idea of deliberate unkindness being too painful for me to bear. And yet, just as our pity for misfortune is perhaps not very precise since in our imagination we re-create a whole world of grief by which the unfortunate who has to struggle against it has no thought of being moved to self-pity, so unkindness has probably not in the minds of the unkind that pure and voluptuous cruelty which we find it so painful to imagine. Hatred inspires them, anger prompts them to an ardour and an activity in which there is no great joy; sadism is needed to extract any pleasure from it; whereas unkind people suppose themselves to be punishing someone equally unkind. Rachel certainly imagined that the actress whom she had tortured was far from being of interest to anyone, and that in any case, by having her hissed off the stage, she was herself avenging an outrage on good taste and teaching an unworthy colleague a lesson. Nevertheless, I preferred not to speak of this incident since I had had neither the courage nor the power to prevent it, and it would have been too embarrassing for me, by speaking well of their victim, to make the sentiments which animated the tormentors of the novice look like gratifications of cruelty.

But the beginning of this performance interested me in quite another way. It made me realise in part the nature of the illusion of which Saint-Loup was a victim with regard to Rachel, and which had set a gulf between the images that he and I respectively had of his mistress, when we saw her that morning among the blossoming pear-trees. Rachel had scarcely more than a walking-on part in the little play. But seen thus, she was another woman. She had one of those faces to which distance—and not necessarily that between stalls and stage, the world being merely a larger theatre—gives form and outline and which, seen from close to, crumble to dust. Standing beside her one saw only a nebula, a milky way of freckles, of tiny spots, nothing

more. At a respectable distance, all this ceased to be visible and, from cheeks that withdrew, were reabsorbed into her face, there rose like a crescent moon a nose so fine and so pure that one would have liked to be the object of Rachel's attention, to see her again and again, to keep her near one, provided that one had never seen her differently and at close range. This was not my case, but it had been Saint-Loup's when he first saw her on the stage. Then he had asked himself how he might approach her, how get to know her, a whole miraculous world had opened up in his imagination—the world in which she lived—from which emanated an exquisite radiance but into which he could never penetrate. He had left the theatre in the little provincial town where this had happened several years before, telling himself that it would be madness to write to her, that she would not answer his letter, quite prepared to give his fortune and his name for the creature who now lived within him in a world so vastly superior to those too familiar realities, a world made beautiful by desire and dreams of happiness, when he saw emerging from the stage door the gay and charmingly hatted band of actresses who had just been playing. Young men who knew them were waiting for them outside. The number of pawns on the human chessboard being less than the number of combinations that they are capable of forming, in a theatre from which all the people we know and might have expected to find are absent, there turns up one whom we never imagined that we should see again and who appears so opportunely that the coincidence seems to us providential, although no doubt some other coincidence would have occurred in its stead had we been not in that place but in some other, where other desires would have been born and another old acquaintance forthcoming to help us to satisfy them. The golden portals of the world of dreams had closed upon Rachel before Saint-Loup saw her emerge from the theatre, so that the freckles and spots were of little importance. They displeased him nevertheless, especially as, being no longer alone, he had not now the same power to dream as in the theatre. But she, for all that he could no longer see her, continued to dictate his actions, like those stars which govern us by their attraction even during the hours in which they are not visible to our eyes. And so his desire for the actress with the delicate features which were not now even present in Robert's memory caused him to fling himself at the old friend whom chance had brought to the spot and get himself introduced to the person with no features and with freckles, since she was the same person, telling himself that later on he would take care to find out which of the two the actress really was. She was in a hurry, she did not on this occasion address a single word to Saint-Loup, and it was only some days later that he finally induced her to leave her companions and allow him to escort her home. He loved her already. The need for dreams, the desire to be made happy by the woman one has dreamed of, ensure that not much time is required before one entrusts all one's chances of happiness to someone who a few days since was no more than a fortuitous, unknown, insignificant apparition on the boards of a theatre.

When, the curtain having fallen, we moved on to the stage, alarmed at finding myself there for the first time, I felt the need to begin a spirited conversation with Saint-Loup. In this way my demeanour, since I did not know which one to adopt in a setting that was new to me, would be entirely dominated by our talk, and people would think that I was so absorbed in it, so unobservant of my surroundings, that it was quite natural for me not to be wearing the facial expressions proper to a place in which, to judge by what I appeared to be saying, I was barely conscious of standing; and seizing, for the sake of speed, upon the first topic that came to my mind:

"You know," I said, "I did come to say good-bye to you the day I left Doncières. I've never had a chance to mention it. I waved to you in the street."

"Don't speak about it," he replied, "I was so sorry. I passed you just outside the barracks, but I couldn't stop because I was late already. I assure you I felt quite wretched about it."

So he had recognised me! I saw again in my mind the utterly impersonal salute which he had given me, raising his hand to his cap, without a glance to indicate that he knew me, without a gesture to show that he was sorry he could not stop. Evidently the fiction of not recognising me which he had adopted at that moment must have simplified matters for him greatly. But I was amazed that he had hit upon it so swiftly and before a reflex had betrayed his original impression. I had already observed at Balbec that, side by side with that childlike sincerity of his face, the skin of which by its transparency made visible the sudden surge of his emotions, his body had been admirably trained to perform a certain number of well-bred dissimulations, and that, like a consummate actor, he could, in his regimental and in his social life, play alternately quite different roles. In one of his roles he loved me tenderly, and behaved towards me almost as if he was my brother; my brother he had been, and was now again, but for a moment that day he had been another person who did not know me and who, holding the reins, his monocle screwed into his eye, without a look or a smile had lifted his disengaged hand to the peak of his cap to give me a correct military salute!

The stage sets, still in their place, among which I was passing, seen thus at close range and deprived of those effects of lighting and distance on which the eminent artist whose brush had painted them had calculated, were a depressing sight, and Rachel, when I came near her, was subjected to a no less destructive influence. The curves of her charming nostrils had remained in the perspective between auditorium and stage, like the relief of the scenery. It was no longer she: I recognised her only by her eyes, in which her identity had taken refuge. The form, the radiance of this young star, so brilliant a moment ago, had vanished. On the other hand—as though we were to look more closely at the moon so that it ceased to present the appearance of a disc of pink and gold—on this face that had seemed so smooth a surface I could now distinguish only protuberances, blemishes, hollows.

Yet in spite of the incoherence into which the woman's face and likewise the painted backdrops dissolved when seen from close to, I was happy to be there, to stroll among the sets, in surroundings which in the past my love of nature would have made me find tiresome and artificial, but to which Goethe's portrayal of them

in *Wilhelm Meister* had given a certain beauty in my eyes. And I was delighted to observe, in the thick of a crowd of journalists or men of fashion, admirers of the actresses, who were greeting one another, talking, smoking, as though at a party in town, a young man in a black velvet cap and hortensia-coloured skirt, his cheeks chalked in red like a page from a Watteau album, who with smiling lips and eyes raised to the ceiling, describing graceful patterns with the palms of his hands and springing lightly into the air, seemed so entirely of another species from the sensible people in everyday clothes in the midst of whom he was pursuing like a madman the course of his ecstatic dream, so alien to the preoccupations of their life, so anterior to the habits of their civilisation, so enfranchised from the laws of nature, that it was as restful and refreshing a spectacle as watching a butterfly straying through a crowd to follow with one's eyes, between the flats, the natural arabesques traced by his winged, capricious, painted curvetings. But at that moment Saint-Loup conceived the notion that his mistress was paying undue attention to this dancer, who was now engaged in a final rehearsal of a dance-figure for the ballet performance in which he was about to appear, and his face darkened.

"You might look the other way," he said to her sombrely. "You know that those dancer-fellows are not worth the rope which one hopes they'll fall off and break their necks, and they're the sort of people who go about afterwards boasting that you've taken notice of them. Besides, you know very well you've been told to go to your dressing-room and change. You'll be missing your call again."

A group of men—journalists—noticing the look of fury on Saint-Loup's face, came nearer, amused, to listen to what was being said. And as the stage-hands had just set up some scenery on our other side we were forced into close contact with them.

"Oh, but I know him; he's a friend of mine," cried Saint-Loup's mistress, her eyes still fixed on the dancer. "Look how beautifully made he is; just watch those little hands of his dancing away by themselves like the rest of him!"

The dancer turned his head towards her, and his human person appeared beneath the sylph that he was endeavouring to be, the clear grey jelly of his eyes trembled and sparkled between eyelashes stiff with paint, and a smile extended the corners of his mouth in a face plastered with rouge; then, to amuse the young woman, like a singer who obligingly hums the tune of the song in which we have told her that we admired her singing, he began to repeat the movement of his hands, counterfeiting himself with the subtlety of a mime and the good humour of a child.

"Oh, it's too lovely, the way he mimics himself," cried Rachel, clapping her hands.

"I implore you, my dearest girl," Saint-Loup broke in, in a tone of utter misery, "don't make an exhibition of yourself, I can't stand it. I swear if you say another word I won't go with you to your room, I shall walk straight out. Come on, don't be nasty ... You oughtn't to stand about in the cigar smoke like that, it'll make you ill," he added, turning to me, with the solicitude he had shown for me in our Balbec days.

"Oh! what bliss it would be if you did go."

"I warn you, if I do, I shan't come back."

"That's more than I should dare to hope."

"Look here, I promised you the necklace if you behaved nicely to me, but since you treat me like this ..."

"Ah! that doesn't surprise me in the least. You gave me a promise, but I ought to have known you'd never keep it. You want the whole world to know you're made of money, but I'm not self-interested and money-grubbing like you. You can keep your blasted necklace; I know someone else who'll give it to me."

"No one else can possibly give it to you. I've told Boucheron he's to keep it for me, and I have his promise not to sell it to anyone else."

"So that's it! You wanted to blackmail me, so you took all your precautions in advance. It's just what they say: Marsantes, *Mater Semita*, it smells of the race," retorted Rachel, quoting an etymology which was founded on a wild misinterpretation, for *Semita* means "path" and not "Semite," but one which the Nationalists applied to Saint-Loup on account of the Dreyfusard views for which, as it happened, he was indebted to the actress. (She was less justified than anyone in applying the appellation of Jewess to Mme de Marsantes, in whom the ethnologists of society could succeed in finding no trace of Jewishness apart from her kinship with the Lévy-Mirepoix family.) "But this isn't the last of it, I can tell you. An agreement like that isn't binding. You've behaved treacherously towards me. Boucheron shall be told of it and he'll be paid twice as much for his necklace. You'll hear from me before long, don't you worry."

Robert was in the right a hundred times over. But circumstances are always so entangled that the man who is in the right a hundred times may have been once in the wrong. (Lord Derby himself acknowledges that England does not always seem right *vis-à-vis* Ireland.) And I could not help recalling that unpleasant and yet quite innocent remark he had made at Balbec: "In that way I keep a hold over her."

"You don't understand what I mean about the necklace. I made no formal promise. Once you start doing everything you possibly can to make me leave you, it's only natural, surely, that I shouldn't give it to you. I fail to understand what treachery you can see in that, or in what way I'm supposed to be self-interested. You can't seriously maintain that I brag about my money, I'm always telling you that I'm only a poor devil without a cent to my name. It's foolish of you to take it that way, my sweet. How am I self-interested? You know very well that my one interest in life is you."

"Yes, yes, please go on," she retorted ironically, with the sweeping gesture of a barber wielding his razor.<sup>11</sup> And turning towards the dancer:

"Isn't he too wonderful with his hands! I couldn't do the things he's doing there, even though I'm a woman." She went closer to him and, pointing to Robert's stricken face: "Look, he's hurt," she murmured, in a

momentary impulse of sadistic cruelty totally out of keeping with her genuine feelings of affection for Saint-Loup.

"Listen; for the last time, I swear to you that you can try as hard as you like, that in a week's time you can have all the regrets in the world, but I shan't come back, I've had enough, do you hear, it's irrevocable; you'll be sorry one day, when it's too late."

Perhaps he was sincere in saying this, and the torture of leaving his mistress may have seemed to him less cruel than that of remaining with her in certain circumstances.

"But, my dear boy," he added, addressing me, "you oughtn't to stay here, I tell you, you'll start coughing."

I pointed to the scenery which barred my way. He touched his hat and said to one of the journalists:

"Would you mind, sir, throwing away your cigar? The smoke is bad for my friend."

His mistress, not waiting for him to accompany her, was on her way to the dressing-room when she turned round and addressed the dancer from the back of the stage, in an artificially melodious tone of girlish innocence:

"Do they do those tricks with women too, those nice little hands? You look just like a woman yourself. I'm sure I could have a wonderful time with you and a girl I know."

"There's no rule against smoking that I know of," said the journalist. "If people aren't well, they have only to stay at home."

The dancer smiled mysteriously at the actress.

"Oh! Do stop! You're driving me crazy," she cried to him. "The larks we'll have!"

"In any case, sir, you are not very civil," observed Saint-Loup to the journalist, still in a mild and courteous tone, with the air of appraisal of a man judging retrospectively the rights and closed.

At that moment cally above his head wrongs of an incident that is already I saw Saint-Loup raise his arm vertias if he were making a sign to someone I could not see, or like the conductor of an orchestra, and indeed—without any greater transition than when, at a simple stroke of a violin bow, in a symphony or a ballet, violent rhythms succeed a graceful andante—after the courteous words that he had just uttered, he brought down his hand with a resounding smack upon the journalist's cheek.

Now that to the measured conversations of the diplomats, to the smiling arts of peace, had succeeded the furious onthrust of war, since blows lead to blows, I should not have been surprised to see the combatants wading in one another's blood. But what I could not understand (like people who feel that it is not according to the rules for war to break out between two countries when up till then it has been a question merely of the rectification of a frontier, or for a sick man to die when there was talk of nothing more serious than a swelling of the liver) was how Saint-Loup had contrived to follow up those words, which implied a hint of affability, with a gesture which in no way arose out of them, which they had not foreshadowed, the gesture of that arm raised in defiance not only of international law but of the principle of causality, in a spontaneous generation of anger, a gesture created *ex nihilo*. Fortunately the journalist who, staggering back from the violence of the blow, had turned pale and hesitated for a moment, did not retaliate. As for his friends, one of them had promptly turned away his head and was staring fixedly into the wings at someone who was evidently not there; the second pretended that a speck of dust had got into his eye, and began rubbing and squeezing his eyelid with every sign of being in pain; while the third had rushed off, exclaiming: "Good heavens, I believe the curtain's going up; we shan't get into our seats."

I wanted to speak to Saint-Loup, but he was so full of his indignation with the dancer that it clung to the very surface of his eyeballs; like a subcutaneous integument it distended his cheeks, so that, his inner agitation expressing itself externally in total immobility, he had not even the elasticity, the "play" necessary to take in a word from me and to answer it. The journalist's friends, seeing that the incident was at an end, gathered round him again, still trembling. But, ashamed of having deserted him, they were absolutely determined that he should be made to suppose that they had noticed nothing. And so they expatiated, one upon the speck of dust in his eye, one upon the false alarm which had made him think that the curtain was going up, the third upon the astonishing resemblance between a man who had just gone by and the speaker's brother. Indeed they seemed quite to resent their friend's not having shared their several emotions.

"What, didn't it strike you? You must be going blind."

"What I say is that you're a pack of cowards," growled the journalist who had been struck.

Forgetting the fictions they had adopted, to be consistent with which they ought—but they did not think of it—to have pretended not to understand what he meant, they fell back on certain expressions traditional in the circumstances: "What's all the excitement? Keep your hair on, old chap. You seem to be rather het up."

I had realised that morning beneath the pear blossom how illusory were the grounds upon which Robert's love for "Rachel when from the Lord" was based. On the other hand, I was no less aware how very real was the pain to which that love gave rise. Gradually the pain he had suffered without ceasing for the last hour receded, withdrew inside him, and a zone of accessibility appeared in his eyes. The two of us left the theatre and began to walk. I had stopped for a moment at a corner of the Avenue Gabriel from which I had often in the past seen Gilberte appear. I tried for a few seconds to recall those distant impressions, and was hurrying almost at the double to overtake Saint-Loup when I saw that a somewhat shabbily attired gentleman appeared to be talking to him confidentially. I concluded that this was a personal friend of Robert; meanwhile they seemed to be drawing even closer to one another; suddenly, as an astral phenomenon flashes through the sky, I saw a number of ovoid bodies assume with a dizzy swiftness all the positions necessary for them to compose a flickering constellation in front of Saint-Loup. Flung out like stones from a catapult, they seemed to me to be at the very least seven in number. They were merely, however, Saint-Loup's two fists, multiplied by the speed

with which they were changing place in this—to all appearance ideal and decorative—arrangement. But this elaborate display was nothing more than a pummelling which Saint-Loup was administering, the aggressive rather than aesthetic character of which was first revealed to me by the aspect of the shabbily dressed gentleman who appeared to be losing at once his self-possession, his lower jaw and a quantity of blood. He gave mendacious explanations to the people who came up to question him, turned his head and, seeing that Saint-Loup had made off and was hastening to rejoin me, stood gazing after him with an offended, crushed, but by no means furious expression on his face. Saint-Loup, on the other hand, was furious, although he himself had received no blow, and his eyes were still blazing with anger when he reached me. The incident was in no way connected (as I had supposed) with the assault in the theatre. It was an impassioned loiterer who, seeing the handsome young soldier that Saint-Loup was, had made a proposition to him. My friend could not get over the audacity of this “clique” who no longer even waited for the shades of night to venture forth, and spoke of the proposition that had been made to him with the same indignation as the newspapers use in reporting an armed assault and robbery in broad daylight in the centre of Paris. And yet the recipient of his blows was excusable in one respect, for the trend of the downward slope brings desire so rapidly to the point of enjoyment that beauty in itself appears to imply consent. And that Saint-Loup was beautiful was beyond dispute. Castigation such as he had just administered has this value, for men of the type that had accosted him, that it makes them think seriously of their conduct, though never for long enough to enable them to mend their ways and thus escape correction at the hands of the law. And so, although Saint-Loup had administered the thrashing without much preliminary thought, all such punishments, even when they reinforce the law, are powerless to bring uniformity to morals.

These incidents, particularly the one that was weighing most on his mind, seemed to have prompted in Robert a desire to be left alone for a while. For after a time he asked me to leave him, and go by myself to call on Mme de Villeparisis. He would join me there, but preferred that we should not go in together, so that he might appear to have only just arrived in Paris instead of having spent half the day already with me.

As I had supposed before making the acquaintance of Mme de Villeparisis at Balbec, there was a vast difference between the world in which she lived and that of Mme de Guermantes. Mme de Villeparisis was one of those women who, born of an illustrious house, entering by marriage into another no less illustrious, do not for all that enjoy any great position in the social world, and, apart from a few duchesses who are their nieces or sisters-in-law, perhaps even a crowned head or two, old family connexions, have their drawing-rooms patronised only by third-rate people, drawn from the middle classes or from a nobility either provincial or tainted in some way, whose presence there has long since driven away all such smart and snobbish folk as are not obliged to come to the house by ties of blood or the claims of a friendship too old to be ignored. Certainly I had no difficulty after the first few minutes in understanding how Mme de Villeparisis, at Balbec, had come to be so well informed, better than ourselves even, as to the smallest details of the tour through Spain which my father was then making with M. de Norpois. It was impossible, for all that, to entertain the theory that the intimacy—of more than twenty years’ standing—between Mme de Villeparisis and the Ambassador could have been responsible for the lady’s loss of caste in a world where the smartest women boasted lovers far less respectable than him, quite apart from the fact that it was probably years since he had been anything more to the Marquise than an old friend. Had Mme de Villeparisis then had other adventures in the past? Being then of a more passionate temperament than now, in a calm and pious old age which nevertheless owed some of its mellow colouring to those ardent, vanished years, had she somehow failed, in the country neighbourhood where she had lived for so long, to avoid certain scandals unknown to a younger generation which merely noted their effect in the mixed and defective composition of a visiting list bound otherwise to have been among those least tarnished by any base alloy? Had that “sharp tongue” which her nephew ascribed to her made her enemies in those far-off days? Had it driven her into taking advantage of certain successes with men to avenge herself upon women? All this was possible; nor could the exquisitely sensitive way in which—modulating so delicately her choice of words as well as her tone of voice—Mme de Villeparisis spoke of modesty or kindness be held to invalidate this supposition; for the people who not only speak with approval of certain virtues but actually feel their charm and understand them admirably (who will be capable of painting a worthy picture of them in their memoirs) are often sprung from, but do not themselves belong to, the inarticulate, rough-hewn, artless generation which practised them. That generation is reflected but not continued in them. Instead of the character which it possessed, one finds a sensibility, an intelligence which are not conducive to action. And whether or not there had been in the life of Mme de Villeparisis any of those scandals which the lustre of her name had expunged, it was this intelligence, resembling rather that of a writer of the second rank than that of a woman of position, that was undoubtedly the cause of her social decline.

It is true that the qualities, such as level-headedness and moderation, which Mme de Villeparisis chiefly extolled were not especially exalting; but in order to describe moderation in an entirely convincing way, moderation will not suffice, and some of the qualities of authorship which presuppose a quite immoderate exaltation are required. I had remarked at Balbec that the genius of certain great artists was completely unintelligible to Mme de Villeparisis, and that all she could do was to make delicate fun of them and to express her incomprehension in a graceful and witty form. But this wit and grace, in the degree to which they were developed in her, became themselves—on another plane, and even though they were employed to belittle the noblest masterpieces—true artistic qualities. Now the effect of such qualities on any social position is a

morbid activity of the kind which doctors call elective, and so disintegrating that the most firmly established can hardly resist it for any length of time. What artists call intelligence seems pure presumption to the fashionable world which, incapable of adopting the angle of vision from which they, the artists, judge things, incapable of understanding the particular attraction to which they yield when they choose an expression or draw a parallel, feel in their company an exhaustion, an irritation, from which antipathy rapidly springs. And yet in her conversation, and the same may be said of the *Memoirs* which she afterwards published, Mme de Villeparisis showed nothing but a sort of graciousness that was eminently social. Having passed by great works without considering them deeply, sometimes without even noticing them, she had retained from the period in which she had lived, and which indeed she described with great aptness and charm, little but the most trivial things it had had to offer. But a piece of writing, even if it treats exclusively of subjects that are not intellectual, is still a work of the intelligence, and to give a consummate impression of frivolity in a book, or in a talk which is not dissimilar, requires a touch of seriousness which a purely frivolous person would be incapable of. In a certain book of memoirs written by a woman and regarded as a masterpiece, such and such a sentence that people quote as a model of airy grace has always made me suspect that, in order to arrive at such a degree of lightness, the author must once have been imbued with a rather weighty learning, a forbidding culture, and that as a girl she probably appeared to her friends an insufferable bluestocking. And between certain literary qualities and lack of social success the connexion is so inevitable that when we open Mme de Villeparisis's *Memoirs* today, on any page an apt epithet, a sequence of metaphors will suffice to enable the reader to reconstruct the deep but icy bow which must have been bestowed on the old Marquise on the staircase of an embassy by a snob such as Mme Leroi, who may perhaps have left a card on her when she went to call on the Guermantes, but never set foot in her house for fear of losing caste among all the doctors' or solicitors' wives whom she would find there. A bluestocking Mme de Villeparisis had perhaps been in her earliest youth, and, intoxicated with her learning, had perhaps been unable to resist applying to people in society, less intelligent and less educated than herself, those cutting taunts which the injured party never forgets.

Moreover, talent is not a separate appendage which can be artificially attached to those qualities which make for social success, in order to create from the whole what people in society call a "complete woman." It is the living product of a certain moral conformation from which as a rule many qualities are lacking and in which there predominates a sensibility of which other manifestations not discernible in a book may make themselves fairly acutely felt in the course of a life: certain curiosities for instance, certain whims, the desire to go to this place or that for one's own amusement and not with a view to the extension, the maintenance or even the mere exercise of one's social relations. I had seen Mme de Villeparisis at Balbec hemmed in by a bodyguard of her own servants and not even glancing at the people sitting in the hall of the hotel. But I had had a presentiment that this abstention was not due to indifference, and it seemed that she had not always confined herself to it. She would get a sudden craze to know such and such an individual who had no claim to be received in her house, sometimes because she had thought him good-looking, or merely because she had been told that he was amusing, or because he had struck her as different from the people she knew, who at this period, when she had not yet begun to appreciate them because she imagined that they would never abandon her, belonged, all of them, to the purest Faubourg Saint-Germain. To this bohemian or bourgeois intellectual whom she had marked out with her favour she was obliged to address her invitations, the value of which he was unable to appreciate, with an insistence that gradually depreciated her in the eyes of the snobs who were in the habit of judging a salon by the people whom its mistress excluded rather than by those whom she entertained. True, if at some point in her youth Mme de Villeparisis, surfeited with the satisfaction of belonging to the flower of the aristocracy, had somehow amused herself by scandalising the people among whom she lived, and deliberately impairing her own position in society, she had begun to attach importance to that position once she had lost it. She had wished to show the duchesses that she was better than they, by saying and doing all the things that they dared not say or do. But now that the latter, except for those who were closely related to her, had ceased to call, she felt herself diminished, and sought once more to reign, but with another sceptre than that of wit. She would have liked to attract to her house all those whom she had taken such pains to discard. How many women's lives, lives of which little enough is known (for we all live in different worlds according to our age, and the discretion of their elders prevents the young from forming any clear idea of the past and taking in the whole spectrum), have been divided thus into contrasting periods, the last being entirely devoted to the reconquest of what in the second has been so light-heartedly flung to the winds! Flung to the winds in what way? The young are all the less capable of imagining it, since they see before them an elderly and respectable Marquise de Villeparisis and have no idea that the grave memorialist of today, so dignified beneath her pile of snowy hair, can ever have been a gay midnight-reveller who was perhaps in those days the delight, who perhaps devoured the fortunes, of men now sleeping in their graves. That she should also have set to work, with a persevering and natural industry, to destroy the social position which she owed to her high birth does not in the least imply that even at that remote period Mme de Villeparisis did not attach great importance to her position. In the same way the web of isolation, of inactivity in which a neurasthenic lives may be woven by him from morning to night without thereby seeming endurable, and while he is hastening to add another mesh to the net which holds him captive, it is possible that he is dreaming only of dancing, sport and travel. We strive all the time to give our life its form, but we do so by copying willy-nilly, like a drawing, the features of the person that we are and not of the person we should like to be. Mme Leroi's disdainful bows might to some extent be expressive of the true nature of Mme de Villeparisis; they in no way corresponded to her ambition.

No doubt at the same moment in which Mme Leroi was—to use an expression dear to Mme Swann—“cutting” the Marquise, the latter could seek consolation in remembering how Queen Marie-Amélie had once said to her: “You are just like a daughter to me.” But such royal civilities, secret and unknown to the world, existed for the Marquise alone, as dusty as the diploma of an old Conservatoire medallist. The only real social advantages are those that create life, that can disappear without the person who has benefited by them needing to try to cling on to them or to make them public, because on the same day a hundred others will take their place. Remember as she might the words of the Queen, Mme de Villeparisis would have bartered them gladly for the permanent capacity for being invited everywhere which Mme Leroi possessed, just as, in a restaurant, a great but unknown artist whose genius is written neither in the lines of his shy face nor in the antiquated cut of his threadbare coat, would willingly change places with the young stock-jobber from the lowest ranks of society, who is sitting with a couple of actresses at a neighbouring table to which in an obsequious and incessant chain come hurrying owner, manager, waiters, bell-hops and even the scullions who file out of the kitchen to salute him, as in the fairy-tales, while the wine waiter advances, as dust-covered as his bottles, limping and dazed as if, on his way up from the cellar, he had twisted his foot before emerging into the light of day.

It must be remarked, however, that the absence of Mme Leroi from Mme de Villeparisis’s salon, if it distressed the lady of the house, passed unperceived by the majority of her guests. They were entirely ignorant of the peculiar position which Mme Leroi occupied, a position known only to the fashionable world, and never doubted that Mme de Villeparisis’s receptions were, as the readers of her *Memoirs* today are convinced that they must have been, the most brilliant in Paris.

On the occasion of this first call which, after leaving Saint-Loup, I went to pay on Mme de Villeparisis following the advice given by M. de Norpois to my father, I found her in a drawing-room hung with yellow silk, against which the settees and the admirable armchairs upholstered in Beauvais tapestry stood out with the almost purple redness of ripe raspberries. Side by side with the Guermantes and Villeparisis portraits were to be seen—gifts from the sitters themselves—those of Queen Marie-Amélie, the Queen of the Belgians, the Prince de Joinville and the Empress of Austria. Mme de Villeparisis herself, wearing an old-fashioned bonnet of black lace (which she preserved with the same shrewd instinct for local or historical colour as a Breton innkeeper who, however Parisian his clientele may have become, thinks it more astute to keep his maids dressed in coifs and wide sleeves), was seated at a little desk on which, as well as her brushes, her palette and an unfinished flower-piece in water-colour, were arranged—in glasses, in saucers, in cups—moss-roses, zinnias, maidenhair ferns, which on account of the sudden influx of callers she had just left off painting, and which gave the impression of being arrayed on a florist’s counter in some eighteenth-century mezzotint. In this drawing-room, which had been slightly heated on purpose because the Marquise had caught cold on the journey from her house in the country, there were already, among those present when I arrived, an archivist with whom Mme de Villeparisis had spent the morning selecting the autograph letters to herself from various historical personages which were to figure in facsimile as documentary evidence in the *Memoirs* which she was preparing for the press, and a solemn and tongue-tied historian, who, hearing that she had inherited and still possessed a portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency, had come to ask her permission to reproduce it as a plate in his work on the Fronde—guests who were presently joined by my old schoolfriend Bloch, now a rising dramatist upon whom she counted to secure the gratuitous services of actors and actresses at her next series of afternoon parties. It was true that the social kaleidoscope was in the act of turning and that the Dreyfus case was shortly to relegate the Jews to the lowest rung of the social ladder. But, for one thing, however fiercely the anti-Dreyfus cyclone might be raging, it is not in the first hour of a storm that the waves are at their worst. In the second place, Mme de Villeparisis, leaving a whole section of her family to fulminate against the Jews, had remained entirely aloof from the Affair and never gave it a thought. Lastly, a young man like Bloch whom no one knew might pass unnoticed, whereas leading Jews who were representative of their side were already threatened. His chin was now decorated with a goatee beard, he wore a pince-nez and a long frock-coat, and carried a glove like a roll of papyrus in his hand. The Romanians, the Egyptians, the Turks may hate the Jews. But in a French drawing-room the differences between those peoples are not so apparent, and a Jew making his entry as though he were emerging from the desert, his body crouching like a hyena’s, his neck thrust forward, offering profound “salaams,” completely satisfies a certain taste for the oriental. Only it is essential that the Jew in question should not be actually “in” society, otherwise he will readily assume the aspect of a lord and his manners become so Gallicised that on his face a refractory nose, growing like a nasturtium in unexpected directions, will be more reminiscent of Molière’s Mascarille than of Solomon. But Bloch, not having been limbered up by the gymnastics of the Faubourg, nor ennobled by a crossing with England or Spain, remained for a lover of the exotic as strange and savoury a spectacle, in spite of his European costume, as a Jew in a painting by Decamps. How marvellous the power of the race which from the depths of the ages thrusts forwards even into modern Paris, in the corridors of our theatres, behind the desks of our public offices, at a funeral, in the street, a solid phalanx, setting their mark upon our modern ways of hairdressing, absorbing, making us forget, disciplining the frock-coat which on the whole has remained almost identical with the garment in which Assyrian scribes are depicted in ceremonial attire on the frieze of a monument at Susa before the gates of the Palace of Darius. (An hour later, Bloch was to feel that it was out of anti-semitic malice that M. de Charlus inquired whether his first name was Jewish, whereas it was simply from aesthetic interest and love of local colour.) But in any case to speak of racial persistence is to convey inaccurately the impression we receive from the Jews, the Greeks, the Persians, all those peoples whose variety is worth preserving. We know from classical paintings the faces of the ancient Greeks, we have



seen Assyrians on the walls of a palace at Susa. And so we feel, on encountering in a Paris drawing-room Orientals belonging to such and such a group, that we are in the presence of supernatural creatures whom the forces of necromancy must have called into being. Hitherto we had only a superficial image; suddenly it has acquired depth, it extends into three dimensions, it moves. The young Greek lady, daughter of a rich banker and one of the latest society favourites, looks exactly like one of those dancers who in the chorus of a ballet at once historical and aesthetic symbolise Hellenic art in flesh and blood; but in the theatre the setting somehow vulgarises these images; whereas the spectacle to which the entry into a drawing-room of a Turkish lady or a Jewish gentleman admits us, by animating their features makes them appear stranger still, as if they really were creatures evoked by the efforts of a medium. It is the soul (or rather the pigmy thing which—up to the present, at any rate—the soul amounts to in this sort of materialisation), it is the soul, glimpsed by us hitherto in museums alone, the soul of the ancient Greeks, of the ancient Hebrews, torn from a life at once insignificant and transcendental, which seems to be enacting before our eyes this disconcerting pantomime. What we seek in vain to embrace in the shy young Greek is the figure admired long ago on the side of a vase. It struck me that if in the light of Mme de Villeparisis's drawing-room I had taken some photographs of Bloch, they would have given an image of Israel identical with those we find in spirit photographs—so disturbing because it does not appear to emanate from humanity, so deceptive because it none the less resembles humanity all too closely. There is nothing, to speak more generally, even down to the insignificance of the remarks made by the people among whom we spend our lives, that does not give us a sense of the supernatural, in our poor everyday world where even a man of genius from whom, gathered as though around a table at a séance, we expect to learn the secret of the infinite, simply utters these words, which had just issued from the lips of Bloch: "Take care of my top hat."

"Oh, ministers, my dear sir," Mme de Villeparisis was saying, addressing in particular my old schoolfriend and picking up the thread of a conversation which had been interrupted by my arrival, "ministers, nobody ever wanted to see them. I was only a child at the time, but I can well remember the King begging my grandfather to invite M. Decazes<sup>12</sup> to a rout at which my father was to dance with the Duchesse de Berry. 'It will give me pleasure, Florimond,' said the King. My grandfather, who was a little deaf, thought he had said M. de Castries, and found the request perfectly natural. When he understood that it was M. Decazes, he was furious at first, but he gave in, and wrote the same evening to M. Decazes, begging him to do him the honour of attending the ball which he was giving the following week. For we were polite in those days, and no hostess would have dreamed of simply sending her card and writing on it 'Tea' or 'Dancing' or 'Music.' But if we understood politeness, we were not incapable of impertinence either. M. Decazes accepted, but the day before the ball it was given out that my grandfather felt indisposed and had cancelled the ball. He had obeyed the King, but he had not had M. Decazes at his ball ... Yes, indeed, I remember M. Molé very well, he was a man of wit—he showed that in his reception of M. de Vigny at the Academy—but he was very pompous, and I can see him now coming downstairs to dinner in his own house with his top hat in his hand."

"Ah! how evocative that is of what must have been a pretty perniciously philistine epoch, for it was no doubt a universal habit to carry one's hat in one's hand in one's own house," observed Bloch, anxious to make the most of so rare an opportunity of learning from an eyewitness details of the aristocratic life of another day, while the archivist, who was a sort of intermittent secretary to the Marquise, gazed at her tenderly as though he were saying to the rest of us: "There, you see what she's like, she knows everything, she has met everybody, you can ask her anything you like, she's quite amazing."

"Oh dear, no," replied Mme de Villeparisis, drawing towards her as she spoke the glass containing the maiden-hair which presently she would continue painting. "It was simply a habit of M. de Molé's. I never saw my father carry his hat in the house, except of course when the King came, because the King being at home wherever he is, the master of the house is then only a visitor in his own drawing-room."

"Aristotle tells us in the second chapter of ..." ventured M. Pierre, the historian of the Fronde, but so timidly that no one paid any attention. Having been suffering for some weeks from a nervous insomnia which resisted every attempt at treatment, he had given up going to bed, and, half-dead with exhaustion, went out only whenever his work made it imperative. Incapable of repeating too often these expeditions which, simple enough for other people, cost him as much effort as if he was obliged to come down from the moon, he was surprised to be brought up so frequently against the fact that other people's lives were not organised on a constant and permanent basis with a view to providing the maximum utility to the sudden eruptions of his own. He sometimes found closed a library which he had set out to visit only after planting himself artificially on his feet and in a frock-coat like the invisible man in a story by Wells. Fortunately he had found Mme de Villeparisis at home and was going to be shown the portrait.

Meanwhile he was cut short by Bloch. "Really," the latter observed, referring to what Mme de Villeparisis had said as to the etiquette for royal visits. "Do you know, I never knew that" (as though it were strange that he should not have known it).

"Talking of that sort of visit, do you know the stupid joke my nephew Basin played on me yesterday morning?" Mme de Villeparisis asked the librarian. "He told my people, instead of announcing him, to say that it was the Queen of Sweden who had called to see me."

"What! He made them tell you just like that! I say, he must have a nerve," exclaimed Bloch with a shout of laughter, while the historian smiled with a stately timidity.

"I was rather surprised, because I had only been back from the country a few days; I had given instructions, so as to be left in peace for a while, that no one was to be told that I was in Paris, and I wondered how the Queen of Sweden could have heard so soon, and in any case didn't leave me a couple of days to get my

breath," went on Mme de Villeparisis, leaving her guests under the impression that a visit from the Queen of Sweden was in itself nothing unusual for their hostess.

And it was true that if earlier in the day Mme de Villeparisis had been checking the documentation of her *Memoirs* with the archivist, she was now quite unconsciously trying out their effect on an average audience representative of that from which she would eventually have to recruit her readers. Hers might differ in many ways from a really fashionable salon from which many of the bourgeois ladies whom she entertained would have been absent and where one would have seen instead such brilliant leaders of fashion as Mme Leroi had in course of time managed to secure, but this distinction is not perceptible in her *Memoirs*, in which certain mediocre connexions of the author's have disappeared because there is no occasion to refer to them; while the absence of ladies who did not visit her leaves no gap because, in the necessarily restricted space at the author's disposal, only a few persons can appear, and if these persons are royal personages, historic personalities, then the maximum impression of elegance which any volume of memoirs can convey to the public is achieved. In the opinion of Mme Leroi, Mme de Villeparisis's salon was third-rate; and Mme de Villeparisis felt the sting of Mme Leroi's opinion. But hardly anyone today remembers who Mme Leroi was, her opinions have vanished into thin air, and it is the salon of Mme de Villeparisis, frequented as it was by the Queen of Sweden, and as it had been by the Duc d'Aumale, the Duc de Broglie, Thiers, Montalembert, Mgr. Dupanloup, which will be regarded as one of the most brilliant of the nineteenth century by that posterity which has not changed since the days of Homer and Pindar, and for which the enviable things are exalted birth, royal or quasi-royal, and the friendship of kings, of leaders of the people and other eminent men.

Now of all these Mme de Villeparisis had her share in her present salon and in the memories—sometimes slightly touched up—by means of which she extended it into the past. And then there was M. de Norpois who, while unable to restore his friend to any substantial position in society, on the other hand brought to her house such foreign or French statesmen as might have need of his services and knew that the only effective method of securing them was to pay court to Mme de Villeparisis. Perhaps Mme Leroi also knew these European celebrities. But, as an agreeable woman who shunned anything that smacked of the bluestocking, she would as little have thought of mentioning the Eastern Question to a Prime Minister as of discussing the nature of love with a novelist or a philosopher. "Love?" she had once replied to a pretentious lady who had asked for her views on love, "I make it often but I never talk about it." When she had any of these literary or political lions in her house she contented herself, as did the Duchesse de Guermantes, with setting them down to play poker. They often preferred this to the serious conversations on general ideas in which Mme de Villeparisis forced them to engage. But these conversations, ridiculous as in the social sense they may have been, have furnished the *Memoirs* of Mme de Villeparisis with those admirable passages, those political dissertations which read well in volumes of autobiography as they do in tragedies in the style of Corneille. Furthermore, the salons of the Mme de Villeparisis of this world are alone destined to be handed down to posterity, because the Mme Lerois of this world cannot write, and, if they could, would not have the time. And if the literary dispositions of the Mme de Villeparisis are the cause of the disdain of the Mme Lerois, in its turn the disdain of the Lerois does a singular service to the literary dispositions of the Mme de Villeparisis by affording those bluestocking ladies that leisure which the career of letters requires. God, whose will it is that there should be a few well-written books in the world, breathes with that purpose such disdain into the hearts of the Mme Lerois, for he knows that if these should invite the Mme de Villeparisis to dinner, the latter would at once rise from their writing tables and order their carriages to be round at eight.

Presently there entered with slow and solemn tread an old lady of tall stature who, beneath the raised brim of her straw hat, revealed a monumental pile of snowy hair in the style of Marie-Antoinette. I did not then know that she was one of three women still to be seen in Parisian society who, like Mme de Villeparisis, while all of the noblest birth, had been reduced, for reasons which were now lost in the mists of time and could have been explained to us only by some old gallant of their period, to entertaining only certain of the dregs of society who were not sought after elsewhere. Each of these ladies had her own "Duchesse de Guermantes," the brilliant niece who came regularly to pay her respects, but none of them could have succeeded in attracting to her house the "Duchesse de Guermantes" of either of the others. Mme de Villeparisis was on the best of terms with these three ladies, but she did not like them. Perhaps the similarity between their social position and her own gave her a disagreeable impression of them. Besides, soured bluestockings as they were, seeking, by the number and frequency of the dramatic entertainments which they arranged in their houses, to give themselves the illusion of a regular salon, there had grown up among them a rivalry which the erosion of their wealth in the course of somewhat tempestuous lives, obliging them to watch their expenditure, to count on the services of professional actors or actresses free of charge, transformed into a sort of struggle for existence. Furthermore, the lady with the Marie-Antoinette hair-style, whenever she set eyes on Mme de Villeparisis, could not help being reminded of the fact that the Duchesse de Guermantes did not come to her Fridays. Her consolation was that at these same Fridays she could always count on having, blood being thicker than water, the Princesse de Poix, who was her own personal Guermantes, and who never went near Mme de Villeparisis, albeit Mme de Poix was an intimate friend of the Duchess.

Nevertheless from the mansion on the Quai Malaquais to the drawing-rooms of the Rue de Tournon, the Rue de la Chaise and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a bond as compelling as it was hateful united the three fallen goddesses, as to whom I should have been interested to learn, from some dictionary of social mythology, what amorous adventure, what sacrilegious presumption, had brought about their punishment. The same illustrious origins, the same present decline, no doubt had much to do with the necessity which compelled them, while hating each other, to frequent one another's society. Besides, each of them found in the others a convenient way of impressing her guests. How should these fail to suppose that they had scaled the most inaccessible peak of the Faubourg when they were introduced to a lady with a string of titles whose sister was married to a Duc de Sagan or a Prince de Ligne? Especially as there was infinitely more in the newspapers about these sham salons than about the genuine ones. Indeed these old ladies' "swell" nephews—and Saint-Loup the foremost of them—when asked by a friend to introduce him into society would say: "I'll take you to my aunt Villeparisis's, or to my aunt X's—you meet interesting people there." They knew very well that this would mean less trouble for themselves than trying to get the said friend invited by the smart nieces or sisters-in-law of these ladies. Certain very old men, and young women who had heard it from those men, told me that if these ladies were no longer received in society it was because of the extraordinary dissoluteness of their conduct, which, when I objected that dissolute conduct was not necessarily a barrier to social success, was represented to me as having gone far beyond anything to be met with today. The misconduct of these solemn dames who held themselves so erect assumed on the lips of those who hinted at it something that I was incapable of imagining, something proportionate to the magnitude of prehistoric days, to the age of the mammoth. In a word, these three Parcae with their white or blue or pink hair had been the ruin of an incalculable number of gentlemen. It struck me that the men of today exaggerated the vices of those fabulous times, like the Greeks who created Icarus, Theseus, Heracles out of men who had been but little different from those who long afterwards deified them. But one does not tabulate the sum of a person's vices until he has almost ceased to be in a fit state to practise them, when from the magnitude of his social punishment, which is then nearing the completion of its term and which alone one can estimate, one measures, one imagines, one exaggerates the magnitude of the crime that has been committed. In that gallery of symbolical figures which is "society," the really dissolute women, the true Messalinas, invariably present the solemn aspect of a lady of at least seventy, with an air of lofty distinction, who entertains everyone she can but not everyone she would like to, to whose house women whose own conduct is not above reproach refuse to go, to whom the Pope regularly sends his Golden Rose, and who as often as not has written a book about Lamartine's early years that has been crowned by the French Academy.

"How d'ye do, Alix?" Mme de Villeparisis greeted the lady with the Marie-Antoinette hair-style, which lady cast a searching glance round the assembly to see whether there was not in this drawing-room any item that might be a valuable addition to her own, in which case she would have to discover it for herself, for Mme de Villeparisis, she was sure, would be malevolent enough to hide it from her. Thus Mme de Villeparisis took good care not to introduce Bloch to the old lady for fear of his being asked to produce the same play that he was arranging for her in the drawing-room of the Quai Malaquais. Besides, it was only tit for tat. For the evening before the old lady had had Mme Ristori reciting verses, and had taken care that Mme de Villeparisis, from whom she had filched the Italian artist, should not hear of this function until it was over. So that she should not read it first in the newspapers and feel ruffled, the old lady had come in person to tell her about it, showing no sense of guilt. Mme de Villeparisis, judging that the introduction of myself was unlikely to have the same drawbacks as that of Bloch, made me known to the Marie-Antoinette of the Quai Malaquais. The latter, who sought, by making the fewest possible movements, to preserve in her old age those lines, as of a Coysevox goddess, which had years ago charmed the young men of fashion and which spurious poets still celebrated in rhyming couplets—and had acquired the habit of a lofty and compensating stiffness common to all those whom a personal uncomeliness obliges to be continually making advances—just perceptibly lowered her head with a frigid majesty, and, turning the other way, took no more notice of me than if I had not existed. Her dual-purpose attitude seemed to be saying to Mme de Villeparisis: "You see, I'm not as hard up for acquaintance as all that, and I'm not interested—in any sense of the word, you old cat—in young men." But when, twenty minutes later, she took her leave, taking advantage of the general hubbub she slipped into my ear an invitation to come to her box the following Friday with another of the three, whose high-sounding name—she had been born a Choiseul, moreover—made a prodigious impression on me.

"I understand, M'sieur, that you want to write somethin' about Mme la Duchesse de Montmorency," said Mme de Villeparisis to the historian of the Fronde in the gruff tone with which her genuine affability was furrowed by the shrivelled crotchiness, the physiological spleen of old age, as well as by the affectation of imitating the almost rustic speech of the old nobility. "I'll show you her portrait, the original of the copy they have in the Louvre."

She rose, laying down her brushes beside the flowers, and the little apron which then came into sight at her waist, and which she wore so as not to stain her dress with paint, added still further to the impression of an old peasant given by her bonnet and her big spectacles, and offered a sharp contrast to the luxury of her household, the butler who had brought in the tea and cakes, the liveried footman for whom she now rang to light up the portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency, abbess of one of the most famous chapters in the east of France. Everyone had risen. "What is rather amusin'," said our hostess, "is that in these chapters where our great-aunts were so often made abbesses, the daughters of the King of France would not have been admitted. They were very exclusive chapters." "The King's daughters not admitted!" cried Bloch in amazement, "why ever not?" "Why, because the House of France had not enough quarterin's after that misalliance." Bloch's

bewilderment increased. "A misalliance? The House of France? When was that?" "Why, when they married into the Medicis," replied Mme de Villeparisis in the most natural tone in the world. "It's a fine picture, is it not, and in a perfect state of preservation," she added.

"My dear," said the lady with the Marie-Antoinette hair-style, "surely you remember that when I brought Liszt to see you he said that it was this one that was the copy."

"I shall bow to any opinion of Liszt's on music, but not on painting. Besides, he was already gaga, and I don't remember his ever saying anything of the sort. But it wasn't you who brought him here. I had met him any number of times at dinner at Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein's."

Alix's shot had misfired; she stood silent, erect and motionless. Plastered with layers of powder, her face had the appearance of stone. And, since the profile was noble, she seemed, on a triangular, moss-grown pedestal hidden by her cape, like a crumbling goddess in a park.

"Ah, I see another fine portrait," said the historian.

The door opened and the Duchesse de Guermantes entered the room.

"Oh, good evening," Mme de Villeparisis greeted her without even a nod of the head, taking from her apron-pocket a hand which she held out to the newcomer; and ceasing at once to pay any further attention to her niece, turned back to the historian: "That is the portrait of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld ..."

A young servant with a bold manner and a charming face (but so finely chiselled to ensure its perfection that the nose was a little red and the rest of the skin slightly inflamed as though they were still smarting from the recent sculptural incision) came in bearing a card on a salver.

"It is that gentleman who has been several times to see Mme la Marquise."

"Did you tell him I was at home?"

"He heard the voices."

"Oh, very well then, show him in. It's a gentleman who was introduced to me," she explained. "He told me he was very anxious to come to my house. I certainly never said he might. But he's taken the trouble to call five times now, and it doesn't do to hurt people's feelings. Monsieur," she added to me, "and you, Monsieur," to the historian of the Fronde, "let me introduce my niece, the Duchesse de Guermantes."

The historian made a low bow, as I did too, and since he seemed to suppose that some friendly remark ought to follow this salute, his eyes brightened and he was preparing to open his mouth when he was chilled by the demeanour of Mme de Guermantes, who had taken advantage of the independence of her torso to throw it forward with an exaggerated politeness and bring it neatly back to a position of rest without letting face or eyes appear to have noticed that anyone was standing before them; after breathing a little sigh she contented herself with manifesting the nullity of the impression that had been made on her by the sight of the historian and myself by performing certain movements of her nostrils with a precision that testified to the absolute inertia of her unoccupied attention.

The importunate visitor entered the room, making straight for Mme de Villeparisis with an ingenuous, fervent air: it was Legrandin.

"Thank you so very much for letting me come and see you," he began, laying stress on the word "very." "It is a pleasure of a quality altogether rare and subtle that you confer on an old solitary. I assure you that its repercussion ..."

He stopped short on catching sight of me.

"I was just showing this gentleman a fine portrait of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, the wife of the author of the *Maxims*; it's a family heirloom."

Mme de Guermantes meanwhile had greeted Alix, with apologies for not having been able, that year as in every previous year, to go and see her. "I hear all about you from Madeleine," she added.

"She was at luncheon with me today," said the Marquise of the Quai Malaquais, with the satisfying reflexion that Mme de Villeparisis could never say the same.

Meanwhile I had been talking to Bloch, and fearing, from what I had been told of his father's change of attitude towards him, that he might be envying my life, I said to him that his must be happier. My remark was prompted simply by a desire to be friendly. But such friendliness readily convinces those who cherish a high opinion of themselves of their own good fortune, or gives them a desire to convince other people of it. "Yes, I do lead a delightful existence," Bloch assured me with a beatific smile. "I have three great friends—I do not wish for one more—and an adorable mistress; I am infinitely happy. Rare is the mortal to whom Father Zeus accords so much felicity." I fancy that he was anxious principally to congratulate himself and to make me envious. Perhaps, too, his optimism reflected a desire to be original. It was evident that he did not wish to reply with the usual banalities—"Oh, it was nothing, really," and so forth—when, to my question: "Was it nice?" apropos of an afternoon dance at his house to which I had been prevented from going, he replied in a level, careless tone, as if the dance had been given by someone else: "Why, yes, it was very nice, couldn't have been more successful. In fact it was really enchanting."

"What you have just told us interests me enormously," said Legrandin to Mme de Villeparisis, "for I was saying to myself only the other day that you showed a marked resemblance to him in the agile sharpness of your turn of phrase, in a quality which I will describe by two contradictory terms, concise rapidity and immortal instantaneousness. I should have liked this afternoon to take down all the things you say; but I shall remember them. They are, in a phrase which comes, I think, from Joubert, congenial to the memory. You have never read Joubert? Oh! he would have admired you so! I will take the liberty this very evening of sending you his works: it will be a privilege to make you a present of his mind. He had not your force. But he had a similar gracefulness."

I had wanted to go and greet Legrandin at once, but he kept as far away from me as he could, no doubt in the hope that I might not overhear the stream of flattery which, with a remarkable preciousness of expression, he kept pouring out to Mme de Villeparisis whatever the subject.

She shrugged her shoulders, smiling, as though he had been trying to make fun of her, and turned to the historian.

"And this is the famous Marie de Rohan, Duchesse de Chevreuse, who was previously married to M. de Luynes."

"My dear, Mme de Luynes reminds me of Yolande; she came to me yesterday evening, and if I had known that you weren't engaged I'd have sent round to ask you to come. Mme Ristori turned up quite by chance, and recited some poems by Queen Carmen Sylva<sup>13</sup> in the author's presence. It was too beautiful!"

"What treachery!" thought Mme de Villeparisis. "Of course that was what she was whispering about the other day to Mme de Beaulaincourt and Mme de Chaponay." ... "I was free," she replied, "but I would not have come. I heard Ristori in her great days, she's a mere wreck now. Besides, I detest Carmen Sylva's poetry. Ristori came here once—the Duchess of Aosta brought her—to recite a canto of Dante's *Inferno*. In that sort of thing she's incomparable."

Alix bore the blow without flinching. She remained marble. Her gaze was piercing and blank, her nose proudly arched. But the surface of one cheek was flaking. A faint, strange vegetation, green and pink, was invading her chin. Perhaps another winter would finally lay her low.

"There, Monsieur, if you are fond of painting, look at the portrait of Mme de Montmorency," Mme de Villeparisis said to Legrandin to interrupt the flow of compliments which was beginning again.

Taking the opportunity of his back being turned, Mme de Guermantes pointed to him with an ironical, questioning look at her aunt.

"It's M. Legrandin," murmured Mme de Villeparisis. "He has a sister called Mme de Cambremer, not that that will mean any more to you than it does to me."

"What! Oh, but I know her very well!" exclaimed Mme de Guermantes, clapping her hand to her mouth. "Or rather I don't know her, but for some reason or other Basin, who meets the husband heaven knows where, took it into his head to tell the wretched woman she might call on me. And she did. I can't tell you what it was like. She told me she had been to London, and gave me a complete catalogue of all the things in the British Museum. And just as you see me now, the moment I leave your house, I'm going to drop a card on the monster. And don't think it's as easy as all that, because on the pretext that she's dying of some disease she's always at home, no matter whether you arrive at seven at night or nine in the morning, she's ready for you with a plate of strawberry tarts. No, but seriously, you know, she is a monstrosity," Mme de Guermantes went on in reply to a questioning glance from her aunt. "She's an impossible person, she talks about 'scriveners' and things like that." "What does 'scrivener' mean?" asked Mme de Villeparisis. "I haven't the slightest idea!" cried the Duchess in mock indignation. "I don't want to know. I don't speak that sort of language." And seeing that her aunt really did not know what a scrivener was, to give herself the satisfaction of showing that she was a scholar as well as a purist, and to make fun of her aunt after having made fun of Mme de Cambremer: "Why, of course," she said, with a half-laugh which the last traces of her feigned ill-humour kept in check, "everybody knows what it means; a scrivener is a writer, a person who scribbles. But it's a horror of a word. It's enough to make your wisdom teeth drop out. Nothing will ever make me use words like that ... And so that's the brother, is it? I can't get used to the idea. But after all it's not inconceivable. She has the same doormat humility and the same mass of information like a circulating library. She's just as much of a toady as he is, and just as boring. Yes, I'm beginning to see the family likeness now quite plainly."

"Sit down, we're just going to take a dish of tea," said Mme de Villeparisis to her niece. "Help yourself; you don't want to look at the pictures of your great-grandmothers, you know them as well as I do."

Presently Mme de Villeparisis sat down again at her desk and went on with her painting. The rest of the party gathered round her, and I took the opportunity to go up to Legrandin and, seeing no harm myself in his presence in Mme de Villeparisis's drawing-room and never dreaming how much my words would at once hurt him and make him believe that I had deliberately intended to hurt him, say: "Well, Monsieur, I am almost excused for being in a salon when I find you here too." M. Legrandin concluded from these words (at least this was the opinion which he expressed of me a few days later) that I was a thoroughly spiteful young wretch who delighted only in doing mischief.

"You might at least have the civility to begin by saying how d'ye do to me," he replied, without offering me his hand and in a coarse and angry voice which I had never suspected him of possessing, a voice which, having no rational connexion with what he ordinarily said, had another more immediate and striking connexion with something he was feeling. For the fact of the matter is that, since we are determined always to keep our feelings to ourselves, we have never given any thought to the manner in which we should express them. And suddenly there is within us a strange and obscene animal making itself heard, whose tones may inspire as much alarm in the person who receives the involuntary, elliptical and almost irresistible communication of one's defect or vice as would the sudden avowal indirectly and outlandishly proffered by a criminal who can no longer refrain from confessing to a murder of which one had never imagined him to be guilty. I knew, of course, that idealism, even subjective idealism, did not prevent great philosophers from still having hearty appetites or from presenting themselves with untiring perseverance for election to the Academy. But really Legrandin had no need to remind people so often that he belonged to another planet when all his uncontrollable impulses of anger or affability were governed by the desire to occupy a good position on this one.

“Naturally, when people pester me twenty times on end to go somewhere,” he went on in lower tones, “although I am perfectly free to do what I choose, still I can’t behave like an absolute boor.”

Mme de Guermites had sat down. Her name, accompanied as it was by her title, added to her physical person the duchy which cast its aura round about her and brought the shadowy, sun-splashed coolness of the woods of Guermites into this drawing-room, to surround the pouf on which she was sitting. I was surprised only that the likeness of those woods was not more discernible on the face of the Duchess, about which there was nothing suggestive of vegetation, and on which the ruddiness of her cheeks—which ought, one felt, to have been emblazoned with the name Guermites—was at most the effect, and not the reflexion, of long gallops in the open air. Later on, when I had become indifferent to her, I came to know many of the Duchess’s distinctive features, notably (to stick for the moment only to those of which I already at this time felt the charm though without yet being able to identify it) her eyes, which captured as in a picture the blue sky of a French country afternoon, broadly expansive, bathed in light even when no sun shone; and a voice which one would have thought, from its first hoarse sounds, to be almost plebeian, in which there lingered, as over the steps of the church at Combray or the pastry-cook’s in the square, the rich and lazy gold of a country sun. But on this first day I discerned nothing, my ardent attention volatilised at once the little that I might otherwise have been able to take in and from which I might have been able to grasp something of the name Guermites. In any case, I told myself that it was indeed she who was designated for all the world by the title Duchesse de Guermites: the inconceivable life which that name signified was indeed contained in this body; it had just introduced that life into the midst of a group of disparate people, in this room which enclosed it on every side and on which it produced so vivid a reaction that I felt I could see, where the extent of that mysterious life ceased, a fringe of effervescence outline its frontiers—in the circumference of the circle traced on the carpet by the balloon of her blue pekin skirt, and in the bright eyes of the Duchess at the point of intersection of the preoccupations, the memories, the incomprehensible, scornful, amused and curious thoughts which filled them from within and the outside images that were reflected on their surface. Perhaps I should have been not quite so deeply stirred had I met her at Mme de Villeparisis’s at an evening party, instead of seeing her thus at one of the Marquise’s “at homes,” at one of those tea-parties which are for women no more than a brief halt in the course of their afternoon’s outing, when, keeping on the hats in which they have been doing their shopping, they waft into a succession of salons the quality of the fresh air outside, and offer a better view of Paris in the late afternoon than do the tall open windows through which one can hear the rumble of victorias: Mme de Guermites wore a straw hat trimmed with cornflowers, and what they recalled to me was not the sunlight of bygone years among the tilled fields round Combray where I had so often gathered them on the slope adjoining the Tansonville hedge, but the smell and the dust of twilight as they had been an hour ago when Mme de Guermites had walked through them in the Rue de la Paix. With a smiling, disdainful, absent-minded air, and a pout on her pursed lips, she was tracing circles on the carpet with the point of her sunshade, as with the extreme tip of an antenna of her mysterious life; then, with that indifferent attention which begins by eliminating every point of contact between oneself and what one is considering, her gaze fastened upon each of us in turn, then inspected the settees and chairs, but softened now by that human sympathy which is aroused by the presence, however insignificant, of a thing one knows, a thing that is almost a person: these pieces of furniture were not like us, they belonged vaguely to her world, they were bound up with the life of her aunt; then from a Beauvais chair her gaze was carried back to the person sitting on it, and thereupon resumed the same air of perspicacity and that same disapproval which the respect that Mme de Guermites felt for her aunt would have prevented her from expressing in words, but which she would have felt had she noticed on the chairs, instead of our presence, that of a spot of grease or a layer of dust.

The excellent writer G—— entered the room, having come to pay a call on Mme de Villeparisis which he regarded as a tiresome duty. The Duchess, although delighted to see him again, gave him no sign of welcome, but instinctively he made straight for her, the charm that she possessed, her tact, her simplicity making him look upon her as a woman of intelligence. He was bound, in any case, in common politeness to go and talk to her, for, since he was a pleasant and distinguished man, Mme de Guermites frequently invited him to lunch even when her husband and herself were alone, or, in the autumn, took advantage of this intimacy to have him to dinner occasionally at Guermites with royal personages who were curious to meet him. For the Duchess liked to entertain certain eminent men, on condition always that they were bachelors, a condition which, even when married, they invariably fulfilled for her, for since their wives, who were always more or less common, would have been a blot on a salon in which there were never any but the most fashionable beauties of Paris, it was always without them that their husbands were invited; and the Duke, to forestall any hurt feelings, would explain to these involuntary widowers that the Duchess never had women in the house, could not endure feminine company, almost as though this had been under doctor’s orders, and as he might have said that she could not stay in a room in which there were smells, or eat over-salted food, or travel with her back to the engine, or wear stays. It was true that these eminent men used to see at the Guermites’ the Princesse de Parme, the Princesse de Sagan (whom Françoise, hearing her constantly mentioned, had taken to calling, in the belief that this feminine ending was required by the laws of accident, “the Sagante”), and plenty more, but their presence was accounted for by the explanation that they were relations, or such very old friends that it was impossible to exclude them. Whether or not they were convinced by the explanations which the Duc de Guermites had given of the singular malady that made it impossible for the Duchess to associate with other women, the great men duly transmitted them to their wives. Some of these thought that the malady was only an excuse to cloak her jealousy, because the Duchess wished to reign alone over a court of worshippers. Others more simple still thought that perhaps the Duchess had some peculiar habit, or even a scandalous past,

so that women did not care to go to her house and that she gave the name of a whim to what was stern necessity. The better among them, hearing their husbands expatiate on the Duchess's wit, assumed that she must be so far superior to the rest of womankind that she found their society boring since they could not talk intelligently about anything. And it was true that the Duchess was bored by other women, if their princely rank did not give them an exceptional interest. But the excluded wives were mistaken when they imagined that she chose to entertain men only in order to be able to discuss with them literature, science, and philosophy. For she never spoke of these, at least with the great intellectuals. If, by virtue of a family tradition such as makes the daughters of great soldiers preserve a respect for military matters in the midst of their most frivolous distractions, she felt, as the granddaughter of women who had been on terms of friendship with Thiers, Mérimée and Augier, that a place must always be kept in her drawing-room for men of intellect, she had at the same time derived from the manner, at once condescending and familiar, in which those famous men had been received at Guermantes, the foible of looking on men of talent as family friends whose talent does not dazzle one, to whom one does not speak of their work, and who would not be at all interested if one did. Moreover the type of mind illustrated by Mérimée and Meilhac and Halévy, which was also hers, led her, by contrast with the verbal sentimentality of an earlier generation, to a style of conversation that rejects everything to do with fine language and the expression of lofty thoughts, so that she made it a sort of point of good breeding when she was with a poet or a musician to talk only of the food that they were eating or the game of cards to which they would afterwards sit down. This abstention had, on a third person not conversant with her ways, a disturbing effect which amounted to mystification. Mme de Guermantes having asked him if he would like to be invited with this or that famous poet, devoured by curiosity he arrived at the appointed hour. The Duchess would talk to the poet about the weather. They sat down to lunch. "Do you like this way of doing eggs?" she would ask the poet. On hearing his approval, which she shared, for everything in her own house appeared to her exquisite, down to a horrible cider which she imported from Guermantes: "Give Monsieur some more eggs," she would tell the butler, while the anxious fellow-guest sat waiting for what must surely have been the object of the occasion, since they had arranged to meet, in spite of every sort of difficulty, before the Duchess, the poet and he himself left Paris. But the meal went on, one after another the courses would be cleared away, not without having provided Mme de Guermantes with opportunities for clever witticisms or well-judged anecdotes. Meanwhile the poet went on eating without either the Duke or Duchess showing any sign of remembering that he was a poet. And presently the luncheon came to an end and the party broke up, without a word having been said about poetry which they nevertheless all admired but to which, by a reserve analogous to that of which Swann had given me a foretaste, no one referred. This reserve was simply a matter of good form. But for the fellow-guest, if he thought about the matter, there was something strangely melancholy about it all, and these meals in the Guermantes household were reminiscent of the hours which timid lovers often spend together in talking trivialities until it is time to part, without—whether from shyness, from modesty or from awkwardness—the great secret which they would have been happier to confess ever having succeeded in passing from their hearts to their lips. It must, however, be added that this silence with regard to deeper things which one was always waiting in vain to see broached, if it might pass as characteristic of the Duchess, was by no means absolute with her. Mme de Guermantes had spent her girlhood in a somewhat different environment, equally aristocratic but less brilliant and above all less futile than that in which she now lived, and one of wide culture. It had left beneath her present frivolity a sort of firmer bedrock, invisibly nutritious, to which indeed the Duchess would repair in search (very rarely, though, for she detested pedantry) of some quotation from Victor Hugo or Lamartine which, extremely appropriate, uttered with a look of true feeling from her fine eyes, never failed to surprise and charm her audience. Sometimes, even, unpretentiously, with pertinence and simplicity, she would give some dramatist and Academician a piece of sage advice, would make him modify a situation or alter an ending.

If, in the drawing-room of Mme de Villeparisis, as in the church at Combray on the day of Mlle Percepied's wedding, I had difficulty in rediscovering in the handsome but too human face of Mme de Guermantes the enigma of her name, I thought at least that, when she spoke, her conversation, profound, mysterious, would have the strangeness of a mediaeval tapestry or a Gothic window. But in order that I should not be disappointed by the words that I should hear uttered by a person who called herself Mme de Guermantes, even if I had not been in love with her, it would not have sufficed that those words should be shrewd, beautiful and profound, they would have had to reflect that amaranthine colour of the closing syllable of her name, that colour which on first seeing her I had been disappointed not to find in her person and had fancied as having taken refuge in her mind. True, I had already heard Mme de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup, people whose intelligence was in no way extraordinary, pronounce quite casually this name Guermantes, simply as that of a person who was coming to see them or with whom they were going to dine, without seeming to feel that there were latent in her name the glow of yellowing woods and a whole mysterious tract of country. But this must have been an affectation on their part, as when the classic poets give us no warning of the profound intentions which they nevertheless had, an affectation which I myself also strove to imitate, saying in the most natural tone: "The Duchesse de Guermantes," as though it were a name that was just like other names. Besides, everyone declared that she was a highly intelligent woman, a witty conversationalist, living in a small circle of most interesting people: words which became accomplices of my dream. For when they spoke of an intelligent group, of witty talk, it was in no way intelligence as I knew it that I imagined, not even that of the greatest minds; it was not at all with men like Bergotte that I peopled this group. No, by intelligence I understood an ineffable faculty gilded by the sun, impregnated with a sylvan coolness. Indeed, had she made the most intelligent remarks (in the sense in which I understood the word when it was used of a philosopher or critic),

Mme de Guermentes would perhaps have disappointed even more keenly my expectation of so special a faculty than if, in the course of a trivial conversation, she had confined herself to discussing cooking recipes or the furnishing of a country house, to mentioning the names of neighbours or relatives of hers, which would have given me a picture of her life.

"I thought I should find Basin here. He was meaning to come and see you today," said Mme de Guermentes to her aunt.

"I haven't set eyes on your husband for some days," replied Mme de Villeparisis in a somewhat nettled tone. "In fact, I haven't seen him—well, perhaps once—since that charming joke he played on me of having himself announced as the Queen of Sweden."

Mme de Guermentes formed a smile by contracting the corners of her mouth as though she were biting her veil.

"We met her at dinner last night at Blanche Leroi's. You wouldn't know her now, she's positively enormous. I'm sure she must be ill."

"I was just telling these gentlemen that you said she looked like a frog."

Mme de Guermentes emitted a sort of raucous noise which meant that she was laughing for form's sake.

"I don't remember making such a charming comparison, but if she was one before, now she's the frog that has succeeded in swelling to the size of the ox. Or rather, it isn't quite that, because all her swelling is concentrated in her stomach: she's more like a frog in an interesting condition."

"Ah, I do find that funny," said Mme de Villeparisis, secretly proud that her guests should be witnessing this display of her niece's wit.

"It is purely *arbitrary*, though," answered Mme de Guermentes, ironically detaching this selected epithet, as Swann would have done, "for I must admit I never saw a frog in the family way. Anyhow, the frog in question, who, by the way, does not require a king, for I never saw her so skittish as she's been since her husband died, is coming to dine with us one day next week. I promised I'd let you know just in case."

Mme de Villeparisis gave vent to an indistinct growl, from which emerged: "I know she was dining with the Mecklenburgs the night before last. Hannibal de Bréauté was there. He came and told me about it, quite amusingly, I must say."

"There was a man there who's a great deal wittier than Babal," said Mme de Guermentes who, intimate though she was with M. de Bréauté-Consalvi, felt the need to advertise the fact by the use of this diminutive. "I mean M. Bergotte."

I had never imagined that Bergotte could be regarded as witty; moreover, I thought of him always as part of the intellectual section of humanity, that is to say infinitely remote from that mysterious realm of which I had caught a glimpse through the purple hangings of a theatre box behind which, making the Duchess laugh, M. de Bréauté had been holding with her, in the language of the gods, that unimaginable thing, a conversation between people of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. I was distressed to see the balance upset and Bergotte rise above M. de Bréauté. But above all I was dismayed to think that I had avoided Bergotte on the evening of *Phèdre*, that I had not gone up and spoken to him, when I heard Mme de Guermentes, in whom one could always, as at the turn of a mental tide, see the flow of curiosity with regard to well-known intellectuals sweep over the ebb of her aristocratic snobbishness, say to Mme de Villeparisis: "He's the only person I have any wish to know. It would be such a pleasure."

The presence of Bergotte by my side, which it would have been so easy for me to secure but which I should have thought liable to give Mme de Guermentes a bad impression of me, would no doubt, on the contrary, have resulted in her signalling to me to join her in her box, and inviting me to bring the eminent writer to lunch one day.

"I gather that he didn't behave very well. He was presented to M. de Cobourg, and never uttered a word to him," Mme de Guermentes went on, dwelling on this odd fact as she might have recounted that a Chinese had blown his nose on a sheet of paper. "He never once said 'Your Royal Highness' to him," she added, with an air of amusement at this detail, as important to her mind as the refusal of a Protestant, during an audience with the Pope, to go on his knees before His Holiness.

Interested by these idiosyncrasies of Bergotte's, she did not, however, appear to consider them reprehensible, and seemed rather to give him credit for them, though she would have been hard put to it to say why. Despite this unusual mode of appreciating Bergotte's originality, it was a fact which I was later to regard as not wholly negligible that Mme de Guermentes, greatly to the surprise of many of her friends, considered Bergotte wittier than M. de Bréauté. Thus it is that such judgments, subversive, isolated, and yet after all right, are delivered in the world of society by those rare people who are superior to the rest. And they sketch then the first rough outlines of the hierarchy of values as the next generation will establish it, instead of abiding eternally by the old standards.

The Comte d'Argencourt, Chargé d'Affaires at the Belgian Legation and a second cousin by marriage of Mme de Villeparisis, came in limping, followed presently by two young men, the Baron de Guermentes and H.H. the Duc de Châtellerault, whom Mme de Guermentes greeted with: "Good evening, my dear Châtellerault," with a nonchalant air and without moving from her pouf, for she was a great friend of the young Duke's mother, which had given him a deep and lifelong respect for her. Tall, slim, with golden hair and skin, thoroughly Guermentes in type, these two young men looked like a condensation of the light of the spring evening which was flooding the spacious room. Following a custom which was the fashion at that time, they laid their top hats on the floor beside them. The historian of the Fronde assumed that they must be embarrassed, like



peasants coming into the mayor's office and not knowing what to do with their hats. Feeling that he ought in charity to come to the rescue of the awkwardness and timidity which he ascribed to them:

"No, no," he said, "don't leave them on the floor, they'll be trodden on."

A glance from the Baron de Guermantes, tilting the plane of his pupils, shot suddenly from them a wave of pure and piercing blue which froze the well-meaning historian.

"What is that person's name?" the Baron asked me, having just been introduced to me by Mme de Villeparisis.

"M. Pierre," I whispered.

"Pierre what?"

"Pierre: it's his name, he's a very distinguished historian."

"Really? You don't say so."

"No, it's a new fashion with these young men to put their hats on the floor," Mme de Villeparisis explained. "I'm like you, I can never get used to it. Still, it's better than my nephew Robert, who always leaves his in the hall. I tell him, when I see him come in like that, that he looks just like a clockmaker, and I ask him if he's come to wind the clocks."

"You were speaking just now, Madame la Marquise, of M. Molé's hat; we shall soon be able, like Aristotle, to compile a chapter on hats," said the historian of the Fronde, somewhat reassured by Mme de Villeparisis's intervention, but in so faint a voice that no one heard him except me.

"She really is astonishing, the little Duchess," said M. d'Argencourt, pointing to Mme de Guermantes who was talking to G—. "Whenever there's a prominent person in the room you're sure to find him sitting with her. Evidently that must be the lion of the party over there. It can't be M. de Borelli everyday, or M. Schlumberger or M. d'Avenel. But then it's bound to be M. Pierre Loti or M. Edmond Rostand. Yesterday evening at the Doudeauvilles', where by the way she was looking splendid in her emerald tiara and a pink dress with a long train, she had M. Deschanel on one side and the German Ambassador on the other: she was holding forth to them about China. The general public, at a respectful distance where they couldn't hear what was being said, were wondering whether there wasn't going to be war. Really, you'd have said she was a queen holding her circle."

Everyone had gathered round Mme de Villeparisis to watch her painting.

"Those flowers are a truly celestial pink," said Legrandin, "I should say sky-pink. For there is such a thing as sky-pink just as there is sky-blue. But," he lowered his voice in the hope that he would not be heard by anyone but the Marquise, "I think I still plump for the silky, the living rosininess of your rendering of them. Ah, you leave Pisanello and Van Huysum a long way behind, with their meticulous, dead herbals."

An artist, however modest, is always willing to hear himself preferred to his rivals, and tries only to see that justice is done them.

"What gives you that impression is that they painted flowers of their time which we no longer know, but they did it with great skill."

"Ah! Flowers of their time! That is a most ingenious theory," exclaimed Legrandin.

"I see you're painting some fine cherry blossoms—or are they mayflowers?" began the historian of the Fronde, in some doubt as to the flower, but with a note of confidence in his voice, for he was beginning to forget the incident of the hats.

"No, they're apple blossom," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, addressing her aunt.

"Ah! I see you're a good countrywoman like me; you can tell one flower from another."

"Why yes, so they are! But I thought the season for apple blossom was over now," hazarded the historian, to cover his mistake.

"Not at all; on the contrary it's not out yet; it won't be out for another fortnight, or three weeks perhaps," said the archivist who, since he helped with the management of Mme de Villeparisis's estates, was better informed upon country matters.

"Yes, even round Paris, where they're very far forward," put in the Duchess. "Down in Normandy, don't you know, at his father's place," she pointed to the young Duc de Châtellerauld, "where they have some splendid apple-trees close to the sea, like a Japanese screen, they're never really pink until after the twentieth of May."

"I never see them," said the young Duke, "because they give me hay fever. Such a bore."

"Hay fever? I never heard of that before," said the historian.

"It's the fashionable complaint just now," the archivist informed him.

"It all depends: you won't get it at all, probably, if it's a good year for apples. You know the Norman saying: 'When it's a good year for apples ...';" put in M. d'Argencourt who, not being quite French, was always trying to give himself a Parisian air.

"You're quite right," Mme de Villeparisis said to her niece, "these are from the South. It was a florist who sent them round and asked me to accept them as a present. You're surprised, I dare say, Monsieur Vallenères," she turned to the archivist, "that a florist should make me a present of apple blossom. Well, I may be an old woman, but I'm not quite on the shelf yet, I still have a few friends," she went on with a smile that might have been taken as a sign of her simplicity but meant rather, I could not help feeling, that she thought it intriguing to pride herself on the friendship of a mere florist when she had such grand connexions.

Bloch rose and in his turn came over to look at the flowers which Mme de Villeparisis was painting.

"Never mind, Marquise," said the historian, sitting down again, "even if we were to have another of those revolutions which have stained so many pages of our history with blood—and, upon my soul, in these days one can never tell," he added with a circular and circumspect glance, as if to make sure that there were no

“dissidents” in the room, though he did not suppose there were any, “with a talent like yours and your five languages you would be certain to get on all right.”

The historian of the Fronde was feeling quite refreshed, for he had forgotten his insomnia. But he suddenly remembered that he had not slept for six nights, whereupon a crushing weariness, born of his mind, took hold of his legs and bowed his shoulders, and his melancholy face began to droop like an old man’s.

Bloch wanted to express his admiration in an appropriate gesture, but only succeeded in knocking over the glass containing the spray of apple blossom with his elbow, and all the water was spilled on the carpet.

“You really have a fairy’s touch,” the historian said to the Marquise; having his back turned to me at that moment, he had not noticed Bloch’s clumsiness.

But Bloch took the remark as a jibe at him, and to cover his shame with a piece of insolence, retorted: “It’s not of the slightest importance; I’m not wet.”

Mme de Villeparisis rang the bell and a footman came to wipe the carpet and pick up the fragments of glass. She invited the two young men to her theatricals, and also Mme de Guermantes, with the injunction:

“Remember to tell Gisèle and Berthe” (the Duchesses d’Auberjon and de Portefin) “to be here a little before two to help me,” as she might have told hired waiters to come early to arrange the fruit-stands.

She treated her princely relatives, as she treated M. de Norpois, without any of the little courtesies which she showed to the historian, Cottard, Bloch and myself, and they seemed to have no interest for her beyond the possibility of serving them up as food for our social curiosity. This was because she knew that she need not put herself out to entertain people for whom she was not a more or less brilliant woman but the sister, touchy and used to tactful handling, of their father or uncle. There would have been no object in her trying to shine in front of them; she could never have deceived them as to the strength or weakness of her situation, for they knew her whole story only too well and respected the illustrious race from which she sprang. But, above all, they had ceased to be anything more for her than a dead stock that would never bear fruit again; they would never introduce her to their new friends, or share their pleasures with her. She could obtain from them only their occasional presence, or the possibility of speaking of them, at her five o’clock receptions as, later on, in her *Memoirs*, of which these receptions were only a sort of rehearsal, a preliminary reading aloud of the manuscript before a selected audience. And the society which all these noble kinsmen and kinswomen served to interest, to dazzle, to enthral, the society of the Cottards, of the Blochs, of well-known dramatists, historians of the Fronde and suchlike, it was this society that, for Mme de Villeparisis—in the absence of that section of the fashionable world which did not go to her house—represented movement, novelty, entertainment and life; it was from people like these that she was able to derive social advantages (which made it well worth her while to let them meet, now and then, though without ever getting to know her, the Duchesse de Guermantes): dinners with remarkable men whose work had interested her, a light opera or a pantomime staged complete by its author in her drawing-room, boxes for interesting shows.

Bloch got up to go. He had said aloud that the incident of the broken flower-glass was of no importance, but what he said under his breath was different, more different still what he thought: “If people can’t train their servants to put vases where they won’t risk soaking and even injuring their guests, they oughtn’t to go in for such luxuries,” he muttered angrily. He was one of those susceptible, highly-strung persons who cannot bear to have made a blunder which, though they do not admit it to themselves, is enough to spoil their whole day. In a black rage, he was just making up his mind never to go into society again. He had reached the point at which some distraction was imperative. Fortunately in a moment Mme de Villeparisis would press him to stay. Either because she was aware of the opinions of her friends and the rising tide of anti-semitism, or simply from absent-mindedness, she had not introduced him to any of the people in the room. He, however, being little used to society, felt that he ought to take leave of them all before going, out of good manners, but without warmth; he lowered his head several times, buried his bearded chin in his stiff collar, and scrutinised each of the party in turn through his glasses with a cold and peevish glare. But Mme de Villeparisis stopped him; she had still to discuss with him the little play which was to be performed in her house, and also she did not wish him to leave before he had had the satisfaction of meeting M. de Norpois (whose failure to appear surprised her), although as an inducement to Bloch this introduction was quite superfluous, he having already decided to persuade the two actresses whose names he had mentioned to her to come and sing for nothing in the Marquise’s drawing-room, in the interest of their careers, at one of those receptions to which the élite of Europe thronged. He had even offered in addition a tragic actress “with sea-green eyes, fair as Hera,” who would recite lyrical prose with a sense of plastic beauty. But on hearing this lady’s name Mme de Villeparisis had declined, for it was that of Saint-Loup’s mistress.

“I have better news,” she murmured in my ear. “I really believe it’s on its last legs, and that before very long they’ll have separated—in spite of an officer who has played an abominable part in the whole business,” she added. (For Robert’s family were beginning to look with a deadly hatred on M. de Borodino, who had given him leave, at the hair-dresser’s instance, to go to Bruges, and accused him of giving countenance to an infamous liaison.) “He’s a very bad man,” said Mme de Villeparisis with that virtuous accent common to all the Guermantes, even the most depraved. “Very, very bad,” she repeated, emphasising the word “very” and rolling the ‘r’s. One felt that she had no doubt of the Prince’s being present at all their orgies. But, as kindness of heart was the old lady’s dominant quality, her expression of frowning severity towards the horrible captain, whose name she articulated with an ironical emphasis: “The Prince de Borodino!”—as a woman for whom the Empire simply did not count—melted into a gentle smile at myself with a mechanical twitch of the eyelid indicating a vague connivance between us.

"I was quite fond of de Saint-Loup-en-Bray," said Bloch, "dirty dog though he is, because he's extremely well-bred. I have a great admiration for well-bred people, they're so rare," he went on, without realising, since he was himself so extremely ill-bred, how displeasing his words were. "I will give you an example which I consider most striking of his perfect breeding. I met him once with a young man just as he was about to spring into his wheelèd chariot, after he himself had buckled their splendid harness on a pair of steeds nourished with oats and barley, who had no need of the flashing whip to urge them on. He introduced us, but I did not catch the young man's name—one never does catch people's names when one's introduced to them," he added with a laugh, this being one of his father's witticisms. "De Saint-Loup-en-Bray remained perfectly natural, made no fuss about the young man, seemed absolutely at his ease. Well, I found out by pure chance a day or two later that the young man was the son of Sir Rufus Israels!"

The end of this story sounded less shocking than its preface, for it remained quite incomprehensible to everyone in the room. The fact was that Sir Rufus Israels, who seemed to Bloch and his father an almost royal personage before whom Saint-Loup ought to tremble, was in the eyes of the Guermantes world a foreign upstart, tolerated in society, on whose friendship nobody would ever have dreamed of priding himself—far from it.

"I learned this," said Bloch, "from Sir Rufus Israels' agent, who is a friend of my father and a quite remarkable man. Oh, an absolutely wonderful individual," he added with that affirmative energy, that note of enthusiasm which one puts only into convictions that do not originate from oneself.

"But tell me," Bloch asked me, lowering his voice, "how much money do you suppose Saint-Loup has? Not that it matters to me in the least, you quite understand. I'm interested from the Balzacian point of view. You don't happen to know what it's in, French stocks, foreign stocks, or land or what?"

I could give him no information whatsoever. Suddenly raising his voice, Bloch asked if he might open the windows, and without waiting for an answer, went across the room to do so. Mme de Villeparisis said that it was out of the question, as she had a cold. "Oh, well, if it's bad for you!" Bloch was downcast. "But you can't say it's not hot in here." And breaking into a laugh, he swept a glance round the room in an appeal for support against Mme de Villeparisis. He received none, from these well-bred people. His blazing eyes, having failed to seduce any of the other guests, resignedly reverted to their former gravity of expression. He acknowledged his defeat with: "What's the temperature? Twenty-two at least, I should say. Twenty-five? I'm not surprised. I'm simply dripping. And I have not, like the sage Antenor, son of the river Alpheus, the power to plunge myself in the paternal wave to staunch my sweat before laying my body in a bath of polished marble and anointing my limbs with fragrant oils." And with that need which people feel to outline for the benefit of others medical theories the application of which would be beneficial to their own health: "Well, if you believe it's good for you! I must say, I think the opposite. It's exactly what gives you your cold."

Bloch had expressed delight at the idea of meeting M. de Norpois. He would like, he said, to get him to talk about the Dreyfus case.

"There's a mentality at work there which I don't altogether understand, and it would be rather intriguing to have an interview with this eminent diplomat," he said in a sarcastic tone, so as not to appear to be rating himself below the Ambassador.

Mme de Villeparisis was sorry that he had said this so loud, but minded less when she saw that the archivist, whose strong Nationalist views kept her, so to speak, on a leash, was too far off to have overheard. She was more shocked to hear Bloch, led on by that demon of ill-breeding which made him permanently blind to the consequences of what he said, inquiring with a laugh at the paternal pleasantry:

"Haven't I read a learned treatise by him in which he sets forth a string of irrefutable arguments to prove that the Russo-Japanese war was bound to end in a Russian victory and a Japanese defeat? And isn't he a bit senile? I'm sure he's the one I've seen taking aim at his chair before sliding across the room to it, as if on casters."

"Good gracious, never!" the Marquise put in. "Just wait a minute. I don't know what he can be doing."

She rang the bell and, when the servant appeared, as she made no secret of, and indeed liked to advertise, the fact that her old friend spent the greater part of his time in her house: "Go and tell M. de Norpois to come," she ordered. "He's sorting some papers in my library; he said he would be twenty minutes, and I've been waiting now for an hour and three-quarters. He'll talk to you about the Dreyfus case, or anything else you like," she said grumpily to Bloch. "He doesn't much approve of what's happening."

For M. de Norpois was not on good terms with the ministry of the day, and Mme de Villeparisis, although he had never taken the liberty of bringing any governmental personalities to her house (she still preserved all the unapproachable dignity of a great lady of the aristocracy and remained outside and above the political relations which he was obliged to cultivate), was kept well informed by him of everything that went on. Equally, these politicians of the present regime would never have dared to ask M. de Norpois to introduce them to Mme de Villeparisis. But several of them had gone down to see him at her house in the country when they needed his advice or help at critical junctures. They knew the address. They went to the house. They did not see its mistress. But at dinner that evening she would say: "I hear they've been down here bothering you. Are things going better?"

"You're not in a hurry?" she now asked Bloch.

"No, not at all. I was thinking of going because I'm not very well; in fact there's a possibility of my taking a cure at Vichy for my gall bladder," he explained, articulating these words with a fiendish irony.

"Why, that's just where my nephew Châtellerault's got to go. You must fix it up together. Is he still here? He's a nice boy, you know," said Mme de Villeparisis, sincerely perhaps, thinking that two people whom she

knew had no reason not to be friends with each other.

"Oh, I dare say he wouldn't care about that—I don't ... I scarcely know him. He's over there," stammered Bloch, overwhelmed with delight.

The butler had evidently failed to deliver his mistress's message properly, for M. de Norpois, to give the impression that he had just come in from the street and had not yet seen his hostess, had picked up the first hat that he found in the vestibule, one which I thought I recognised, and came forward to kiss Mme de Villeparisis's hand with great ceremony, asking after her health with all the interest that people show after a long separation. He was not aware that the Marquise had removed in advance any semblance of verisimilitude from this charade, which indeed she eventually cut short by introducing him to Bloch. The latter, who had observed all the polite attentions that were being shown to a person whom he had not yet discovered to be M. de Norpois, and the formal, gracious, deep bows with which the Ambassador replied to them, evidently felt inferior to all this ceremonial and vexed to think that it would never be addressed to him, and said to me in order to appear at ease: "Who is that old idiot?" Perhaps, too, all this bowing and scraping by M. de Norpois had really shocked the better element in Bloch's nature, the freer and more straightforward manners of a younger generation, and he was partly sincere in condemning it as absurd. However that might be, it ceased to appear absurd and indeed delighted him the moment it was himself, Bloch, to whom the salutations were addressed.

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," said Mme de Villeparisis, "I should like you to meet this gentleman. Monsieur Bloch, Monsieur le Marquis de Norpois." She made a point, in spite of the way she bullied M. de Norpois, of addressing him always as "Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," as a point of etiquette as well as from an exaggerated respect for his ambassadorial rank, a respect which the Marquis had inculcated in her, and also with the intention of applying that less familiar, more ceremonious posture towards one particular man which, in the salon of a distinguished woman, in contrast to the freedom with which she treats her other regular guests, marks that man out instantly as her lover.

M. de Norpois sank his azure gaze in his white beard, bent his tall body deep down as though he were bowing before all the renowned and imposing connotations of the name Bloch, and murmured: "I'm delighted ..." whereat his young interlocutor, moved, but feeling that the illustrious diplomat was going too far, hastened to correct him, saying: "Not at all! On the contrary, it is I who am delighted." But this ceremony, which M. de Norpois, out of friendship for Mme de Villeparisis, repeated for the benefit of every new person that his old friend introduced to him, did not seem to her adequate to the deserts of Bloch, to whom she said:

"Just ask him anything you want to know. Take him aside if it's more convenient; he will be delighted to talk to you. I think you wished to speak to him about the Dreyfus case," she went on, no more considering whether this would be agreeable to M. de Norpois than she would have thought of asking leave of the Duchesse de Montmorency's portrait before having it lighted up for the historian, or of the tea before offering a cup of it.

"You must speak loud," she warned Bloch, "he's a little deaf, but he will tell you anything you want to know; he knew Bismarck very well, and Cavour. That is so, isn't it?" she raised her voice, "you knew Bismarck well."

"Have you got anything on the stocks?" M. de Norpois asked me with a knowing air as he shook my hand warmly. I took the opportunity to relieve him politely of the hat which he had felt obliged to bring ceremonially into the room, for I saw that it was my own which he had picked up at random. "You showed me a somewhat laboured little thing in which you went in for a good deal of hair-splitting. I gave you my frank opinion; what you had written was not worth the trouble of putting on paper. Are you preparing something for us? You were greatly smitten with Bergotte, if I remember rightly." "You're not to say anything against Bergotte," put in the Duchess. "I don't dispute his pictorial talent; no one would, Duchess. He understands all about etching and engraving, if not brush-work on a large canvas like M. Cherbuliez. But it seems to me that in these days there is a tendency to mix up the genres and forget that the novelist's business is rather to weave a plot and edify his readers than to fiddle away at producing a frontispiece or tailpiece in drypoint. I shall be seeing your father on Sunday at our good friend A.J.'s," he went on, turning again to me.

I had hoped for a moment, when I saw him talking to Mme de Guermantes, that he would perhaps afford me, for getting myself asked to her house, the help he had refused me for getting to Mme Swann's. "Another of my great favourites," I told him, "is Elstir. It seems the Duchesse de Guermantes has some wonderful examples of his work, particularly that admirable *Bunch of Radishes* which I remember at the Exhibition and should so much like to see again; what a masterpiece it is!" And indeed, if I had been a prominent person and had been asked to state what picture I liked best, I should have named this *Bunch of Radishes*.

"A masterpiece?" cried M. de Norpois with a surprised and reproachful air. "It makes no pretence of being even a picture, it's merely a sketch." (He was right.) "If you label a clever little thing of that sort 'masterpiece,' what will you say about Hébert's *Virgin* or Dagnan-Bouveret?"

"I heard you refusing to have Robert's woman," said Mme de Guermantes to her aunt, after Bloch had taken the Ambassador aside. "I don't think you'll miss much: she's a perfect horror, you know, without a vestige of talent, and besides she's grotesquely ugly."

"Do you mean to say you know her, Duchess?" asked M. d'Argencourt.

"Yes, didn't you know that she performed in my house before anyone else's—not that that's anything to be proud of," replied Mme de Guermantes with a laugh, glad nevertheless, since the actress was under discussion, to let it be known that she herself had had the first taste of her absurdities. "Hallo, I suppose I ought to go now," she added, without moving.

She had just seen her husband enter the room, and these words were an allusion to the absurdity of their appearing to be paying a call together like a newly married couple, rather than to the often strained relations

that existed between her and the strapping individual she had married, who, despite his advancing years, still led the life of a gay bachelor. Casting over the considerable party that was gathered round the tea-table the affable, waggish gaze—dazzled a little by the slanting rays of the setting sun—of the little round pupils lodged in the exact centre of his eyes, like the “bulls” which the excellent marksman that he was could always target with such perfect precision, the Duke advanced with a wondering, gingerly deliberation as though, alarmed by so brilliant a gathering, he was afraid of treading on ladies’ skirts and interrupting conversations. A permanent smile suggesting a slightly tipsy “Good King Wenceslas,” and a half-open hand floating like a shark’s fin by his side, which he allowed to be clasped indiscriminately by his old friends and by the strangers who were introduced to him, enabled him, without having to make a single movement, or to interrupt his genial, lazy, royal progress, to reward the alacrity of them all by simply murmuring: “How do, my boy; how do, my dear fellow; charmed, Monsieur Bloch; how do, Argencourt”; and, on coming to myself, who was the most favoured of all when he had been told my name: “How do, young neighbour, how’s your father? What an admirable man!” He made no great demonstration except to Mme de Villeparisis, who greeted him with a nod of her head, drawing one hand from a pocket of her little apron.

Being formidably rich in a world where people were becoming steadily less so, and having adapted himself long since to the idea of this enormous fortune, he had all the vanity of the great nobleman combined with that of the man of means, the refinement and breeding of the former only just managing to counterbalance the smugness of the latter. One could understand, moreover, that his success with women, which made his wife so unhappy, was not due merely to his name and his wealth, for he was still remarkably handsome, and his profile retained the purity, the firmness of outline of a Greek god’s.

“Do you mean to tell me she performed in your house?” M. d’Argencourt asked the Duchess.

“Well, you know, she came to recite, with a bunch of lilies in her hand, and more lilies on her *dwess*.” (Mme de Guermites shared her aunt’s affectation of pronouncing certain words in an exceedingly rustic fashion, though she never rolled her ‘r’s like Mme de Villeparisis.)

Before M. de Norpois, under constraint from his hostess, had taken Bloch into the little recess where they could talk more freely, I went up to the old diplomat for a moment and put in a word about my father’s academic chair. He tried first of all to postpone the conversation to another day. I pointed out that I was going to Balbec. “What? Going to Balbec again? Why, you’re a regular *globe-trotter*.” Then he listened to what I had to say. At the name of Leroy-Beaulieu, he looked at me suspiciously. I conjectured that he had perhaps said something disparaging to M. Leroy-Beaulieu about my father and was afraid that the economist might have repeated it to him. All at once he seemed to be filled with a positive affection for my father. And after one of those decelerations in the flow of speech out of which suddenly a word explodes as though in spite of the speaker, whose irresistible conviction overcomes his stuttering efforts at silence: “No, no,” he said to me with emotion, “your father *must not* stand. In his own interest he must not, for his own sake, out of respect for his merits, which are great, and which would be compromised by such an adventure. He is too big a man for that. If he were elected, he would have everything to lose and nothing to gain. He is not an orator, thank heaven. And that is the one thing that counts with my dear colleagues, even if you only talk platitudes. Your father has an important goal in life; he should march straight ahead towards it, and not beat about the bush, even the bushes (more thorny than flowery) of the groves of Academe. Besides, he would not get many votes. The Academy likes to keep a postulant waiting for some time before taking him to its bosom. For the present, there is nothing to be done. Later on, I can’t say. But he must wait until the Society itself comes to seek him out. It observes with more fetishism than success the maxim *Farà da sé* of our neighbours across the Alps. Leroy-Beaulieu spoke to me about it all in a way I found highly displeasing. I should have said at a guess that he was hand in glove with your father? ... I pointed out to him, a little sharply perhaps, that a man accustomed as he is to dealing with textiles and metals could not be expected to understand the part played by the imponderables, as Bismarck used to say. But, whatever happens, your father must on no account put himself forward as a candidate. *Principiis obsta*. His friends would find themselves placed in a delicate position if he presented them with a *fait accompli*. Indeed,” he went on brusquely with an air of candour, fixing his blue eyes on my face, “I am going to tell you something that will surprise you coming from me, who am so fond of your father. Well, precisely because I am fond of him (we are known as the inseparables—*Arcades ambo*), precisely because I know the immense service that he can still render to his country, the reefs from which he can steer her if he remains at the helm; out of affection, out of high regard for him, out of patriotism, I would not vote for him. I fancy, moreover, that I have given him to understand that I wouldn’t.” (I seemed to discern in his eyes the stern Assyrian profile of Leroy-Beaulieu.) “So that to give him my vote now would be a sort of recantation on my part.” M. de Norpois repeatedly dismissed his brother Academicians as old fossils. Other reasons apart, every member of a club or academy likes to ascribe to his fellow members the type of character that is the direct converse of his own, less for the advantage of being able to say: “Ah! if it only rested with me!” than for the satisfaction of making the honour which he himself has managed to secure seem less accessible, a greater distinction. “I may tell you,” he concluded, “that in the best interests of you all, I should prefer to see your father triumphantly elected in ten or fifteen years’ time.” Words which I assumed to have been dictated, if not by jealousy, at any rate by an utter lack of willingness to oblige, and which were later, in the event, to acquire a different meaning.

“You haven’t thought of giving the *Institut* an address on the price of bread during the Fronde, I suppose,” the historian of that movement timidly inquired of M. de Norpois. “It might be an enormous success” (which was to say, “give me a colossal advertisement”), he added, smiling at the Ambassador with an obsequious tenderness which made him raise his eyelids and reveal eyes as wide as the sky. I seemed to have seen this

look before, though I had met the historian for the first time this afternoon. Suddenly I remembered having seen the same expression in the eyes of a Brazilian doctor who claimed to be able to cure breathless spasms of the kind from which I suffered by absurd inhalations of plant essences. When, in the hope that he would pay more attention to my case, I had told him that I knew Professor Cottard, he had replied, as though speaking in Cottard's interest: "Now this treatment of mine, if you were to tell him about it, would give him the material for a most sensational paper for the Academy of Medicine!" He had not ventured to press the matter but had stood gazing at me with the same air of interrogation, timid, suppliant and self-seeking, which I had just wonderingly observed on the face of the historian of the Fronde. Obviously the two men were not acquainted and had little or nothing in common, but psychological laws, like physical laws, have a more or less general application. And if the requisite conditions are the same, an identical expression lights up the eyes of different human animals, as an identical sunrise lights up places that are a long way apart and that have no connexion with one another. I did not hear the Ambassador's reply, for the whole party, with a good deal of commotion, had again gathered round Mme de Villeparisis to watch her at work.

"You know who we're talking about, Basin?" the Duchess asked her husband.

"I can make a pretty good guess," said the Duke. "As an actress she's not, I'm afraid, in what one would call the great tradition."

"You can't imagine anything more ridiculous," went on Mme de Guermites to M. d'Argencourt.

"In fact, it was drolatic," put in M. de Guermites, whose odd vocabulary enabled society people to declare that he was no fool and literary people, at the same time, to regard him as a complete imbecile.

"What I fail to understand," resumed the Duchess, "is how in the world Robert ever came to fall in love with her. Oh, of course I know one must never discuss that sort of thing," she added, with the charming pout of a philosopher and sentimentalist whose last illusion had long been shattered. "I know that anybody may fall in love with anybody else. And," she went on, for, though she might still make fun of modern literature, it had to some extent seeped into her, either through popularisation in the press or through certain conversations, "that is the really nice thing about love, because it's what makes it so 'mysterious.'"

"Mysterious! Oh, I must say, cousin, that's a bit beyond me," said the Comte d'Argencourt.

"Oh dear, yes, it's a very mysterious thing, love," declared the Duchess, with the sweet smile of a good-natured woman of the world, but also with the uncompromising conviction with which a Wagnerian assures a clubman that there is something more than just noise in the *Walküre*. "After all, one never does know what makes one person fall in love with another; it may not be at all what we think," she added with a smile, repudiating at once by this interpretation the idea she had just put forward. "After all, one never knows anything, does one?" she concluded with an air of weary scepticism. "So you see it's wiser never to discuss other people's choices in love."

But having laid down this principle she proceeded at once to violate it by criticising Saint-Loup's choice.

"All the same, don't you know, it's amazing to me that people can find any attraction in a ridiculous person."

Bloch, hearing Saint-Loup's name mentioned and gathering that he was in Paris, began to slander him so outrageously that everybody was shocked. He was beginning to nourish hatreds, and one felt that he would stop at nothing to gratify them. Having established the principle that he himself was of great moral integrity and that the sort of people who frequented La Boulie (a sporting club which he supposed to be highly fashionable) deserved penal servitude, he regarded every injury he could do to them as praiseworthy. He once went so far as to threaten to bring a lawsuit against one of his La Boulie friends. In the course of the trial he proposed to give certain evidence which would be entirely false, though the defendant would be unable to disprove it. In this way Bloch (who never in fact put his plan into action) counted on tormenting and alarming him still further. What harm could there be in that, since the man he sought to injure was a man who was interested only in fashion, a La Boulie man, and against people like that any weapon was justified, especially in the hands of a saint such as Bloch himself?

"I say, though, what about Swann?" objected M. d'Argencourt, who having at last succeeded in grasping the point of his cousin's remarks, was impressed by their shrewdness and was racking his brains for instances of men who had fallen in love with women in whom he himself would have seen no attraction.

"Oh, but Swann's case was quite different," the Duchess protested. "It was a great surprise, I admit, because she was a bit of an idiot, but she was never ridiculous, and she was at one time pretty."

"Pooh!" muttered Mme de Villeparisis.

"You didn't find her pretty? Surely, she had some charming points, very fine eyes, good hair, and she used to dress and still dresses wonderfully. Nowadays, I quite agree, she's unspeakable, but she has been a lovely woman in her time. Not that that made me any less sorry when Charles married her, because it was so unnecessary."

The Duchess had not intended to say anything out of the common, but as M. d'Argencourt began to laugh she repeated these last words—either because she thought them amusing or because she thought it nice of him to laugh—and looked up at him with a caressing smile, to add the enchantment of her femininity to that of her wit. She went on:

"Yes, really, it wasn't worth the trouble, was it? Still, after all, she did have some charm and I can quite understand why people might fall for her, but if you saw Robert's young lady, I assure you you'd simply die laughing. Oh, I know somebody's going to quote Augier at me: 'What matters the bottle so long as one gets drunk?'<sup>14</sup> Well, Robert may have got drunk all right, but he certainly hasn't shown much taste in his choice of a bottle! First of all, would you believe it, she actually expected me to fit up a staircase right in the middle of

my drawing-room. Oh, a mere nothing—what?—and she announced that she was going to lie flat on her stomach on the steps. And then, if you'd heard the things she recited! I only remember one scene, but I'm sure nobody could imagine anything like it: it was called *The Seven Princesses*."

"*Seven Princesses*! Dear, dear, what a snob she must be!" cried M. d'Argencourt. "But, wait a minute, why, I know the whole play. The author sent a copy to the King, who couldn't understand a word of it and called on me to explain it to him."

"It isn't, by any chance, by Sâr Péladan?" asked the historian of the Fronde, meaning to make a subtle and topical illusion, but in such a low voice that his question passed unnoticed.

"So you know *The Seven Princesses*, do you?" said the Duchess. "I congratulate you! I only know one, but she's quite enough; I have no wish to make the acquaintance of the other six. If they're all like the one I've seen!"

"What a goose!" I thought to myself, irritated by her icy greeting. I found a sort of bitter satisfaction in this proof of her total incomprehension of Maeterlinck. "To think that's the woman I walk miles every morning to see. Really, I'm too kind. Well, it's my turn now to ignore her." Those were the words I said to myself, but they were the opposite of what I thought; they were purely conversational words such as we say to ourselves at those moments when, too excited to remain quietly alone with ourselves, we feel the need, for want of another listener, to talk to ourselves, without meaning what we say, as we talk to a stranger.

"I can't tell you what it was like," the Duchess went on. "It was enough to make you howl with laughter. Most people did, rather too much, I'm sorry to say, for the young person was not at all pleased and Robert has never really forgiven me. Though I can't say I'm sorry, actually, because if it had been a success the lady would perhaps have come again, and I don't think Marie-Aynard would have been exactly thrilled."

Marie-Aynard was the name given in the family to Robert's mother, Mme de Marsantes, the widow of Aynard de Saint-Loup, to distinguish her from her cousin, the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, also a Marie, to whose Christian name her nephews and cousins and brothers-in-law added, to avoid confusion, either that of her husband or another of her own, making her Marie-Gilbert or Marie-Hedwige.

"To begin with, there was a sort of rehearsal the night before, which was a wonderful affair!" went on Mme de Guermantes in ironical pursuit of her theme. "Just imagine, she uttered a sentence, no, not so much, not a quarter of a sentence, and then she stopped; after which she didn't open her mouth—I'm not exaggerating—for a good five minutes."

"Oh, I say," cried M. d'Argencourt.

"With the utmost politeness I took the liberty of suggesting to her that this might seem a little unusual. And she said—I give you her actual words—'One ought always to recite a thing as though one were just composing it oneself.' It's really monumental, that reply, when you come to think of it!"

"But I understood she wasn't at all bad at reciting poetry," said one of the two young men.

"She hasn't the ghost of a notion what poetry is," replied Mme de Guermantes. "However, I didn't need to listen to her to tell that. It was quite enough to see her arriving with her lilies. I knew at once that she couldn't have any talent when I saw those lilies!"

Everybody laughed.

"I hope, my dear aunt, you weren't annoyed by my little joke the other day about the Queen of Sweden. I've come to ask your forgiveness."

"Oh, no, I'm not at all angry, I even give you leave to eat at my table, if you're hungry,—Come along, M. Vallenères, you're the daughter of the house," Mme de Villeparisis went on to the archivist, repeating a time-honoured pleasantry.

M. de Guermantes sat up in the armchair into which he had sunk, his hat on the carpet by his side, and examined with a satisfied smile the plate of cakes that was being held out to him.

"Why, certainly, now that I'm beginning to feel at home in this distinguished company, I will take a sponge-cake; they look excellent."

"This gentleman makes you an admirable daughter," commented M. d'Argencourt, whom the spirit of imitation prompted to keep Mme de Villeparisis's little joke in circulation.

The archivist handed the plate of cakes to the historian of the Fronde.

"You perform your functions admirably," said the latter, startled into speech, and hoping also to win the sympathy of the crowd. At the same time he cast a covert glance of connivance at those who had anticipated him.

"Tell me, my dear aunt," M. de Guermantes inquired of Mme de Villeparisis, "who was that rather handsome-looking gentleman who was leaving just now as I came in? I must know him, because he gave me a sweeping bow, but I couldn't place him at all; you know I never can remember names, it's such a nuisance," he added with a self-satisfied air.

"M. Legrandin."

"Oh, but Oriane has a cousin whose mother, if I'm not mistaken, was a Grandin. Yes, I remember quite well, she was a Grandin de l'Eprevier."

"No," replied Mme de Villeparisis, "no relation at all. These are plain Grandins. Grandins of nothing at all. But they'd be only too glad to be Grandins of anything you choose to name. This one has a sister called Mme de Cambremer."

"Why, Basin, you know quite well who my aunt means," cried the Duchess indignantly. "He's the brother of that great graminivorous creature you had the weird idea of sending to call on me the other day. She stayed a solid hour; I thought I'd go mad. But I began by thinking it was she who was mad when I saw a person I didn't know come browsing into the room looking exactly like a cow."

"Look here, Oriane; she asked me what afternoon you were at home; I couldn't very well be rude to her; and besides, you do exaggerate so, she's not in the least like a cow," he added in a plaintive tone, though not without a furtive smiling glance round the audience.

He knew that his wife's conversational zest needed the stimulus of contradiction, the contradiction of common sense which protests that one cannot, for instance, mistake a woman for a cow. It was in this way that Mme de Guermentes, improving on a preliminary notion, had been inspired to produce many of her wittiest sallies. And the Duke would come forward with feigned naïvety to help her to bring off her effects, like the unacknowledged partner of a three-card trickster in a railway carriage.

"I admit she doesn't look like a cow, she looks like several," exclaimed Mme de Guermentes. "I assure you, I didn't know what to do when I saw a herd of cattle come marching into my drawing-room in a hat and asking me how I was. I had half a mind to say: 'Please, herd of cattle, you must be making a mistake, you can't possibly know me, because you're a herd of cattle,' but after racking my brains I came to the conclusion that your Cambremer woman must be the Infanta Dorothea, who had said she was coming to see me one day and who is rather bovine too, so that I was just on the point of saying 'Your Royal Highness' and using the third person to a herd of cattle. She's also got the same sort of dewlap as the Queen of Sweden. But actually this mass attack had been prepared for by long-range artillery fire, according to all the rules of war. For I don't know how long before, I was bombarded with her cards; I used to find them lying about all over the house, on all the tables and chairs, like prospectuses. I couldn't think what they were supposed to be advertising. You saw nothing in the house but 'Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer' with some address or other which I've forgotten and which you may be quite sure I shall never make use of."

"But it's very flattering to be taken for a queen," said the historian of the Fronde.

"Good God, sir, kings and queens don't amount to much these days," said M. de Guermentes, partly because he liked to be thought broad-minded and modern, and also so as not to seem to attach any importance to his own royal connexions, which he valued highly.

Bloch and M. de Norpois had risen and were now in our vicinity.

"Well, Monsieur," asked Mme de Villeparisis, "have you been talking to him about the Dreyfus case?"

M. de Norpois raised his eyes to the ceiling, but with a smile, as though calling on heaven to witness the enormity of the whims to which his Dulcinea compelled him to submit. Nevertheless he spoke to Bloch with great affability of the terrible, perhaps fatal period through which France was passing. As this presumably meant that M. de Norpois (to whom Bloch had confessed his belief in the innocence of Dreyfus) was an ardent anti-Dreyfusard, the Ambassador's geniality, his air of tacit admission that his interlocutor was in the right, of never doubting that they were both of the same opinion, of joining forces with him to denounce the Government, flattered Bloch's vanity and aroused his curiosity. What were the important points which M. de Norpois never specified but on which he seemed implicitly to affirm that he was in agreement with Bloch? What opinion did he hold of the case that could bring them together? Bloch was all the more astonished at the mysterious unanimity which seemed to exist between him and M. de Norpois, in that it was not confined to politics, Mme de Villeparisis having spoken at some length to M. de Norpois of Bloch's literary work.

"You are not of your age," the former Ambassador told him, "and I congratulate you upon that. You are not of this age in which disinterested work no longer exists, in which writers offer the public nothing but obscenities or inanities. Efforts such as yours ought to be encouraged, and would be if we had a Government."

Bloch was flattered by this picture of himself swimming alone amid a universal shipwreck. But here again he would have been glad of details, would have liked to know what were the inanities to which M. de Norpois referred. Bloch had the feeling that he was working along the same lines as plenty of others; he had never supposed himself to be so exceptional. He returned to the Dreyfus case, but did not succeed in disentangling M. de Norpois's own views. He tried to induce him to speak of the officers whose names were appearing constantly in the newspapers at that time; they aroused more curiosity than the politicians who were involved in the affair, because they were not, like the politicians, well known already, but, wearing a special garb, emerging from the obscurity of a different kind of life and a religiously guarded silence, had only just appeared on the scene and spoken, like Lohengrin landing from a skiff drawn by a swan. Bloch had been able, thanks to a Nationalist lawyer of his acquaintance, to secure admission to several hearings of the Zola trial. He would arrive there in the morning and stay until the court rose, with a supply of sandwiches and a flask of coffee, as though for the final examination for a degree, and this change of routine stimulating a nervous excitement which the coffee and the emotional interest of the trial worked up to a climax, he would come away so enamoured of everything that had happened in court that when he returned home in the evening he longed to immerse himself again in the thrilling drama and would hurry out to a restaurant frequented by both parties in search of friends with whom he would go over the day's proceedings interminably and make up, by a supper ordered in an imperious tone which gave him the illusion of power, for the hunger and exhaustion of a day begun so early and unbroken by any interval for lunch. The human mind, hovering perpetually between the two planes of experience and imagination, seeks to fathom the ideal life of the people it knows and to know the people whose life it has had to imagine. To Bloch's questions M. de Norpois replied:

"There are two officers in the case now being tried of whom I remember hearing some time ago from a man whose judgment inspired me with the greatest confidence, and who had a high opinion of them both—I mean M. de Miribel. They are Lieutenant-Colonel Henry and Lieutenant-Colonel Picquart."

"But," exclaimed Bloch, "the divine Athena, daughter of Zeus, has put in the mind of each the opposite of what is in the mind of the other. And they are fighting against one another like two lions. Colonel Picquart had a splendid position in the Army, but his Moira has led him to the side that was not rightly his. The sword



of the Nationalists will carve his tender flesh, and he will be cast out as food for the beasts of prey and the birds that feed on the fat of dead men."

M. de Norpois made no reply.

"What are those two palavering about over there?" M. de Guermantes asked Mme de Villeparisis, pointing to M. de Norpois and Bloch.

"The Dreyfus case."

"The devil they are. By the way, do you know who is a rabid supporter of Dreyfus? I give you a thousand guesses. My nephew Robert! I can tell you that when they heard of his goings-on at the Jockey there was a fine gathering of the clans, a regular outcry. And as he's coming up for election next week ..."

"Of course," broke in the Duchess, "if they're all like Gilbert, who's always maintained that all the Jews ought to be sent back to Jerusalem ..."

"Ah! then the Prince de Guermantes is quite of my way of thinking," put in M. d'Argencourt.

The Duke showed off his wife, but did not love her. Extremely self-important, he hated to be interrupted, and was moreover in the habit of being rude to her at home. Quivering with the twofold rage of a bad husband when his wife speaks to him, and a glib talker when he is not listened to, he stopped short and transfixed the Duchess with a glare which made everyone feel uncomfortable.

"What makes you think we want to hear about Gilbert and Jerusalem?" he said at last. "That's got nothing to do with it. But," he went on in a gentler tone, "you must admit that if one of our family were to be black-balled at the Jockey, especially Robert whose father was president for ten years, it would be the limit. What do you expect, my dear, it's caught 'em on the raw, those fellows, it made them roll their eyes. I don't blame them, either; personally, you know that I have no racial prejudice, all that sort of thing seems to me out of date, and I do claim to move with the times; but damn it all, when one goes by the name of Marquis de Saint-Loup one isn't a Dreyfusard. I'm sorry, but there it is."

M. de Guermantes uttered the words "when one goes by the name of Marquis de Saint-Loup" with some emphasis. And yet he knew very well that it was a far greater thing to go by that of Duc de Guermantes. But if his self-esteem had a tendency to exaggerate if anything the superiority of the title Duc de Guermantes over all others, it was perhaps not so much the rules of good taste as the laws of imagination that prompted him thus to diminish it. Each of us sees in brighter colours what he sees at a distance, what he sees in other people. For the general laws which govern perspective in imagination apply just as much to dukes as to ordinary mortals. And not only the laws of imagination, but those of speech. Now, one or other of two laws of speech might apply here. One of them demands that we should express ourselves like others of our mental category and not of our caste. Under this law M. de Guermantes might, in his choice of expressions, even when he wished to talk about the nobility, be indebted to the humblest little tradesman, who would have said: "When one goes by the name of Duc de Guermantes," whereas an educated man, a Swann, a Legrandin, would not have said it. A duke may write novels worthy of a grocer, even about life in high society, titles and pedigrees being of no help to him there, and the writings of a plebeian may deserve the epithet "aristocratic." Who in this instance had been the inferior from whom M. de Guermantes had picked up "when one goes by the name," he had probably not the least idea. But another law of speech is that, from time to time, as diseases appear and then vanish of which nothing more is ever heard, there come into being, no one knows how, spontaneously perhaps or by an accident like that which introduced into France a certain weed from America the seeds of which, caught in the wool of a travelling rug, fell on a railway embankment, modes of expression which one hears in the same decade on the lips of people who have not in any way combined together to that end. So, just as in a certain year I heard Bloch say, referring to himself, that "the most charming people, the most brilliant, the best known, the most exclusive had discovered that there was only one man in Paris whom they felt to be intelligent and agreeable, whom they could not do without—namely Bloch," and heard the same remark used by countless other young men who did not know him and varied it only by substituting their own names for his, so I was often to hear this "when one goes by the name."

"What do you expect," the Duke went on, "with the attitude he's adopted, it's fairly understandable."

"It's more comic than anything else," said the Duchess, "when you think of his mother's attitude, how she bores us to tears with her *Patrie française*, morning, noon and night."

"Yes, but there's not only his mother to be thought of, you can't humbug us like that. There's a wench, a bed-hopper of the worst type; she has far more influence over him than his mother, and she happens to be a compatriot of Master Dreyfus. She has infected Robert with her way of thinking."

"You may not have heard, Duke, that there is a new word to describe that sort of attitude," said the archivist, who was Secretary to the Committee against Reconsideration. "One says 'mentality.' It means exactly the same thing, but it has the advantage that nobody knows what you're talking about. It's the *ne plus ultra* just now, the 'latest thing,' as they say."

Meanwhile, having heard Bloch's name, he watched him question M. de Norpois with misgivings which aroused others as strong though of a different order in the Marquise. Trembling before the archivist, and always acting the anti-Dreyfusard in his presence, she dreaded what he would say were he to find out that she had asked to her house a Jew more or less affiliated to the "Syndicate."<sup>15</sup>

"Indeed," said the Duke, "'mentality,' you say. I must make a note of that and trot it out one of these days." (This was no figure of speech, the Duke having a little pocket-book filled with "quotations" which he used to consult before dinner-parties.) "I like 'mentality.' There are a lot of new words like that which people suddenly start using, but they never last. Some time ago I read that a writer was 'talentuous.' Damned if I know what it means. And since then I've never come across the word again."

"But 'mentality' is more widely used than 'talentuous,' " the historian of the Fronde put in his oar. "I'm on a committee at the Ministry of Education where I've heard it used several times, as well as at my club, the Volney, and even at dinner at M. Emile Ollivier's."

"I who have not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education," replied the Duke with a feigned humility but with a vanity so intense that his lips could not refrain from curving in a smile, nor his eyes from casting round his audience a glance sparkling with joy, the ironical scorn in which made the poor historian blush, "I who have not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education," he repeated, relishing the sound of his own voice, "nor to the Volney Club. My only clubs are the Union and the Jockey—you aren't in the Jockey, I think, sir?" he asked the historian, who, reddening still further, scenting an insult and failing to understand it, began to tremble in every limb. "I who am not even invited to dine with M. Emile Ollivier, I must confess that I had never heard 'mentality.' I'm sure you're in the same boat, Argencourt ... You know," he went on, "why they can't produce the proofs of Dreyfus's guilt. Apparently it's because he's the lover of the War Minister's wife, that's what people are saying on the sly."

"Ah! I thought it was the Prime Minister's wife," said M. d'Argencourt.

"I think you're all equally tiresome about this wretched case," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, in the social sphere, was always anxious to show that she did not allow herself to be led by anyone. "It can't make any difference to me so far as the Jews are concerned, for the simple reason that I don't know any of them and I intend to remain in that state of blissful ignorance. But on the other hand I do think it perfectly intolerable that just because they're supposed to be right-thinking and don't deal with Jewish tradesmen, or have 'Down with the Jews' written on their sunshades, we should have a swarm of Durands and Dubois and so forth, women we should never have known but for this business, forced down our throats by Marie-Aynard or Victurnienne. I went to see Marie-Aynard a couple of days ago. It used to be so nice there. Nowadays one finds all the people one has spent one's life trying to avoid, on the pretext that they're against Dreyfus, and others of whom you have no idea who they can be."

"No, it was the War Minister's wife; at least, that's the talk of the coffee-houses," went on the Duke, who liked to flavour his conversation with certain expressions which he imagined to be of the old school. "Personally, of course, as everyone knows, I take just the opposite view to my cousin Gilbert. I'm not feudal like him, I'd go about with a negro if he was a friend of mine, and I shouldn't care two straws what anybody thought; still, after all you must agree with me that when one goes by the name of Saint-Loup one doesn't amuse oneself by flying in the face of public opinion, which has more sense than Voltaire or even my nephew. Nor does one go in for what I may be allowed to call these acrobatics of conscience a week before one comes up for a club. It really is a bit stiff! No, it's probably that little tart of his who worked him up to it. I expect she told him he would be classed among the 'intellectuals.' The intellectuals, that's the shibboleth of those gentlemen. It's given rise, by the way, to a rather amusing pun, though a very naughty one."

And the Duke murmured, lowering his voice, for his wife's and M. d'Argencourt's benefit, "Mater Semita," which had already made its way into the Jockey Club, for, of all the flying seeds in the world, that to which are attached the most solid wings, enabling it to be disseminated at the greatest distance from its point of origin, is still a joke.

"We might ask this gentleman, who has a *nerudite* air, to explain it to us," he went on, pointing to the historian. "But it's better not to repeat it, especially as there's not a vestige of truth in the suggestion. I'm not so ambitious as my cousin Mirepoix, who claims that she can trace the descent of her family before Christ to the Tribe of Levi, and I'll guarantee to prove that there has never been a drop of Jewish blood in our family. Still it's no good shutting our eyes to the fact that my dear nephew's charming views are liable to make a considerable stir in Landerneau. Especially as Fezensac is ill just now, and Duras will be running the election; you know how he likes to draw the longbow," concluded the Duke, who had never succeeded in learning the exact meaning of certain phrases, and supposed drawing the longbow to mean making complications.

"In any case, if this man Dreyfus is innocent," the Duchess broke in, "he hasn't done much to prove it. What idiotic, turgid letters he writes from his island! I don't know whether M. Esterhazy is any better, but at least he has more of a knack of phrase-making, a different tone altogether. That can't be very welcome to the supporters of M. Dreyfus. What a pity for them that they can't swap innocents."

Everyone burst out laughing. "Did you hear what Oriane said?" the Duc de Guermantes inquired eagerly of Mme de Villeparisis. "Yes, I thought it most amusing." This was not enough for the Duke: "Well, I don't know, I can't say that I thought it amusing; or rather it doesn't make the slightest difference to me whether a thing is amusing or not. I set no store by wit." M. d'Argencourt protested. "He doesn't believe a word he says," murmured the Duchess. "It's probably because I've been a Member of Parliament, where I've listened to brilliant speeches that meant absolutely nothing. I learned there to value logic more than anything else. That's probably why I wasn't re-elected. Amusing things leave me cold." "Basin, don't play the humbug like that, my sweet, you know quite well that no one admires wit more than you do." "Please let me finish. It's precisely because I'm unmoved by a certain type of humour that I appreciate my wife's wit. For you will find it based, as a rule, upon sound observation. She reasons like a man; she expresses herself like a writer."

Meanwhile Bloch was trying to pin M. de Norpois down on Colonel Picquart.

"There can be no question," replied M. de Norpois, "that the Colonel's evidence became necessary if only because the Government felt that there might well be something in the wind. I am well aware that, by maintaining this attitude, I have drawn shrieks of protest from more than one of my colleagues, but to my mind the Government were bound to let the Colonel speak. One can't get out of that sort of fix simply by performing a pirouette, or if one does there's always the risk of falling into a quagmire. As for the officer

himself, his statement made a most excellent impression at the first hearing. When one saw him, looking so well in that smart Chasseur uniform, come into court and relate in a perfectly simple and frank tone what he had seen and what he had deduced, and say: 'On my honour as a soldier' " (here M. de Norpois's voice shook with a faint patriotic throb) "such is my conviction," it is impossible to deny that the impression he made was profound."

"There, he's a Dreyfusard, there's not the least doubt of it," thought Bloch.

"But where he entirely forfeited all the sympathy that he had managed to attract was when he was confronted with the registrar, Gribelin. When one heard that old public servant, a man of his word if ever there was one" (here M. de Norpois began to accentuate his words with the energy of sincere conviction), "when one saw him look his superior officer in the face, not afraid to hold his head up to him, and say to him in an unanswerable tone: 'Come, come, Colonel, you know very well that I have never told a lie, you know that at this moment, as always, I am speaking the truth,' the wind changed; M. Picquart might move heaven and earth at the subsequent hearings, but he came completely to grief."

"No, he's definitely an anti-Dreyfusard; it's quite obvious," said Bloch to himself. "But if he considers Picquart a traitor and a liar, how can he take his revelations seriously, and quote them as if he found them charming and believed them to be sincere? And if, on the other hand, he sees him as an honest man unburdening his conscience, how can he suppose him to have been lying when he was confronted with Gribelin?"

Perhaps the reason why M. de Norpois spoke thus to Bloch as though they were in agreement arose from the fact that he himself was so keen an anti-Dreyfusard that, finding the Government not anti-Dreyfusard enough, he was its enemy just as much as the Dreyfusards were. Perhaps it was because the object to which he devoted himself in politics was something more profound, situated on another plane, from which Dreyfusism appeared as an unimportant issue which did not deserve the attention of a patriot interested in large questions of foreign policy. Perhaps, rather, it was because, the maxims of his political wisdom being applicable only to questions of form, of procedure, of expediency, they were as powerless to solve questions of fact as, in philosophy, pure logic is powerless to tackle the problems of existence; or else because that very wisdom made him see danger in handling such subjects and so, in his caution, he preferred to speak only of minor circumstances. But where Bloch was mistaken was in assuming that M. de Norpois, even had he been less cautious by nature and of a less exclusively formal cast of mind, could, if he had wished, have told him the truth as to the part played by Henry, Picquart or du Paty de Clam, or as to any of the different aspects of the case. For Bloch had no doubt that M. de Norpois knew the truth as to all these matters. How could he fail to know it, seeing that he was a friend of all the ministers? Naturally, Bloch thought that the truth in politics could be approximately reconstructed by the most lucid minds, but he imagined, like the man in the street, that it resided permanently, beyond the reach of argument and in a material form, in the secret files of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, who imparted it to the Cabinet. Whereas, even when a political truth is enshrined in written documents, it is seldom that these have any more value than a radiographic plate on which the layman imagines that the patient's disease is inscribed in so many words, whereas in fact the plate furnishes simply one piece of material for study, to be combined with a number of others on which the doctor's reasoning powers will be brought to bear and on which he will base his diagnosis. Thus the truth in politics, when one goes to well-informed men and imagines that one is about to grasp it, eludes one. Indeed, later on (to confine ourselves to the Dreyfus case), when so startling an event occurred as Henry's confession, followed by his suicide, this fact was at once interpreted in opposite ways by the Dreyfusard ministers and by Cavaignac and Cuignet who had themselves made the discovery of the forgery and conducted the interrogation; more remarkable still, among the Dreyfusard ministers themselves, men of the same shade of opinion, judging not only from the same documents but in the same spirit, the part played by Henry was explained in two entirely opposite ways, one set seeing in him an accomplice of Esterhazy, the others assigning that role to du Paty de Clam, thus adopting a thesis of their opponent Cuignet and in complete opposition to their supporter Reinach. All that Bloch could elicit from M. de Norpois was that if it were true that the Chief of the General Staff, General de Boisdeffre, had had a secret communication sent to M. Rochefort, it was evident that a singularly regrettable irregularity had occurred.

"You may be quite sure that the War Minister must (*in petto* at any rate) have called down every curse on his Chief of Staff. An official disclaimer would not have been (to my mind) a work of supererogation. But the War Minister expresses himself very bluntly on the matter *inter pocula*. There are certain subjects, moreover, about which it is highly imprudent to create an agitation over which one cannot afterwards retain control."

"But those documents are obviously fake," said Bloch.

M. de Norpois made no reply to this, but declared that he did not approve of the public demonstrations of Prince Henri d'Orléans:<sup>16</sup>

"Besides, they can only ruffle the calm of the praetorium, and encourage disturbances which, looked at from either point of view, would be deplorable. Certainly we must put a stop to the anti-militarist intrigues, but neither can we tolerate a brawl encouraged by those elements on the Right who instead of serving the patriotic ideal themselves are hoping to make it serve them. Heaven be praised, France is not a South American replica, and the need has not yet been felt here for a military pronunciamento."

Bloch could not get him to pronounce on the question of Dreyfus's guilt, nor would he utter any forecast as to the judgment in the civil trial then proceeding. On the other hand, M. de Norpois seemed only too ready to expatiate on the consequences of the verdict.

"If it is a conviction," he said, "it will probably be quashed, for it is seldom that, in a case where there has been such a number of witnesses, there is not some flaw in the procedure which counsel can raise on appeal. To return to Prince Henri's outburst, I greatly doubt whether it met with his father's approval."

"You think Chartres is for Dreyfus?" asked the Duchess with a smile, her eyes rounded, her cheeks bright, her nose buried in her plate of petits fours, her whole manner deliciously scandalised.

"Not at all. I meant only that there runs through the whole family, on that side, a political sense of which we have seen the *ne plus ultra* in the admirable Princess Clémentine, and which her son, Prince Ferdinand, has kept as a priceless inheritance. You would never have found the Prince of Bulgaria clasp Major Esterhazy to his bosom."

"He would have preferred a private soldier," murmured Mme de Guermantes, who often met the Bulgarian at dinner at the Prince de Joinville's, and had said to him once, when he asked if she was not jealous: "Yes, Your Highness, of your bracelets."

"You aren't going to Mme de Sagan's ball this evening?" M. de Norpois asked Mme de Villeparisis, to cut short his conversation with Bloch.

The latter had made a not unpleasing impression on the Ambassador, who told us afterwards, with some naïvety, thinking no doubt of the traces that survived in Bloch's speech of the neo-Homeric manner which he had on the whole outgrown: "He is quite amusing, with his old-fashioned, rather solemn way of speaking. You expect him to come out with 'the Learned Sisters,' like Lamartine or Jean-Baptiste Rousseau. It has become quite rare in the youth of the present day, as it was indeed in the generation before them. We ourselves were inclined to be a bit romantic." But however interesting his interlocutor may have seemed to him, M. de Norpois considered that the conversation had lasted long enough.

"No, I don't go to balls any more," Mme de Villeparisis replied with a charming grandmotherly smile. "You're going, all of you, I suppose? You're the right age for that sort of thing," she added, embracing in a comprehensive glance M. de Châtellerauld, his friend and Bloch. "I was asked too," she went on, coyly pretending to be flattered by the distinction. "In fact, they came specially to invite me." ("They" being the Princesse de Sagan.)

"I haven't had a card," said Bloch, thinking that Mme de Villeparisis would at once offer to procure him one, and that Mme de Sagan would be happy to welcome the friend of a woman on whom she had called in person to invite.

The Marquise made no reply, and Bloch did not press the point, for he had another, more serious matter to discuss with her, and, with that in view, had already asked her whether he might call again in a couple of days. Having heard the two young men say that they had both just resigned from the Rue Royale Club, which was letting in every Tom, Dick and Harry, he wished to ask Mme de Villeparisis to arrange for his election there.

"Aren't they rather bad form, rather stuck-up snobs, these Sagans?" he inquired in a sarcastic tone of voice.

"Not at all, they're the best we can do for you in that line," replied M. d'Argencourt, who adopted all the witticisms of Parisian society.

"Then," said Bloch, still half in irony, "I suppose it's one of the solemnities, the great social fixtures of the season."

Mme de Villeparisis turned merrily to Mme de Guermantes:

"Tell us, is it a great social solemnity, Mme de Sagan's ball?"

"It's no good asking me," answered the Duchess, "I have never yet succeeded in finding out what a social solemnity is. Besides, society isn't my forte."

"Oh, I thought it was just the opposite," said Bloch, who supposed Mme de Guermantes to have spoken seriously.

He continued, to the desperation of M. de Norpois, to ply him with questions about the Dreyfus case. The Ambassador declared that at first sight Colonel du Paty de Clam gave him the impression of a somewhat woolly mind, which had perhaps not been very happily chosen to conduct that delicate operation, which required so much coolness and discernment, a judicial inquiry.

"I know that the Socialist Party are clamouring for his head on a charger, as well as for the immediate release of the prisoner from Devil's Island. But I trust that we are not yet reduced to the necessity of going through the Caudine Forks of MM. Gérault-Richard and company. So far, there's no making head or tail of the case. I don't say that on both sides there isn't some pretty dirty work to be hushed up. That certain of your client's more or less disinterested patrons may have the best intentions I will not attempt to deny. But you know that hell is paved with such things," he added, with a look of great subtlety. "The great thing is that the Government should make it clear that it is no more in the hands of the factions of the Left than it is prepared to surrender, bound hand and foot, to the demands of some praetorian guard or other which, believe me, is not the same thing as the Army. It goes without saying that, should any fresh evidence come to light, a new trial would be ordered. It's as plain as a pike-staff; to demand that is to push at an open door. When that day comes the Government will speak out loud and clear—otherwise it would forfeit what is its essential prerogative. Cock and bull stories will no longer suffice. We must appoint judges to try Dreyfus. And that will be an easy matter because, although we have acquired the habit in our beloved France, where we love to speak ill of ourselves, of thinking or letting it be thought that in order to hear the words Truth and Justice it is necessary to cross the Channel, which is very often only a roundabout way of reaching the Spree, there are judges to be found outside Berlin. But once the machinery of Government has been set in motion, will you have ears for the voice of authority? When it bids you perform your duty as a citizen will you take your stand

in the ranks of law and order? When its patriotic appeal sounds, will you have the wisdom not to turn a deaf ear but to answer: 'Present!'?"

M. de Norpois put these questions to Bloch with a vehemence which, while it alarmed my old schoolfriend, flattered him also; for the Ambassador seemed to be addressing a whole party in Bloch's person, to be interrogating him as though he had been in the confidence of that party and might be held responsible for the decisions which it would adopt. "Should you fail to disarm," M. de Norpois went on without waiting for Bloch's collective answer, "should you, before even the ink has dried on the decree ordering the retrial, obeying I know not what insidious word of command, fail, I say, to disarm, and band yourselves in a sterile opposition which seems to some minds the *ultima ratio* of policy, should you retire to your tents and burn your boats, you would be doing so to your own detriment. Are you the prisoner of those who foment disorder? Have you given them pledges?" Bloch was at a loss for an answer. M. de Norpois gave him no time. "If the negative be true, as I sincerely hope and trust, and if you have a little of what seems to me to be lamentably lacking in certain of your leaders and your friends, namely political sense, then, on the day when the Criminal Court assembles, if you do not allow yourselves to be dragooned by the fishers in troubled waters, you will have won the day. I do not guarantee that the whole of the General Staff is going to get away unscathed, but it will be so much to the good if some of them at least can save their faces without putting a match to the powder-barrel. It goes without saying, of course, that it rests with the Government to pronounce judgment and to close the list—already too long—of unpunished crimes, not, certainly, at the bidding of Socialist agitators, nor yet of any obscure military rabble," he added, looking Bloch in the eyes, perhaps with the instinct that leads all Conservatives to try to win support for themselves in the enemy's camp. "Government action is not to be dictated by the highest bid, wherever it may come from. The Government is not, thank heaven, under the orders of Colonel Driant, nor, at the other end of the scale, under M. Clemenceau's. We must curb the professional agitators and prevent them from raising their heads again. France, the vast majority here in France, desires only to be allowed to work in orderly conditions. As to that, there can be no question whatever. But we must not be afraid to enlighten public opinion; and if a few sheep, of the kind our friend Rabelais knew so well, should dash headlong into the water, it would be as well to point out to them that the water in question is troubled water, that it has been troubled deliberately by an agency not within our borders, in order to conceal the dangers lurking in its depths. And the Government must not give the impression that it is emerging from its passivity under duress when it exercises the right which is essentially its own and no one else's, I mean that of setting the wheels of justice in motion. The Government will accept all your suggestions. If there should prove to have been a judicial error, it can be assured of an overwhelming majority which would give it some elbow-room."

"You, sir," said Bloch, turning to M. d'Argencourt, to whom he had been introduced with the rest of the party on that gentleman's arrival, "you are a Dreyfusard, of course. Everyone is, abroad."

"It is a question that concerns only the French themselves, don't you think?" replied M. d'Argencourt with that peculiar form of insolence which consists in ascribing to the other person an opinion which one plainly knows that he does not share since he has just expressed one directly its opposite.

Bloch coloured; M. d'Argencourt smiled, looking round the room, and if this smile, so long as it was directed at the rest of the company, was charged with malice at Bloch's expense, he tempered it with cordiality when finally it came to rest on the face of my friend, so as to deprive him of any excuse for annoyance at the words he had just heard, though those words remained just as cruel. Mme de Guermantes muttered something in M. d'Argencourt's ear which I could not catch but which must have referred to Bloch's religion, for there flitted at that moment over the face of the Duchess that expression to which one's fear of being noticed by the person one is speaking of gives a certain hesitancy and falseness mixed with the inquisitive, malicious amusement inspired by a human group to which one feels oneself to be fundamentally alien. To retrieve himself, Bloch turned to the Duc de Châtellerault. "You, Monsieur, as a Frenchman, you must be aware that people abroad are all Dreyfusards, although everyone pretends that in France we never know what is going on abroad. Anyhow, I know I can talk freely to you; Saint-Loup told me so." But the young Duke, who felt that everyone was turning against Bloch, and was a coward as people often are in society, employing a mordant and precious form of wit which he seemed, by a sort of collateral atavism, to have inherited from M. de Charlus, replied: "Forgive me, Monsieur, if I don't discuss the Dreyfus case with you; it is a subject which, on principle, I never mention except among Japhetics." Everyone smiled, except Bloch, not that he was not himself in the habit of making sarcastic references to his Jewish origin, to that side of his ancestry which came from somewhere near Sinai. But instead of one of these remarks (doubtless because he did not have one ready) the trigger of his inner mechanism brought to Bloch's lips something quite different. And all one heard was: "But how on earth did you know? Who told you?" as though he had been the son of a convict. Whereas, given his name, which had not exactly a Christian sound, and his face, his surprise argued a certain naïvety.

What M. de Norpois had said to him not having completely satisfied him, he went up to the archivist and asked him whether M. du Paty de Clam or M. Joseph Reinach were not sometimes to be seen at Mme de Villeparisis's. The archivist made no reply; he was a Nationalist, and never ceased preaching to the Marquise that the social revolution might break out at any moment, and that she ought to show more caution in the choice of her acquaintances. He wondered whether Bloch might not be a secret emissary of the Syndicate, come to collect information, and went off at once to repeat to Mme de Villeparisis the questions that Bloch had put to him. She decided that he was ill-bred at best and that he might perhaps be in a position to compromise M. de Norpois. She also wished to give satisfaction to the archivist, who was the only person she

was a little afraid of, and by whom she was being indoctrinated, though without much success (every morning he read her M. Judet's article in the *Petit Journal*). She decided, therefore, to make it plain to Bloch that he need not come to the house again, and had no difficulty in choosing from her social repertory the scene by which a great lady shows someone her door, a scene which does not in the least involve the raised finger and blazing eyes that people imagine. As Bloch came up to her to say good-bye, buried in her deep armchair she seemed only half-awakened from a vague somnolence. Her filmy eyes held only the faint and charming gleam of a pair of pearls. Bloch's farewells, barely unwrinkling the Marquise's face in a languid smile, drew from her not a word, and she did not offer him her hand. This scene left Bloch in utter bewilderment, but as he was surrounded by a circle of bystanders he felt that it could not be prolonged without embarrassment to himself, and, to force the Marquise, he himself thrust out the hand which she had just refused to shake. Mme de Villeparisis was shocked. But doubtless, while still bent on giving immediate satisfaction to the archivist and the anti-Dreyfus clan, she wished at the same time to insure against the future, and so contented herself with letting her eyelids droop over her half-closed eyes.

"I think she's asleep," said Bloch to the archivist who, feeling that he had the support of the Marquise, assumed an air of indignation. "Good-bye, Madame," shouted Bloch.

The old lady made the slight movement with her lips of a dying woman who wants to open her mouth but whose eyes betray no hint of recognition. Then she turned, overflowing with restored vitality, towards M. d'Argencourt, while Bloch took himself off, convinced that she must be "soft" in the head. Full of curiosity and anxious to clear up such a strange incident, he came to see her again a few days later. She received him in the most friendly fashion, because she was a good-natured woman, because the archivist was not there, because she was keen on the little play which Bloch was to put on in her house, and finally because she had staged the appropriate *grande dame* act which was universally admired and commented upon that very evening in various drawing-rooms, but in a version that had already ceased to bear the slightest relation to the truth.

"You were speaking just now of *The Seven Princesses*, Duchess. You know (not that it's anything to be proud of) that the author of that—what shall I call it?—that object is a compatriot of mine," said M. d'Argencourt with an irony blended with the satisfaction of knowing more than anyone else in the room about the author of a work which had been under discussion. "Yes, he's a Belgian, by nationality," he went on.

"Indeed? No, we don't accuse you of any responsibility for *The Seven Princesses*. Fortunately for yourself and your compatriots you are not like the author of that absurdity. I know several charming Belgians, yourself, your King, who is a little shy but full of wit, my Ligne cousins, and heaps of others, but none of you, I'm happy to say, speak the same language as the author of *The Seven Princesses*. Besides, if you want to know, it's not worth talking about, because really there is absolutely nothing in it. You know the sort of people who are always trying to seem obscure, and don't even mind making themselves ridiculous to conceal the fact that they haven't an idea in their heads. If there was anything behind it all, I may tell you that I'm not in the least afraid of a little daring," she added in a serious tone, "provided there's a little thought. I don't know if you've seen Borelli's play. Some people seem to have been shocked by it, but I must say, even if they stone me through the streets for saying it," she went on, without stopping to think that she ran no very great risk of such a punishment, "I found it immensely interesting. But *The Seven Princesses*! One of them may have a fondness for my nephew, but I can't carry family feeling quite ..."

The Duchess broke off abruptly, for a lady came in who was the Comtesse de Marsantes, Robert's mother. Mme de Marsantes was regarded in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as a superior being, of a goodness and resignation that were positively angelic. So I had been told, and had had no particular reason to feel surprised, not knowing at the time that she was the sister of the Duc de Guermantes. Later, I was always taken aback when I learned, in that society, that melancholy, pure, self-sacrificing women, venerated like ideal saints in stained-glass windows, had flowered from the same genealogical stem as brothers who were brutal, debauched and vile. Brothers and sisters, when they are identical in features as were the Duc de Guermantes and Mme de Marsantes, ought (I felt) to have a single intellect in common, a similar heart, like a person who may have good or bad moments but in whom nevertheless one cannot expect to find a vast breadth of outlook if his mental range is narrow or a sublime abnegation if he is hard-hearted.

Mme de Marsantes attended Brunetière's lectures. She inspired the Faubourg Saint-Germain with enthusiasm and, by her saintly life, edified it as well. But the morphological link of handsome nose and piercing gaze none the less led me to classify Mme de Marsantes in the same intellectual and moral family as her brother the Duke. I could not believe that the mere fact of her being a woman, and perhaps of her having had an unhappy life and won everyone's high opinion, could make a person so different from the rest of her family, as in the mediaeval romances where all the virtues and graces are combined in the sister of wild and lawless brothers. It seemed to me that nature, less unfettered than the old poets, must make use almost exclusively of the elements common to the family, and I was unable to credit her with enough power of invention to construct, out of materials analogous to those that composed a fool and a lout, a lofty mind without the least strain of foolishness, a saint without the least taint of brutality. Mme de Marsantes was wearing a gown of white surah embroidered with large palms, on which stood out flowers of a different material, these being black. This was because, three weeks earlier, she had lost her cousin M. de Montmorency, a bereavement which did not prevent her from paying calls or even from going to small dinners, but always in mourning. She was a great lady. Atavism had filled her with the frivolity of generations of life at court, with all the superficial and rigorous duties that that implies. Mme de Marsantes had not had the strength to mourn her father and mother for any length of time, but she would not for anything in the world have appeared in colours in the month following the death of a cousin. She was more than friendly to me, both because I was

Robert's friend and because I did not move in the same world as he. This friendliness was accompanied by a pretence of shyness, by a sort of intermittent withdrawal of the voice, the eyes, the mind, as though she were drawing in a wayward skirt, so as not to take up too much room, to remain stiff and erect even in her suppleness, as good breeding demands—a good breeding that must not, however, be taken too literally, many of these ladies lapsing very swiftly into moral licentiousness without ever losing the almost childlike correctness of their manners. Mme de Marsantes was a trifle irritating in conversation since, whenever she had occasion to speak of a commoner, as for instance Bergotte or Elstir, she would say, isolating the word, giving it its full value, intoning it on two different notes with a modulation peculiar to the Guermantes: “I have had the *honour*, the great *hon-our* of meeting Monsieur Bergotte,” or “of making the acquaintance of Monsieur Elstir,” either in order that her hearers might marvel at her humility, or from the same tendency evinced by M. de Guermantes to revert to obsolete forms as a protest against the slovenly usages of the present day, in which people never professed themselves sufficiently “honoured.” Whichever of these was the true reason, one felt that when Mme de Marsantes said: “I have had the *honour*, the great *hon-our*,” she felt she was fulfilling an important role and showing that she could take in the names of distinguished men as she would have welcomed the men themselves at her country seat had they happened to be in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, as her family was large, as she was devoted to all her relations, as, slow of speech and fond of explaining things at length, she was always trying to make clear the exact degrees of kinship, she found herself (without any desire to create an effect and while genuinely preferring to talk only about touching peasants and sublime gamekeepers) referring incessantly to all the families of Europe under the suzerainty of the Holy Roman Empire, which people less brilliantly connected than herself could not forgive her and, if they were at all intellectual, derided as a sign of stupidity.

In the country, Mme de Marsantes was adored for the good that she did, but principally because the purity of a blood-line into which for many generations there had flowed only what was greatest in the history of France had rid her manner of everything that the lower orders call “airs” and had endowed her with perfect simplicity. She never shrank from embracing a poor woman who was in trouble, and would tell her to come up to the house for a cartload of wood. She was, people said, the perfect Christian. She was determined to find an immensely rich wife for Robert. Being a great lady means playing the great lady, that is to say, to a certain extent, playing at simplicity. It is a pastime which costs a great deal of money, all the more because simplicity charms people only on condition that they know that you are capable of not living simply, that is to say that you are very rich. Someone said to me afterwards, when I mentioned that I had seen her: “You saw of course that she must have been lovely as a young woman.” But true beauty is so individual, so novel always, that one does not recognise it as beauty. I said to myself that afternoon only that she had a tiny nose, very blue eyes, a long neck and a sad expression.

“By the way,” said Mme de Villeparisis to the Duchesse de Guermantes, “I’m expecting a woman at any moment whom you don’t wish to know. I thought I’d better warn you, to avoid any unpleasantness. But you needn’t be afraid, I shall never have her here again, only I was obliged to let her come today. It’s Swann’s wife.”

Mme Swann, seeing the dimensions that the Dreyfus case had begun to assume, and fearing that her husband’s racial origin might be used against herself, had besought him never again to allude to the prisoner’s innocence. When he was not present she went further and professed the most ardent nationalism; in doing which she was only following the example of Mme Verdurin, in whom a latent bourgeois anti-semitism had awakened and grown to a positive fury. Mme Swann had won by this attitude the privilege of membership in several of the anti-semitic leagues of society women that were beginning to be formed and had succeeded in establishing relations with various members of the aristocracy. It may seem strange that, so far from following their example, the Duchesse de Guermantes, so close a friend of Swann, had on the contrary always resisted the desire which he had not concealed from her to introduce his wife to her. But we shall see in due course that this was an effect of the peculiar character of the Duchess, who held that she was not “bound to” do such and such a thing, and laid down with despotic force what had been decided by her social “free will,” which was extremely arbitrary.

“Thank you for warning me,” said the Duchess. “It would indeed be most disagreeable. But as I know her by sight I shall be able to get away in time.”

“I assure you, Oriane, she is really quite nice; an excellent woman,” said Mme de Marsantes.

“I have no doubt she is, but I feel no need to assure myself of it in person.”

“Have you been invited to Lady Israel’s?” Mme de Villeparisis asked the Duchess, to change the subject.

“Why, thank heaven, I don’t know the woman,” replied Mme de Guermantes. “You must ask Marie-Aynard. She knows her. I never could make out why.”

“I did indeed know her at one time,” said Mme de Marsantes. “I confess my sins. But I have decided not to know her any more. It seems she’s one of the very worst of them, and makes no attempt to conceal it. Besides, we have all been too trusting, too hospitable. I shall never go near anyone of that race again. While we closed our doors to old country cousins, people of our own flesh and blood, we threw them open to Jews. And now we see what thanks we get from them. But alas, I’ve no right to speak; I have an adorable son who, young fool that he is, goes round talking the most utter nonsense,” she went on, having caught some allusion by M. d’Argencourt to Robert. “But, talking of Robert, haven’t you seen him?” she asked Mme de Villeparisis. “Since it’s Saturday, I thought he might have come to Paris for twenty-four hours, and in that case would have been sure to pay you a visit.”



As a matter of fact Mme de Marsantes thought that her son would not obtain leave that week; but knowing that, even if he did, he would never dream of coming to see Mme de Villeparisis, she hoped, by making herself appear to have expected to find him there, to make his susceptible aunt forgive him for all the visits that he had failed to pay her.

"Robert here! But I haven't even had a word from him. I don't think I've seen him since Balbec."

"He is so busy; he has so much to do," said Mme de Marsantes.

A faint smile made Mme de Guermentes's eyelashes quiver as she studied the circle which she was tracing on the carpet with the point of her sunshade. Whenever the Duke had been too openly unfaithful to his wife, Mme de Marsantes had always taken up the cudgels against her own brother on her sister-in-law's behalf. The latter had a grateful and bitter memory of this support, and was not herself seriously shocked by Robert's pranks. At this point the door opened again and Robert himself came in.

"Well, talk of the Saint!"<sup>17</sup> said Mme de Guermentes.

Mme de Marsantes, who had her back to the door, had not seen her son come in. When she caught sight of him, her motherly bosom was convulsed with joy as by the beating of a wing, her body half rose from her seat, her face quivered and she fastened on Robert eyes that glowed with wonderment.

"What, you've come! How delightful! What a surprise!"

"Ah! *talk of the Saint*—I see," cried the Belgian diplomat with a shout of laughter.

"Delicious, isn't it?" the Duchess retorted curtly, for she hated puns, and had ventured this one only with a pretence of self-mockery.

"Good evening, Robert," she said. "Well, so this is how we forget our aunt."

They talked for a moment, doubtless about me, for as Saint-Loup was leaving her to join his mother Mme de Guermentes turned to me:

"Good evening, how are you?" was her greeting.

She showered me with the light of her azure gaze, hesitated for a moment, unfolded and stretched towards me the stem of her arm, and leaned forward her body which sprang rapidly backwards like a bush that has been pulled down to the ground and, on being released, returns to its natural position. Thus she acted under the fire of Saint-Loup's eyes, which kept her under observation from a distance and made frantic efforts to obtain some further concession still from his aunt. Fearing that our conversation might dry up altogether, he came across to fuel it, and answered for me:

"He's not very well just now, he gets rather tired. I think he would be a great deal better, by the way, if he saw you more often, for I don't mind telling you that he enjoys seeing you very much."

"Oh, but that's very nice of him," said Mme de Guermentes in a deliberately trite tone, as if I had brought her her coat. "I'm most flattered."

"Look, I must go and talk to my mother for a minute; take my chair," said Saint-Loup, thus forcing me to sit down next to his aunt.

We were both silent.

"I catch sight of you sometimes in the morning," she said, as though she were giving me a piece of news and as though I for my part never saw her. "It's so good for one, a walk."

"Oriane," said Mme de Marsantes in a low voice, "you said you were going on to Mme de Saint-Ferréol's. Would you be so very kind as to tell her not to expect me to dinner. I shall stay at home now that I've got Robert. And might I ask you in passing to see that someone sends out at once for a box of the cigars Robert likes? 'Corona,' they're called. I've none in the house."

Robert came up to us. He had caught only the name of Mme de Saint-Ferréol.

"Who in the world is Mme de Saint-Ferréol?" he inquired in a tone of studied surprise, for he affected ignorance of everything to do with society.

"But, my darling boy, you know perfectly well," said his mother. "She's Vermandois's sister. It was she who gave you that nice billiard table you liked so much."

"What, she's Vermandois's sister, I had no idea. Really, my family are amazing," he went on, half-turning towards me and unconsciously adopting Bloch's intonation just as he borrowed his ideas, "they know the most unheard-of people, people called Saint-Ferréol" (emphasising the final consonant of each word) "or something like that; my family go to balls, they drive in victorias, they lead a fabulous existence. It's prodigious."

Mme de Guermentes made a slight, short, sharp sound in her throat as of an involuntary laugh choked back, which was intended to show that she acknowledged her nephew's wit to the degree which kinship demanded. A servant came in to say that the Prince von Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen sent word to M. de Norpois that he had arrived.

"Go and fetch him, Monsieur," said Mme de Villeparisis to the ex-Ambassador, who set off in quest of the German Prime Minister.

"Wait, Monsieur. Do you think I ought to show him the miniature of the Empress Charlotte?"

"Why, I'm sure he'll be delighted," said the Ambassador in a tone of conviction, as though he envied the fortunate Minister the favour that was in store for him.

"Oh, I know he's very *sound*," said Mme de Marsantes, "and that is so rare among foreigners. But I've found out all about him. He's anti-semitism personified."

The Prince's name preserved, in the boldness with which its opening syllables were—to borrow an expression from music—attacked, and in the stammering repetition that scanned them, the energy, the mannered simplicity, the heavy refinements of the Teutonic race, projected like green boughs over the "Heim" of dark blue enamel which glowed with the mystic light of a Rhenish window behind the pale and finely



wrought gildings of the German eighteenth century. This name included, among the several names of which it was composed, that of a little German watering-place to which as a small child I had gone with my grandmother, under a mountain honoured by the feet of Goethe, from the vineyards of which we used to drink at the Kurhof the illustrious vintages with their compound and sonorous names like the epithets which Homer applies to his heroes. And so, scarcely had I heard it spoken than, before I had recalled the watering-place, the Prince's name seemed to shrink, to become imbued with humanity, to find large enough for itself a little place in my memory to which it clung, familiar, earthbound, picturesque, appetising, light, with something about it that was authorised, prescribed. Furthermore, M. de Guermantes, in explaining who the Prince was, quoted a number of his titles, and I recognised the name of a village traversed by a river on which, every evening, the cure finished for the day, I used to go boating amid the mosquitoes, and that of a forest far enough away for the doctor not to allow me to make the excursion to it. And indeed it was comprehensible that the suzerainty of the noble gentleman should extend to the surrounding places and associate afresh in the enumeration of his titles the names which one could read side by side on a map. Thus beneath the visor of the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and Knight of Franconia it was the face of a beloved, smiling land, on which the rays of the evening sun had often lingered for me, that I saw, at any rate before the Prince, Rhinegrave and Elector Palatine, had entered the room. For I speedily learned that the revenues which he drew from the forest and the river peopled with gnomes and undines, and from the magic mountain on which rose the ancient Burg that still cherished memories of Luther and Louis the German, he employed in keeping five Charron motor-cars, a house in Paris and another in London, a box on Mondays at the Opéra and another for the "Tuesdays" at the "Français." He did not seem to me to be—nor did he himself seem to believe that he was—different from other men of similar wealth and age who had a less poetic origin. He had their culture, their ideals, he was proud of his rank but purely on account of the advantages it conferred on him, and had now only one ambition in life, to be elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, which was the reason of his coming to see Mme de Villeparisis.

If he, whose wife was a leader of the most exclusive set in Berlin, had solicited an introduction to the Marquise, it was not the result of any desire on his part for her acquaintance. Devoured for years past by this ambition to be elected to the *Institut*, he had unfortunately never been in a position to reckon above five the number of Academicians who seemed prepared to vote for him. He knew that M. de Norpois could by himself command at least a dozen votes, a number which he was capable, by skilful negotiations, of increasing still further. And so the Prince, who had known him in Russia when they were both there as ambassadors, had gone to see him and had done everything in his power to win him over. But in vain might he intensify his friendly overtures, procure for the Marquis Russian decorations, quote him in articles on foreign policy, he had been faced with a heartless ingrate, a man in whose eyes all these attentions appeared to count as nothing, who had not advanced the prospects of his candidature one inch, had not even promised him his own vote. True, M. de Norpois received him with extreme politeness, indeed begged him not to put himself out and "take the trouble to come so far out of his way," went himself to the Prince's residence, and when the Teutonic knight had launched his: "I should very much like to be your colleague," replied in a tone of deep emotion: "Ah! I should be most happy!" And no doubt a simpleton, a Dr Cottard, would have said to himself: "Well, here he is in my house; it was he who insisted on coming because he regards me as a more important person than himself; he tells me he'd be happy to see me in the Academy; words do have some meaning after all, damn it, so if he doesn't offer to vote for me it's probably because it hasn't occurred to him. He lays so much stress on influence that he must imagine the plums fall into my lap, that I have all the support I need and that's why he doesn't offer me his; but I've only to corner him here, just the two of us, and say to him: 'Very well, vote for me,' and he'll be obliged to do it."

But Prince von Faffenheim was no simpleton. He was what Dr Cottard would have called "a shrewd diplomat" and he knew that M. de Norpois was a no less shrewd one and a man who would have realised without needing to be told that he could confer a favour on a candidate by voting for him. The Prince, in his ambassadorial missions and as Foreign Minister, had conducted, on his country's behalf instead of, as in the present instance, his own, many of those conversations in which one knows beforehand just how far one is prepared to go and at what point one will decline to commit oneself. He was not unaware that in diplomatic parlance to talk means to offer. And it was for this reason that he had arranged for M. de Norpois to receive the Order of Saint Andrew. But if he had had to report to his Government the conversation which he had subsequently had with M. de Norpois, he would have stated in his dispatch: "I realised that I had taken the wrong tack." For as soon as he had returned to the subject of the *Institut*, M. de Norpois had repeated:

"I should like nothing better; nothing could be better for my colleagues. They ought, I consider, to feel genuinely honoured that you should have thought of them. It's a really interesting candidature, a little outside our normal practice. As you know, the Academy is very hide-bound; it takes fright at anything that smacks of novelty. Personally, I deplore this. How often have I not had occasion to say as much to my colleagues! I cannot be sure, God forgive me, that I did not even once let the term 'stick-in-the-mud' escape my lips," he added with a scandalised smile in an undertone, almost an aside, as though on the stage, giving the Prince a rapid, sidelong glance from his blue eyes, like a veteran actor studying an effect on his audience. "You understand, Prince, that I should not care to allow a personality so eminent as yourself to embark on a venture which was hopeless from the start. So long as my colleagues' ideas linger so far behind the times, I consider that the wiser course will be to abstain. But you may rest assured that if I were ever to discern a slightly more modern, a slightly more lively spirit emerge in that college, which is tending to become a mausoleum, if I felt you had a genuine chance of success, I should be the first to inform you of it."

"The Order was a mistake," thought the Prince; "the negotiations have not advanced one step. That's not what he wanted. I have not yet laid my hand on the right key."

This was a kind of reasoning of which M. de Norpois, formed in the same school as the Prince, would also have been capable. One may mock at the pedantic silliness which makes diplomats of the Norpois type go into ecstasies over some piece of official wording which is to all intents and purposes meaningless. But their childishness has this compensation: diplomats know that, in the scales which ensure that balance of power, European or otherwise, which we call peace, good feeling, fine speeches, earnest entreaties weigh very little; and that the heavy weight, the true determinant consists in something else, in the possibility which the adversary enjoys, if he is strong enough, or does not enjoy, of satisfying a desire in exchange for something in return. With this order of truths, which an entirely disinterested person, such as my grandmother for instance, would not have understood, M. de Norpois and Prince von Faffenheim had frequently to deal. As an envoy in countries with which we had been within an ace of going to war, M. de Norpois, in his anxiety as to the turn which events were about to take, knew very well that it was not by the word "Peace," nor by the word "War," that it would be revealed to him, but by some other, apparently commonplace word, a word of terror or blessing, which the diplomat, by the aid of his cipher, would immediately know how to interpret and to which, to safeguard the dignity of France, he would respond in another word, quite as commonplace, but one beneath which the minister of the enemy nation would at once decipher: "War." Moreover, in accordance with a time-honoured custom, analogous to that which used to give to the first meeting between two young people promised to one another in marriage the form of a chance encounter at a performance in the Théâtre du Gymnase, the dialogue in the course of which destiny was to dictate the word "War" or the word "Peace" took place, as a rule, not in the ministerial sanctum but on a bench in a Kurgarten where the minister and M. de Norpois went independently to a thermal spring to drink at its source their little tumblers of some curative water. By a sort of tacit convention they met at the hour appointed for their cure, and began by taking together a short stroll which, beneath its benign appearance, the two interlocutors knew to be as tragic as an order for mobilisation. And so, in a private matter like this nomination for election to the Institute, the Prince had employed the same system of induction which had served him in the diplomatic service, the same method of reading beneath superimposed symbols.

And certainly it would be wrong to pretend that my grandmother and the few who resembled her would have been alone in their failure to understand this kind of calculation. For one thing, the average run of humanity, practising professions the lines of which have been laid down in advance, approximate in their lack of intuition to the ignorance which my grandmother owed to her lofty disinterestedness. Often one has to come down to "kept" persons, male or female, before one finds the hidden spring of actions or words, apparently of the most innocent nature, in self-interest, in the necessity to keep alive. What man does not know that when a woman whom he is going to pay says to him: "Don't let's talk about money," the speech must be regarded as what is called in music "a silent bar" and that if, later on, she declares: "You make me too unhappy, you're always keeping things from me; I can't stand it any longer," he must interpret this as: "Someone else has been offering her more"? And yet this is only the language of the woman of easy virtue, not so far removed from society women. The ponce furnishes more striking examples. But M. de Norpois and the German prince, if ponces and their ways were unknown to them, had been accustomed to living on the same plane as nations, which are also, for all their grandeur, creatures of selfishness and cunning, which can be tamed only by force, by consideration of their material interests which may drive them to murder, a murder that is also often symbolic, since its mere hesitation or refusal to fight may spell for a nation the word "Perish." But since all this is not set forth in the various Yellow Books or elsewhere, the people as a whole are naturally pacific; if they are warlike, it is instinctively, from hatred, from a sense of injury, not for the reasons which have made up the mind of their ruler on the advice of his Norpois.

The following winter the Prince was seriously ill. He recovered, but his heart was permanently affected.

"The devil!" he said to himself, "I can't afford to lose any time over the *Institut*. If I wait too long, I may be dead before they elect me. That really would be disagreeable."

He wrote an essay for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on European politics over the past twenty years, in which he referred more than once to M. de Norpois in the most flattering terms. The latter called upon him to thank him. He added that he did not know how to express his gratitude. The Prince said to himself, like a man who has just tried to fit another key into a stubborn lock: "Still not the right one!" and, feeling somewhat out of breath as he showed M. de Norpois to the door, thought: "Damn it, these fellows will see me in my grave before letting me in. We must hurry up."

That evening, he met M. de Norpois again at the Opéra.

"My dear Ambassador," he said to him, "you told me this morning that you did not know how to prove your gratitude to me. It's entirely superfluous, since you owe me none, but I am going to be so indelicate as to take you at your word."

M. de Norpois had a no less high esteem for the Prince's tact than the Prince had for his. He understood at once that it was not a request that Prince von Faffenheim was about to put to him, but an offer, and with a radiant affability he made ready to hear it.

"Well now, you will think me highly indiscreet. There are two people to whom I am greatly attached—in quite different ways, as you will understand in a moment—two people both of whom have recently settled in Paris, where they intend to live henceforth: my wife, and the Grand Duchess John. They are thinking of giving a few dinners, notably in honour of the King and Queen of England, and their dream would have been to be able to offer their guests the company of a person for whom, without knowing her, they both of them feel a

great admiration. I confess that I did not know how I was going to gratify their wish when I learned just now, by the merest chance, that you were a friend of this person. I know that she lives a most retired life, and sees only a very few people—*happy few*—but if you were to give me your support, with the kindness you have always shown me, I am sure that she would allow you to present me to her so that I might convey to her the wish of the Grand Duchess and the Princess. Perhaps she would consent to come to dinner with the Queen of England, and then (who knows) if we don't bore her too much, to spend the Easter holidays with us at Beaulieu, at the Grand Duchess John's. This person is called the Marquise de Villeparisis. I confess that the hope of becoming an habitu   of such a school of wit would console me, would make me contemplate without regret the abandoning of my candidature for the *Institut*. For in her house, too, I understand, there is intellectual intercourse and brilliant talk."

With an inexpressible sense of pleasure the Prince felt that the lock no longer resisted and that at last the key was turning.

"Such an alternative is wholly unnecessary, my dear Prince," replied M. de Norpois. "Nothing could be more in harmony with the *Institut* than the house you speak of, which is a regular breeding-ground of academicians. I shall convey your request to Mme la Marquise de Villeparisis: she will undoubtedly be flattered. As for her dining with you, she goes out very little, and that will perhaps be more difficult to arrange. But I shall introduce you to her and you will plead your cause in person. You must on no account give up the Academy; tomorrow fortnight, as it happens, I shall be having luncheon, before going on with him to an important meeting, with Leroy-Beaulieu, without whom nobody can be elected; I had already allowed myself in conversation with him to let fall your name, with which, naturally, he was perfectly familiar. He raised certain objections. But it so happens that he requires the support of my group at the next election, and I fully intend to return to the charge; I shall tell him frankly of the extremely cordial ties that unite us, I shall not conceal from him that, if you were to stand, I should ask all my friends to vote for you" (here the Prince breathed a deep sigh of relief), "and he knows that I have friends. I consider that if I were to succeed in obtaining his co-operation, your chances would become very real. Come that evening, at six, to Mme de Villeparisis's. I will introduce you, and at the same time will be able to give you an account of my morning meeting."

Thus it was that Prince von Faffenheim had been led to call upon Mme de Villeparisis. My profound disillusionment occurred when he spoke. It had never struck me that, whereas a period has features both particular and general which are stronger than those of a nationality, so that in an illustrated dictionary which goes so far as to include an authentic portrait of Minerva, Leibniz with his periwig and his neckerchief differs little from Marivaux or Samuel Bernard, a nationality has particular features stronger than those of a caste. In the present instance these found expression not in a discourse in which I had expected to hear the rustling of the elves and the dance of the kobolds, but by a transposition which certified no less plainly that poetic origin: the fact that as he bowed, short, red-faced and portly, over the hand of Mme de Villeparisis, the Rhinegrave said to her: "Goot-tay, Matame la Marquise," in the accent of an Alsatian concierge.

"Won't you let me give you a cup of tea or a little of this tart, it's so good?" Mme de Guermantes asked me, anxious to have shown herself as friendly as possible. "I do the honours in this house just as if it was mine," she explained in an ironical tone which gave a slightly guttural sound to her voice, as though she were trying to stifle a hoarse laugh.

"Monsieur," said Mme de Villeparisis to M. de Norpois, "you won't forget that you have something to say to the Prince about the Academy?"

Mme de Guermantes lowered her eyes and gave a semicircular turn to her wrist to look at the time.

"Gracious! It's time I said good-bye to my aunt if I'm to get to Mme de Saint-Ferr  ol's, and I'm dining with Mme Leroi."

And she rose without bidding me good-bye. She had just caught sight of Mme Swann, who appeared somewhat embarrassed at finding me in the room. Doubtless she remembered that she had been the first to assure me that she was convinced of Dreyfus's innocence.

"I don't want my mother to introduce me to Mme Swann," Saint-Loup said to me. "She's an ex-whore. Her husband's a Jew, and she comes here to pose as a Nationalist. Hallo, here's my uncle Palam  de."

The arrival of Mme Swann had a special interest for me, owing to an incident which had occurred a few days earlier and which it is necessary to relate because of the consequences which it was to have at a much later date and which the reader will follow in detail in due course. A few days before this visit to Mme de Villeparisis, I had myself received a visitor whom I little expected, namely Charles Morel, the son, whom I did not know, of my great-uncle's old valet. This great-uncle (he in whose house I had met the lady in pink) had died the year before. His servant had more than once expressed his intention of coming to see me; I had no idea of the object of his visit, but should have been glad to see him, for I had learned from Fran  oise that he had a genuine veneration for my uncle's memory and made a pilgrimage regularly to the cemetery in which he was buried. But, being obliged for reasons of health to retire to his home in the country, where he expected to remain for some time, he had delegated the duty to his son. I was surprised to see a handsome young man of eighteen come into my room, dressed expensively rather than with taste, but looking, all the same, like anything but the son of a valet. He made a point, moreover, from the start, of emphasising his aloofness from the domestic class from which he sprang, by informing me with a complacent smile that he had won a first prize at the Conservatoire. The object of his visit to me was as follows: his father on going through the effects of my uncle Adolphe, had set aside some which he felt it unseemly to send to my parents but which he considered to be of a nature to interest a young man of my age. These were photographs of the famous actresses, the notorious courtesans whom my uncle had known, the last fading pictures of that gay life of a

man about town which he kept separated by a watertight compartment from his family life. While the young Morel was showing them to me, I noticed that he affected to speak to me as to an equal. He derived from saying "you" to me as often and "sir" as seldom as possible the pleasure of one whose father had never ventured, when addressing my parents, upon anything but the third person. Almost all the photographs bore an inscription such as: "To my best friend." One actress, less grateful and more circumspect than the rest, had written: "To the best of friends," which enabled her (so I have been assured) to say afterwards that my uncle was in no sense and had never been her best friend but was merely the friend who had done the most small services for her, the friend she made use of, a good, kind man, in other words an old fool. In vain might young Morel seek to divest himself of his lowly origin, one felt that the shade of my uncle Adolphe, venerable and gigantic in the eyes of the old servant, had never ceased to hover, almost a sacred vision, over the childhood and youth of the son. While I was turning over the photographs Charles Morel examined my room. And as I was looking for somewhere to put them, "How is it," he asked me (in a tone in which the reproach had no need to be emphasised, so implicit was it in the words themselves), "that I don't see a single photograph of your uncle in your room?" I felt the blood rise to my cheeks and stammered: "Why, I don't believe I have one." "What, you haven't a single photograph of your uncle Adolphe, who was so fond of you! I'll send you one of the governor's—he's got stacks of them—and I hope you'll put it in the place of honour above that chest of drawers, which incidentally came to you from your uncle." It is true that, as I had not even a photograph of my father or mother in my room, there was nothing so very shocking in there not being one of my uncle Adolphe. But it was easy enough to see that for old Morel, who had trained his son in the same way of thinking, my uncle was the important person in the family, from whom my parents derived only a dim reflected glory. I was in higher favour, because my uncle used constantly to say to his valet that I was going to turn out a sort of Racine, or Vaulabelle, and Morel regarded me almost as an adopted son, as a favourite child of my uncle. I soon discovered that Morel's son was extremely "go-getting." Thus at this first meeting he asked me, being something of a composer as well and capable of setting short poems to music, whether I knew any poet who had a good position in "aristo" society. I mentioned one. He did not know the work of this poet and had never heard his name, of which he made a note. And I was to discover that shortly afterwards he wrote to the poet telling him that, being a fanatical admirer of his work, he, Morel, had composed a musical setting for one of his sonnets and would be grateful if the author would arrange for its performance at the Comtesse So-and-so's. This was going a little too fast and exposing his hand. The poet, taking offence, made no reply.

For the rest, Charles Morel seemed to possess, besides ambition, a strong leaning towards more concrete realities. He had noticed, as he came through the courtyard, Jupien's niece at work upon a waistcoat, and although he explained to me only that he happened to want a fancy waistcoat at that very moment, I felt that the girl had made a vivid impression on him. He had no hesitation in asking me to come downstairs and introduce him to her, "but not as a connexion of your family, you follow me, I rely on your discretion not to drag in my father, say just a distinguished artist of your acquaintance, you know how important it is to make a good impression on tradespeople." Although he had suggested to me that, not knowing him well enough to call him, he quite realised, "dear friend," I might address him, in front of the girl, in some such terms as "not dear master, of course ... although ... well, if you like, dear distinguished artist," I avoided "qualifying" him, as Saint-Simon would have said, in the shop and contented myself with returning his "you's." He picked out from several patterns of velvet one of the brightest red imaginable, so loud that, for all his bad taste, he was never able to wear the waistcoat when it was made. The girl settled down to work again with her two "apprentices," but it struck me that the impression had been mutual, and that Charles Morel, whom she regarded as of my "station" (only smarter and richer), had proved singularly attractive to her. As I had been greatly surprised to find among the photographs which his father had sent me one of the portrait of Miss Sacripant (otherwise Odette) by Elstir, I said to Charles Morel as I accompanied him to the carriage gateway: "I don't suppose you can tell me, but did my uncle know this lady well? I can't think what stage of his life she fits into exactly; and it interests me, because of M. Swann ..." "Why, if I wasn't forgetting to tell you that my father asked me specially to draw your attention to that lady's picture. As a matter of fact, she was lurching with your uncle the last time you saw him. My father was in two minds whether to let you in. It seems you made a great impression on the wench, and she hoped to see you again. But just at that time there was a row in the family, from what my father tells me, and you never set eyes on your uncle again." He broke off to give Jupien's niece a smile of farewell across the courtyard. She gazed after him, doubtless admiring his thin but regular features, his fair hair and sparkling eyes. For my part, as I shook hands with him I was thinking of Mme Swann and saying to myself with amazement, so far apart, so different were they in my memory, that I should have henceforth to identify her with the "Lady in pink."

M. de Charlus was soon seated by the side of Mme Swann. At every social gathering at which he appeared, contemptuous towards the men, courted by the women, he promptly attached himself to the most elegantly dressed of the latter, by whose garments he felt himself to be embellished. The Baron's frock-coat or tails were reminiscent of a portrait by some great colourist of a man dressed in black but having by his side, thrown over a chair, the brilliant cloak which he is about to wear at some fancy-dress ball. These tête-à-têtes, generally with some royal lady, secured for M. de Charlus various privileges which he cherished. For instance, one consequence of them was that his hostesses, at theatricals or recitals, allowed the Baron alone to have a front seat in a row of ladies, while the rest of the men jostled one another at the back of the room. Furthermore, completely absorbed, it seemed, in telling amusing stories to the enraptured lady at the top of his voice, M. de Charlus was dispensed from the necessity of going to shake hands with any of the others, was set free from all social duties. Behind the scented barrier which the chosen beauty provided for him, he was

isolated in the middle of a crowded drawing-room, as, in a crowded theatre, behind the rampart of a box; and when anyone came up to greet him, through, as it were, the beauty of his companion, it was permissible for him to reply quite curtly and without interrupting his conversation with a lady. True, Mme Swann was scarcely of the rank of the persons with whom he liked thus to flaunt himself. But he professed admiration for her and friendship for Swann, knew that she would be flattered by his attentions, and was himself flattered at being compromised by the prettiest woman in the room.

Mme de Villeparisis meanwhile was not too well pleased to receive a visit from M. de Charlus. The latter, while admitting serious defects in his aunt's character, was genuinely fond of her. But every now and then in a fit of anger or imaginary grievance, he would sit down and write to her, without making the slightest attempt to resist his impulse, letters full of the most violent abuse, in which he made the most of trifling incidents which until then he seemed not even to have noticed. Among other examples I may instance the following, which my stay at Balbec brought to my knowledge: Mme de Villeparisis, fearing that she had not brought enough money with her to Balbec to enable her to prolong her holiday there, and not caring, since she was of a thrifty disposition and shrank from superfluous expenditure, to have money sent to her from Paris, had borrowed three thousand francs from M. de Charlus. A month later, annoyed with his aunt for some trivial reason, he asked her to repay him this sum by telegraphic money order. He received two thousand nine hundred and ninety-odd francs. Meeting his aunt a few days later in Paris, in the course of a friendly conversation he drew her attention, very mildly, to the mistake that her bank had made when sending the money. "But there was no mistake," replied Mme de Villeparisis, "the money order cost six francs seventy-five." "Ah, well, if it was intentional, that's fine," said M. de Charlus. "I mentioned it only in case you didn't know, because in that case, if the bank had done the same thing with anyone who didn't know you as well as I do, it might have led to unpleasantness." "No, no, there was no mistake." "Actually you were quite right," M. de Charlus concluded gaily, stooping to kiss his aunt's hand. And in fact he bore her no ill will and was only amused at this little instance of her stinginess. But some time afterwards, imagining that, in a family matter, his aunt had been trying to cheat him and had "worked up a regular conspiracy" against him, as she rather foolishly took shelter behind the lawyers with whom he suspected her of having plotted to do him down, he had written her a letter boiling over with insolence and rage. "I shall not be satisfied with having my revenge," he added as a postscript, "I shall make you a laughing-stock. Tomorrow I shall tell everyone the story of the money order and the six francs seventy-five you kept back from me out of the three thousand I lent you. I shall disgrace you publicly." Instead of so doing, he had gone to his aunt the next day to apologise, having already regretted a letter in which he had used some really appalling language. In any case, to whom could he have told the story of the money order? Since he no longer sought vengeance but a sincere reconciliation, now would have been the time for him to keep silence. But he had already told the story everywhere, while still on the best of terms with his aunt, had told it without malice, as a joke, and because he was the soul of indiscretion. He had told the story, but without Mme de Villeparisis's knowledge. With the result that, having learned from his letter that he intended to disgrace her by divulging a transaction in which he had assured her personally that she had acted rightly, she concluded that he had deceived her then and had lied when he pretended to be fond of her. All this had now died down, but neither of them knew precisely what the other thought of him or her. This sort of intermittent quarrel is of course somewhat exceptional. Of a different order again were those of M. de Charlus, as we shall presently see, with people wholly unlike Mme de Villeparisis. In spite of this we must bear in mind that the opinions which we hold of one another, our relations with friends and family, far from being static, save in appearance, are as eternally fluid as the sea itself. Whence all the rumours of divorce between couples who have always seemed so perfectly united and will soon afterwards speak of one another with affection; all the terrible things said by one friend of another from whom we supposed him to be inseparable and with whom we shall find him once more reconciled before we have had time to recover from our surprise; all the reversals of alliances between nations after the briefest of spells.

"I say, things are hotting up between my uncle and Mme Swann," remarked Saint-Loup. "And look at Mamma in the innocence of her heart going across to disturb them. To the pure all things are pure!"

I studied M. de Charlus. The tuft of his grey hair, his twinkling eye, the brow of which was raised by his monocle, the red flowers in his buttonhole, formed as it were the three mobile apexes of a convulsive and striking triangle. I had not ventured to greet him, for he had given me no sign of recognition. And yet, though he was not facing in my direction, I was convinced that he had seen me; while he sat spinning some yarn to Mme Swann, whose sumptuous, pansy-coloured cloak floated over his knee, the Baron's roving eye, like that of a street hawker who is watching all the time for the "law" to appear, had certainly explored every corner of the room and taken note of all the people who were in it. M. de Châtellerault came up to say good evening to him without there being the slightest hint on M. de Charlus's face that he had seen the young Duke until he was actually standing in front of him. In this way, in fairly numerous gatherings such as this, M. de Charlus kept almost continuously on show a smile without determinate direction or particular object, which, thereby pre-existing the greetings of new arrivals, remained, when the latter entered its zone, devoid of any amiable implication towards them. Nevertheless, I felt obliged to go across and speak to Mme Swann. But as she was not certain whether I knew Mme de Marsantes and M. de Charlus, she was distinctly cold, fearing no doubt that I might ask her to introduce me to them. I then turned to M. de Charlus, and at once regretted it, for though he could not have helped seeing me he showed no sign of having done so. As I stood before him and bowed I found, at some distance from his body which it prevented me from approaching by the full length of his outstretched arm, a finger bereft, one would have said, of an episcopal ring, of which he appeared to be

offering the consecrated site for the kiss of the faithful, and I was made to appear to have penetrated, without leave from the Baron and by an act of trespass for which he left me the entire responsibility, the unalterable, anonymous and vacant dispersion of his smile. This coldness was hardly of a kind to encourage Mme Swann to depart from hers.

"How tired and worried you look," said Mme de Marsantes to her son who had come up to greet M. de Charlus.

And indeed the expression in Robert's eyes seemed now and then to reach a depth from which it rose at once like a diver who has touched bottom. This bottom which hurt Robert so much when he touched it that he left it at once, to return to it a moment later, was the thought that he had broken with his mistress.

"Never mind," his mother went on, stroking his cheek, "never mind; it's good to see my little boy again."

This show of affection seeming to irritate Robert, Mme de Marsantes led her son away to the other end of the room where in an alcove hung with yellow silk a group of Beauvais armchairs massed their violet-hued tapestries like purple irises in a field of buttercups. Mme Swann, finding herself alone and having realised that I was a friend of Saint-Loup, beckoned me to come and sit beside her. Not having seen her for so long, I did not know what to talk to her about. I was keeping an eye on my hat among all those that littered the carpet, and I wondered with a vague curiosity to whom could belong one that was not the Duc de Guermantes's and yet in the lining of which a capital "G" was surmounted by a ducal coronet. I knew who everyone in the room was, and could not think of anyone whose hat this could possibly be.

"What a pleasant man M. de Norpois is," I said to Mme Swann, pointing him out to her. "It's true that Robert de Saint-Loup says he's a pest, but ..."

"He's quite right," she replied.

Seeing from her face that she was thinking of something which she was keeping from me, I plied her with questions. Pleased, perhaps, to appear to be very taken up with someone in this room where she hardly knew anyone, she took me into a corner.

"I'm sure this is what M. de Saint-Loup meant," she began, "but you must never tell him I said so, for he would think me indiscreet, and I value his esteem very highly—I'm an 'honest Injun,' you know. The other day, Charlus was dining at the Princesse de Guermantes's, and for some reason or other your name was mentioned. It appears that M. de Norpois told them—it's all too silly for words, don't go and worry yourself to death over it, nobody paid any attention, they all knew only too well the mischievous tongue that said it—that you were a hysterical little flatterer."

I have recorded a long way back my stupefaction at the discovery that a friend of my father such as M. de Norpois was could have expressed himself thus in speaking of me. I was even more astonished to learn that my emotion on that evening long ago when I had spoken about Mme Swann and Gilberte was known to the Princesse de Guermantes, whom I imagined never to have heard of my existence. Each of our actions, our words, our attitudes is cut off from the "world," from the people who have not directly perceived it, by a medium the permeability of which is infinitely variable and remains unknown to ourselves; having learned from experience that some important utterance which we eagerly hoped would be disseminated (such as those so enthusiastic speeches which I used at one time to make to everyone and at every opportunity on the subject of Mme Swann, thinking that among so many scattered seeds one at least would germinate) has at once, often because of our very anxiety, been hidden under a bushel, how immeasurably less do we suppose that some tiny word which we ourselves have forgotten, which may not even have been uttered by us but formed along its way by the imperfect refraction of a different word, could be transported, without ever being halted in its progress, infinite distances—in the present instance to the Princesse de Guermantes—and succeed in diverting at our expense the banquet of the gods! What we remember of our conduct remains unknown to our nearest neighbour; what we have forgotten that we ever said, or indeed what we never did say, flies to provoke hilarity in another planet, and the image that other people form of our actions and demeanour no more resembles our own than an inaccurate tracing, on which for the black line we find an empty space and for a blank area an inexplicable contour, resembles the original drawing. It may happen however that what has not been transcribed is a non-existent feature which only our purblind self-esteem reveals to us, and what seems to us to have been added does indeed belong to us, but so quintessentially that it escapes us. So that this strange print which seems to us to have so little resemblance to us bears sometimes the same stamp of truth, unflattering, certainly, but profound and useful, as an X-ray photograph. Not that that is any reason why we should recognise ourselves in it. A man who is in the habit of smiling in the glass at his handsome face and stalwart figure will, if he is shown an X-ray of them, have the same suspicion of error at the sight of this rosary of bones labelled as being a picture of himself as the visitor to an art gallery who, on coming to the portrait of a girl, reads in his catalogue: "Dromedary resting." Later on, this discrepancy in the picture of ourselves according to whether it is drawn by one's own hand or another's was something I was to register in the case of others than myself, living placidly in the midst of a collection of photographs which they had taken of themselves while round about them grinned frightful faces, invisible to them as a rule, but stunning them with amazement if some chance revealed them to them, saying: "It's you."

A few years earlier I should have been only too glad to tell Mme Swann in what connexion I had behaved so tenderly towards M. de Norpois, since the connexion had been my desire to get to know her. But I no longer felt this desire, since I was no longer in love with Gilberte. At the same time I found it difficult to identify Mme Swann with the lady in pink of my childhood. Accordingly I spoke of the woman who was on my mind at the moment.

"Did you see the Duchesse de Guermantes just now?" I asked Mme Swann.

But since the Duchess did not greet Mme Swann when they met, the latter chose to appear to regard her as a person of no interest, whose presence in a room one did not even notice.

"I don't know; I didn't *realise* she was here," she replied sourly, using an expression borrowed from English.

I was anxious nevertheless for information with regard not only to Mme de Guermantes but to all the people who came in contact with her, and (for all the world like Bloch), with the tactlessness of people who seek in their conversations not to give pleasure to others but to elucidate, from sheer egoism, points that are of interest to themselves, in my effort to form an exact idea of the life of Mme de Guermantes I questioned Mme de Villeparisis about Mme Leroi.

"Oh, yes, I know who you mean," she replied with an affectation of contempt, "the daughter of those rich timber merchants. I've heard that she's begun to go about quite a lot lately, but I must explain to you that I'm rather old now to make new acquaintances. I've known such interesting, such delightful people in my time that really I don't believe Mme Leroi would add much to what I already have."

Mme de Marsantes, who was playing lady-in-waiting to the Marquise, presented me to the Prince, and scarcely had she finished doing so than M. de Norpois also presented me in the most glowing terms. Perhaps he found it opportune to pay me a compliment which could in no way damage his credit since I had just been introduced; perhaps it was that he thought that a foreigner, even so distinguished a foreigner, was unfamiliar with French society and might think that he was being introduced to a young man of fashion; perhaps it was to exercise one of his prerogatives, that of adding the weight of his personal recommendation as an ambassador, or in his taste for the archaic to revive in the Prince's honour the old custom, flattering to his rank, whereby two sponsors were necessary if one wished to be presented to a royal personage.

Mme de Villeparisis appealed to M. de Norpois, feeling it imperative that I should have his assurance that she had nothing to regret in not knowing Mme Leroi.

"Isn't it true, M. l'Ambassadeur, that Mme Leroi is of no interest, very inferior to all the people who come here, and that I'm quite right not to have cultivated her?"

Whether from independence or because he was tired, M. de Norpois replied merely in a bow full of respect but devoid of meaning.

"Do you know," went on Mme de Villeparisis with a laugh, "there are some absurd people in the world. Would you believe that I had a visit this afternoon from a gentleman who tried to persuade me that he found more pleasure in kissing my hand than a young woman's?"

I guessed at once that this was Legrandin. M. de Norpois smiled with a slight quiver of the eyelid, as though he felt that such a remark had been prompted by a concupiscence so natural that one could not feel any resentment against the person who had felt it, almost as though it were the beginning of a romance which he was prepared to forgive, even to encourage, with the perverse tolerance of a Voisenon or a Cr billon *fil*s.

"Many young women's hands would be incapable of doing what I see there," said the Prince, pointing to Mme de Villeparisis's unfinished water-colours. And he asked her whether she had seen the flower paintings by Fantin-Latour which had recently been exhibited.

"They are first class, the work, as they say nowadays, of a fine painter, one of the masters of the palette," declared M. de Norpois. "Nevertheless, in my opinion, they cannot stand comparison with those of Mme de Villeparisis, which give a better idea of the colouring of the flower."

Even supposing that the partiality of an old lover, the habit of flattery, the prevailing opinions in a social circle, had dictated these words to the ex-Ambassador, they nevertheless proved on what a negation of true taste the judgment of society people is based, so arbitrary that the smallest trifle can make it rush to the wildest absurdities, on the way to which it comes across no genuinely felt impression to arrest it.

"I claim no credit for knowing about flowers, since I've lived all my life in the fields," replied Mme de Villeparisis modestly. "But," she added graciously, turning to the Prince, "if, when I was very young, I had some rather more serious notions about them than other country children, I owe it to a distinguished fellow-countryman of yours, Herr von Schlegel. I met him at Broglie, where I was taken by my aunt Cordelia (Marshal de Castellane's wife, don't you know?). I remember so well M. Lebrun, M. de Salvandy, M. Doudan, getting him to talk about flowers. I was only a little girl, and I couldn't understand all he said. But he liked playing with me, and when he went back to your country he sent me a beautiful botany book to remind me of a drive we took together in a phaeton to the Val Richer, when I fell asleep on his knee. I've always kept the book, and it taught me to observe many things about flowers which I should not have noticed otherwise. When Mme de Barante published some of Mme de Broglie's letters, charming and affected like herself, I hoped to find among them some record of those conversations with Herr von Schlegel. But she was a woman who only looked to nature for arguments in support of religion."

Robert called me away to the far end of the room where he and his mother were.

"How very nice you've been," I said to him, "I don't know how to thank you. Can we dine together tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow? Yes, if you like, but it will have to be with Bloch. I met him just now on the doorstep. He was rather stiff with me at first because I had quite forgotten to answer his last two letters (he didn't tell me that was what had offended him, but I guessed it), but after that he was so friendly to me that I simply can't disappoint him. Between ourselves, on his side at least, I feel it's a friendship for life."

I do not think that Robert was altogether mistaken. Furious detraction was often, with Bloch, the effect of a keen affection which he had supposed to be unrequited. And as he made little effort to imagine other people's lives, and never dreamed that one might have been ill, or away from home, or otherwise occupied, a week's silence was at once interpreted by him as arising from deliberate coldness. And so I never believed that his

most violent outbursts as a friend, or in later years as a writer, went very deep. They were exacerbated if one replied to them with an icy dignity, or with a platitude which encouraged him to redouble his onslaught, but yielded often to a warmly sympathetic response. "As for my being nice to you," went on Saint-Loup, "I haven't really been nice at all. My aunt tells me that it's you who avoid her, that you never utter a word to her. She wonders whether you have anything against her."

Fortunately for myself, if I had been taken in by these words, our departure for Balbec, which I believed to be imminent, would have prevented my making any attempt to see Mme de Guermentes again, to assure her that I had nothing against her, and so put her under the necessity of proving that it was she who had something against me. But I had only to remind myself that she had not even offered to let me see her Elstirs. Moreover, this was not a disappointment; I had never expected her to talk to me about them; I knew that I did not appeal to her, that I had no hope of ever making her like me; the most that I had been able to look forward to was that, since I should not be seeing her again before I left Paris, her kindness would afford me an entirely soothing impression of her, which I could take with me to Balbec indefinitely prolonged, intact, instead of a memory mixed with anxiety and gloom.

Mme de Marsantes kept on interrupting her conversation with Robert to tell me how often he had spoken to her about me, how fond he was of me; she treated me with a deference which I found almost painful because I felt it to be prompted by her fear of falling out because of me with this son whom she had not seen all day, with whom she must accordingly have supposed that the influence which she wielded was not equal to and must conciliate mine. Having heard me earlier asking Bloch for news of his uncle, M. Nissim Bernard, Mme de Marsantes inquired whether it was he who had at one time lived at Nice.

"In that case, he knew M. de Marsantes there before our marriage," she told me. "My husband used often to speak of him as an excellent man, with such a delicate, generous nature."

"To think that for once in his life he wasn't lying! It's incredible," Bloch would have thought.

All this time I should have liked to explain to Mme de Marsantes that Robert felt infinitely more affection for her than for myself, and that even if she had shown hostility towards me it was not in my nature to attempt to set him against her, to detach him from her. But now that Mme de Guermentes had gone I had more leisure to observe Robert, and it was only then that I noticed that a sort of fury seemed to have taken possession of him once more, rising to the surface of his stern and sombre features. I was afraid lest, remembering the scene in the theatre that afternoon, he might be feeling humiliated in my presence at having allowed himself to be treated so harshly by his mistress without making any rejoinder.

Suddenly he broke away from his mother, who had put her arm round his neck, and, coming towards me, led me behind the little flower-strewn counter at which Mme de Villeparisis had resumed her seat and beckoned me to follow him into the smaller drawing-room. I was hurrying after him when M. de Charlus, who may have supposed that I was leaving the house, turned abruptly from Prince von Faffenheim, to whom he had been talking, and made a rapid circuit which brought him face to face with me. I saw with alarm that he had taken the hat in the lining of which were a capital "G" and a ducal coronet. In the doorway into the small drawing-room he said without looking at me:

"As I see that you have taken to going into society, you must give me the pleasure of coming to see me. But it's a little complicated," he went on with a distracted but calculating air, as if the pleasure had been one that he was afraid of not securing again once he had let slip the opportunity of arranging with me the means by which it might be realised. "I am very seldom at home; you will have to write to me. But I should prefer to explain things to you more quietly. I shall be leaving soon. Will you walk a short way with me? I shall only keep you for a moment."

"You'd better take care, Monsieur," I warned him. "You have picked up the wrong hat by mistake."

"Do you want to prevent me from taking my own hat?"

I assumed, a similar mishap having recently occurred to myself, that, someone else having taken his hat, he had seized upon one at random so as not to go home bareheaded, and that I had placed him in a difficulty by exposing his stratagem. So I did not pursue the matter. I told him that I must say a few words to Saint-Loup. "He's talking to that idiotic Duc de Guermentes," I added. "That's a charming thing to say: I shall tell my brother." "Oh! you think that would interest M. de Charlus?" (I imagined that, if he had a brother, that brother must be called Charlus too. Saint-Loup had indeed explained his family tree to me at Balbec, but I had forgotten the details.) "Who's talking about M. de Charlus?" said the Baron in an insolent tone. "Go to Robert. I know that you took part this morning in one of those lunch-time orgies that he has with a woman who is disgracing him. You would do well to use your influence with him to make him realise the pain he is causing his poor mother and all of us by dragging our name in the dirt."

I should have liked to reply that at this degrading luncheon the conversation had been entirely about Emerson, Ibsen and Tolstoy, and that the young woman had lectured Robert to make him drink nothing but water. In the hope of bringing some balm to Robert, whose pride I thought had been wounded, I sought to excuse his mistress. I did not know that at that moment, in spite of his anger with her, it was on himself that he was heaping reproaches. But it always happens, in quarrels between a good man and a worthless woman and when the right is all on one side, that some trifle crops up which enables the woman to appear not to have been in the wrong on one point. And since she ignores all the other points, if the man feels the need of her, if he is upset by the separation, his weakness will make him exaggeratedly scrupulous, he will remember the absurd reproaches that have been flung at him and will ask himself whether they have not some foundation in fact.



"I've come to the conclusion that I was wrong about that necklace," Robert said to me. "Of course, I didn't do it with any ill intent, but I know very well that other people don't look at things in the same way as oneself. She had a very hard time when she was young. In her eyes I'm bound to appear the rich man who thinks he can get anything he wants with his money and against whom a poor person can't compete, whether in trying to influence Boucheron or in a lawsuit. Of course she has been horribly cruel to me, when I've never thought of anything but her good. But I do see clearly that she thinks I wanted to make her feel that one could keep a hold on her with money, and that's not true. And she's so fond of me—what must she be thinking? Poor darling, if you only knew how sweet and thoughtful she is, I simply can't tell you what adorable things she's often done for me. How wretched she must be feeling now! In any case, whatever happens I don't want to let her think me a cad; I shall dash off to Boucheron's and get the necklace. Who knows? Perhaps when she sees what I've done she'll admit that she's been partly in the wrong. You see, it's the idea that she's suffering at this moment that I can't bear. What one suffers oneself one knows—it's nothing. But to tell oneself that *she's* suffering and not to be able to form any idea of what she feels—I think I should go mad, I'd rather not see her ever again than let her suffer. All I ask is that she should be happy without me if need be. You know, for me everything that concerns her is enormously important, it becomes something cosmic; I shall run to the jeweller's and then go and ask her to forgive me. Until I get down there, what will she be thinking of me? If she could only know that I was on my way! Why don't you come to her house on the off chance; perhaps everything will be all right. Perhaps," he went on with a smile, as though hardly daring to believe in so idyllic a possibility, "we can all three dine together in the country. But one can't tell yet. I'm so bad at handling her; poor sweet, I may perhaps hurt her feelings again. Besides, her decision may be irrevocable."

Robert swept me back to his mother.

"Good-bye," he said to her. "I've got to go now. I don't know when I shall get leave again. Probably not for a month. I shall write to you as soon as I know."

Certainly Robert was not in the least the sort of son who, when he goes out with his mother, feels that an attitude of exasperation towards her ought to counterbalance the smiles and greetings which he bestows on strangers. Nothing is more prevalent than this odious form of vengeance on the part of those who appear to believe that rudeness to one's own family is the natural complement to ceremonial behaviour. Whatever the wretched mother may say, her son, as though he had been brought along against his will and wished to make her pay dearly for his presence, immediately refutes the timidly ventured assertion with a sarcastic, precise, cruel contradiction; the mother at once conforms, though without thereby disarming him, to the opinion of this superior being whose delightful nature she will continue to vaunt to all and sundry in his absence, but who, for all that, spares her none of his most wounding remarks. Saint-Loup was not at all like this; but the anguish which Rachel's absence provoked in him caused him for different reasons to be no less harsh with his mother than those other sons are with theirs. And as she listened to him I saw the same throb, like the beating of a wing, which Mme de Marsantes had been unable to repress when her son first entered the room, convulse her whole body once again; but this time it was an anxious face and weebegone eyes that she fastened on him.

"What, Robert, you're going off? Seriously? My little son—the one day I had a chance to see something of you!"

And then quite softly, in the most natural tone, in a voice from which she strove to banish all sadness so as not to inspire her son with a pity which would perhaps have been painful to him, or else useless and simply calculated to irritate him, as a simple common-sense assertion she added: "You know it's not at all nice of you."

But to this simplicity she added so much timidity, to show him that she was not trespassing on his freedom, so much affection, so that he should not reproach her for interfering with his pleasures, that Saint-Loup could not help but observe in himself as it were the possibility of a similar wave of affection, in other words an obstacle to his spending the evening with his mistress. And so he reacted angrily: "It's unfortunate, but, nice or not, that's how it is."

And he heaped on his mother the reproaches which no doubt he felt that he himself perhaps deserved; thus it is that egoists have always the last word; having posited at the start that their resolution is unshakeable, the more susceptible the feeling to which one appeals in them to make them abandon their resolution, the more reprehensible they find, not themselves who resist that appeal, but those who put them under the necessity of resisting it, so that their own harshness may be carried to the utmost degree of cruelty without having any effect in their eyes but to aggravate the culpability of the person who is so indelicate as to be hurt, to be in the right, and to cause them thus treacherously the pain of acting against their natural instinct of pity. But of her own accord Mme de Marsantes ceased to pursue the matter, for she sensed that she would be unable to dissuade him.

"Well, I'm off," he said to me, "but you're not to keep him long, Mamma, because he's got to go and pay a call elsewhere quite soon."

I was fully aware that my company could not afford any pleasure to Mme de Marsantes, but I was glad not to give her the impression by leaving with Robert that I was involved in these pleasures which deprived her of him. I should have liked to find some excuse for her son's conduct, less from affection for him than from pity for her. But it was she who spoke first:

"Poor boy," she began, "I'm sure I must have hurt him dreadfully. You see, Monsieur, mothers are such selfish creatures. After all, he hasn't many pleasures, he comes so seldom to Paris. Oh, dear, if he hadn't gone already I should have liked to stop him, not to keep him of course, but just to tell him that I'm not vexed with him, that I think he was quite right. Will you excuse me if I go and look over the staircase?"

I accompanied her there.

"Robert! Robert!" she called. "No, he's gone. It's too late."

At that moment I would as gladly have undertaken a mission to make Robert break with his mistress as, a few hours earlier, to make him go and live with her altogether. In the one case Saint-Loup would have regarded me as a false friend, in the other his family would have called me his evil genius. Yet I was the same man at an interval of a few hours.

We returned to the drawing-room. Seeing that Saint-Loup was not with us, Mme de Villeparisis exchanged with M. de Norpois one of those sceptical, mocking and not too compassionate glances with which people point out to one another an over-jealous wife or an over-fond mother (traditional laughing-stocks), as much as to say: "Well, well, there's been trouble."

Robert went to his mistress, taking with him the splendid ornament which, after what had passed between them, he ought not to have given her. But it came to the same thing, for she would not look at it, and even subsequently he could never persuade her to accept it. Certain of Robert's friends thought that these proofs of disinterestedness were deliberately calculated to bind him to her. And yet she was not greedy for money, except perhaps in order to be able to spend it freely. I often saw her lavish on people whom she believed to be in need the most extravagant largesse. "At this moment," Robert's friends would say to him, seeking to invalidate by their malicious words a disinterested action on Rachel's part, "at this moment she'll be in the promenade at the Folies-Bergère. She's an enigma, that Rachel, a regular sphinx." In any case, how many mercenary women, women who are kept by men, does one not see setting countless little limits to the generosity of their lovers out of a delicacy that flowers in the midst of that sordid existence!

Robert was ignorant of almost all the infidelities of his mistress, and tormented himself over what were mere nothings compared with the real life of Rachel, a life which began every day only after he had left her. He was ignorant of almost all these infidelities. One could have told him of them without shaking his confidence in Rachel. For it is a charming law of nature, which manifests itself in the heart of the most complex social organisms, that we live in perfect ignorance of those we love. On the one hand the lover says to himself: "She is an angel, she will never give herself to me, I may as well die—and yet she loves me; she loves me so much that perhaps ... but no, it can never possibly happen." And in the exaltation of his desire, in the anguish of his expectation, what jewels he flings at the feet of this woman, how he runs to borrow money to save her from financial worries! Meanwhile, on the other side of the glass screen, through which these conversations will no more carry than those which visitors exchange in front of an aquarium in a zoo, the public are saying: "You don't know her? You can count yourself lucky—she has robbed, in fact ruined, I don't know how many men, as girls go there's nothing worse. She's a swindler pure and simple. And crafty!" And perhaps this last epithet is not absolutely wrong, for even the sceptical man who is not really in love with the woman, who merely gets pleasure from her, says to his friends: "No, no, my dear fellow, she's not at all a whore. I don't say she hasn't had an adventure or two in her time, but she's not a woman one pays, she'd be a damned sight too expensive if she was. With her it's fifty thousand francs or nothing." The fact of the matter is that he himself has spent fifty thousand francs for the privilege of having her once, but she (finding a willing accomplice in the man himself, in the person of his self-esteem) has managed to persuade him that he is one of those who have had her for nothing. Such is society, where every being is double, and where the most thoroughly exposed, the most notorious, will be known to a certain other only as protected by a shell, by a sweet cocoon, as a charming natural curiosity. There were in Paris two thoroughly decent men whom Saint-Loup no longer greeted when he saw them and to whom he could not refer without a tremor in his voice, calling them exploiters of women: this was because they had both been ruined by Rachel.

"There's only one thing I blame myself for," Mme de Marsantes murmured in my ear, "and that is for telling him that he wasn't nice. Such an adorable, unique son, like no one else in the world—to have told him, the only time I see him, that he wasn't nice to me! I'd sooner have been given a beating, because I'm sure that whatever pleasure he may be having this evening, and he hasn't many, will be spoiled for him by that unfair word. But I mustn't keep you, Monsieur, since you're in a hurry."

Mme de Marsantes bade me good-bye anxiously. Those feelings concerned Robert, and she was sincere. But she ceased to be so on becoming a grand lady again: "I have been so *interested*, so *happy*, so *charmed* to have this little talk with you. Thank you! Thank you!"

And with a humble air she fastened on me a look of ecstatic gratitude, as though my conversation had been one of the keenest pleasures she had experienced in her life. This charming expression went very well with the black flowers on her white patterned skirt; they were those of a great lady who knew her business.

"I can't leave at once. I must wait for M. de Charlus. I'm going with him."

Mme de Villeparisis overheard these last words. They appeared to vex her. Had the matter not been one which couldn't involve a sentiment of that nature, it would have struck me that what seemed to be alarmed at that moment in Mme de Villeparisis was her sense of decency. But this hypothesis never even entered my mind. I was delighted with Mme de Guermantes, with Saint-Loup, with Mme de Marsantes, with M. de Charlus, with Mme de Villeparisis; I did not stop to reflect, and I spoke light-heartedly, and at random.

"You're leaving here with my nephew Palamède?" she asked me.

Thinking that it might produce a highly favourable impression on Mme de Villeparisis if she learned that I was on intimate terms with a nephew whom she esteemed so greatly, "He has asked me to walk home with him," I answered blithely. "I'm delighted. As a matter of fact, we're better friends than you think, and I've quite made up my mind that we're going to be better friends still."

From being vexed, Mme de Villeparisis seemed to have become worried. "Don't wait for him," she said to me with a preoccupied air. "He is talking to M. de Faffenheim. He's already forgotten what he said to you. You'd much better go now quickly while his back is turned."

I was not myself in any hurry to join Robert and his mistress. But Mme de Villeparisis seemed so anxious for me to go that, thinking perhaps that she had some important business to discuss with her nephew, I bade her good-bye. Next to her M. de Guermantes, superb and Olympian, was ponderously seated. One felt that the notion, omnipresent in all his limbs, of his vast riches, as though they had been smelted in a crucible into a single human ingot, gave an extraordinary density to this man who was worth so much. When I said good-bye to him he rose politely from his seat, and I sensed the inert and compact mass of thirty millions which his old-fashioned French breeding activated and raised up until it stood before me. I seemed to be looking at that statue of Olympian Zeus which Phidias is said to have cast in solid gold. Such was the power that a Jesuit education had over M. de Guermantes, over the body of M. de Guermantes at least, for it did not reign with equal mastery over the ducal mind. M. de Guermantes laughed at his own jokes, but did not even smile at other people's.

On my way downstairs I heard a voice calling out to me from behind: "So this is how you wait for me, is it?" It was M. de Charlus.

"You don't mind if we go a little way on foot?" he asked dryly, when we were in the courtyard. "We'll walk until I find a cab that suits me."

"You wished to speak to me, Monsieur?"

"Ah, yes, as a matter of fact there were some things I wanted to say to you, but I'm not so sure now whether I shall. As far as you are concerned, I am sure that they could be the starting-point for inestimable benefits. But I can see also that they would bring into my existence, at an age when one begins to value tranquillity, a great deal of time-wasting, all sorts of inconvenience. I ask myself whether you are worth all the pains that I should have to take with you, and I have not the pleasure of knowing you well enough to be able to say. I found you very unsatisfactory at Balbec, even when allowances are made for the stupidity inseparable from the image of the 'bather' and the wearing of the objects called *espadrilles*. Perhaps in any case you are not sufficiently desirous of what I could do for you to make it worth my while, for I must repeat to you quite frankly, Monsieur, that for me it can mean nothing but trouble."

I protested that, in that case, he must not dream of it. This summary end to negotiations did not seem to be to his liking.

"That sort of politeness means nothing," he rebuked me coldly. "There is nothing so agreeable as to put oneself out for a person who is worth one's while. For the best of us, the study of the arts, a taste for old things, collections, gardens, are all mere ersatz, surrogates, alibis. From the depths of our tub, like Diogenes, we cry out for a man. We cultivate begonias, we trim yews, as a last resort, because yews and begonias submit to treatment. But we should prefer to give our time to a plant of human growth, if we were sure that he was worth the trouble. That is the whole question. You must know yourself a little. Are you worth my trouble or not?"

"I would not for anything in the world, Monsieur, be a cause of anxiety to you," I said to him, "but so far as I am concerned you may be sure that everything that comes to me from you will give me very great pleasure. I am deeply touched that you should be so kind as to take an interest in me in this way and try to help me."

Greatly to my surprise, it was almost with effusion that he thanked me for these words. Slipping his arm through mine with that intermittent familiarity which had already struck me at Balbec, and was in such contrast to the harshness of his tone, he went on:

"With the want of consideration common at your age, you are liable to say things at times which would open an unbridgeable gulf between us. What you have said just now, on the other hand, is exactly the sort of thing that is capable of touching me, and of inducing me to do a great deal for you."

As he walked arm in arm with me and uttered these words, which, though tinged with disdain, were so affectionate, M. de Charlus now fastened his gaze on me with that intense fixity, that piercing hardness which had struck me the first morning, when I saw him outside the casino at Balbec, and indeed many years before that, through the pink hawthorns, standing beside Mme Swann, whom I supposed then to be his mistress, in the park at Tansonville, now let it stray around him and examine the cabs which at this time of day were passing in considerable numbers, staring so insistently at them that several stopped, the drivers supposing that he wished to engage them. But M. de Charlus immediately dismissed them.

"None of them is suitable," he explained to me, "it's all a question of their lamps, and the direction they're going home in. I hope, Monsieur," he went on, "that you will not in any way misinterpret the purely disinterested and charitable nature of the proposal which I am going to make to you."

I was struck by the way, even more than at Balbec, his diction resembled Swann's.

"You are intelligent enough, I dare say, not to imagine that it is inspired by 'lack of connexions,' by fear of solitude and boredom. I need not speak to you of my family, for I assume that a youth of your age belonging to the lower middle class" (he accentuated the phrase in a tone of self-satisfaction) "must know the history of France. It is the people of my world who read nothing and are as ignorant as lackeys. In the old days the King's valets were recruited among the nobility; now the nobility are scarcely better than valets. But young bourgeois like you do read, and you must certainly know Michelet's fine passage about my family: 'I see them as being very great, these powerful Guermantes. And what is the poor little King of France beside them, shut up in his palace in Paris?' As for what I am personally, that, Monsieur, is a subject which I do not much care to talk about, but you may possibly have heard—it was alluded to in a leading article in *The Times*, which made a considerable impression—that the Emperor of Austria, who has always honoured me with his friendship, and is good enough to maintain cousinly relations with me, declared the other day in an interview which was made public that if the Comte de Chambord had had at his side a man as thoroughly conversant with the undercurrents of European politics as myself he would be King of France today. I have often thought, Monsieur, that there was in me, thanks not to my own humble gifts but to circumstances which you may one day have occasion to learn, a wealth of experience, a sort of secret dossier of inestimable value, of which I have not felt myself at liberty to make use for my own personal ends, which would be a priceless acquisition to a young man to whom I would hand over in a few months what it has taken me more than thirty years to acquire, and which I am perhaps alone in possessing. I do not speak of the intellectual enjoyment which you would find in learning certain secrets which a Michelet of our day would give years of his life to know, and in the light of which certain events would assume an entirely different aspect. And I do not speak only of events that have already occurred, but of the chain of circumstances." (This was a favourite expression of M. de Charlus's, and often, when he used it, he joined his hands as if in prayer, but with his fingers stiffened, as

though by this complexus to illustrate the said circumstances, which he did not specify, and the links between them.) "I could give you an explanation that no one has dreamed of, not only of the past but of the future."

M. de Charlus broke off to question me about Bloch, whom he had heard discussed, though without appearing to be listening, in his aunt's drawing-room. And in that tone which he was so skilful at detaching from what he was saying that he seemed to be thinking of something else altogether, and to be speaking mechanically, simply out of politeness, he asked if my friend was young, good-looking and so forth. Bloch, if he had heard him, would have been more puzzled even than with M. de Norpois, but for very different reasons, to know whether M. de Charlus was for or against Dreyfus. "It is not a bad idea, if you wish to learn about life," went on M. de Charlus when he had finished questioning me about Bloch, "to have a few foreigners among your friends." I replied that Bloch was French. "Indeed," said M. de Charlus, "I took him to be a Jew." His assertion of this incompatibility made me suppose that M. de Charlus was more anti-Dreyfusard than anyone I had met. He protested, however, against the charge of treason levelled against Dreyfus. But his protest took this form: "I believe the newspapers say that Dreyfus has committed a crime against his country—so I understand; I pay no attention to the newspapers; I read them as I wash my hands, without considering it worth my while to take an interest in what I am doing. In any case, the crime is non-existent. This compatriot of your friend would have committed a crime if he had betrayed Judaea, but what has he to do with France?" I pointed out that if there should be a war the Jews would be mobilised just as much as anyone else. "Perhaps so, and I am not sure that it would not be an imprudence. If we bring over Senegalese or Malagasies, I hardly suppose that their hearts will be in the task of defending France, and that is only natural. Your Dreyfus might rather be convicted of a breach of the laws of hospitality. But enough of that. Perhaps you could ask your friend to allow me to attend some great festival in the Temple, a circumcision, or some Hebrew chants. He might perhaps hire a hall and give me some biblical entertainment, as the young ladies of Saint-Cyr performed scenes taken from the Psalms by Racine, to amuse Louis XIV. You might perhaps arrange that, and even some comic exhibitions. For instance a contest between your friend and his father, in which he would smite him as David smote Goliath. That would make quite an amusing farce. He might even, while he was about it, give his hag (or, as my old nurse would say, his 'haggart') of a mother a good thrashing. That would be an excellent show, and would not be unpleasing to us, eh, my young friend, since we like exotic spectacles, and to thrash that non-European creature would be giving a well-earned punishment to an old cow."

As he poured out these terrible, almost insane words, M. de Charlus squeezed my arm until it hurt. It reminded myself of all that his family had told me of his wonderful kindness to this old nurse, whose Molièresque vocabulary he had just recalled, and thought to myself that the connexions, hitherto, I felt, little studied, between goodness and wickedness in the same heart, various as they might be, would be an interesting subject for research.

I warned him that in any case Mme Bloch no longer existed, while as for M. Bloch, I questioned to what extent he would enjoy a sport which might easily result in his being blinded. M. de Charlus seemed annoyed. "That," he said, "is a woman who made a great mistake in dying. As for blinding him, surely the Synagogue is blind, since it does not perceive the truth of the Gospel. Besides, just think, at this moment when all those unhappy Jews are trembling before the stupid fury of the Christians, what an honour it would be for him to see a man like myself condescend to be amused by their sports."

At this point I caught sight of M. Bloch senior coming towards us, probably on his way to meet his son. He did not see us, but I offered to introduce him to M. de Charlus. I had no idea of the torrent of rage which my words were to let loose. "Introduce him to me! But you must have singularly little idea of social values! People do not get to know me as easily as that. In the present instance, the impropriety would be twofold, on account of the youth of the introducer and the unworthiness of the person introduced. At the most, if I am ever permitted to enjoy the Asiatic spectacle which I outlined to you, I might address to the frightful fellow a few affable words. But on condition that he should have allowed himself to be thoroughly thrashed by his son. I might go so far as to express my satisfaction."

In any event M. Bloch paid no attention to us. He was in the process of greeting Mme Sazerat with a sweeping bow, which was very favourably received. I was surprised at this, for in the old days at Combray she was so anti-semitic that she had been highly indignant with my parents for having young Bloch in the house. But Dreyfusism, like a strong gust of wind, had, a few days before this, borne M. Bloch to her feet. My friend's father had found Mme Sazerat charming and was particularly gratified by that lady's anti-semitism which he regarded as a proof of the sincerity of her faith and the soundness of her Dreyfusard opinions, and which also enhanced the value of the call which she had authorised him to pay her. He had not even been offended when she had said to him without thinking: "M. Drumont has the impudence to put the Reconsiderationists in the same bag as the Protestants and the Jews. A charming promiscuity!" "Bernard," he had said proudly to M. Nissim Bernard on returning home, "she has the prejudice, you know!" But M. Nissim Bernard had said nothing, raising his eyes to heaven in an angelic gaze. Saddened by the misfortunes of the Jews, remembering his old Christian friendships, grown mannered and precious with increasing years for reasons which the reader will learn in due course, he had now the air of a pre-Raphaelite grub on to which hair had been incongruously grafted, like threads in the heart of an opal.

"All this Dreyfus business," went on the Baron, still clasping me by the arm, "has only one drawback. It destroys society (I don't mean polite society; society has long ceased to deserve that laudatory epithet) by the influx of Mr and Mrs Cow and Cowshed and Cow-pat, whom I find even in the houses of my own cousins, because they belong to the Patriotic League, the Anti-Jewish League, or some such league, as if a political opinion entitled one to a social qualification."

This frivolity in M. de Charlus brought out his family likeness to the Duchesse de Guermantes. I remarked on the resemblance. As he appeared to think that I did not know her, I reminded him of the evening at the Opéra when he had seemed to be trying to avoid me. He assured me so forcefully that he had never seen me there that I should have ended by believing him if presently a trifling incident had not led me to think that M. de Charlus, in his excessive pride perhaps, did not care to be seen with me.

"Let us return to yourself," he said, "and my plans for you. There exists among certain men a freemasonry of which I cannot now say more than that it numbers in its ranks four of the reigning sovereigns of Europe. Now, the entourage of one of these, who is the Emperor of Germany, is trying to cure him of his fancy. That is a very serious matter, and may lead us to war. Yes, my dear sir, that is a fact. You remember the story of the man who believed that he had the Princess of China shut up in a bottle. It was a form of insanity. He was cured of it. But as soon as he ceased to be mad he became merely stupid. There are maladies which we must not seek to cure because they alone protect us from others that are more serious. A cousin of mine had a stomach ailment: he could digest nothing. The most learned stomach specialists treated him, to no avail. I took him to a certain doctor (another highly interesting man, by the way, of whom I could tell you a great deal). He guessed at once that the malady was nervous, persuaded his patient of this, advised him to eat whatever he liked unhesitatingly, and assured him that his digestion would stand it. But my cousin also had nephritis. What the stomach digested perfectly well the kidneys ceased after a time to be able to eliminate, and my cousin, instead of living to a fine old age with an imaginary disease of the stomach which obliged him to keep to a diet, died at forty with his stomach cured but his kidneys ruined. Given a very considerable lead over your contemporaries, who knows whether you may not perhaps become what some eminent man of the past might have been if a beneficent spirit had revealed to him, among a generation that knew nothing of them, the secrets of steam and electricity. Do not be foolish, do not refuse for reasons of tact and discretion. Try to understand that, if I do you a great service, I do not expect my reward from you to be any less great. It is many years now since people in society ceased to interest me. I have but one passion left, to seek to redeem the mistakes of my life by conferring the benefit of my knowledge on a soul that is still virgin and capable of being fired by virtue. I have had great sorrows, of which I may tell you perhaps some day; I have lost my wife, who was the loveliest, the noblest, the most perfect creature that one could dream of. I have young relatives who are not—I do not say worthy, but capable of accepting the intellectual heritage of which I have been speaking. Who knows but that you may be the person into whose hands it is to pass, the person whose life I shall be able to guide and to raise to so lofty a plane. My own would gain in return. Perhaps in teaching you the great secrets of diplomacy I might recover a taste for them myself, and begin at last to do things of real interest in which you would have an equal share. But before I can discover this I must see you often, very often, every day."

I was thinking of taking advantage of these unexpectedly ardent predispositions on M. de Charlus's part to ask him whether he could not arrange for me to meet his sister-in-law when suddenly I felt my arm violently jerked as though by an electric shock. It was M. de Charlus who had hurriedly withdrawn his arm from mine. Although as he talked he had allowed his eyes to wander in all directions, he had only just caught sight of M. d'Argencourt emerging from a side street. On seeing us, the Belgian Minister appeared annoyed and gave me a look of distrust, almost that look intended for a creature of another race with which Mme de Guermantes had scrutinised Bloch, and tried to avoid us. But it was as though M. de Charlus was determined to show him that he was not at all anxious not to be seen by him, for he called after him to tell him something of extreme insignificance. And fearing perhaps that M. d'Argencourt had not recognised me, M. de Charlus informed him that I was a great friend of Mme de Villeparisis, of the Duchesse de Guermantes, of Robert de Saint-Loup, and that he himself, Charlus, was an old friend of my grandmother, glad to be able to show her grandson a little of the affection that he felt for her. Nevertheless I observed that M. d'Argencourt, although I had barely been introduced to him at Mme de Villeparisis's and M. de Charlus had now spoken to him at great length about my family, was distinctly colder to me than he had been an hour ago, and thereafter, for a long time, he showed the same aloofness whenever we met. He examined me now with a curiosity in which there was no sign of friendliness, and seemed even to have to overcome an instinctive repulsion when, on leaving us, after a moment's hesitation, he held out a hand to me which he at once withdrew.

"I'm sorry about that," said M. de Charlus. "That fellow Argencourt, well born but ill bred, a worse than second-rate diplomat, an execrable husband and a womaniser, as double-faced as a villain in a play, is one of those men who are incapable of understanding but perfectly capable of destroying the things in life that are really great. I hope that our friendship will be one of them, if it is ever to be formed, and that you will do me the honour of keeping it—as I shall—well clear of the heels of any of those donkeys who, from idleness or clumsiness or sheer malice, trample on what seemed destined to endure. Unfortunately, that is the mould in which most society people have been cast."

"The Duchesse de Guermantes seems to be very intelligent. We were talking this afternoon about the possibility of war. It appears that she is especially knowledgeable on that subject."

"She is nothing of the sort," replied M. de Charlus tartly. "Women, and most men for that matter, understand nothing about what I wished to speak to you of. My sister-in-law is an agreeable woman who imagines that we are still living in the days of Balzac's novels, when women had an influence on politics. Association with her could at present only have a most unfortunate effect on you, as for that matter all social intercourse. That was one of the very things I was about to tell you when that fool interrupted me. The first sacrifice that you must make for me—I shall claim them from you in proportion to the gifts I bestow on you—is to give up going into society. It distressed me this afternoon to see you at that idiotic gathering. You will tell me that I was there

myself, but for me it was not a social gathering, it was simply a family visit. Later on, when you are a man of established position, if it amuses you to stoop for a moment to that sort of thing, it may perhaps do no harm. And then I need not point out how invaluable I can be to you. The 'Open Sesame' to the Guermantes house, and any others that it is worth while throwing open the doors of to you, rests with me. I shall be the judge, and intend to remain in control of the situation. At present you are a catechumen. There was something scandalous about your presence up there. You must at all costs avoid impropriety."

Since M. de Charlus had mentioned this visit to Mme de Villeparisis's, I wanted to ask him his exact relationship to the Marquise, the latter's birth, and so on, but the question took another form on my lips than I had intended, and I asked him instead what the Villeparisis family was.

"Dear me, it's not an easy question to answer," M. de Charlus replied in a voice that seemed to skate over the words. "It's as if you had asked me to tell you what nothing was. My aunt, who is capable of anything, took it into her whimsical head to plunge the greatest name in France into oblivion by marrying for the second time a little M. Thirion. This Thirion thought that he could assume an extinct aristocratic name with impunity, as people do in novels. History doesn't relate whether he was tempted by La Tour d'Auvergne, whether he hesitated between Toulouse and Montmorency. At all events he made a different choice and became Monsieur de Villeparisis. Since there have been no Villeparisis since 1702, I thought that he simply meant to indicate modestly that he was a gentleman from Villeparisis, a little place near Paris, that he had a solicitor's practice or a barber's shop at Villeparisis. But my aunt didn't see things that way—as a matter of fact she's reaching the age when she can scarcely see at all. She tried to make out that such a marquise existed in the family; she wrote to us all and wanted to put things on a proper footing, I don't know why. When one takes a name to which one has no right, it's best not to make too much fuss, like our excellent friend the so-called Comtesse de M. who, against the advice of Mme Alphonse Rothschild, refused to swell the coffers of the State for a title which would not have been made more authentic thereby. The joke is that ever since then my aunt has claimed a monopoly of all the paintings connected with the real Villeparisis family, to whom the late Thirion was in no way related. My aunt's country house has become a sort of repository for their portraits, genuine or not, under the rising flood of which several Guermantes and several Condés who are by no means small beer have had to disappear. The picture dealers manufacture new ones for her every year. And she even has in her dining-room in the country a portrait of Saint-Simon because of his niece's first marriage to a M. de Villeparisis, as if the author of the *Memoirs* hadn't perhaps other claims to the interest of visitors than not to have been the great-grandfather of M. Thirion."

Mme de Villeparisis being merely Mme Thirion completed the decline and fall in my estimation of her which had begun when I had seen the mixed composition of her salon. It seemed to me to be unfair that a woman whose title and name were of quite recent origin should be able thus to delude her contemporaries and might similarly delude posterity by virtue of her friendships with royal personages. Now that she had become once again what I had supposed her to be in my childhood, a person who had nothing aristocratic about her, these distinguished kinsfolk by whom she was surrounded struck me as somehow extraneous to her. She did not cease to be charming to us all. I went occasionally to see her and she sent me little presents from time to time. But I had never any impression that she belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and if I had wanted any information about it she was one of the last people to whom I should have applied.

"At present," M. de Charlus went on, "by going into society you will only damage your position, warp your intellect and character. Moreover, you must be particularly careful in choosing your friends. Keep mistresses if your family have no objection—that doesn't concern me, and indeed I can only encourage it, you young rascal—a young rascal who will soon have to start shaving," he added, touching my chin. "But your choice of men friends is more important. Eight out of ten young men are little bounders, little wretches capable of doing you an injury which you will never be able to repair. My nephew Saint-Loup, now, he might be a suitable companion for you at a pinch. As far as your future is concerned, he can be of no possible use to you, but for that I will suffice. And really, when all's said and done, as a person to go about with, at times when you have had enough of me, he does not seem to present any serious drawback that I know of. At least he's a man, not one of those effeminate creatures one sees so many of nowadays, who look like little rent boys and at any moment may bring their innocent victims to the gallows." (I did not know the meaning of this slang expression, "rent boy"; anyone who had known it would have been as greatly surprised by his use of it as myself. Society people always like talking slang, and people who may be suspected of certain things like to show that they are not afraid to mention them. A proof of innocence in their eyes. But they have lost their sense of proportion, they are no longer capable of realising the point beyond which a certain pleasantry will become too technical, too flagrant, will be a proof rather of corruption than of ingenuousness.) "He's not like the rest of them: he's very nice, very serious."

I could not help smiling at this epithet "serious," to which the intonation that M. de Charlus gave it seemed to impart the sense of "virtuous," of "steady," as one says of a little shop-girl that she is "serious." At that moment a cab passed, zigzagging along the street. A young cabman, who had deserted his box, was driving it from inside, where he lay sprawling on the cushions, apparently half-tipsy. M. de Charlus instantly stopped him. The driver began to parley:

"Which way are you going?"

"Yours." (This surprised me, for M. de Charlus had already refused several cabs with similarly coloured lamps.)

"Well, I don't want to get up on the box. D'you mind if I stay inside?"

"No, but lower the hood. Well, think over my proposal," said M. de Charlus, preparing to leave me, "I give you a few days to consider it. Write to me. I repeat, I shall need to see you every day, and to receive from you guarantees of loyalty and discretion which, I must admit, you do seem to offer. But in the course of my life I have been so often deceived by appearances that I never wish to trust them again. Damn it, it's the least I can expect that before giving up a treasure I should know into what hands it is going to pass. Anyway, bear in mind what I'm offering you. You are like Hercules (though, unfortunately for yourself, you do not appear to me to have quite his muscular development) at the parting of the ways. Remember that you may regret for the rest of your life not having chosen the way that leads to virtue. Hallo," he turned to the cabman, "haven't you put the hood down? I'll do it myself. I think, too, I'd better drive, seeing the state you appear to be in."

He jumped in beside the cabman, and the cab set off at a brisk trot.

As for myself, no sooner had I turned in at our gate than I came across the pendant to the conversation which I had heard that afternoon between Bloch and M. de Norpois, but in another form, brief, inverted and cruel. This was a dispute between our butler, who was a Dreyfusard, and the Guermantes', who was an anti-Dreyfusard. The truths and counter-truths which contended on high among the intellectuals of the rival Leagues, the Patrie Française and the Droits de l'Homme, were fast spreading downwards into the subsoil of popular opinion. M. Reinach manipulated through their feelings people whom he had never seen, whereas for him the Dreyfus case simply presented itself to his reason as an irrefutable theorem which he "demonstrated" in the sequel by the most astonishing victory for rational politics (a victory against France, according to some) that the world has ever seen. In two years he replaced a Billot ministry by a Clemenceau ministry, revolutionised public opinion from top to bottom, took Picquart from his prison to install him, ungrateful, in the Ministry of War. Perhaps this rationalist crowd-manipulator was himself manipulated by his ancestry. When we find that the systems of philosophy which contain the most truths were dictated to their authors, in the last analysis, by reasons of sentiment, how are we to suppose that in a simple affair of politics like the Dreyfus case reasons of that sort may not, unbeknown to the reasoner, have ruled his reason? Bloch believed himself to have been led by a logical chain of reasoning to choose Dreyfusism, yet he knew that his nose, his skin and his hair had been imposed on him by his race. Doubtless the reason enjoys more freedom; yet it obeys certain laws which it has not prescribed for itself. The case of the Guermantes' butler and our own was peculiar. The waves of the two currents of Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism which now divided France from top to bottom were, on the whole, silent, but the occasional echoes which they emitted were sincere. When you heard anyone in the middle of a talk which was being deliberately kept off the Affair announce furtively some piece of political news, generally false but always devoutly to be wished, you could induce from the nature of his predictions where his heart lay. Thus there came into conflict on certain points, on one side a timid apostolate, on the other a righteous indignation. The two butlers whom I heard arguing as I came in furnished an exception to the rule. Ours insinuated that Dreyfus was guilty, the Guermantes' that he was innocent. This was done not to conceal their personal convictions, but from cunning and competitive ruthlessness. Our butler, being uncertain whether the retrial would be ordered, wanted in case of failure to deprive the Duke's butler in advance of the joy of seeing a just cause vanquished. The Duke's butler thought that, in the event of a refusal to grant a retrial, ours would be more indignant at the detention of an innocent man on Devil's Island. The concierge looked on. I had the impression that it was not he who was the cause of dissension in the Guermantes household.

I went upstairs, and found my grandmother not at all well. For some time past, without knowing exactly what was wrong, she had been complaining of her health. It is in sickness that we are compelled to recognise that we do not live alone but are chained to a being from a different realm, from whom we are worlds apart, who has no knowledge of us and by whom it is impossible to make ourselves understood: our body. Were we to meet a brigand on the road, we might perhaps succeed in making him sensible of his own personal interest if not of our plight. But to ask pity of our body is like discoursing in front of an octopus, for which our words can have no more meaning than the sound of the tides, and with which we should be appalled to find ourselves condemned to live. My grandmother's ailments often passed unnoticed by her attention, which was always directed towards us. When they gave her too much pain, in the hope of curing them she tried in vain to understand them. If the morbid phenomena of which her body was the theatre remained obscure and beyond the reach of her mind, they were clear and intelligible to certain beings belonging to the same natural kingdom as themselves, beings to whom the human mind has learned gradually to have recourse in order to understand what its body is saying to it, as when a foreigner addresses us we try to find someone of his country who will act as interpreter. These can talk to our body, can tell us if its anger is serious or will soon be appeased. Cottard, who had been called in to examine my grandmother—and who had infuriated us by asking with a subtle smile, the moment we told him she was ill: "Ill? You're sure it's not what they call a diplomatic illness?"—tried to soothe his patient's restlessness by a milk diet. But incessant bowls of milk soup gave her no relief, because my grandmother sprinkled them liberally with salt, the injurious effects of which were then unknown (Widal not yet having made his discoveries). For, medicine being a compendium of the successive and contradictory mistakes of medical practitioners, when we summon the wisest of them to our aid the chances are that we may be relying on a scientific truth the error of which will be recognised in a few years' time. So that to believe in medicine would be the height of folly, if not to believe in it were not a greater folly still, for from this mass of errors a few truths have in the long run emerged. Cottard had told us to take her temperature. A thermometer was fetched. Almost throughout its entire length the tube was empty of mercury. One could scarcely make out, nestling at the bottom of its trough, the silver salamander. It seemed dead. The little glass pipe was slipped into my grandmother's mouth. We had no need to leave it there for



long; the little sorceress had not been slow in casting her horoscope. We found her motionless, perched half-way up her tower and declining to move, showing us with precision the figure that we had asked of her, a figure with which all the most careful thought that my grandmother's mind might have devoted to herself would have been incapable of furnishing her: 101°. For the first time we felt some anxiety. We shook the thermometer well, to erase the ominous sign, as though we were able thus to reduce the patient's fever simultaneously with the temperature indicated. Alas, it was only too clear that the little sibyl, bereft of reason though she was, had not pronounced judgment arbitrarily, for the next day, scarcely had the thermometer been inserted between my grandmother's lips when almost at once, as though with a single bound, exulting in her certainty and in her intuition of a fact that to us was imperceptible, the little prophetess had come to a halt at the same point, in an implacable immobility, and pointed once again to that figure 101 with the tip of her gleaming wand. She said nothing else; in vain had we longed, wished, prayed, she was deaf to our entreaties; it seemed as though this were her final word, a warning and a threat.

Then, in an attempt to constrain her to modify her response, we had recourse to another creature of the same kingdom, but more potent, a creature not content with questioning the body but capable of commanding it, a febrifuge of the same order as the modern aspirin, which had not then come into use. We had not brought the thermometer down below 99.5, in the hope that it would not have to rise from there. We made my grandmother swallow this drug and then replaced the thermometer in her mouth. Like an implacable warder to whom one presents a permit signed by a higher authority whose patronage one enjoys, and who, finding it to be in order, replies: "All right, I've nothing to say; if that's how it is you may pass," this time the vigilant out-sister did not move. But sullenly she seemed to be saying: "What good will it do you? Since you know quinine, she may give me the order not to go up once, ten times, twenty times. And then she'll grow tired of telling me, I know her, believe me. This won't last for ever. And then where will it have got you?"

Thereupon my grandmother felt the presence within her of a being who knew the human body better than she; the presence of a contemporary of the races that have vanished from the earth, the presence of earth's first inhabitant—far earlier than the creation of thinking man; she felt that primeval ally probing in her head, her heart, her elbow; he was reconnoitring the ground, organising everything for the prehistoric combat which began at once to be fought. In a moment, a crushed Python, the fever was vanquished by the potent chemical element to which my grandmother, across all the kingdoms, reaching out beyond all animal and vegetable life, would have liked to be able to give thanks. And she remained moved by this glimpse which she had caught, through the mists of so many centuries, of an element anterior to the creation even of plants. Meanwhile the thermometer, like one of the Parcae momentarily vanquished by a more ancient god, held its silver spindle motionless. Alas! other inferior creatures which man has trained to hunt the mysterious quarry which he himself is incapable of pursuing in the depths of his being, reported cruelly to us every day a certain quantity of albumin, not large, but constant enough for it also to appear to be related to some persistent malady which we could not detect. Bergotte had shaken that scrupulous instinct in me which made me subordinate my intellect when he spoke to me of Dr du Boulbon as of a physician who would not bore me, who would discover methods of treatment which, however strange they might appear, would adapt themselves to the singularity of my intelligence. But ideas transform themselves in us, overcome the resistance we put up to them at first, and feed upon rich intellectual reserves which were ready-made for them without our realising it. So, as happens whenever remarks we have heard made about someone we do not know have had the faculty of awakening in us the idea of great talent, of a sort of genius, in my inmost mind I now gave Dr du Boulbon the benefit of that unlimited confidence which is inspired in us by the man who, with an eye more penetrating than other men's, perceives the truth. I knew indeed that he was more of a specialist in nervous diseases, the man to whom Charcot before his death had predicted that he would reign supreme in neurology and psychiatry. "Ah, I don't know about that. It's quite possible," put in Françoise, who was in the room and who was hearing Charcot's name, as indeed du Boulbon's, for the first time. But this in no way prevented her from saying "It's possible." Her "possibles," her "perhapses," her "I don't knows" were peculiarly irritating at such moments. One wanted to say to her: "Naturally you didn't know, since you haven't the faintest idea what we are talking about. How can you even say whether it's possible or not, since you know nothing about it? Anyhow, you can't say now that you don't know what Charcot said to du Boulbon. You do know because we've just told you, and your 'perhapses' and 'possibles' are out of place, because it's a fact."

In spite of this more special competence in cerebral and nervous matters, as I knew that du Boulbon was a great physician, a superior man with a profound and inventive intellect, I begged my mother to send for him, and the hope that, by a clear perception of the malady, he might perhaps cure it, finally prevailed over the fear that we had that by calling in a consultant we would alarm my grandmother. What decided my mother was the fact that, unwittingly encouraged by Cottard, my grandmother no longer went out of doors, and scarcely rose from her bed. In vain might she answer us in the words of Mme de Sévigné's letter on Mme de La Fayette: "Everyone said she was mad not to wish to go out. I said to these persons so precipitate in their judgment: 'Mme de La Fayette is not mad!' and I stuck to that. It has taken her death to prove that she was quite right not to go out." Du Boulbon when he came decided against, if not Mme de Sévigné, whom we did not quote to him, at any rate my grandmother. Instead of sounding her chest, he gazed at her with his wonderful eyes, in which there was perhaps the illusion that he was making a profound scrutiny of his patient, or the desire to give her that illusion, which seemed spontaneous but must have become mechanical, or not to let her see that he was thinking of something quite different, or to establish his authority over her, and began to talk about Bergotte.

"Ah yes, indeed, Madame, he's splendid. How right you are to admire him! But which of his books do you prefer? Oh, really? Why, yes, perhaps that is the best after all. In any case it is the best composed of his novels. Claire is quite charming in it. Which of his male characters appeals to you most?"

I supposed at first that he was making her talk about literature because he himself found medicine boring, perhaps also to display his breadth of mind and even, with a more therapeutic aim, to restore confidence to his patient, to show her that he was not alarmed, to take her mind off the state of her health. But afterwards I realised that, being chiefly distinguished as an alienist and for his work on the brain, he had been seeking to ascertain by these questions whether my grandmother's memory was in good order. With seeming reluctance he began to inquire about her life, fixing her with a stern and sombre eye. Then suddenly, as though he had glimpsed the truth and was determined to reach it at all costs, with a preliminary rubbing of his hands to shake off any lingering hesitations which he himself might feel and any objections which we might have raised, looking down at my grandmother with a lucid eye, boldly and as though he were at last upon solid ground, punctuating his words in a quietly impressive tone, every inflexion of which was instinct with intelligence (his voice, indeed, throughout his visit remained what it naturally was, caressing, and under his bushy brows his ironical eyes were full of kindness), he said:

"You will be cured, Madame, on the day, whenever it comes—and it rests entirely with you whether it comes today—on which you realise that there is nothing wrong with you and resume your ordinary life. You tell me that you have not been eating, not going out?"

"But, Doctor, I have a temperature."

"Not just now at any rate. Besides, what a splendid excuse! Don't you know that we feed up tuberculosis patients with temperatures of 102 and keep them out in the open air?"

"But I have a little albumin as well."

"You ought not to know anything about that. You have what I have had occasion to call 'mental albumin.' We have all of us had, when we have not been very well, little albuminous phases which our doctor has done his best to prolong by calling our attention to them. For one disorder that doctors cure with medicaments (as I am assured that they do occasionally succeed in doing) they produce a dozen others in healthy subjects by inoculating them with that pathogenic agent a thousand times more virulent than all the microbes in the world, the idea that one is ill. A belief of that sort, which has a potent effect on any temperature, acts with special force on neurotic people. Tell them that a shut window is open behind their backs, and they will begin to sneeze; persuade them that you have put magnesia in their soup, and they will be seized with colic; that their coffee is stronger than usual, and they will not sleep a wink all night. Do you imagine, Madame, that I needed to do more than look you in the eyes, listen to the way in which you express yourself, observe, if I may say so, your daughter and your grandson who are so like you, to realise what was the matter with you?"

"Your grandmother might perhaps go and sit, if the doctor allows it, in some quiet path in the Champs-Élysées, near that clump of laurels where you used to play when you were little," said my mother to me, thus indirectly consulting Dr du Boulbon and her voice for that reason assuming a tone of timid deference which it would not have had if she had been addressing me alone. The doctor turned to my grandmother and, being a man of letters no less than a man of science, adjured her as follows:

"Go to the Champs-Élysées, Madame, to the clump of laurels which your grandson loves. The laurel will be beneficial to your health. It purifies. After he had exterminated the serpent Python, it was with a branch of laurel in his hand that Apollo made his entry into Delphi. He sought thus to guard himself from the deadly germs of the venomous monster. So you see that the laurel is the most ancient, the most venerable and, I may add—something that has its therapeutic as well as its prophylactic value—the most beautiful of antiseptics."

Inasmuch as a great part of what doctors know is taught them by the sick, they are easily led to believe that this knowledge which patients exhibit is common to them all, and they fondly imagine that they can impress the patient of the moment with some remark picked up at a previous bedside. Thus it was with the superior smile of a Parisian who, in conversation with a peasant, might hope to surprise him by using a word of the local dialect, that Dr du Boulbon said to my grandmother: "Probably a windy night will help to put you to sleep when the strongest soporifics would have no effect." "On the contrary, the wind always keeps me wide awake." But doctors are touchy people. "Ach!" muttered du Boulbon with a frown, as if someone had trodden on his toe, or as if my grandmother's sleeplessness on stormy nights were a personal insult to himself. He had not, however, an undue opinion of himself, and since, in his character as a "superior" person, he felt himself bound not to put any faith in medicine, he quickly recovered his philosophic serenity.

My mother, in her passionate longing for reassurance from Bergotte's friend, added in support of his verdict that a first cousin of my grandmother's, who suffered from a nervous complaint, had remained for seven years shut up in her bedroom at Combray, without getting up more than once or twice a week.

"You see, Madame, I didn't know that, and yet I could have told you."

"But, Doctor, I'm not in the least like her; on the contrary, my doctor complains that he cannot get me to stay in bed," said my grandmother, either because she was a little irritated by the doctor's theories, or because she was anxious to submit to him all the objections that might be made to them, in the hope that he would refute these and that, once he had gone, she would no longer have any doubts as to the accuracy of his encouraging diagnosis.

"Why, naturally, Madame, one cannot have—if you'll forgive the expression—every form of mental derangement. You have others, but not that particular one. Yesterday I visited a home for neurasthenics. In the garden, I saw a man standing on a bench, motionless as a fakir, his neck bent in a position which must have been highly uncomfortable. On my asking him what he was doing there, he replied without turning his head

or moving a muscle: 'You see, Doctor, I am extremely rheumatic and catch cold very easily. I have just been taking a lot of exercise, and while I was foolishly getting too hot, my neck was touching my flannels. If I move it away from my flannels now before letting myself cool down, I'm sure to get a stiff neck and possibly bronchitis.' Which he would, in fact, have done. 'You're a real neurotic, that's what you are,' I told him. And do you know what argument he advanced to prove that I was mistaken? It was this: that while all the other patients in the establishment had a mania for testing their weight, so much so that the weighing machine had to be padlocked so that they shouldn't spend the whole day on it, he had to be lifted on to it bodily, so little did he care to be weighed. He prided himself on not sharing the mania of the others, oblivious of the fact that he had one of his own, and that it was this that saved him from another. You must not be offended by the comparison, Madame, for that man who dared not turn his neck for fear of catching a chill is the greatest poet of our day. That poor lunatic is the most lofty intellect that I know. Submit to being called a neurotic. You belong to that splendid and pitiable family which is the salt of the earth. Everything we think of as great has come to us from neurotics. It is they and they alone who found religions and create great works of art. The world will never realise how much it owes to them, and what they have suffered in order to bestow their gifts on it. We enjoy fine music, beautiful pictures, a thousand exquisite things, but we do not know what they cost those who wrought them in insomnia, tears, spasmodic laughter, urticaria, asthma, epilepsy, a terror of death which is worse than any of these, and which you perhaps have experienced, Madame," he added with a smile at my grandmother, "for confess now, when I came, you were not feeling very confident. You thought you were ill, dangerously ill, perhaps. Heaven only knows what disease you thought you had detected the symptoms of in yourself. And you were not mistaken; they were there. Neurosis has a genius for mimicry. There is no illness which it cannot counterfeit perfectly. It will produce lifelike imitations of the dilatations of dyspepsia, the nausea of pregnancy, the arrhythmia of the cardiac, the feverishness of the consumptive. If it is capable of deceiving the doctor, how should it fail to deceive the patient? Ah, do not think that I am mocking your sufferings. I should not undertake to cure them unless I understood them thoroughly. And, may I say, there is no good confession that is not reciprocal. I have told you that without nervous disorder there can be no great artist. What is more," he added, raising a solemn forefinger, "there can be no great scientist either. I will go further, and say that, unless he himself is subject to nervous trouble, he is not, I won't say a good doctor, but I do say the right doctor to treat nervous troubles. In the pathology of nervous diseases, a doctor who doesn't talk too much nonsense is a half-cured patient, just as a critic is a poet who has stopped writing verse and a policeman a burglar who has retired from practice. I, Madame, I do not, like you, fancy myself to be suffering from albuminuria, I have not your neurotic fear of food, or of fresh air, but I can never go to sleep without getting out of bed at least twenty times to see if my door is shut. And yesterday I went to that nursing-home, where I came across the poet who wouldn't move his neck, for the purpose of booking a room, for, between ourselves, I spend my holidays there looking after myself when I have aggravated my own troubles by wearing myself out in the attempt to cure those of others."

"But, Doctor, ought I to take a similar cure?" asked my grandmother, aghast.

"It is not necessary, Madame. The symptoms you betray here will vanish at my bidding. Besides, you have a very efficient person whom I appoint as your doctor from now onwards. That is your malady itself, your nervous hyperactivity. Even if I knew how to cure you of it, I should take good care not to. All I need do is to control it. I see on your table there one of Bergotte's books. Cured of your nervous diathesis, you would no longer care for it. Now, how could I take it upon myself to substitute for the joys that it procures you a nervous stability which would be quite incapable of giving you those joys? But those joys themselves are a powerful remedy, the most powerful of all perhaps. No, I have nothing to say against your nervous energy. All I ask is that it should listen to me; I leave you in its charge. It must reverse its engines. The force which it has been using to prevent you from going out, from taking sufficient food, must be directed towards making you eat, making you read, making you go out, and distracting you in every possible way. Don't tell me that you feel tired. Tiredness is the organic realisation of a preconceived idea. Begin by not thinking it. And if ever you have a slight indisposition, which is a thing that may happen to anyone, it will be just as if you hadn't, for your nervous energy will have endowed you with what M. de Talleyrand astutely called 'imaginary good health.' See, it has begun to cure you already. You've been sitting up in bed listening to me without once leaning back on your pillows, your eyes bright, colour in your cheeks. I've been talking to you for a good half-hour and you haven't noticed the time. Well, Madame, I shall now bid you good-day."

When, after seeing Dr du Boulbon to the door, I returned to the room in which my mother was alone, the anguish that had been weighing me down for several weeks suddenly lifted, I sensed that my mother was going to give vent to her joy and would observe mine too, and I felt that inability to endure the suspense of the coming moment when a person is about to be overcome with emotion in our presence, which *mutatis mutandis* is not unlike the thrill of fear that runs through one when one knows that somebody is going to come in and startle one by a door that is still closed. I tried to speak to Mamma but my voice broke, and, bursting into tears, I remained for a long time with my head on her shoulder, weeping, savouring, accepting, cherishing my grief, now that I knew that it had departed from my life, as we like to work ourselves up into a state of exaltation with virtuous plans which circumstances do not permit us to put into execution.

Françoise annoyed me by refusing to share in our joy. She was in a state of great excitement because there had been a terrible scene between the lovesick footman and the tale-bearing porter. It had required the Duchess herself, in her benevolence, to intervene, restore a semblance of calm, and forgive the footman. For she was a kind mistress, and it would have been the ideal "place" if only she didn't listen to "tittle-tattle."

During the last few days people had begun to hear of my grandmother's illness and to ask after her. Saint-Loup had written to me: "I do not wish to take advantage of a time when your dear grandmother is unwell to convey to you what is far more than mere reproach on a matter with which she has no concern. But I should not be speaking the truth were I to say to you, if only by preterition, that I shall ever forget the perfidy of your conduct, or that there can ever be any forgiveness for so scoundrelly a betrayal." But some other friends, supposing that my grandmother was not seriously ill, or not knowing that she was ill at all, had asked me to meet them next day in the Champs-Élysées, to go with them from there to pay a call together, ending up with a dinner in the country, the thought of which appealed to me. I had no longer any reason to forgo these two pleasures. When my grandmother had been told that it was now imperative, if she was to obey Dr du Boulbon's orders, that she should go out as much as possible, she had herself at once suggested the Champs-Élysées. It would be easy for me to escort her there; and, while she sat reading, to arrange with my friends where I should meet them later; and I should still be in time, if I made haste, to take the train with them to Ville d'Avray. When the time came, my grandmother did not want to go out, saying that she felt tired. But my mother, acting on du Boulbon's instructions, had the strength of mind to be firm and to command obedience. She was almost in tears at the thought that my grandmother was going to relapse again into her nervous weakness and might not recover from it. Never had there been such a fine, warm day for an outing. The sun as it moved through the sky interposed here and there in the broken solidity of the balcony its insubstantial muslins, and gave to the freestone ledge a warm epidermis, an ill-defined halo of gold. As Françoise had not had time to send a "wire" to her daughter, she left us immediately after lunch. She considered it kind enough of her as it was to call first at Jupien's to get a stitch put in the cape which my grandmother was going to wear. Returning at that moment from my morning walk, I accompanied her into the shop. "Is it your young master who brings you here," Jupien asked Françoise, "is it you who have brought him to see me, or is it a fair wind and Dame Fortune that brings you both?" For all his want of education, Jupien respected the laws of syntax as instinctively as M. de Guermantes, in spite of every effort, broke them. With Françoise gone and the cape mended, it was time for my grandmother to get ready. Having obstinately refused to let Mamma stay in the room with her, left to herself she took an endlessly long time over her dressing, and now that I knew that she was not ill, with that strange indifference which we feel towards our relations so long as they are alive, and which makes us put everyone else before them, I thought it very selfish of her to take so long and to risk making me late when she knew that I had an appointment with my friends and was dining at Ville d'Avray. In my impatience I finally went downstairs without waiting for her, after I had twice been told that she was just ready. At last she joined me, without apologising to me as she generally did for having kept me waiting, flushed and bothered like a person who has come to a place in a hurry and has forgotten half her belongings, just as I was reaching the half-opened glass door which let in the liquid, humming, tepid air from outside, as though the sluices of a reservoir had been opened between the glacial walls of the house, without warming them.

"Oh, dear, if you're going to meet your friends I ought to have put on another cape. I look rather wretched in this one."

I was startled to see her so flushed, and supposed that having begun by making herself late she had had to hurry over her dressing. When we left the cab at the corner of the Avenue Gabriel, in the Champs-Élysées, I saw my grandmother turn away without a word and make for the little old pavilion with its green trellis at the door of which I had once waited for Françoise. The same park-keeper who had been there then was still there beside the "Marquise" as, following my grandmother who, doubtless because she was feeling sick, had her hand in front of her mouth, I climbed the steps of the little rustic theatre erected there in the middle of the gardens. At the entrance, as in those travelling circuses where the clown, dressed for the ring and smothered in flour, stands at the door and takes the money himself for the seats, the "Marquise," at the receipt of custom, was still in her place with her huge, irregular face smeared with coarse paint and her little bonnet of red flowers and black lace surmounting her auburn wig. But I do not think she recognised me. The park-keeper, abandoning the supervision of the greenery, with the colour of which his uniform had been designed to harmonise, was sitting beside her chatting.

"So you're still here," he was saying. "You don't think of retiring?"

"And why should I retire, Monsieur? Will you tell me where I should be better off than here, where I'd be more comfy and snug? And then there's all the coming and going, plenty of distraction. My little Paris, I call it; my customers keep me in touch with everything that's going on. Just to give you an example, there's one of them went out not five minutes ago; he's a judge, a proper high-up. Well!" she exclaimed heatedly, as though prepared to maintain the truth of this assertion by violence, should the agent of civic authority show any sign of challenging its accuracy, "for the last eight years, do you hear me, every blessed day, regular on the stroke of three he comes here, always polite, never saying one word louder than another, never making any mess; and he stays half an hour and more to read his papers while seeing to his little needs. There was one day he didn't come. I never noticed it at the time, but that evening, all of a sudden I says to myself: 'Why, that gentleman never came today; perhaps he's dead!' And I came over all queer, seeing as how I get quite fond of people when they behave nicely. And so I was very glad when I saw him come in again next day, and I said to him: 'I hope nothing happened to you yesterday, sir?' And he told me nothing had happened to *him*, it was his wife that had died, and it had given him such a turn he hadn't been able to come. He looked sad, of course—well, you know, people who've been married five-and-twenty years—but he seemed pleased, all the same, to be back here. You could see that all his little habits had been quite upset. I did what I could to cheer him up. I said to

him: 'You mustn't let go of things, sir. Just keep coming here the same as before, it will be a little distraction for you in your sorrow.' "

The "Marquise" resumed a gentler tone, for she had observed that the guardian of groves and lawns was listening to her good-naturedly and with no thought of contradiction, keeping harmlessly in its scabbard a sword which looked more like a gardening implement or some horticultural emblem.

"And besides," she went on, "I choose my customers, I don't let everyone into my parlours, as I call them. Doesn't it just look like a parlour with all my flowers? Such friendly customers I have; there's always someone or other brings me a spray of nice lilac, or jasmine or roses; my favourite flowers, roses are."

The thought that we were perhaps viewed with disfavour by this lady because we never brought any sprays of lilac or fine roses to her bower made me blush, and in the hope of escaping physically (or of being condemned only *in absentia*) from an adverse judgment, I moved towards the exit. But it is not always in this world the people who bring us fine roses to whom we are most friendly, for the "Marquise," thinking that I was bored, turned to me:

"You wouldn't like me to open a little cabin for you?"

And, on my declining:

"No? You're sure you won't?" she persisted, smiling. "You're welcome to it, but of course, not having to pay for a thing won't make you want to do it if you've got nothing to do."

At this moment a shabbily dressed woman hurried into the place who seemed to be feeling precisely the want in question. But she did not belong to the "Marquise's" world, for the latter, with the ferocity of a snob, said to her curtly:

"I've nothing vacant, Madame."

"Will they be long?" asked the poor lady, flushed beneath the yellow flowers in her hat.

"Well, ma'am, if you want my advice you'd better try somewhere else. You see, there's still these two gentlemen waiting, and I've only one closet; the others are out of order."

"Looked like a bad payer to me," she explained when the other had gone. "That's not the sort we want here, either; they're not clean, don't treat the place with respect. It'd be me who'd have to spend the next hour cleaning up after her ladyship. I'm not sorry to lose her couple of sous."

At last, after a good half-hour, my grandmother emerged, and fearing that she might not seek to atone by a lavish gratuity for the indiscretion she had shown by remaining so long inside, I beat a retreat so as not to have to share in the scorn which the "Marquise" would no doubt heap on her, and strolled down a path, but slowly, so that my grandmother should not have to hurry to overtake me, as presently she did. I expected her to begin: "I'm afraid I've kept you waiting; I hope you'll still be in time for your friends," but she did not utter a single word, so much so that, feeling a little hurt, I was disinclined to speak first. Finally, looking up at her I noticed that as she walked beside me she kept her face turned the other way. I was afraid that she might be feeling sick again. I looked at her more closely and was struck by the disjointedness of her gait. Her hat was crooked, her cloak stained; she had the dishevelled and disgruntled appearance, the flushed, slightly dazed look of a person who has just been knocked down by a carriage or pulled out of a ditch.

"I was afraid you were feeling sick, Grandmamma; are you feeling better now?" I asked her.

Doubtless she thought that it would be impossible for her not to make some answer without alarming me.

"I heard the whole of the 'Marquise's' conversation with the keeper," she told me. "Could anything have been more typical of the Guermantes, or the Verdurins and their little clan? 'Ah! in what courtly terms those things were put!'"<sup>18</sup> And she added, with deliberate application, this from her own special Marquise, Mme de Sévigné: "As I listened to them I thought that they were preparing for me the delights of a farewell."

Such were the remarks that she addressed to me, remarks into which she had put all her critical delicacy, her love of quotation, her memory of the classics, more thoroughly even than she would normally have done, and as though to prove that she retained possession of all these faculties. But I guessed rather than heard what she said, so inaudible was the voice in which she mumbled her sentences, clenching her teeth more than could be accounted for by the fear of vomiting.

"Come!" I said lightly enough not to seem to be taking her illness too seriously, "since you're feeling a little sick I suggest we go home. I don't want to trundle a grandmother with indigestion about the Champs-Élysées."

"I didn't like to suggest it because of your friends," she replied. "Poor pet! But if you don't mind, I think it would be wiser."

I was afraid of her noticing the strange way in which she uttered these words.

"Come," I said to her brusquely, "you mustn't tire yourself talking when you're feeling sick—it's silly; wait till we get home."

She smiled at me sorrowfully and gripped my hand. She had realised that there was no need to hide from me what I had at once guessed, that she had had a slight stroke.

## PART SEVEN

### Chapter Seven

We made our way back along the Avenue Gabriel through the strolling crowds. I left my grandmother to rest on a bench and went in search of a cab. She, in whose heart I always placed myself in order to form an opinion of the most insignificant person, she was now closed to me, had become part of the external world, and, more than from any casual passer-by, I was obliged to keep from her what I thought of her condition, to betray no sign of my anxiety. I could not have spoken of it to her with any more confidence than to a stranger. She had suddenly returned to me the thoughts, the griefs which, from my earliest childhood, I had entrusted to her for all time. She was not yet dead. But I was already alone. And even those allusions which she had made to the Guermantes, to Molière, to our conversations about the little clan, assumed a baseless, adventitious, fantastical air, because they sprang from this same being who tomorrow perhaps would have ceased to exist, for whom they would no longer have any meaning, from the non-being—incapable of conceiving them—which my grandmother would shortly be.

“Monsieur, I don’t like to say no, but you have not made an appointment, you haven’t a number. Besides, this is not my day for seeing patients. You surely have a doctor of your own. I cannot stand in for him, unless he calls me in for consultation. It’s a question of professional etiquette ...”

Just as I was signalling to a cabman, I had caught sight of the famous Professor E——, almost a friend of my father and grandfather, acquainted at any rate with them both, who lived in the Avenue Gabriel, and, on a sudden inspiration, had stopped him just as he was entering his house, thinking that he would perhaps be the very person to examine my grandmother. But, being evidently in a hurry, after collecting his letters he seemed anxious to get rid of me, and I could only speak to him by going up with him in the lift, of which he begged me to allow him to press the buttons himself, this being an idiosyncrasy of his.

“But Doctor, I’m not asking you to see my grandmother here; you will realise when I’ve explained to you that she isn’t in a fit state; what I’m asking is that you should call at our house in half an hour’s time, when I’ve taken her home.”

“Call at your house! Really, Monsieur, you can’t mean such a thing. I’m dining with the Minister of Commerce. I have a call to pay first. I must change at once, and to make matters worse my tail-coat is torn and the other one has no buttonhole for my decorations. Would you please oblige me by not touching the lift-buttons. You don’t know how the lift works; one can’t be too careful. Getting that buttonhole made means more delay. However, out of friendship for your family, if your grandmother comes here at once I’ll see her. But I warn you I shan’t be able to give her more than a quarter of an hour.”

I had set off again at once, without even getting out of the lift, which Professor E—— had himself set in motion to take me down again, eyeing me distrustfully as he did so.

We may, indeed, say that the hour of death is uncertain, but when we say this we think of that hour as situated in a vague and remote expanse of time; it does not occur to us that it can have any connexion with the day that has already dawned and can mean that death—or its first assault and partial possession of us, after which it will never leave hold of us again—may occur this very afternoon, so far from uncertain, this afternoon whose timetable, hour by hour, has been settled in advance. One insists on one’s daily outing so that in a month’s time one will have had the necessary ration of fresh air; one has hesitated over which coat to take, which cabman to call; one is in the cab, the whole day lies before one, short because one must be back home early, as a friend is coming to see one; one hopes that it will be as fine again tomorrow; and one has no suspicion that death, which has been advancing within one on another plane, has chosen precisely this particular day to make its appearance, in a few minutes’ time, more or less at the moment when the carriage reaches the Champs-Élysées. Perhaps those who are habitually haunted by the fear of the utter strangeness of death will find something reassuring in this kind of death—in this kind of first contact with death—because death thus assumes a known, familiar, everyday guise. A good lunch has preceded it, and the same outing that people take who are in perfect health. A drive home in an open carriage comes on top of its first onslaught; ill as my grandmother was, there were, after all, several people who could testify that at six o’clock, as we came home from the Champs-Élysées, they had bowed to her as she drove past in an open carriage, in perfect weather. Legrandin, making his way towards the Place de la Concorde, raised his hat to us, stopping to look after us with an air of surprise. I, who was not yet detached from life, asked my grandmother if she had acknowledged his greeting, reminding her of his touchiness. My grandmother, thinking me no doubt very frivolous, raised her hand in the air as though to say: “What does it matter? It’s of no importance.”

Yes, it might have been said that a few minutes earlier, while I was looking for a cab, my grandmother was resting on a bench in the Avenue Gabriel, and that a little later she had driven past in an open carriage. But would it have been really true? A bench, in order to maintain its position at the side of an avenue—although it may also be subject to certain conditions of equilibrium—has no need of energy. But in order for a living being to be stable, even when supported by a bench or in a carriage, there must be a tension of forces which we do not ordinarily perceive, any more than we perceive (because its action is multi-dimensional) atmospheric pressure. Perhaps if a vacuum were created within us and we were left to bear the pressure of the air, we should feel, in the moment that preceded our extinction, the terrible weight which there was now nothing else to neutralise. Similarly, when the abyss of sickness and death opens up within us, and we have nothing left to oppose to the tumult with which the world and our own body rush upon us, then to sustain

even the thought of our muscles, even the shudder that pierces us to the marrow, then even to keep ourselves still, in what we ordinarily regard as no more than the simple negative position of a thing, demands, if one wants one's head to remain erect and one's demeanour calm, an expense of vital energy and becomes the object of an exhausting struggle.

And if Legrandin had looked back at us with that air of astonishment, it was because to him, as to the other people who passed us then, in the cab in which my grandmother was apparently sitting on the back seat, she had seemed to be foundering, slithering into the abyss, clinging desperately to the cushions which could scarcely hold back the headlong plunge of her body, her hair dishevelled, her eyes wild, no longer capable of facing the assault of the images which their pupils no longer had the strength to bear. She had appeared, although I was beside her, to be plunged in that unknown world in the heart of which she had already received the blows of which she bore the marks when I had looked up at her in the Champs-Élysées, her hat, her face, her coat deranged by the hand of the invisible angel with whom she had wrestled.

I have thought, since, that this moment of her stroke cannot have altogether surprised my grandmother, that indeed she had perhaps foreseen it a long time back, had lived in expectation of it. She had not known, naturally, when this fatal moment would come, had never been certain, any more than those lovers whom a similar doubt leads alternately to found unreasonable hopes and unjustified suspicions on the fidelity of their mistresses. But it is rare for these grave illnesses, such as that which now at last had struck her full in the face, not to take up residence in a sick person a long time before killing him, during which period they hasten, like a "sociable" neighbour or tenant, to make themselves known to him. A terrible acquaintance, not so much for the sufferings that it causes as for the strange novelty of the terminal restrictions which it imposes upon life. We see ourselves dying, in these cases, not at the actual moment of death but months, sometimes years before, when death has hideously come to dwell in us. We make the acquaintance of the Stranger whom we hear coming and going in our brain. True, we do not know him by sight, but from the sounds we hear him regularly make we can form an idea of his habits. Is he a malefactor? One morning, we can no longer hear him. He has gone. Ah! if only it were for ever! In the evening he has returned. What are his plans? The consultant, put to the question, like an adored mistress, replies with avowals that one day are believed, another day questioned. Or rather it is not the mistress's role but that of interrogated servants that the doctor plays. They are only third parties. The person whom we press for an answer, whom we suspect of being about to play us false, is Life itself, and although we feel it to be no longer the same, we believe in it still, or at least remain undecided until the day on which it finally abandons us.

I helped my grandmother into Professor E——'s lift and a moment later he came to us and took us into his consulting room. But there, pressed for time though he was, his offensive manner changed, such is the force of habit, and his habit was to be friendly, not to say playful, with his patients. Since he knew that my grandmother was a great reader, and was himself one, he devoted the first few minutes to quoting various favourite passages of poetry appropriate to the glorious summer weather. He had placed her in an armchair and himself with his back to the light so as to have a good view of her. His examination was minute and thorough, even obliging me to leave the room for a moment. He continued it after my return, then, having finished, went on, although the quarter of an hour was almost at an end, repeating various quotations to my grandmother. He even made a few jokes, which were witty enough, though I should have preferred to hear them on some other occasion, but which completely reassured me by the tone of amusement in which he uttered them. I then remembered that M. Fallières, the President of the Senate, had, many years earlier, had a false seizure, and that to the consternation of his political rivals he had taken up his duties again a few days later and had begun, it was said, to prepare an eventual candidature for the Presidency of the Republic. My confidence in my grandmother's prompt recovery was all the more complete in that, just as I was recalling the example of M. Fallières, I was distracted from pursuing the parallel by a shout of laughter which served as conclusion to one of the Professor's jokes. After which he took out his watch, frowned feverishly on seeing that he was five minutes late, and while he bade us good-bye rang for his dress clothes to be brought to him at once. I waited until my grandmother had left the room, closed the door and asked him to tell me the truth.

"Your grandmother is doomed," he said to me. "It is a stroke brought on by uraemia. In itself, uraemia is not necessarily fatal, but this case seems to me hopeless. I need not tell you that I hope I am mistaken. At all events, with Cottard you're in excellent hands. Excuse me," he broke off as a maid came into the room with his tail-coat over her arm. "As I told you, I'm dining with the Minister of Commerce, and I have a call to pay first. Ah! life is not all a bed of roses, as one is apt to think at your age."

And he graciously offered me his hand. I had shut the door behind me, and a footman was ushering us into the hall, when my grandmother and I heard a great shout of rage. The maid had forgotten to cut and hem the buttonhole for the decorations. This would take another ten minutes. The Professor continued to storm while I stood on the landing gazing at my grandmother who was doomed. Each of us is indeed alone. We set off homewards.

The sun was sinking; it burnished an interminable wall along which our cab had to pass before reaching the street in which we lived, a wall against which the shadow of horse and carriage cast by the setting sun stood out in black on a ruddy background, like a hearse on some Pompeian terra-cotta. At length we arrived at the house. I sat the invalid down at the foot of the staircase in the hall, and went up to warn my mother. I told her that my grandmother had come home feeling slightly unwell, after an attack of giddiness. As soon as I began to speak, my mother's face was convulsed by a paroxysm of despair, a despair which was yet already so resigned that I realised that for many years she had been holding herself quietly in readiness for an indeterminate but inexorable day. She asked me no questions; it seemed that, just as malevolence likes to

exaggerate the sufferings of others, she in her loving tenderness did not want to admit that her mother was seriously ill, especially with a disease which might have affected the brain. Mamma shuddered, her eyes wept without tears, she ran to give orders for the doctor to be fetched at once; but when Françoise asked who was ill she could not reply, her voice stuck in her throat. She came running downstairs with me, struggling to banish from her face the sob that crumpled it. My grandmother was waiting below on the settee in the hall, but as soon as she heard us coming she drew herself up, rose to her feet, and waved her hand cheerfully at Mamma. I had partially wrapped her head in a white lace shawl, telling her that this was to prevent her from catching cold on the stairs. I had hoped that my mother might not immediately notice the alteration in the face, the distortion of the mouth. My precaution proved unnecessary: my mother went up to my grandmother, kissed her hand as though it were that of her God, raised her up and supported her to the lift with an infinite care which reflected, together with the fear of being clumsy and hurting her, the humility of one who felt herself unworthy to touch what was for her the most precious thing in the world, but not once did she raise her eyes and look at the sufferer's face. Perhaps this was in order that my grandmother should not be saddened by the thought that the sight of her might have alarmed her daughter. Perhaps from fear of a grief so piercing that she dared not face it. Perhaps from respect, because she did not feel it permissible for her without impiety to notice the trace of any mental enfeeblement on those revered features. Perhaps to be better able to preserve intact in her memory the image of the true face of my grandmother, radiant with wisdom and goodness. So they went up side by side, my grandmother half-hidden in her shawl, my mother averting her eyes.

Meanwhile there was one person who never took hers from what could be discerned of my grandmother's altered features at which her daughter dared not look, a person who fastened on them a dumbfounded, indiscreet and ominous look: this was Françoise. Not that she was not sincerely attached to my grandmother (indeed she had been disappointed and almost scandalised by the coldness shown by Mamma, whom she would have liked to see fling herself weeping into her mother's arms), but she had a certain tendency always to look at the worse side of things, and had retained from her childhood two characteristics which would seem to be mutually exclusive, but which, when combined, reinforce one another: the lack of restraint common among uneducated people who make no attempt to conceal the impression, indeed the painful alarm aroused in them by the sight of a physical change which it would be more tactful to appear not to notice, and the unfeeling roughness of the peasant who tears the wings off dragon-flies until she gets a chance to wring the necks of chickens, and lacks that sense of shame which would make her conceal the interest that she feels in the sight of suffering flesh.

When, thanks to the faultless ministrations of Françoise, my grandmother had been put to bed, she discovered that she could speak much more easily, the little rupture or obstruction of a blood-vessel which had produced the uraemia having apparently been quite slight. And at once she was anxious not to fail Mamma in her hour of need, to assist her in the most cruel moments through which she had yet to pass.

"Well, my child," she began, taking my mother's hand in one of hers, and keeping the other in front of her lips, in order thus to account for the slight difficulty which she still found in pronouncing certain words. "So this is all the pity you show your mother! You look as if you thought that indigestion was quite a pleasant thing!"

Then for the first time my mother's eyes gazed passionately into those of my grandmother, not wishing to see the rest of her face, and she replied, beginning the list of those false promises which we swear but are unable to keep:

"Mamma, you'll soon be quite well again, your daughter will see to that."

And gathering up all her most ardent love, all her determination that her mother should recover, she entrusted them to a kiss which she accompanied with her whole mind, with her whole being until it flowered upon her lips, and bent down to lay it humbly, reverently, on the beloved forehead.

My grandmother complained of a sort of alluvial deposit of bedclothes which kept gathering all the time in the same place, over her left leg, and which she could never manage to lift off. But she did not realise that she was herself the cause of this (so that day after day she accused Françoise unjustly of not "doing" her bed properly). By a convulsive movement she kept flinging to that side the whole flood of those billowing blankets of fine wool, which gathered there like the sand in a bay which is very soon transformed into a beach (unless a breakwater is built) by the successive deposits of the tide.

My mother and I (whose mendacity was exposed before we spoke by the obnoxious perspicaciousness of Françoise) would not even admit that my grandmother was seriously ill, as though such an admission might give pleasure to her enemies (not that she had any) and it was more loving to feel that she was not so bad as all that, in short from the same instinctive sentiment which had led me to suppose that Andrée pitied Albertine too much to be really fond of her. The same individual phenomena are reproduced in the mass, in great crises. In a war, the man who does not love his country says nothing against it, but regards it as doomed, pities it, sees everything in the blackest colours.

Françoise was infinitely helpful to us owing to her faculty of doing without sleep, of performing the most arduous tasks. And if, when she had gone to bed after several nights spent in the sickroom, we were obliged to call her a quarter of an hour after she had fallen asleep, she was so happy to be able to perform painful duties as if they had been the simplest things in the world that, far from baulking, she would show signs of satisfaction tinged with modesty. Only when the time came for mass, or for breakfast, even if my grandmother had been in her death throes, Françoise would have slipped away in order not to be late. She neither could nor would let her place be taken by her young footman. It was true that she had brought from Combray an



extremely exalted idea of everyone's duty towards ourselves; she would not have tolerated that any of our servants should "fail" us. This doctrine had made her so noble, so imperious, so efficient an instructor that we had never had in our house any servants, however corrupt, who had not speedily modified and purified their conception of life so far as to refuse to touch the usual commissions from tradesmen and to come rushing—however little they might previously have sought to oblige—to take from my hands and not let me tire myself by carrying the smallest parcel. But at Combray Françoise had contracted also—and had brought with her to Paris—the habit of not being able to put up with any assistance in her work. The sight of anyone coming to help her seemed to her like a deadly insult, and servants had remained for weeks without receiving from her any response to their morning greeting, had even gone off on their holidays without her bidding them good-bye or their guessing her reason, which was simply and solely that they had offered to do a share of her work on some day when she had not been well. And at this moment when my grandmother was so ill, Françoise's duties seemed to her peculiarly her own. She would not allow herself, as the official incumbent, to be done out of her role in the ritual of these gala days. And so her young footman, discarded by her, did not know what to do with himself, and not content with having copied the butler's example and supplied himself with note-paper from my desk, had begun as well to borrow volumes of poetry from my bookshelves. He sat reading them for a good half of the day, out of admiration for the poets who had written them, but also in order, during the rest of his time, to sprinkle with quotations the letters which he wrote to his friends in his native village. True, his intention was to dazzle them. But since he was somewhat lacking in logic he had formed the notion that these poems, picked out at random from my shelves, were things of common currency to which it was customary to refer. So much so that in writing to these peasants whom he expected to impress, he interspersed his own reflexions with lines from Lamartine, just as he might have said "Who laughs last, laughs longest!" or merely "How are you keeping?"

Because of her acute pain my grandmother was given morphine. Unfortunately, if this relieved the pain it also increased the quantity of albumin. The blows which we aimed at the evil which had settled inside her were always wide of the mark, and it was she, it was her poor interposed body that had to bear them, without her ever uttering more than a faint groan by way of complaint. And the pain that we caused her found no compensation in any benefit that we were able to give her. The ferocious beast we were anxious to exterminate we barely succeeded in grazing; we merely enraged it even more, hastening perhaps the moment when the captive would be devoured. On certain days when the discharge of albumin had been excessive Cottard, after some hesitation, stopped the morphine. During these brief moments in which he deliberated, in which the relative dangers of one and another course of treatment fought it out between them in his mind until he arrived at a decision, this man who was so insignificant and so commonplace had something of the greatness of a general who, vulgar in all things else, moves us by his decisiveness when the fate of the country is at stake and, after a moment's reflexion, he decides upon what is from the military point of view the wisest course, and gives the order: "Advance eastwards." Medically, however little hope there might be of bringing this attack of uraemia to an end, it was important not to put a strain on the kidneys. But, on the other hand, when my grandmother was given no morphine, her pain became unbearable; she would perpetually attempt a certain movement which it was difficult for her to perform without groaning: to a great extent, pain is a sort of need on the part of the organism to take cognisance of a new state which is troubling it, to adapt its sensibility to that state. We can discern this origin of pain in the case of certain discomforts which are not such for everyone. Into a room filled with pungent smoke two men of coarse fibre will come and attend to their business; a third, more sensitively constituted, will betray an incessant discomfort. His nostrils will continue to sniff anxiously the odour which he ought, one would think, to try not to notice but which he will keep on attempting to accommodate, by a more exact apprehension of it, to his troubled sense of smell. Hence the fact that an intense preoccupation will prevent one from complaining of a toothache. When my grandmother was suffering thus the sweat trickled over the mauve expanse of her forehead, glueing her white locks to it, and if she thought that none of us was in the room she would cry out: "Oh, it's dreadful!"—but if she caught sight of my mother, at once she devoted all her energy to banishing from her face every sign of pain, or alternatively repeated the same complaints accompanying them with explanations which gave a different sense retrospectively to those which my mother might have overheard:

"Ah! my dear, it's dreadful to have to stay in bed on a beautiful sunny day like this when one wants to be out in the fresh air—I've been weeping with rage against your instructions."

But she could not get rid of the anguish in her eyes, the sweat on her forehead, the convulsive start, checked at once, of her limbs.

"I'm not in pain, I'm complaining because I'm not lying very comfortably, I feel my hair is untidy, I feel sick, I knocked my head against the wall."

And my mother, at the foot of the bed, riveted to that suffering as though, by dint of piercing with her gaze that pain-racked forehead, that body which contained the evil thing, she must ultimately succeed in reaching and removing it, my mother said:

"No, no, Mamma dear, we won't let you suffer like that, we'll find something to take it away, have patience just for a moment; let me give you a kiss, darling—no, you're not to move."

And stooping over the bed, with her knees bent, almost kneeling on the ground, as though by an exercise of humility she would have a better chance of making acceptable the impassioned gift of herself, she lowered towards my grandmother her whole life contained in her face as in a ciborium which she was holding out to her, adorned with dimples and folds so passionate, so sorrowful, so sweet that one could not have said whether they had been engraved on it by a kiss, a sob or a smile. My grandmother too tried to lift up her face

to Mamma's. It was so altered that probably, had she been strong enough to go out, she would have been recognised only by the feather in her hat. Her features, as though during a modelling session, seemed to be straining, with an effort which distracted her from everything else, to conform to some particular model which we failed to identify. The work of the sculptor was nearing its end, and if my grandmother's face had shrunk in the process, it had at the same time hardened. The veins that traversed it seemed those not of marble, but of some more rugged stone. Permanently thrust forward by the difficulty that she found in breathing, and as permanently withdrawn into itself by exhaustion, her face, worn, diminished, terrifyingly expressive, seemed like the rude, flushed, purplish, desperate face of some wild guardian of a tomb in a primitive, almost prehistoric sculpture. But the work was not yet completed. Afterwards, the sculpture would have to be broken, and into that tomb—so painfully and tensely guarded—be lowered.

At one of those moments when, as the saying goes, we did not know which way to turn, since my grandmother was coughing and sneezing a good deal, we took the advice of a relative who assured us that if we sent for the specialist X—the trouble would be over in a couple of days. Society people say that sort of thing about their own doctors, and their friends believe them just as Françoise always believed the advertisements in the newspapers. The specialist came with his bag packed with all the colds and coughs of his other patients, like Aeolus's goatskin. My grandmother refused point-blank to let herself be examined. And we, out of consideration for this doctor who had been put to trouble for nothing, deferred to the desire that he expressed to inspect each of our noses in turn, although there was nothing the matter with any of them. According to him, however, there was; everything, whether headache or colic, heart-disease or diabetes, was a disease of the nose that had been wrongly diagnosed. To each of us he said: "I should like to have another look at that little nozzle. Don't put it off too long. I'll soon clear it for you with a hot needle." Of course we paid no attention whatsoever. And yet we asked ourselves: "Clear it of what?" In a word, every one of our noses was infected; his mistake lay only in his use of the present tense. For by the following day his examination and provisional treatment had taken effect. Each of us had his or her catarrh. And when in the street he ran into my father doubled up with a cough, he smiled to think that an ignorant layman might suppose the attack to be due to his intervention. He had examined us at a moment when we were already ill.

My grandmother's illness gave occasion to various people to manifest an excess or deficiency of sympathy which surprised us quite as much as the sort of chance which led one or another of them to reveal to us connecting links of circumstances, or even of friendships, which we had never suspected. And the signs of interest shown by the people who called incessantly at the house to inquire revealed to us the gravity of an illness which, until then, we had not sufficiently detached from the countless painful impressions that we received by my grandmother's sickbed. Informed by telegram, her sisters declined to leave Combray. They had discovered a musician there who gave them excellent chamber recitals, in listening to which they felt they could enjoy better than by the invalid's bedside a contemplative melancholy, a sorrowful exaltation, the form of which was, to say the least of it, unusual. Mme Sazerat wrote to Mamma, but in the tone of a person whom the sudden breaking off of an engagement (the cause of the rupture being Dreyfusism) has separated from one for ever. Bergotte, on the other hand, came every day and spent several hours with me.

He had always enjoyed going regularly for some time to the same house where he had no need to stand on ceremony. But formerly it had been in order that he might talk without being interrupted; now it was so that he might sit for as long as he chose in silence, without being expected to talk. For he was very ill, some people said with albuminuria, like my grandmother, while according to others he had a tumour. He grew steadily weaker; it was with difficulty that he climbed our staircase, with greater difficulty still that he went down it. Even though he held on to the banisters he often stumbled, and he would, I believe, have stayed at home had he not been afraid of losing altogether the habit and the capacity of going out, he, the "man with the goatee" whom I remembered as being so alert not very long since. He was now quite blind, and often he even had trouble with his speech.

But at the same time, by a directly opposite process, the corpus of his work, known only to a few literary people at the period when Mme Swann used to patronise their timid efforts to disseminate it, now grown in stature and strength in the eyes of all, had acquired an extraordinary power of expansion among the general public. No doubt it often happens that only after his death does a writer become famous. But it was while he was still alive, and during his own slow progress towards approaching death, that this writer was able to watch the progress of his works towards Renown. A dead writer can at least be illustrious without any strain on himself. The effulgence of his name stops short at his gravestone. In the deafness of eternal sleep he is not importuned by Glory. But for Bergotte the antithesis was still incomplete. He existed still sufficiently to suffer from the tumult. He still moved about, though with difficulty, while his books, cavorting like daughters whom one loves but whose impetuous youthfulness and noisy pleasures tire one, brought day after day to his very bedside a crowd of fresh admirers.

The visits which he now began to pay us came for me several years too late, for I no longer had the same admiration for him as of old. This was in no sense incompatible with the growth of his reputation. A man's work seldom becomes completely understood and successful before that of another writer, still obscure, has begun, among a few more exigent spirits, to substitute a fresh cult for the one that has almost ceased to command observance. In Bergotte's books, which I constantly re-read, his sentences stood out as clearly before my eyes as my own thoughts, the furniture in my room and the carriages in the street. All the details were easily visible, not perhaps precisely as one had always seen them, but at any rate as one was accustomed to see them now. But a new writer had recently begun to publish work in which the relations between things were so different from those that connected them for me that I could understand hardly anything of what he

wrote. He would say, for instance: "The hose-pipes admired the splendid upkeep of the roads" (and so far it was simple, I followed him smoothly along those roads) "which set out every five minutes from Briand and Claudel." At that point I ceased to understand, because I had expected the name of a place and was given that of a person instead. Only I felt that it was not the sentence that was badly constructed but I myself that lacked the strength and agility necessary to reach the end. I would start afresh, striving tooth and nail to reach the point from which I would see the new relationships between things. And each time, after I had got about half-way through the sentence, I would fall back again, as later on, in the Army, in my attempts at the exercises on the horizontal bar. I felt nevertheless for the new writer the admiration which an awkward boy who gets nought for gymnastics feels when he watches another more nimble. And from then onwards I felt less admiration for Bergotte, whose limpidity struck me as a deficiency. There was a time when people recognised things quite easily when it was Fromentin who had painted them, and could not recognise them at all when it was Renoir.

People of taste tell us nowadays that Renoir is a great eighteenth-century painter. But in so saying they forget the element of Time, and that it took a great deal of time, even at the height of the nineteenth century, for Renoir to be hailed as a great artist. To succeed thus in gaining recognition, the original painter or the original writer proceeds on the lines of the oculist. The course of treatment they give us by their painting or by their prose is not always pleasant. When it is at an end the practitioner says to us: "Now look!" And, lo and behold, the world around us (which was not created once and for all, but is created afresh as often as an original artist is born) appears to us entirely different from the old world, but perfectly clear. Women pass in the street, different from those we formerly saw, because they are Renoirs, those Renoirs we persistently refused to see as women. The carriages, too, are Renoirs, and the water, and the sky; we feel tempted to go for a walk in the forest which is identical with the one which when we first saw it looked like anything in the world except a forest, like for instance a tapestry of innumerable hues but lacking precisely the hues peculiar to forests. Such is the new and perishable universe which has just been created. It will last until the next geological catastrophe is precipitated by a new painter or writer of original talent.

The writer who had taken Bergotte's place in my affections wearied me not by the incoherence but by the novelty—perfectly coherent—of associations which I was unaccustomed to following. The point, always the same, at which I felt myself falter indicated the identity of each renewed feat of acrobatics that I must undertake. Moreover, when once in a thousand times I did succeed in following the writer to the end of his sentence, what I saw there always had a humour, a truthfulness and a charm similar to those which I had found long ago in reading Bergotte, only more delightful. I reflected that it was not so many years since a renewal of the world similar to that which I now expected his successor to produce had been wrought for me by Bergotte himself. And I was led to wonder whether there was any truth in the distinction which we are always making between art, which is no more advanced now than in Homer's day, and science with its continuous progress. Perhaps, on the contrary, art was in this respect like science; each new original writer seemed to me to have advanced beyond the stage of his immediate predecessor; and who was to say whether in twenty years' time, when I should be able to accompany without strain or effort the newcomer of today, another might not emerge in the face of whom the present one would go the way of Bergotte?

I spoke to the latter of the new writer. He put me off him not so much by assuring me that his art was uncouth, facile and vacuous, as by telling me that he had seen him and had almost mistaken him (so strong was the likeness) for Bloch. The latter's image thenceforth loomed over the printed pages, and I no longer felt under compulsion to make the effort necessary to understand them. If Bergotte had decried him to me it was less, I fancy, from jealousy of a success that was yet to come than from ignorance of his work. He read scarcely anything. The bulk of his thought had long since passed from his brain into his books. He had grown thin, as though they had been extracted from him by a surgical operation. His reproductive instinct no longer impelled him to any activity, now that he had given an independent existence to almost all his thoughts. He led the vegetative life of a convalescent, of a woman after childbirth; his fine eyes remained motionless, vaguely dazed, like the eyes of a man lying on the sea-shore and in a vague day-dream contemplating only each little breaking wave. However, if it was less interesting to talk to him now than I should once have found it, I felt no compunction about that. He was so far a creature of habit that the simplest as well as the most luxurious habits, once he had formed them, became indispensable to him for a certain length of time. I do not know what made him come to our house the first time, but thereafter he came every day simply because he had been there the day before. He would turn up at the house as he might have gone to a café, in order that no one should talk to him, in order that he might—very rarely—talk himself, so that it would have been difficult on the whole to say whether he was moved by our grief or that he enjoyed my company, had one sought to draw any conclusion from such assiduity. But it did not fail to impress my mother, sensitive to everything that might be regarded as an act of homage to her invalid. And every day she reminded me: "See that you don't forget to thank him nicely."

We had also—a discreet feminine attention like the refreshments that are brought to one, between sittings, by a painter's mistress—as a supplement, free of charge, to those which her husband paid us professionally, a visit from Mme Cottard. She came to offer us her "waiting-woman," or, if we preferred the services of a man, she would "scour the country" for one, and on our declining, said that she did hope this was not just a "put-off" on our part, a word which in her world signified a false pretext for not accepting an invitation. She assured us that the Professor, who never referred to his patients when he was at home, was as sad about it as if it had been she herself who was ill. We shall see in due course that even if this had been true it would have

meant at once very little and a great deal on the part of the most unfaithful and the most attentive of husbands.

Offers as helpful, and infinitely more touching in the way in which they were expressed (which was a blend of the highest intelligence, the warmest sympathy, and a rare felicity of expression), were addressed to me by the heir to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. I had met him at Balbec where he had come on a visit to one of his aunts, the Princesse de Luxembourg, being himself at that time merely Comte de Nassau. He had married, some months later, the beautiful daughter of another Luxembourg princess, extremely rich because she was the only daughter of a prince who was the proprietor of an immense flour-milling business. Whereupon the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, who had no children of his own and was devoted to his nephew Nassau, had obtained parliamentary approval for declaring the young man his heir. As with all marriages of this nature, the origin of the bride's fortune was the obstacle, as it was also the efficient cause. I remembered this Comte de Nassau as one of the most striking young men I had ever met, already devoured, at that time, by a dark and blazing passion for his betrothed. I was deeply touched by the letters which he wrote to me regularly during my grandmother's illness, and Mamma herself, in her emotion, quoted sadly one of her mother's expressions: "Séigné would not have put it better."

On the sixth day Mamma, yielding to my grandmother's entreaties, left her for a little and pretended to go and lie down. I should have liked (so that Grandmamma should go to sleep) Françoise to stay quietly at her bedside. In spite of my supplications, she got up and left the room. She was genuinely devoted to my grandmother, and with her perspicacity and her natural pessimism she regarded her as doomed. She would therefore have liked to give her every possible care and attention. But word had just come that an electrician had arrived, a veteran member of his firm, the head of which was his brother-in-law, highly esteemed throughout the building, where he had been coming for many years, and especially by Jupien. This man had been sent for before my grandmother's illness. It seemed to me that he could have been sent away again, or asked to wait. But Françoise's code of manners would not permit this; it would have been to show a lack of courtesy towards this excellent man; my grandmother's condition ceased at once to matter. When, after waiting a quarter of an hour, I lost patience and went to look for her in the kitchen, I found her chatting to him on the landing of the back staircase, the door of which stood open, a device which had the advantage, should any of us come on the scene, of letting it be thought that they were just saying good-bye, but had also the drawback of sending a terrible draught through the house. Françoise tore herself from the workman, not without turning to shout down after him various greetings, forgotten in her haste, to his wife and his brother-in-law. This concern, characteristic of Combray, not to be found wanting in politeness was one which Françoise extended even to foreign policy. People foolishly imagine that the broad generalities of social phenomena afford an excellent opportunity to penetrate further into the human soul; they ought, on the contrary, to realise that it is by plumbing the depths of a single personality that they might have a chance of understanding those phenomena. Françoise had told the gardener at Combray over and over again that war was the most senseless of crimes, that life was the only thing that mattered. Yet, when the Russo-Japanese war broke out, she was quite ashamed, vis-à-vis the Tsar, that we had not gone to war to help the "poor Russians," "since," she reminded us, "we're allied to them." She felt this abstention to be discourteous to Nicholas II, who had always "said such nice things about us"; it was a corollary of the same code which would have prevented her from refusing a glass of brandy from Jupien, knowing that it would "upset" her digestion, and which caused her, with my grandmother lying at death's door, to feel that, by failing to go in person to make her apologies to this trusty electrician who had been put to so much trouble, she would have been committing the same discourtesy of which she considered France guilty in remaining neutral between Russia and Japan.

Luckily, we were soon rid of Françoise's daughter, who was obliged to be away for some weeks. To the regular stock of advice which people at Combray gave to the family of an invalid: "You haven't tried a little excursion ... the change of air, you know ... pick up an appetite ... etc.," she had added the almost unique idea, which she herself had thought up specially and which she repeated accordingly whenever we saw her, without fail, as though hoping by dint of reiteration to force it through the thickness of people's heads: "She ought to have looked after herself *radically* from the first." She did not recommend one particular kind of cure rather than another, provided it was "radical." As to Françoise herself, she noticed that my grandmother was not being given many medicaments. Since, according to her, they only upset the stomach, she was quite glad of this, but at the same time even more humiliated. She had, in the South of France, some relatively well-to-do cousins whose daughter, after falling ill in her adolescence, had died at twenty-three; for several years the father and mother had ruined themselves on drugs and cures, on different doctors, on pilgrimages from one thermal spa to another, until her decease. Now all this seemed to Françoise, for the parents in question, a kind of luxury, as though they had owned racehorses or a place in the country. They themselves, in the midst of their affliction, derived a certain pride from such lavish expenditure. They had now nothing left, least of all their most precious possession, their child, but they enjoyed telling people how they had done as much for her and more than the richest in the land. The ultra-violet rays to which the poor girl had been subjected several times a day for months on end particularly gratified them. The father, elated in his grief by the glory of it all, was so carried away as to speak of his daughter at times as though she had been an opera star for whose sake he had ruined himself. Françoise was not insensible to such a wealth of scenic effect; that which framed my grandmother's sickbed seemed to her a trifle meagre, suited rather to an illness on the stage of a small provincial theatre.

There was a moment when her uraemic trouble affected my grandmother's eyes. For some days she could not see at all. Her eyes were not at all like those of a blind person, but remained just the same as before. And

I gathered that she could see nothing only from the strangeness of a certain smile of welcome which she assumed the moment one opened the door, until one had come up to her and taken her hand, a smile which began too soon and remained stereotyped on her lips, fixed, but always full-faced, and endeavouring to be visible from every quarter, because it could no longer rely on the eyes to regulate it, to indicate the right moment, the proper direction, to focus it, to make it vary according to the change of position or of facial expression of the person who had come in; because it was left isolated, without the accompanying smile in her eyes which would have diverted the attention of the visitor from it for a while, it assumed in its awkwardness an undue importance, giving an impression of exaggerated amiability. Then her sight was completely restored, and from her eyes the wandering affliction passed to her ears. For several days my grandmother was deaf. And as she was afraid of being taken by surprise by the sudden entry of someone whom she would not have heard come in, all day long (although she was lying with her face to the wall) she kept turning her head sharply towards the door. But the movement of her neck was awkward, for one cannot adapt oneself in a few days to this transposition of faculties, so as, if not actually to see sounds, at least to listen with one's eyes. Finally her pain grew less, but the impediment in her speech increased. We were obliged to ask her to repeat almost everything that she said.

And now my grandmother, realising that we could no longer understand her, gave up altogether the attempt to speak and lay perfectly still. When she caught sight of me she gave a sort of convulsive start like a person who suddenly finds himself unable to breathe, but could make no intelligible sound. Then, overcome by her sheer powerlessness, she let her head fall back on the pillows, stretched herself out flat on her bed, her face grave and stony, her hands motionless on the sheet or occupied in some purely mechanical action such as that of wiping her fingers with her handkerchief. She made no effort to think. Then came a state of perpetual agitation. She was incessantly trying to get up. But we restrained her so far as we could from doing so, for fear of her discovering how paralysed she was. One day when she had been left alone for a moment I found her out of bed, standing in her nightdress trying to open the window.

At Balbec, once, when a widow who had flung herself into the sea had been rescued against her will, my grandmother had told me (moved perhaps by one of those pre-sentiments we discern at times in the mystery of our organic life which remains so obscure but in which nevertheless it seems that the future is foreshadowed) that she could think of nothing so cruel as to snatch a desperate woman away from the death that she had deliberately sought and restore her to her living martyrdom.

We were just in time to catch my grandmother; she put up an almost savage resistance to my mother, then, overpowered, seated forcibly in an armchair, she ceased to will, to regret, her face resumed its impassivity and she began laboriously to pick off the hairs that had been left on her nightdress by a fur coat which had been thrown over her shoulders.

The look in her eyes changed completely; often uneasy, plaintive, haggard, it was no longer the look we knew, it was the sullen expression of a senile old woman.

By dint of repeatedly asking her whether she would like her hair done, Françoise ended up by persuading herself that the request had come from my grandmother. She armed herself with brushes, combs, eau de Cologne, a wrapper. "It can't hurt Madame Amédée," she said, "if I just comb her hair; nobody's ever too weak to be combed." In other words, one is never too weak for another person to be able, for her own satisfaction, to comb one's hair. But when I came into the room I saw between the cruel hands of Françoise, as blissfully happy as though she were in the act of restoring my grandmother to health, beneath aged straggling tresses which scarcely had the strength to withstand the contact of the comb, a head which, incapable of maintaining the position into which it had been forced, was rolling about in a ceaseless whirl in which sheer debility alternated with spasms of pain. I felt that the moment at which Françoise would have finished her task was approaching, and I dared not hasten it by suggesting to her: "That's enough," for fear of her disobeying me. But I did forcibly intervene when, in order that my grandmother might see whether her hair had been done to her liking, Françoise, with innocent brutality, brought her a mirror. I was glad for the moment that I had managed to snatch it from her in time, before my grandmother, whom we had carefully kept away from mirrors, caught even a stray glimpse of a face unlike anything she could have imagined. But alas, when, a moment later, I bent over her to kiss that beloved forehead which had been so harshly treated, she looked up at me with a puzzled, distrustful, shocked expression: she had not recognised me.

According to our doctor, this was a symptom that the congestion of her brain was increasing. It must be relieved in some way. Cottard was in two minds. Françoise hoped at first that they were going to apply "clarified cups." She looked up the effects of this treatment in my dictionary, but could find no reference to it. Even if she had said "scarified" instead of "clarified" she still would not have found any reference to this adjective, since she did not look for it under "C" any more than under "S"—she did indeed say "clarified" but she wrote (and consequently assumed that the printed word was) "esclarified." Cottard, to her disappointment, gave the preference, though without much hope, to leeches. When, a few hours later, I went into my grandmother's room, fastened to her neck, her temples, her ears, the tiny black reptiles were writhing among her bloodstained locks, as on the head of Medusa. But in her pale and peaceful, entirely motionless face I saw her beautiful eyes, wide open, luminous and calm as of old (perhaps even more charged with the light of intelligence than they had been before her illness, since, as she could not speak and must not move, it was to her eyes alone that she entrusted her thought, that thought which can be reborn, as though by spontaneous generation, thanks to the withdrawal of a few drops of blood), her eyes, soft and liquid as oil, in which the rekindled fire that was now burning lit up for the sick woman the recaptured universe. Her calm was no longer the wisdom of despair but of hope. She realised that she was better, wanted to be careful and not to

move, and made me the present only of a beautiful smile so that I should know that she was feeling better, as she gently pressed my hand.

I knew the disgust that my grandmother felt at the sight of certain animals, let alone at being touched by them. I knew that it was in consideration of a higher utility that she was enduring the leeches. And so it infuriated me to hear Françoise repeating to her with the little chuckle one gives to a baby one is trying to amuse: "Oh, look at the little beasties running all over Madame." This was moreover to treat our patient with a lack of respect, as though she had lapsed into second childhood. But my grandmother, whose face had assumed the calm fortitude of a stoic, did not even seem to hear her.

Alas! no sooner had the leeches been removed than the congestion returned and grew steadily worse. I was surprised to find that at this stage, when my grandmother was so ill, Françoise was constantly disappearing. The fact was that she had ordered herself a mourning dress, and did not wish to keep the dressmaker waiting. In the lives of most women, everything, even the greatest sorrow, resolves itself into a question of "trying-on."

A few days later, while I was asleep in bed, my mother came to call me in the early hours of the morning. With that tender concern which in the gravest circumstances people who are overwhelmed by grief show for the comfort and convenience of others, "Forgive me for disturbing your sleep," she said to me.

"I wasn't asleep," I answered as I awoke.

I said this in good faith. The great modification which the act of awakening effects in us is not so much that of ushering us into the clear life of consciousness, as that of making us lose all memory of the slightly more diffused light in which our mind had been resting, as in the opaline depths of the sea. The tide of thought, half veiled from our perception, on which we were still drifting a moment ago, kept us in a state of motion perfectly sufficient to enable us to refer to it by the name of wakefulness. But then our actual awakenings produce an interruption of memory. A little later we describe these states as sleep because we no longer remember them. And when that bright star shines which at the moment of waking lights up behind the sleeper the whole expanse of his sleep, it makes him imagine for a few moments that it was not a sleeping but a waking state; a shooting star indeed, which blots out with the fading of its light not only the illusory existence but every aspect of our dream, and merely enables him who has awoken to say to himself: "I was asleep."

In a voice so gentle that it seemed to be afraid of hurting me, my mother asked whether it would tire me too much to get up, and, stroking my hands, went on:

"My poor child, you have only your Papa and Mamma to rely on now."

We went into the sickroom. Bent in a semi-circle on the bed, a creature other than my grandmother, a sort of beast that had put on her hair and crouched among her bedclothes, lay panting, whimpering, making the blankets heave with its convulsions. The eyelids were closed, and it was because they did not shut properly rather than because they opened that they disclosed a chink of eyeball, blurred, rheumy, reflecting the dimness of an organic vision and of an inward pain. All this agitation was not addressed to us, whom she neither saw nor knew. But if it was only a beast that was stirring there, where was my grandmother? Yes, I could recognise the shape of her nose, which bore no relation now to the rest of her face, but to the corner of which a beauty spot still adhered, and the hand that kept thrusting the blankets aside with a gesture which formerly would have meant that those blankets were oppressing her, but now meant nothing.

Mamma asked me to go for a little vinegar and water with which to sponge my grandmother's forehead. It was the only thing that refreshed her, thought Mamma, who saw that she was trying to push back her hair. But now one of the servants was signalling to me from the doorway. The news that my grandmother was *in extremis* had spread like wildfire through the house. One of those "extra helps" whom people engage at exceptional times to relieve the strain on their servants (a practice which gives deathbeds something of the air of social functions) had just opened the front door to the Duc de Guermantes, who was now waiting in the hall and had asked for me: I could not escape him.

"I have just, my dear sir, heard your macabre news. I should like, as a mark of sympathy, to shake your father by the hand."

I pleaded the difficulty of disturbing him for the moment. M. de Guermantes was like a caller who turns up just as one is about to set out on a journey. But he was so intensely aware of the importance of the courtesy he was showing us that it blinded him to all else, and he insisted upon being taken into the drawing-room. As a rule, he made a point of carrying out to the last letter the formalities with which he had decided to honour anyone, and took little heed that the trunks were packed or the coffin ready.

"Have you sent for Dieulafoy? No? That was a grave error. And if you had only asked me, I would have got him to come—he never refuses me anything, although he has refused the Duchesse de Chartres before now. You see, I set myself above a Princess of the Blood. However, in the presence of death we are all equal," he added, not in order to assure me that my grandmother was becoming his equal, but perhaps because he felt that a prolonged discussion of his power over Dieulafoy and his pre-eminence over the Duchesse de Chartres would not be in very good taste.

His advice did not in the least surprise me. I knew that, in the Guermantes family, the name of Dieulafoy was regularly quoted (only with slightly more respect) among those of other tradesmen who were "quite the best" in their respective lines. And the old Duchesse de Mortemart, *née* Guermantes (I never could understand, by the way, why the moment one speaks of a Duchess, one almost invariably says: "The old Duchess of So-and-so," or, alternatively, in a delicate Watteau tone, if she is still young, "The little Duchess of So-and-so") would prescribe almost automatically, with a droop of the eyelid, in serious cases: "Dieulafoy, Dieulafoy!" as, if one wanted a place for ices, she would advise "Poiré Blanche," or for cakes "Rebattet, Rebattet." But I was not aware that my father had, as a matter of fact, just sent for Dieulafoy.

At this point my mother, who was waiting impatiently for some cylinders of oxygen which would help my grandmother to breathe more easily, came out herself to the hall where she little expected to find M. de Guermantes. I should have liked to conceal him, no matter where. But convinced in his own mind that nothing was more essential, could be more gratifying to her or more indispensable to the maintenance of his reputation as a perfect gentleman, he seized me violently by the arm and, although I defended myself as though against an assault with repeated protestations of "Sir, Sir, Sir," dragged me across to Mamma, saying: "Will you do me the great honour of presenting me to your lady mother?", going slightly off pitch on the word "mother." And it was so plain to him that the honour was hers that he could not help smiling at her even while he was composing a grave face. I had no alternative but to effect the introduction, which triggered off a series of bowings and scrapings: he was about to begin the complete ritual of salutation, and even proposed to enter into conversation, but my mother, beside herself with grief, told me to come at once and did not reply to the speeches of M. de Guermantes who, expecting to be received as a visitor and finding himself instead left alone in the hall, would have been obliged to leave had he not at that moment caught sight of Saint-Loup who had arrived in Paris that morning and had come to us in haste to ask for news. "I say, this is a piece of luck!" cried the Duke joyfully, grabbing his nephew by a button which he nearly tore off, regardless of the presence of my mother who was again crossing the hall. Saint-Loup was not, I think, despite his genuine sympathy, altogether sorry to avoid seeing me, considering his attitude towards me. He left, dragged off by his uncle who, having had something very important to say to him and having very nearly gone down to Doncières on purpose to say it, was beside himself with joy at being able to save himself the trouble. "Upon my soul, if anybody had told me I had only to cross the courtyard to find you here, I should have thought they were pulling my leg. As your friend M. Bloch would say, it's rather droll." And as he disappeared down the stairs with his arm round Robert's shoulder: "All the same," he went on, "it's quite clear I must have touched the hangman's rope or something; I do have the devil's own luck." It was not that the Duc de Guermantes was bad-mannered; far from it. But he was one of those men who are incapable of putting themselves in the place of others, who resemble in that respect undertakers and the majority of doctors, and who, after having composed their faces and said "This is a very painful occasion," having embraced you at a pinch and advised you to rest, cease to regard a deathbed or a funeral as anything but a social gathering of a more or less restricted kind at which, with a joviality that has been checked for a moment only, they scan the room in search of the person whom they can talk to about their own little affairs, or ask to introduce them to someone else, or offer a lift in their carriage when it is time to go home. The Duc de Guermantes, while congratulating himself on the "good wind" that had blown him into the arms of his nephew, was still so surprised at the reception—natural as it was—that he had had from my mother that he declared later on that she was as disagreeable as my father was civil, that she had "aberrations" during which she seemed literally not to hear a word you said to her, and that in his opinion she was out of sorts and perhaps even not quite "all there." At the same time he was prepared (according to what I was told) to put it down partly at least to the "circumstances" and to aver that my mother had seemed to him greatly "affected" by the sad event. But his limbs were still twitching with all the residue of bows and heel-clickings and backings-out which he had been prevented from using up, and he had so little idea of the real nature of Mamma's grief that he asked me, the day before the funeral, if I was doing anything to distract her.

A brother-in-law of my grandmother's, who was a monk, and whom I had never seen, had telegraphed to Austria, where the head of his order was, and having as a special dispensation received permission, arrived that day. Bowed down with grief, he sat by the bedside reading prayers and meditations without, however, taking his gimlet eyes from the invalid's face. At one point when my grandmother was unconscious, the sight of the priest's grief began to upset me, and I looked at him tenderly. He appeared surprised by my pity, and then an odd thing happened. He joined his hands in front of his face like a man absorbed in sorrowful meditation, but, on the assumption that I would then cease to watch him, left, as I observed, a tiny chink between his fingers. And just as I was looking away, I saw his sharp eye, which had been taking advantage of the shelter of his hands to observe whether my sympathy was sincere. He was crouched there as in the shadow of a confessional. He saw that I had noticed him and at once shut tight the lattice which he had left ajar. I met him again later, but never was any reference made by either of us to that minute. It was tacitly agreed that I had not noticed that he was spying on me. With priests as with alienists, there is always an element of the examining magistrate. Besides, what friend is there, however dear to us, in whose past as in ours there has not been some such episode which we find it more convenient to believe that he must have forgotten?

The doctor gave my grandmother an injection of morphine, and to make her breathing less painful ordered cylinders of oxygen. My mother, the doctor, the nursing sister held these in their hands; as soon as one was exhausted another was put in its place. I had left the room for a few minutes. When I returned I found myself in the presence of a sort of miracle. Accompanied by an incessant low murmur, my grandmother seemed to be singing us a long, joyous song which filled the room, rapid and musical. I soon realised that it was scarcely less unconscious than, as purely mechanical as, the hoarse rattle that I had heard before leaving the room. Perhaps to a slight extent it reflected some improvement brought about by the morphine. Principally it was the result (the air not passing quite in the same way through the bronchial tubes) of a change in the register of her breathing. Released by the twofold action of the oxygen and the morphine, my grandmother's breath no longer laboured, no longer whined, but, swift and light, glided like a skater towards the delicious fluid. Perhaps the breath, imperceptible as that of the wind in the hollow stem of a reed, was mingled in this song with some of those more human sighs which, released at the approach of death, suggest intimations of pain or happiness in those who have already ceased to feel, and came now to add a more melodious accent, but

without changing its rhythm, to that long phrase which rose, soared still higher, then subsided, to spring up once more, from the alleviated chest, in pursuit of the oxygen. Then, having risen to so high a pitch, having been sustained with so much vigour, the chant, mingled with a murmur of supplication in the midst of ecstasy, seemed at times to stop altogether like a spring that has ceased to flow.

Françoise, in any great sorrow, felt the need, however futile—but did not possess the art, however simple—to give it expression. Realising that my grandmother was doomed, it was her own personal impressions that she felt impelled to communicate to us. And all that she could do was to repeat: “I feel quite upset,” in the same tone in which she would say, when she had taken too large a plateful of cabbage broth: “I’ve got a sort of weight on my stomach,” sensations both of which were more natural than she seemed to think. Though so feebly expressed, her grief was nevertheless very great, and was aggravated moreover by the fact that her daughter, detained at Combray (to which this young Parisian now disdainfully referred as “the back of beyond” and where she felt herself becoming a “country bumpkin”), would probably not be able to return in time for the funeral ceremony, which was certain, Françoise felt, to be a superb spectacle. Knowing that we were not inclined to be expansive, she had taken the precaution of bespeaking Jupien in advance for every evening that week. She knew that he would not be free at the time of the funeral. She was determined at least to “go over it all” with him on his return.

For several nights now my father, my grandfather and one of our cousins had been keeping vigil and no longer left the house. Their continuous devotion ended by assuming a mask of indifference, and their interminable enforced idleness around this deathbed made them indulge in the sort of small talk that is an inseparable accompaniment of prolonged confinement in a railway carriage. Besides, this cousin (a nephew of my great-aunt) aroused in me an antipathy as strong as the esteem which he deserved and generally enjoyed. He was always in the offing on such occasions, and was so assiduous in his attentions to the dying that their mourning families, on the pretext that he was delicate, despite his robust appearance, his bass voice and bristling beard, invariably besought him, with the customary euphemisms, not to come to the cemetery. I could tell already that Mamma, who thought of others in the midst of the most crushing grief, would soon be saying to him in different terms what he was in the habit of hearing said on all such occasions:

“Promise me that you won’t come ‘tomorrow.’ Please, for ‘her sake.’ At any rate, you won’t go ‘all the way.’ It’s what she would have wished.”

But it was no use; he was always the first to arrive “at the house,” by reason of which he had been given, in another circle, the nickname (unknown to us) of “No flowers by request.” And before attending “everything” he had always “attended to everything,” which entitled him to the formula: “You, we don’t even thank you.”

“What’s that?” came in a loud voice from my grandfather, who had grown rather deaf and had failed to catch something which our cousin had just said to my father.

“Nothing,” answered the cousin. “I was just saying that I’d heard from Combray this morning. The weather is appalling down there, and here we’ve got almost too much sun.”

“And yet the barometer is very low,” put in my father.

“Where did you say the weather was bad?” asked my grandfather.

“At Combray.”

“Ah! I’m not surprised; whenever the weather’s bad here it’s fine at Combray, and vice versa. Good gracious! Talking of Combray, has anyone remembered to tell Legrandin?”

“Yes, don’t worry about that, it’s been done,” said my cousin, whose cheeks, bronzed by an irrepressible growth of beard, dimpled slightly with the satisfaction of having thought of it.

At this point my father hurried from the room. I supposed that a sudden change, for better or worse, had occurred. It was simply that Dr Dieulafoy had just arrived. My father went to receive him in the drawing-room, like the actor who is next to appear on the stage. He had been sent for not to cure but to certify, almost in a legal capacity. Dr Dieulafoy may indeed have been a great physician, a marvellous teacher; to the several roles in which he excelled, he added another, in which he remained for forty years without a rival, a role as original as that of the confidant, the clown or the noble father, which consisted in coming to certify that a patient was *in extremis*. His name alone presaged the dignity with which he would sustain the part, and when the servant announced: “M. Dieulafoy,” one thought one was in a Molière play. To the dignity of his bearing was added, without being conspicuous, the litness of a perfect figure. His exaggerated good looks were tempered by a decorum suited to distressing circumstances. In the sable majesty of his frock-coat the Professor would enter the room, melancholy without affectation, uttering not one word of condolence that could have been construed as insincere, nor being guilty of the slightest infringement of the rules of tact. At the foot of a deathbed it was he and not the Duc de Guermantes who was the great nobleman. Having examined my grandmother without tiring her, and with an excess of reserve which was an act of courtesy to the doctor in charge of the case, he murmured a few words to my father, and bowed respectfully to my mother, to whom I felt that my father had positively to restrain himself from saying: “Professor Dieulafoy.” But already the latter had turned away, not wishing to seem intrusive, and made a perfect exit, simply accepting the sealed envelope that was slipped into his hand. He did not appear to have seen it, and we ourselves were left wondering for a moment whether we had really given it to him, with such a conjurer’s dexterity had he made it vanish without sacrificing one iota of the gravity—which was if anything accentuated—of the eminent consultant in his long frock-coat with its silk lapels, his noble features engraved with the most dignified commiseration. His deliberation and his vivacity combined to show that, even if he had a hundred other calls to make, he did not wish to appear to be in a hurry. For he was the embodiment of tact, intelligence and kindness. The eminent man is no longer with us. Other physicians, other professors, may have rivalled, may



indeed have surpassed him. But the "capacity" in which his knowledge, his physical endowments, his distinguished manners made him supreme exists no longer, for want of any successor capable of taking his place.

Mamma had not even noticed M. Dieulafoy: everything that was not my grandmother no longer existed. I remember (and here I anticipate) that at the cemetery, where we saw her, like a supernatural apparition, tremulously approach the grave, her eyes seeming to gaze after a being that had taken wing and was already far away, my father having remarked to her: "Old Norpois came to the house and to the church and on here; he gave up a most important committee meeting to come; you ought really to say a word to him, he'd be very touched," my mother, when the Ambassador bowed to her, could do no more than gently lower her face, which showed no sign of tears. A couple of days earlier—to anticipate still before returning to the bedside of the dying woman—while we were watching over her dead body, Françoise, who, not disbelieving entirely in ghosts, was terrified by the least sound, had said: "I believe that's her." But instead of fear, it was an ineffable sweetness that her words aroused in my mother, who would have dearly wished that the dead could return, so as to have her mother with her sometimes still.

To return now to those last hours, "You heard about the telegram her sisters sent us?" my grandfather asked the cousin.

"Yes, Beethoven, I've been told. It's worth framing. Still, I'm not surprised."

"And my poor wife was so fond of them, too," said my grandfather, wiping away a tear. "We mustn't blame them. They're stark mad, both of them, as I've always said. What's the matter now? Aren't you going on with the oxygen?"

My mother spoke: "Oh, but then Mamma will be having trouble with her breathing again."

The doctor reassured her: "Oh, no! The effect of the oxygen will last a good while yet. We can begin it again presently."

It seemed to me that he would not have said this of a dying woman, that if this good effect was going to last it meant that it was still possible to do something to keep her alive. The hiss of the oxygen ceased for a few moments. But the happy plaint of her breathing still poured forth, light, troubled, unfinished, ceaselessly recommencing. Now and then it seemed that all was over; her breath stopped, whether owing to one of those transpositions to another octave that occur in the respiration of a sleeper, or else from a natural intermittence, an effect of anaesthesia, the progress of asphyxia, some failure of the heart. The doctor stooped to feel my grandmother's pulse, but already, as if a tributary had come to irrigate the dried-up river-bed, a new chant had taken up the interrupted phrase, which resumed in another key with the same inexhaustible momentum. Who knows whether, without my grandmother's even being conscious of them, countless happy and tender memories compressed by suffering were not escaping from her now, like those lighter gases which had long been compressed in the cylinders? It was as though everything that she had to tell us was pouring out, that it was us that she was addressing with this prolixity, this eagerness, this effusion. At the foot of the bed, convulsed by every gasp of this agony, not weeping but at moments drenched with tears, my mother stood with the unheeding desolation of a tree lashed by the rain and shaken by the wind. I was made to dry my eyes before I went up to kiss my grandmother.

"But I thought she could no longer see," said my father.

"One can never be sure," replied the doctor.

When my lips touched her face, my grandmother's hands quivered, and a long shudder ran through her whole body—a reflex, perhaps, or perhaps it is that certain forms of tenderness have, so to speak, a hyperaesthesia which recognises through the veil of unconsciousness what they scarcely need senses to enable them to love. Suddenly my grandmother half rose, made a violent effort, like someone struggling to resist an attempt on his life. Françoise could not withstand this sight and burst out sobbing. Remembering what the doctor had just said I tried to make her leave the room. At that moment my grandmother opened her eyes. I thrust myself hurriedly in front of Françoise to hide her tears, while my parents were speaking to the patient. The hiss of the oxygen had ceased; the doctor moved away from the bedside. My grandmother was dead.

An hour or two later Françoise was able for the last time, and without causing it any pain, to comb that beautiful hair which was only tinged with grey and hitherto had seemed less old than my grandmother herself. But now, on the contrary, it alone set the crown of age on a face grown young again, from which had vanished the wrinkles, the contractions, the swellings, the strains, the hollows which pain had carved on it over the years. As in the far-off days when her parents had chosen for her a bridegroom, she had the features, delicately traced by purity and submission, the cheeks glowing with a chaste expectation, with a dream of happiness, with an innocent gaiety even, which the years had gradually destroyed. Life in withdrawing from her had taken with it the disillusionments of life. A smile seemed to be hovering on my grandmother's lips. On that funeral couch, death, like a sculptor of the Middle Ages, had laid her down in the form of a young girl.

## Chapter Eight

Although it was simply a Sunday in autumn, I had been born again, life lay intact before me, for that morning, after a succession of mild days, there had been a cold fog which had not cleared until nearly midday: and a change in the weather is sufficient to create the world and ourselves anew. Formerly, when the wind howled in my chimney, I would listen to the blows which it struck on the iron trap with as keen an emotion as if, like the famous chords with which the Fifth Symphony opens, they had been the irresistible calls of a mysterious destiny. Every change in the aspect of nature offers us a similar transformation by adapting our desires so as to harmonise with the new form of things. The mist, from the moment of my awakening, had made of me, instead of the centrifugal being which one is on fine days, a man turned in on himself, longing for the chimney corner and the shared bed, a shivering Adam in quest of a sedentary Eve, in this different world.

Between the soft grey tint of a morning landscape and the taste of a cup of chocolate I incorporated all the originality of the physical, intellectual and moral life which I had taken with me to Doncières about a year earlier and which, blazoned with the oblong form of a bare hillside—always present even when it was invisible—formed in me a series of pleasures entirely distinct from all others, incommunicable to my friends in the sense that the impressions, richly interwoven with one another, which orchestrated them were a great deal more characteristic of them to my unconscious mind than any facts that I might have related. From this point of view the new world in which this morning's fog had immersed me was a world already known to me (which only made it more real) and forgotten for some time (which restored all its novelty). And I was able to look at several of the pictures of misty landscapes which my memory had acquired, notably a series of "Mornings at Doncières," including my first morning there in barracks and another in a neighbouring country house where I had gone with Saint-Loup to spend the night, from the windows of which, when I had drawn back the curtains at daybreak before getting back into bed, in the first a trooper, in the second (on the thin margin of a pond and a wood, all the rest of which was engulfed in the uniform and liquid softness of the mist) a coachman busy polishing harness, had appeared to me like those rare figures, scarcely visible to the eye that is obliged to adapt itself to the mysterious vagueness of the half-light, which emerge from a faded fresco.

It was from my bed that I was contemplating these memories that afternoon, for I had returned to it to wait until the hour came at which, taking advantage of the absence of my parents who had gone for a few days to Combray, I proposed to get up and go to a little play which was being given that evening in Mme de Villeparisis's drawing-room. Had they been at home I should perhaps not have ventured to do so; my mother, in the delicacy of her respect for my grandmother's memory, wished the tokens of regret that were paid to it to be freely and sincerely given; she would not have forbidden me this outing, but she would have disapproved of it. From Combray, on the other hand, had I consulted her wishes, she would not have replied with a melancholy: "Do just as you like; you're old enough now to know what is right or wrong," but, reproaching herself for having left me alone in Paris, and measuring my grief by her own, would have wished for it distractions of a sort which she herself would have eschewed and which she persuaded herself that my grandmother, solicitous above all things for my health and my nervous equilibrium, would have recommended for me.

That morning the boiler of the new central heating installation had been turned on for the first time. Its disagreeable sound—an intermittent hiccup—had no connexion with my memories of Doncières. But its prolonged encounter with them in my thoughts that afternoon was to give it so lasting an affinity with them that whenever, after succeeding more or less in forgetting it, I heard the central heating again it would bring them back to me.

There was no one else in the house but Françoise. The fog had lifted. The grey light, falling like a fine rain, wove without ceasing a transparent web through which the Sunday strollers appeared in a silvery sheen. I had flung to the foot of my bed the *Figaro*, for which I had been sending out religiously every morning ever since I had sent in an article which it had not yet printed; despite the absence of sun, the intensity of the daylight was an indication that we were still only half-way through the afternoon. The tulle window-curtains, vaporous and friable as they would not have been on a fine day, had that same blend of softness and brittleness that dragon-flies' wings have, and Venetian glass. It depressed me all the more that I should be spending this Sunday alone because I had sent a note that morning to Mlle de Stermaria. Robert de Saint-Loup, whom his mother had at length succeeded—after painful abortive attempts—in parting from his mistress, and who immediately afterwards had been sent to Morocco in the hope of forgetting the woman he had already for some time ceased to love, had sent me a line, which had reached me the day before, announcing his imminent arrival in France for a short spell of leave. As he would only be passing through Paris (where his family were doubtless afraid of seeing him renew relations with Rachel), he informed me, to show me that he had been thinking of me, that he had met at Tangier Mlle or rather Mme (for she had divorced her husband after three months of marriage) de Stermaria. And Robert, remembering what I had said to him at Balbec, had asked on my behalf for an assignation with the young woman. She would be delighted to dine with me, she had told him, on one of the evenings which she would be spending in Paris before her return to Brittany. He told me to lose no time in writing to Mme de Stermaria, for she must certainly have arrived.

Saint-Loup's letter had come as no surprise to me, even though I had had no news of him since, at the time of my grandmother's illness, he had accused me of perfidy and treachery. I had grasped at once what must have happened. Rachel, who liked to provoke his jealousy (she also had other causes for resentment against

me), had persuaded her lover that I had made sly attempts to have relations with her in his absence. It is probable that he continued to believe in the truth of this allegation, but he had ceased to be in love with her, which meant that its truth or falsehood had become a matter of complete indifference to him, and our friendship alone remained. When, on meeting him again, I tried to talk to him about his accusations, he merely gave me a benign and affectionate smile which seemed to be a sort of apology, and then changed the subject. All this was not to say that he did not, a little later, see Rachel occasionally when he was in Paris. Those who have played a big part in one's life very rarely disappear from it suddenly for good. They return to it at odd moments (so much so that people suspect a renewal of old love) before leaving it for ever. Saint-Loup's breach with Rachel had very soon become less painful to him, thanks to the soothing pleasure that was given him by her incessant demands for money. Jealousy, which prolongs the course of love, is not capable of containing many more ingredients than the other products of the imagination. If one takes with one, when one starts on a journey, three or four images which incidentally one is sure to lose on the way (such as the lilies and anemones heaped on the Ponte Vecchio, or the Persian church shrouded in mist), one's trunk is already pretty full. When one leaves a mistress, one would be just as glad, until one has begun to forget her, that she should not become the property of three or four potential protectors whom one pictures in one's mind's eye, of whom, that is to say, one is jealous: all those whom one does not so picture count for nothing. Now frequent demands for money from a cast-off mistress no more give one a complete idea of her life than charts showing a high temperature would of her illness. But the latter would at any rate be an indication that she was ill, and the former furnish a presumption, vague enough it is true, that the forsaken one or forsaker (whichever she be) cannot have found anything very remarkable in the way of rich protectors. And so each demand is welcomed with the joy which a lull produces in the jealous one's sufferings, and answered with the immediate dispatch of money, for naturally one does not like to think of her being in want of anything except lovers (one of the three lovers one has in one's mind's eye), until time has enabled one to regain one's composure and to learn one's successor's name without wilting. Sometimes Rachel came in so late at night that she could ask her former lover's permission to lie down beside him until the morning. This was a great comfort to Robert, for it reminded him how intimately, after all, they had lived together, simply to see that even if he took the greater part of the bed for himself it did not in the least interfere with her sleep. He realised that she was more comfortable, lying close to his familiar body, than she would have been elsewhere, that she felt herself by his side—even in an hotel—to be in a bedroom known of old in which one has one's habits, in which one sleeps better. He felt that his shoulders, his limbs, all of him, were for her, even when he was unduly restless from insomnia or thinking of the things he had to do, so entirely usual that they could not disturb her and that the perception of them added still further to her sense of repose.

To revert to where we were, I had been all the more excited by Robert's letter in that I could read between the lines what he had not ventured to write more explicitly. "You can most certainly ask her to dine in a private room," he told me. "She is a charming young person, with a delightful nature—you will get on splendidly with her, and I am sure you will have a most enjoyable evening together." As my parents were returning at the end of the week, on Saturday or Sunday, and after that I should be obliged to dine every evening at home, I had written at once to Mme de Stermaria proposing any evening that might suit her up to Friday. A message was brought back that I should hear from her in writing that very evening at about eight o'clock. This time would have passed quickly enough if I had had, during the afternoon that separated me from her letter, the help of a visit from someone else. When the hours are wrapped in conversation one ceases to measure, or indeed to notice them; they vanish, and suddenly it is a long way beyond the point at which it escaped you that the nimble truant time impinges once more on your attention. But if we are alone, our preoccupation, by bringing before us the still distant and incessantly awaited moment with the frequency and uniformity of a ticking pendulum, divides, or rather multiplies, the hours by all the minutes which, had we been with friends, we should not have counted. And confronted, by the incessant return of my desire, with the ardent pleasure which I was to enjoy—not for some days, though, alas!—in Mme de Stermaria's company, this afternoon, which I was going to have to spend alone, seemed to me very empty and very melancholy.

Every now and then I heard the sound of the lift coming up, but it was followed by a second sound, not the one I was hoping for, namely its coming to a halt at our landing, but another very different sound which the lift made in continuing its progress to the floors above and which, because it so often meant the desertion of my floor when I was expecting a visitor, remained for me later, even when I had ceased to wish for visitors, a sound lugubrious in itself, in which there echoed, as it were, a sentence of solitary confinement. Weary, resigned, occupied for several hours still with its immemorial task, the grey day stitched its shimmering needlework of light and shade, and it saddened me to think that I was to be left alone with a thing that knew me no more than would a seamstress who, installed by the window so as to see better while she finishes her work, pays no attention to the person present with her in the room. Suddenly, although I had heard no bell, Françoise opened the door to introduce Albertine, who entered smiling, silent, plump, containing in the plenitude of her body, made ready so that I might continue living them, come to seek me out, the days we had spent together in that Balbec to which I had never since returned. No doubt, whenever we see again a person with whom our relations—however trivial they may be—have now changed, it is like a juxtaposition of two different periods. For this, there is no need for a former mistress to call round to see us as a friend; all that is required is the visit to Paris of someone we have known day by day in a certain kind of life, and that this life should have ceased for us, if only a week ago. On each of Albertine's smiling, questioning, self-conscious features I could read the questions: "And what about Madame de Villeparisis? And the dancing-master? And the pastry-cook?" When she sat down, her back seemed to be saying: "Well, well, there are no cliffs here, but

you don't mind if I sit down beside you, all the same, as I used to do at Balbec?" She was like an enchantress offering me a mirror that reflected time. In this she resembled all the people whom we seldom see now but with whom at one time we lived on more intimate terms. With Albertine, however, there was something more than this. True, even in our daily encounters at Balbec, I had always been surprised when I caught sight of her, so changeable was her appearance. But now she was scarcely recognisable. Freed from the pink haze that shrouded them, her features had emerged in sharp relief like those of a statue. She had another face, or rather she had a face at last; her body too had grown. There remained scarcely anything now of the sheath in which she had been enclosed and on the surface of which, at Balbec, her future outline had been barely visible.

This time, Albertine had returned to Paris earlier than usual. As a rule she did not arrive until the spring, so that, already disturbed for some weeks past by the storms that were beating down the first flowers, I did not distinguish, in the pleasure that I felt, the return of Albertine from that of the fine weather. It was enough that I should be told that she was in Paris and that she had called at my house, for me to see her again like a rose flowering by the sea. I cannot say whether it was the desire for Balbec or for her that took possession of me then; perhaps my desire for her was itself a lazy, cowardly, and incomplete form of possessing Balbec, as if to possess a thing materially, to take up residence in a town, were tantamount to possessing it spiritually. Besides, even materially, when she was no longer swaying in my imagination before a horizon of sea, but motionless in a room beside me, she seemed to me often a very poor specimen of a rose, so much so that I wanted to shut my eyes in order not to observe this or that blemish of its petals, and to imagine instead that I was inhaling the salt air on the beach.

I may say all this here, although I was not then aware of what was to happen later on. Certainly, it is more reasonable to devote one's life to women than to postage stamps or old snuff-boxes, even to pictures or statues. But the example of other collections should be a warning to us to diversify, to have not one woman only but several. Those charming associations that a young girl affords with a sea-shore, with the braided tresses of a statue in a church, with an old print, with everything that causes one to love in her, whenever she appears, a delightful picture, those associations are not very stable. When you come to live with a woman you will soon cease to see anything of what made you love her; though it is true that the two sundered elements can be reunited by jealousy. If, after a long period of living together, I was to end by seeing no more in Albertine than an ordinary woman, an intrigue between her and someone she had loved at Balbec would still perhaps have sufficed to reincorporate in her, to amalgamate with her, the beach and the unrolling of the tide. But these secondary associations no longer captivate our eyes; it is to the heart that they are perceptible and fatal. We cannot, under so dangerous a form, regard the renewal of the miracle as a thing to be desired. But I am anticipating the course of years. And here I need only register my regret that I did not have the sense simply to keep my collection of women as people keep their collections of old quizzing glasses, never so complete, in their cabinet, that there is not room always for another and rarer still.

Contrary to the habitual order of her holiday movements, this year she had come straight from Balbec, where furthermore she had not stayed nearly so late as usual. It was a long time since I had seen her. And since I did not know even by name the people with whom she was in the habit of mixing in Paris, I knew nothing of her life during the periods in which she abstained from coming to see me. These lasted often for quite a time. Then, one fine day, in would burst Albertine whose rosy apparitions and silent visits left me little if any better informed as to what she might have been doing during an interval which remained plunged in that darkness of her hidden life which my eyes felt little anxiety to penetrate.

This time, however, certain signs seemed to indicate that some new experience must have entered into that life. And yet, perhaps, all that one was entitled to conclude from them was that girls change very rapidly at the age which Albertine had now reached. For instance, her intelligence was now more in evidence, and on my reminding her of the day when she had insisted with so much ardour on the superiority of her idea of making Sophocles write "My dear Racine," she was the first to laugh, quite whole-heartedly. "Andrée was quite right, it was stupid of me," she admitted. "Sophocles ought to have begun: 'Sir.'" I replied that Andrée's "Sir" and "Dear Sir" were no less comic than her own "My dear Racine," or Gisèle's "My dear friend," but that after all the really stupid people were the professors for making Sophocles write letters to Racine. Here, however, Albertine was unable to follow me. She could not see what was stupid about it; her intelligence was opening up, but was not fully developed. There were other more attractive novelties in her; I sensed, in this same pretty girl who had just sat down by my bed, something that was different; and in those lines which, in the look and the features of the face, express a person's habitual volition, a change of front, a partial conversion, as though something had happened to break down those resistances I had come up against in Balbec one long-ago evening when we had formed a couple symmetrical with but the converse of our present arrangement, for then it had been she who was lying down and I by her bedside. Wishing and not daring to ascertain whether she would now let herself be kissed, every time that she rose to go I asked her to stay a little longer. This was a concession not very easy to obtain, for although she had nothing to do (otherwise she would have rushed out of the house) she was a person methodical in her habits and moreover not very gracious towards me, seeming no longer to take pleasure in my company. Yet each time, after looking at her watch, she sat down again at my request until finally she had spent several hours with me without my having asked her for anything; the things I said to her were connected with those I had said during the preceding hours, and were totally unconnected with what I was thinking about, what I desired from her, remaining obstinately parallel thereto. There is nothing like desire for preventing the things one says from bearing any resemblance to what one has in one's mind. Time presses, and yet it seems as though we were seeking to gain time by speaking of subjects absolutely alien to the one that preoccupies us. We go on chatting, whereas the sentence we should

like to utter would have been accompanied by a gesture, if indeed we have not (to give ourselves the pleasure of immediate action and to gratify the curiosity we feel as to the reactions which will follow it, without saying a word, without a by-your-leave) already made this gesture. Certainly I was not in the least in love with Albertine; child of the mists outside, she could simply satisfy the fanciful desire which the change of weather had awakened in me and which was midway between the desires that are satisfied by the arts of the kitchen and of monumental sculpture respectively, for it made me dream simultaneously of mingling with my flesh a substance different and warm, and of attaching at some point to my recumbent body a divergent one, as the body of Eve barely holds by the feet to the side of Adam, to whose body hers is almost perpendicular, in those Romanesque bas-reliefs in the church at Balbec which represent in so noble and so reposeful a fashion, still almost like a classical frieze, the creation of woman; God in them is everywhere, followed, as by two ministers, by two little angels in whom one recognises—like those winged, swarming summer creatures which winter has caught by surprise and spared—cupids from Herculaneum still surviving well into the thirteenth century, and winging their last slow flight, weary but never failing in the grace that might be expected of them, over the whole front of the porch.

As for this pleasure which by accomplishing my desire would have released me from these musings and which I should have sought quite as readily from any other pretty woman, had I been asked upon what—in the course of this endless chatter throughout which I was at pains to keep from Albertine the one thing that was in my mind—my optimistic assumption with regard to her possible complaisances was based, I should perhaps have answered that this assumption was due (while the forgotten outlines of Albertine's voice retraced for me the contour of her personality) to the advent of certain words which had not formed part of her vocabulary, or at least not in the acceptance which she now gave them. Thus, when she said to me that Elstir was stupid and I protested: "You don't understand," she replied, smiling, "I mean that he was stupid in that instance, but of course I know he's a very distinguished person, really."

Similarly, wishing to say of the Fontainebleau golf club that it was smart, she declared: "It's really quite a selection."

Speaking of a duel I had fought, she said of my seconds: "What very choice seconds," and looking at my face confessed that she would like to see me "sport a moustache." She even went so far (and at this point my chances appeared to me very great) as to announce, in a phrase of which I would have sworn that she was ignorant a year earlier, that since she had last seen Gisèle there had passed a certain "lapse of time." This was not to say that Albertine had not already possessed, when I was at Balbec, a quite adequate assortment of those expressions which reveal at once that one comes of a well-to-do family and which, year by year, a mother passes on to her daughter just as she gradually bestows on her, as the girl grows up, her own jewels on important occasions. It was evident that Albertine had ceased to be a little girl when one day, to express her thanks for a present which a strange lady had given her, she had said: "I'm quite overcome." Mme Bontemps had been unable to refrain from looking across at her husband, whose comment was: "Well, well, and she's only fourteen."

Her more pronounced nubility had struck home when Albertine, speaking of another girl whom she considered ill-bred, said: "One can't even tell whether she's pretty, because she paints her face a *foot thick*." Finally, though still only a girl, she already displayed the manner of a grown woman of her upbringing and station when she said, of someone whose face twitched: "I can't look at him, because it makes me want to do the same," or, if someone else were being imitated: "The absurd thing about it is that when you imitate her voice you look exactly like her." All this is drawn from the social treasury. But the point was that it did not seem to me possible that Albertine's natural environment could have supplied her with "distinguished" in the sense in which my father would say of a colleague whom he had not actually met but whose intellectual attainments he had heard praised: "It appears he's a very distinguished person." "Selection," even when used of a golf club, struck me as being as incompatible with the Simonet family as it would be, if preceded by the adjective "natural," with a text published centuries before the researches of Darwin. "Lapse of time" seemed to me to augur better still. Finally there appeared the evidence of certain upheavals, the nature of which was unknown to me, but sufficient to justify me in all my hopes, when Albertine observed, with the self-satisfaction of a person whose opinion is by no means to be despised:

"*To my mind*, that is the best thing that could possibly happen. I regard it as the best solution, the stylish way out."

This was so novel, so manifestly an alluvial deposit leading one to suspect such capricious wanderings over ground hitherto unknown to her, that on hearing the words "to my mind" I drew Albertine towards me, and at "I regard" sat her down on my bed.

No doubt it happens that women of moderate culture, on marrying well-read men, receive such expressions as part of their dowry. And shortly after the metamorphosis which follows the wedding night, when they start paying calls and are stand-offish with their old friends, one notices with surprise that they have turned into matrons if, in decreeing that some person is intelligent, they sound both "I"s in the word; but that is precisely the sign of a change of state, and it seemed to me that there was a world of difference between the new expressions and the vocabulary of the Albertine I had known of old—a vocabulary in which the most daring flights were to say of any unusual person: "He's a type," or, if you suggested a game of cards to her: "I don't have money to burn," or again, if any of her friends were to reproach her in terms which she felt to be unjustified: "You really are the limit!"—expressions dictated in such cases by a sort of bourgeois tradition almost as old as the *Magnificat* itself, which a girl slightly out of temper and confident that she is in the right employs, as the saying is, "quite naturally," that is to say because she has learned them from her mother, just

as she has learned to say her prayers or to curtsy. All these expressions Mme Bontemps had imparted to her at the same time as a hatred of the Jews and a respect for black because it is always suitable and becoming, even without any formal instruction, but as the piping of the parent goldfinches serves as a model for that of the newborn goldfinches so that they in turn grow into true goldfinches also. But when all was said, "selection" appeared to me of alien growth and "I regard" encouraging. Albertine was no longer the same; therefore she might not perhaps act, might not react in the same way.

Not only did I no longer feel any love for her, but I no longer had to consider, as I might have at Balbec, the risk of shattering in her an affection for myself, since it no longer existed. There could be no doubt that she had long since become quite indifferent to me. I was well aware that to her I was no longer in any sense a member of the "little band" into which I had at one time so anxiously sought and had then been so happy to have secured admission. Besides, since she no longer even had, as in the Balbec days, an air of frank good nature, I felt no serious scruples. However, I think what finally decided me was another philological discovery. As, continuing to add fresh links to the external chain of talk behind which I hid my inner desire, I spoke (having Albertine secure now on the corner of my bed) of one of the girls of the little band who was less striking than the rest but whom nevertheless I had thought quite pretty. "Yes," answered Albertine, "she reminds me of a little *mousmé*."<sup>19</sup> Clearly, when I first knew Albertine the word was unknown to her. It was probable that, had things followed their normal course, she would never have learned it, and for my part I should have seen no cause for regret in that, for there is no more repulsive word in the language. The mere sound of it sets one's teeth on edge as when one has put too large a spoonful of ice in one's mouth. But coming from Albertine, pretty as she was, not even "*mousmé*" could strike me as displeasing. On the contrary, I felt it to be a revelation, if not of an external initiation, at any rate of an internal evolution. Unfortunately it was now time for me to bid her good-bye if I wished her to reach home in time for her dinner, and myself to be out of bed and dressed in time for my own. It was Françoise who was preparing it; she did not like it to be delayed, and must already have found it an infringement of one of the articles of her code that Albertine, in the absence of my parents, should be paying me so prolonged a visit, and one which was going to make everything late. But before "*mousmé*" all these arguments fell to the ground and I hastened to say:

"You know, I'm not in the least ticklish. You could go on tickling me for a whole hour and I wouldn't feel it."

"Really?"

"I assure you."

She understood, doubtless, that this was the awkward expression of a desire on my part, for, like a person who offers to give you an introduction for which you have not ventured to ask, though what you have said has shown him that it would be of great service to you:

"Would you like me to try?" she inquired with womanly meekness.

"Just as you like, but you would be more comfortable if you lay down properly on the bed."

"Like that?"

"No, further in."

"You're sure I'm not too heavy?"

As she uttered these words the door opened and Françoise walked in carrying a lamp. Albertine just had time to scramble back on to her chair. Perhaps Françoise had chosen this moment to confound us, having been listening at the door or even peeping through the keyhole. But there was no need to suppose anything of the sort; she might well have scorned to assure herself by the use of her eyes of what her instinct must plainly enough have detected, for by dint of living with me and my parents she had succeeded in acquiring, through fear, prudence, alertness and cunning, that instinctive and almost divinatory knowledge of us all that the mariner has of the sea, the quarry has of the hunter, and if not the physician, often at any rate the invalid has of disease. The amount of knowledge that she managed to acquire would have astounded a stranger with as good reason as does the advanced state of certain arts and sciences among the ancients, given the almost non-existent means of information at their disposal (hers were no less exiguous; they consisted of a few casual remarks forming barely a twentieth part of our conversation at dinner, caught on the wing by the butler and inaccurately transmitted to the kitchen). And even her mistakes were due, like theirs, like the fables in which Plato believed, rather to a false conception of the world and to preconceived ideas than to inadequacy of material resources. Thus even in our own day it has been possible for the most important discoveries as to the habits of insects to be made by a scientist who had access to no laboratory and no apparatus of any sort. But if the drawbacks arising from her menial position had not prevented her from acquiring a stock of learning indispensable to the art which was its ultimate goal—and which consisted in putting us to confusion by communicating to us the results of her discoveries—the limitations under which she worked had done more; in this case the impediment, not content with merely not paralysing the flight of her imagination, had powerfully reinforced it. Of course Françoise neglected no artificial aids, those for example of diction and attitude. Since (if she never believed what we said to her in the hope that she would believe it) she accepted without the slightest hesitation the truth of anything, however absurd, that a person of her own condition in life might tell her which might at the same time offend our notions, just as her way of listening to our assertions bore witness to her incredulity, so the accents in which (the use of indirect speech enabling her to hurl the most deadly insults at us with impunity) she reported the narrative of a cook who had told her how she had threatened her employers and, by calling them "dung" in public, had wrung from them any number of privileges and concessions, showed that she regarded the story as gospel. Françoise went so far as to add: "I'm sure if I had been the mistress I should have been quite vexed." In vain might we, despite our original dislike

of the lady on the fourth floor, shrug our shoulders, as though at an unlikely fable, at this unedifying report, the teller knew how to invest her tone with the trenchant assertiveness of the most irrefutable and most irritating affirmation.

But above all, just as writers, when they are bound hand and foot by the tyranny of a monarch or of a school of poetry, by the constraints of prosodic laws or of a state religion, often attain a power of concentration from which they would have been dispensed under a system of political liberty or literary anarchy, so Françoise, not being able to reply to us in an explicit fashion, spoke like Tiresias and would have written like Tacitus. She managed to embody everything that she could not express directly in a sentence for which we could not find fault with her without accusing ourselves, indeed in less than a sentence, in a silence, in the way in which she placed an object in a room.

Thus, whenever I inadvertently left on my table, among a pile of other letters, one which it was imperative that she should not see, because, for instance, it referred to her with a malevolence which afforded a presumption of the same feeling towards her in the recipient as in the writer, that evening, if I came home with a feeling of uneasiness and went straight to my room, there on top of my letters, neatly arranged in a symmetrical pile, the compromising document caught my eye as it could not possibly have failed to catch the eye of Françoise, placed by her right at the top, almost apart from the rest, in a prominence that was a form of speech, that had an eloquence all its own, and, as soon as I crossed the threshold, made me start as I would at a cry. She excelled in the preparation of these stage effects, intended to so enlighten the spectator, in her absence, that he already knew that she knew everything when in due course she made her entry. She possessed, for thus making an inanimate object speak, the art, at once inspired and painstaking, of an Irving or a Frédéric Lemaître. On this occasion, holding over Albertine and myself the lighted lamp whose searching beams missed none of the still visible depressions which the girl's body had made in the counterpane, Françoise conjured up a picture of "Justice shedding light upon Crime." Albertine's face did not suffer by this illumination. It revealed on her cheeks the same sunny burnish that had charmed me at Balbec. This face of hers, which sometimes, out of doors, made a general effect of livid pallor, now showed, in the light of the lamp, surfaces so glowingly, so uniformly coloured, so firm and so smooth, that one might have compared them to the sustained flesh tints of certain flowers. Taken aback meanwhile by Françoise's unexpected entry, I exclaimed:

"What, the lamp already? Heavens, how bright it is!"

My object, as may be imagined, was by the second of these ejaculations to dissimulate my confusion, by the first to excuse my lateness in rising. Françoise replied with cruel ambiguity:

"Do you want me to extinguish it?"

"Guish?" Albertine murmured in my ear, leaving me charmed by the familiar quick-wittedness with which, taking me at once for master and accomplice, she insinuated this psychological affirmation in the interrogative tone of a grammatical question.<sup>20</sup>

When Françoise had left the room and Albertine was seated once again on my bed:

"Do you know what I'm afraid of?" I asked her. "It is that if we go on like this I may not be able to resist the temptation to kiss you."

"That would be a happy misfortune."

I did not respond at once to this invitation. Another man might even have found it superfluous, for Albertine's way of pronouncing her words was so carnal, so seductive that merely in speaking to you she seemed to be caressing you. A word from her was a favour, and her conversation covered you with kisses. And yet it was highly gratifying to me, this invitation. It would have been so, indeed, coming from any pretty girl of Albertine's age; but that Albertine should be now so accessible to me gave me more than pleasure, brought before my eyes a series of images fraught with beauty. I remembered Albertine first of all on the beach, almost painted upon a background of sea, having for me no more real an existence than those theatrical tableaux in which one does not know whether one is looking at the actress herself who is supposed to appear, at an understudy who for the moment is taking her principal's part, or simply at a projection. Then the real woman had detached herself from the beam of light and had come towards me, but only for me to perceive that in the real world she had none of the amorous facility with which one had credited her in the magic tableau. I had learned that it was not possible to touch her, to kiss her, that one might only talk to her, that for me she was no more a woman than jade grapes, an inedible decoration at one time in fashion on dinner tables, are really fruit. And now she was appearing to me on a third plane, real as in the second experience that I had had of her but available as in the first; available, and all the more deliciously so in that I had long imagined that she was not. My surplus of knowledge of life (life as being less uniform, less simple than I had at first supposed it to be) inclined me provisionally towards agnosticism. What can one positively affirm, when the thing that one thought probable at first has then shown itself to be false and in the third instance turns out true? (And alas, I was not yet at the end of my discoveries with regard to Albertine.) In any case, even if there had not been the romantic attraction of this disclosure of a greater wealth of planes revealed one after another by life (an attraction the opposite of that which Saint-Loup had felt during our dinners at Rivebelle on recognising, beneath the masks which life had superimposed on a calm face, features to which his lips had once been pressed), the knowledge that to kiss Albertine's cheeks was a possible thing was a pleasure perhaps greater even than that of kissing them. What a difference there is between possessing a woman to whom one applies one's body alone, because she is no more than a piece of flesh, and possessing the girl whom one used to see on the beach with her friends on certain days without even knowing why one saw her on those days and not on others, so that one trembled at the thought that one might not see her again! Life had obligingly revealed

to one in its whole extent the novel of this little girl's life, had lent one, for the study of her, first one optical instrument, then another, and had added to carnal desire the accompaniment, which multiplies and diversifies it, of those other desires, more spiritual and less easily assuaged, which do not emerge from their torpor but leave it to carry on alone when it aims only at the conquest of a piece of flesh, but which, to gain possession of a whole tract of memories from which they have felt nostalgically exiled, come surging round it, enlarge and extend it, are unable to follow it to the fulfilment, to the assimilation, impossible in the form in which it is looked for, of an immaterial reality, but wait for this desire half-way and at the moment of return, provide it once more with their escort; to kiss, instead of the cheeks of the first comer, anonymous, without mystery or glamour, however cool and fresh they may be, those of which I had so long been dreaming, would be to know the taste, the savour, of a colour on which I had endlessly gazed. One has seen a woman, a mere image in the decorative setting of life, like Albertine silhouetted against the sea, and then one has been able to take that image, to detach it, to bring it close to oneself, gradually to discern its volume, its colours, as though one had placed it behind the lens of a stereoscope. It is for this reason that women who are to some extent resistant, whom one cannot possess at once, of whom one does not indeed know at first whether one will ever possess them, are alone interesting. For to know them, to approach them, to conquer them, is to make the human image vary in shape, in dimension, in relief, is a lesson in relativity in the appreciation of a woman's body, a woman's life, so delightful to see afresh when it has resumed the slender proportions of a silhouette against the back-drop of life. The women one meets first of all in a brothel are of no interest because they remain invariable.

At the same time, Albertine preserved, inseparably attached to her, all my impressions of a series of seascapes of which I was particularly fond. I felt that in kissing her cheeks I should be kissing the whole of Balbec beach.

"If you really don't mind my kissing you, I'd rather put it off for a while and choose a good moment. Only you mustn't forget that you've said I may. I want a voucher: 'Valid for one kiss.'"

"Do I have to sign it?"

"But if I took it now, should I be entitled to another later on?"

"You do make me laugh with your vouchers: I shall issue a new one every now and then."

"Tell me, just one thing more. You know, at Balbec, before I got to know you, you used often to have a hard, calculating look. You couldn't tell me what you were thinking about when you looked like that?"

"No, I don't remember at all."

"Wait, this may remind you: one day your friend Gisèle jumped with her feet together over the chair an old gentleman was sitting in. Try to remember what was in your mind at that moment."

"Gisèle was the one we saw least of. She did belong to the group, I suppose, but not properly. I expect I thought that she was very ill-bred and common."

"Oh, is that all?"

I should have liked, before kissing her, to be able to breathe into her anew the mystery which she had had for me on the beach before I knew her, to discover in her the place where she had lived earlier still; in its stead at least, if I knew nothing of it, I could insinuate all the memories of our life at Balbec, the sound of the waves breaking beneath my window, the shouts of the children. But when I let my eyes glide over the charming pink globe of her cheeks, the gently curving surfaces of which expired beneath the first foothills of her beautiful black hair which ran in undulating ridges, thrust out its escarpments, and moulded the hollows and ripples of its valleys, I could not help saying to myself: "Now at last, after failing at Balbec, I am going to discover the fragrance of the secret rose that blooms in Albertine's cheeks. And, since the cycles through which we are able to make things and people pass in the course of our existence are comparatively few, perhaps I shall be able to consider mine in a certain sense fulfilled when, having taken out of its distant frame the blossoming face that I had chosen from among all others, I shall have brought it onto this new plane, where I shall at last have knowledge of it through my lips." I told myself this because I believed that there was such a thing as knowledge acquired by the lips; I told myself that I was going to know the taste of this fleshly rose, because I had not stopped to think that man, a creature obviously less rudimentary than the sea-urchin or even the whale, nevertheless lacks a certain number of essential organs, and notably possesses none that will serve for kissing. For this absent organ he substitutes his lips, and thereby arrives perhaps at a slightly more satisfying result than if he were reduced to caressing the beloved with a horny tusk. But a pair of lips, designed to convey to the palate the taste of whatever whets their appetite, must be content, without understanding their mistake or admitting their disappointment, with roaming over the surface and with coming to a halt at the barrier of the impenetrable but irresistible cheek. Moreover at the moment of actual contact with the flesh, the lips, even on the assumption that they might become more expert and better endowed, would doubtless be unable to enjoy any more fully the savour which nature prevents their ever actually grasping, for in that desolate zone in which they are unable to find their proper nourishment they are alone, the sense of sight, then that of smell, having long since deserted them. At first, as my mouth began gradually to approach the cheeks which my eyes had recommended it to kiss, my eyes, in changing position, saw a different pair of cheeks; the neck, observed at closer range and as though through a magnifying-glass, showed in its coarser grain a robustness which modified the character of the face.

Apart from the most recent applications of photography—which huddle at the foot of a cathedral all the houses that so often, from close to, appeared to us to reach almost to the height of the towers, which drill and deploy like a regiment, in file, in extended order, in serried masses, the same monuments, bring together the two columns on the Piazzetta which a moment ago were so far apart, thrust away the adjoining dome of the



Salute and in a pale and toneless background manage to include a whole immense horizon within the span of a bridge, in the embrasure of a window, among the leaves of a tree that stands in the foreground and is more vigorous in tone, or frame a single church successively in the arcades of all the others—I can think of nothing that can to so great a degree as a kiss evoke out of what we believed to be a thing with one definite aspect the hundred other things which it may equally well be, since each is related to a no less legitimate perspective. In short, just as at Balbec Albertine had often appeared different to me, so now—as if, prodigiously accelerating the speed of the changes of perspective and changes of colouring which a person presents to us in the course of our various encounters, I had sought to contain them all in the space of a few seconds so as to reproduce experimentally the phenomenon which diversifies the individuality of a fellow-creature, and to draw out one from another, like a nest of boxes, all the possibilities that it contains—so now, during this brief journey of my lips towards her cheek, it was ten Albertines that I saw; this one girl being like a many-headed goddess, the head I had seen last, when I tried to approach it, gave way to another. At least so long as I had not touched that head, I could still see it, and a faint perfume came to me from it. But alas—for in this matter of kissing our nostrils and eyes are as ill-placed as our lips are ill-made—suddenly my eyes ceased to see, then my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any odour, and, without thereby gaining any clearer idea of the taste of the rose of my desire, I learned, from these obnoxious signs, that at last I was in the act of kissing Albertine's cheek.

Was it because we were enacting (represented by the rotation of a solid body) the converse of our scene together at Balbec, because it was I who was lying in bed and she who was up, capable of evading a brutal attack and of controlling the course of events, that she allowed me to take so easily now what she had refused me on the former occasion with so forbidding a look? (No doubt from that earlier look the voluptuous expression which her face assumed now at the approach of my lips differed only by an infinitesimal deviation of its lines but one in which may be contained all the disparity that there is between the gesture of finishing off a wounded man and that of giving him succour, between a sublime and a hideous portrait.) Not knowing whether I had to give credit and thanks for this change of attitude to some unwitting benefactor who in these last months, in Paris or at Balbec, had been working on my behalf, I supposed that the respective positions in which we were now placed was the principal cause of it. It was quite another explanation, however, that Albertine offered me; precisely this: "Oh, well, you see, that time at Balbec I didn't know you properly. For all I knew, you might have meant mischief." This argument left me perplexed. Albertine was no doubt sincere in advancing it—so difficult is it for a woman to recognise in the movements of her limbs, in the sensations felt by her body, during a tête-à-tête with a male friend, the unknown sin into which she trembled to think that a stranger might be planning her fall!

In any case, whatever the modifications that had occurred recently in her life and that might perhaps have explained why it was that she now so readily accorded to my momentary and purely physical desire what at Balbec she had refused with horror to allow to my love, an even more surprising one manifested itself in Albertine that same evening as soon as her caresses had procured in me the satisfaction which she could not fail to notice and which, indeed, I had been afraid might provoke in her the instinctive movement of revulsion and offended modesty which Gilberte had made at a similar moment behind the laurel shrubbery in the Champs-Élysées.

The exact opposite happened. Already, when I had first made her lie on my bed and had begun to fondle her, Albertine had assumed an air which I did not remember in her, of docile good will, of an almost childish simplicity. Obliterating every trace of her customary preoccupations and pretensions, the moment preceding pleasure, similar in this respect to the moment that follows death, had restored to her rejuvenated features what seemed like the innocence of earliest childhood. And no doubt everyone whose special talent is suddenly brought into play becomes modest, diligent and charming; especially if by this talent such persons know that they are giving us a great pleasure, are themselves made happy by it, and want us to enjoy it to the full. But in this new expression on Albertine's face there was more than disinterestedness and professional conscientiousness and generosity, there was a sort of conventional and unexpected zeal; and it was further than to her own childhood, it was to the infancy of her race that she had reverted. Very different from myself, who had looked for nothing more than a physical alleviation, which I had finally secured, Albertine seemed to feel that it would indicate a certain coarseness on her part were she to think that this material pleasure could be unaccompanied by a moral sentiment or was to be regarded as terminating anything. She, who had earlier been in so great a hurry, now, doubtless because she felt that kisses implied love and that love took precedence over all other duties, said when I reminded her of her dinner:

"Oh, but that doesn't matter in the least. I've got plenty of time."

She seemed embarrassed at the idea of getting up and going immediately after what had happened, embarrassed from a sense of propriety, just as Françoise when, without feeling thirsty, she had felt herself bound to accept with a seemly gaiety the glass of wine which Jupien offered her, would never have dared to leave him as soon as the last drops were drained, however urgent the call of duty. Albertine—and this was perhaps, with another which the reader will learn in due course, one of the reasons which had made me unconsciously desire her—was one of the incarnations of the little French peasant whose type may be seen in stone at Saint-André-des-Champs. As in Françoise, who presently, however, was to become her deadly enemy, I recognised in her a courtesy towards the host and the stranger, a sense of propriety, a respect for the bedside.

Françoise, who after the death of my aunt felt obliged to speak only in a doleful tone, would, in the months that preceded her daughter's marriage, have been quite shocked if the girl had not taken her lover's arm when the young couple walked out together. Albertine lying motionless beside me said:

"What nice hair you have; what nice eyes—you're sweet."

When, after pointing out to her that it was getting late, I added: "You don't believe me?", she replied, what was perhaps true, but only since the minute before and for the next few hours:

"I always believe you."

She spoke to me of myself, my family, my social background. She said: "Oh, I know your parents know some very nice people. You're a friend of Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage." For a moment these names conveyed absolutely nothing to me. But suddenly I remembered that I had indeed played as a child in the Champs-Élysées with Robert Forestier, whom I had never seen since. As for Suzanne Delage, she was the great-niece of Mme Blandais, and I had once been due to go to a dancing lesson, and even to take a small part in a play in her parents' house. But the fear of getting a fit of giggles and a nose-bleed had at the last moment prevented me, so that I had never set eyes on her. I had at the most a vague idea that I had once heard that the Swanns' feather-hatted governess had at one time been with the Delages, but perhaps it was only a sister of this governess, or a friend. I protested to Albertine that Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage occupied a very small place in my life. "That may be; but your mothers are friends, I can place you by that. I often pass Suzanne Delage in the Avenue de Messine. I admire her style." Our mothers were acquainted only in the imagination of Mme Bontemps, who having heard that I had at one time played with Robert Forestier, to whom, it appeared, I used to recite poetry, had concluded from that that we were bound by family ties. She

could never, I gathered, hear my mother's name mentioned without observing: "Oh yes, she belongs to the Delage-Forestier set," giving my parents a good mark which they had done nothing to deserve.

Quite apart from this, Albertine's social notions were fatuous in the extreme. She regarded the Simonnets with a double "n" as inferior not only to the Simonets with a single "n" but to everyone in the world. That someone else should bear the same name as yourself without belonging to your family is an excellent reason for despising him. Of course there are exceptions. It may happen that two Simonnets (introduced to one another at one of those gatherings where one feels the need to talk, no matter what about, and where moreover one is instinctively well disposed towards strangers, for instance in a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery), finding that they have the same name, will seek with mutual affability though without success to discover a possible kinship. But that is only an exception. Plenty of people are disreputable, without our either knowing or caring. If, however, a similarity of names brings to our door letters addressed to them, or vice versa, we at once feel a mistrust, often justified, as to their moral worth. We are afraid of being confused with them, and forestall the mistake by a grimace of disgust when anyone refers to them in our hearing. When we read our own name, as borne by them, in the newspaper, they seem to have usurped it. The transgressions of other members of the social organism are a matter of indifference to us. We lay the burden of them the more heavily upon our namesakes. The hatred which we bear towards the other Simonnets is all the stronger in that it is not a personal feeling but has been transmitted hereditarily. After the second generation we remember only the expression of disgust with which our grandparents used to refer to the other Simonnets; we know nothing of the reason; we should not be surprised to learn that it had begun with a murder. Until, as is not uncommon, the day comes when a male Simonnet and a female Simonnet who are not in any way related are joined together in matrimony and so repair the breach.

Not only did Albertine speak to me of Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage, but spontaneously, with that impulse to confide which the juxtaposition of two human bodies creates, at the beginning at least, during a first phase before it has engendered a special duplicity and reticence in one person towards the other, she told me a story about her own family and one of Andrée's uncles, of which, at Balbec, she had refused to say a word; but she now felt that she ought not to appear to have any secrets from me. Now, had her dearest friend said anything to her against me, she would have made a point of repeating it to me.

I insisted on her going home, and finally she did go, but she was so ashamed on my account at my discourtesy that she laughed almost as though to apologise for me, as a hostess to whose party you have gone without dressing makes the best of you but is offended nevertheless.

"What are you laughing at?" I inquired.

"I'm not laughing, I'm smiling at you," she replied tenderly. "When am I going to see you again?" she went on, as though declining to admit that what had just happened between us, since it is generally the consummation of it, might not be at least the prelude to a great friendship, a pre-existent friendship which we owed it to ourselves to discover, to confess, and which alone could account for what we had indulged in.

"Since you give me leave, I shall send for you when I can."

I dared not let her know that I was subordinating everything else to the chance of seeing Mme de Stermaria.

"It will have to be at short notice, unfortunately," I went on, "I never know beforehand. Would it be possible for me to send round for you in the evenings when I'm free?"

"It will be quite possible soon, because I'm going to have an independent entrance. But just at present it's impracticable. Anyhow I shall come round tomorrow or the next day in the afternoon. You needn't see me if you're busy."

On reaching the door, surprised that I had not preceded her, she offered me her cheek, feeling that there was no need now for any coarse physical desire to prompt us to kiss one another. The brief relations in which we had just indulged being of the sort to which a profound intimacy and a heartfelt choice sometimes lead, Albertine had felt it incumbent upon her to improvise and add temporarily to the kisses which we had exchanged on my bed the sentiment of which those kisses would have been the symbol for a knight and his lady such as they might have been conceived by a Gothic minstrel.

When she had left me, this young Picarde who might have been carved on his porch by the sculptor of Saint-André-des-Champs, Françoise brought me a letter which filled me with joy, for it was from Mme de Stermaria, who accepted my invitation to dinner for Wednesday. From Mme de Stermaria—that was to say, for me, not so much from the real Mme de Stermaria as from the one of whom I had been thinking all day before Albertine's arrival. It is the terrible deception of love that it begins by engaging us in play not with a woman of the outside world but with a doll inside our brain—the only woman moreover that we have always at our disposal, the only one we shall ever possess—whom the arbitrary power of memory, almost as absolute as that of the imagination, may have made as different from the real woman as the Balbec of my dreams had been from the real Balbec; an artificial creation which by degrees, and to our own hurt, we shall force the real woman to resemble.

Albertine had made me so late that the play had just finished when I entered Mme de Villeparisis's drawing-room; and having little desire to be caught in the stream of guests who were pouring out, discussing the great piece of news, the separation, which was said to have been already effected, between the Duc de Guermantes and his wife, I had taken a seat on a *bergère* in the outer room while waiting for an opportunity to greet my hostess, when from the inner one, where she had no doubt been sitting in the front row, I saw emerging, majestic, ample and tall in a flowing gown of yellow satin upon which huge black poppies were picked out in relief, the Duchess herself. The sight of her no longer disturbed me in the least. One fine day my mother, laying her hands on my forehead (as was her habit when she was afraid of hurting my feelings) and saying:

“You really must stop hanging about trying to meet Mme de Guermentes. You’re becoming a laughing-stock. Besides, look how ill your grandmother is, you really have something more serious to think about than waylaying a woman who doesn’t care a straw about you,” instantaneously—like a hypnotist who brings you back from the distant country in which you imagined yourself to be, and opens your eyes for you, or like the doctor who, by recalling you to a sense of duty and reality, cures you of an imaginary disease in which you have been wallowing—had awakened me from an unduly protracted dream. The rest of the day had been consecrated to a last farewell to this malady which I was renouncing; I had sung, for hours on end and weeping as I sang, the words of Schubert’s *Adieu*:

Farewell, strange voices call thee,  
Sweet sister of the angels, far from me.

And then it was over. I had given up my morning walks, and with so little difficulty that I thought myself justified in the prophecy (which we shall see was to prove false later on) that I should easily grow accustomed, during the course of my life, to no longer seeing a woman. And when, shortly afterwards, Françoise had reported to me that Jupien, anxious to enlarge his business, was looking for a shop in the neighbourhood, wanting to find one for him (delighted, too, while strolling along a street which already from my bed I had heard luminously vociferous like a peopled beach, to see behind the raised iron shutters of the dairies the young milk-maids with their white sleeves), I had been able to begin those outings again. Nor did I feel the slightest constraint; for I was conscious that I was no longer going out with the object of seeing Mme de Guermentes—much as a married woman, who has taken endless precautions so long as she has a lover, from the day she breaks with him leaves his letters lying about, at the risk of disclosing to her husband an infidelity which ceased to alarm her the moment she ceased to be guilty of it.

What troubled me now was the discovery that almost every house sheltered some unhappy person. In one the wife was always in tears because her husband was unfaithful to her. In the next it was the other way about. In another a hard-working mother, beaten black and blue by a drunkard son, tried to conceal her sufferings from the eyes of the neighbours. Quite half of the human race was in tears. And when I came to know it I saw that it was so exasperating that I wondered whether it might not be the adulterous husband and wife (who were unfaithful only because their lawful happiness had been denied them, and showed themselves charming and loyal to everyone but their respective spouses) who were in the right. Presently I ceased to have even the excuse of being useful to Jupien for continuing my morning peregrinations. For we learned that the cabinet-maker in our courtyard, whose work-rooms were separated from Jupien’s shop only by the flimsiest of partitions, was shortly to be “given notice” by the Duke’s agent because his hammering made too much noise. Jupien could have hoped for nothing better. The workrooms had a basement for storing timber, which communicated with our cellars. He could keep his coal there, could knock down the partition, and would then have one huge shop. Indeed, since Jupien, finding the rent that M. de Guermentes was asking him exorbitant, allowed the premises to be inspected in the hope that, discouraged by his failure to find a tenant, the Duke would resign himself to accepting a lower offer, Françoise, noticing that, even at an hour when no prospective tenant was likely to call, the concierge left the door of the empty shop on the latch with the “To let” sign still up, scented a trap laid by him to entice the young woman who was engaged to the Guermentes footman (they would find a lovers’ retreat there) and to catch them red-handed.

However that might be, and for all that I had no longer to find Jupien a new shop, I still went out before lunch. Often, on these excursions, I met M. de Norpois. It would happen that, conversing as he walked with a colleague, he cast at me a glance which, after making a thorough scrutiny of my person, turned back towards his companion without his having smiled at me or given me any more sign of recognition than if he had never set eyes on me before. For, with these eminent diplomats, looking at you in a certain way is intended to let you know not that they have seen you but that they have not seen you and that they have some serious matter to discuss with the colleague who is accompanying them. A tall woman whom I frequently encountered near the house was less discreet with me. For although I did not know her, she would turn round to look at me, would wait for me, unavailingly, in front of shop windows, smile at me as though she were going to kiss me, make gestures indicative of complete surrender. She resumed an icy coldness towards me if anyone appeared whom she knew. For a long time now in these morning walks, according to what I had to do, even if it was the most trivial purchase of a newspaper, I chose the shortest way, with no regret if it was off the Duchess’s habitual route, and if on the other hand it did lie along that route, without either compunction or concealment, because it no longer appeared to me the forbidden road on which I extorted from an ungrateful woman the favour of setting eyes on her against her will. But it had never occurred to me that my recovery, in restoring me to a normal attitude towards Mme de Guermentes, would have a corresponding effect on her and make possible a friendliness, even a friendship, which no longer mattered to me. Until then, the efforts of the entire world banded together to bring me into touch with her would have been powerless to counteract the evil spell that is cast by an ill-starred love. Fairies more powerful than mankind have decreed that in such cases nothing can avail us until the day we utter sincerely in our hearts the formula: “I am no longer in love.” I had been vexed with Saint-Loup for not having taken me to see his aunt. But he was no more capable than anyone else of breaking a spell. So long as I was in love with Mme de Guermentes, the marks of cordiality that I received from others, their compliments, actually distressed me, not only because they did not come from her but because she would never hear of them. And yet even if she had known of them it would not have been of the slightest use to me. But even in the details of an attachment, an absence, the declining of an invitation

to dinner, an unintentional, unconscious harshness are of more service than all the cosmetics and fine clothes in the world. There would be plenty of social success if people were taught upon these lines the art of succeeding.

As she swept through the room in which I was sitting, her thoughts filled with the memory of friends whom I did not know and whom she would perhaps be meeting again presently at some other party, the Duchess caught sight of me on my *bergère*, genuinely indifferent and seeking only to be polite whereas while I was in love I had tried so desperately, without ever succeeding, to assume an air of indifference. She swerved aside, came towards me and, reproducing the smile she had worn that evening at the Opéra, which the painful feeling of being loved by someone she did not love no longer obliterated, "No, don't move," she said, gracefully gathering in her immense skirt which otherwise would have occupied the entire *bergère*. "You don't mind if I sit down beside you a moment?"

She was taller than me, and further enlarged by the volume of her dress, and I felt myself almost touching her handsome bare arm, round which a faint and ubiquitous down exhaled as it were a perpetual golden mist, and the blonde coils of her hair which wafted their fragrance over me. Having barely room to sit down, she could not turn easily to face me, and so, obliged to look straight in front of her rather than in my direction, assumed the sort of soft and dreamy expression one sees in a portrait.

"Have you any news of Robert?" she inquired.

At that moment Mme de Villeparisis entered the room.

"Well, what a fine time you arrive when we do see you here for once in a way!"

And noticing that I was talking to her niece, and concluding, perhaps, that we were more intimate than she had supposed: "But don't let me interrupt your conversation with Oriane," she went on (for the good offices of the procuress are part of the duties of the perfect hostess). "You wouldn't care to dine with her here on Wednesday?"

It was the day on which I was to dine with Mme de Stermaria, so I declined.

"Saturday, then?"

As my mother was returning on Saturday or Sunday, it would have been unkind not to stay at home every evening to dine with her. I therefore declined this invitation also.

"Ah, you're not an easy person to get hold of."

"Why do you never come to see me?" inquired Mme de Guermites when Mme de Villeparisis had left us to go and congratulate the performers and present the leading lady with a bunch of roses upon which the hand that offered it conferred all its value, for it had cost no more than twenty francs. (This, incidentally, was as high as she ever went when an artist had performed only once. Those who gave their services at all her afternoons and evenings throughout the season received roses painted by the Marquise.) "It's such a bore never to see each other except in other people's houses. Since you won't dine with me at my aunt's, why not come and dine at my house?"

Various people who had stayed to the last possible moment on one pretext or another, but were at last preparing to leave, seeing that the Duchess had sat down to talk to a young man on a seat so narrow as just to contain them both, thought that they must have been misinformed, that it was not the Duchess but the Duke who was seeking a separation, on my account. Whereupon they hastened to spread abroad this intelligence. I had better grounds than anyone for being aware of its falsity. But I was myself surprised that at one of those difficult periods in which a separation is being effected but is not yet complete, the Duchess, instead of withdrawing from society, should go out of her way to invite a person whom she knew so slightly. The suspicion crossed my mind that it had been the Duke alone who had been opposed to her having me in the house, and that now that he was leaving her she saw no further obstacle to her surrounding herself with the people she liked.

A few minutes earlier I should have been amazed had anyone told me that Mme de Guermites was going to ask me to come and see her, let alone to dine with her. However much I might be aware that the Guermites salon could not present those distinctive features which I had extracted from the name, the fact that it had been forbidden territory to me, by obliging me to give it the same kind of existence that we give to the salons of which we have read the description in a novel or seen the image in a dream, made me, even when I was certain that it was just like any other, imagine it as quite different; between myself and it was the barrier at which reality ends. To dine with the Guermites was like travelling to a place I had long wished to see, making a desire emerge from my head and take shape before my eyes, making acquaintance with a dream. At least I might have supposed that it would be one of those dinners to which the hosts invite someone by telling him: "Do come; there'll be *absolutely* nobody but ourselves," pretending to attribute to the pariah the alarm which they themselves feel at the thought of his mixing with their friends, and seeking indeed to convert into an enviable privilege, reserved for their intimates alone, the quarantine of the outcast, involuntarily unsociable and favoured. I felt on the contrary that Mme de Guermites was anxious for me to taste the most delightful society that she had to offer me when she went on to say, projecting before my eyes as it were the violet-hued loveliness of a visit to Fabrice's aunt and the miracle of an introduction to Count Mosca:

"You wouldn't be free on Friday, now, for a small dinner-party? It would be so nice. There'll be the Princesse de Parme, who's charming, not that I'd ask you to meet anyone who wasn't agreeable."

Discarded in the intermediate social grades which are engaged in a perpetual climbing movement, the family still plays an important part in certain stationary grades, such as the middle class and the semi-royal aristocracy, which latter cannot seek to raise itself since above it, from its own special point of view, there exists nothing. The friendship shown me by her "aunt Villeparisis" and Robert had perhaps made me, for Mme

de Guermantes and her friends, living always upon themselves and in the same little circle, the object of an attentive curiosity of which I had no suspicion.

With these two kinsfolk she had a familiar, everyday, homely relationship of a sort, very different from what we imagine, in which, if we happen to be included, so far from our actions being ejected therefrom like a speck of dust from the eye or a drop of water from the windpipe, they are capable of remaining engraved, and will still be related and discussed years after we ourselves have forgotten them, in the palace in which we are astonished to find them preserved like a letter in our own handwriting among a priceless collection of autographs.

People who are merely fashionable may close their doors against undue invasion. But the Guermantes door did not suffer from that. Hardly ever did a stranger have occasion to appear at it. If, for once in a way, the Duchess had one pointed out to her, she never dreamed of troubling herself about the social distinction that he might bring, since this was a thing that she conferred and could not receive. She thought only of his real merits. Both Mme de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup had testified to mine. And doubtless she would not have believed them if she had not at the same time observed that they could never manage to secure me when they wanted me, and that therefore I attached no importance to society, which seemed to the Duchess a sign that a stranger was to be numbered among what she called "agreeable people."

It was worth seeing, when one spoke to her of women for whom she did not care, how her face changed as soon as one named, in connexion with one of these, let us say her sister-in-law. "Oh, she's charming!" the Duchess would say in an assured and judicious tone. The only reason she gave was that this lady had declined to be introduced to the Marquise de Chaussegros and the Princesse de Silistrie. She did not add that the lady had also refused to be introduced to herself, the Duchesse de Guermantes. This had nevertheless been the case, and ever since, the mind of the Duchess had been at work trying to unravel the motives of a woman who was so hard to know. She was dying to be invited to her house. People in society are so accustomed to being sought after that the person who shuns them seems to them a phoenix and at once monopolises their attention.

Was the real motive in the mind of Mme de Guermantes for thus inviting me (now that I was no longer in love with her) that I did not seek the society of her relatives, although apparently sought after by them? I cannot say. In any case, having made up her mind to invite me, she was anxious to do me the honours of her house to the fullest extent and to keep away those of her friends whose presence might have dissuaded me from coming again, those whom she knew to be boring. I had not known to what to attribute her change of direction, when I had seen her diverge from her stellar path, come to sit down beside me, and invite me to dinner, the effect of unexplained causes: for want of a special sense to enlighten us in this respect, we imagine the people we know only slightly—as was my case with the Duchesse de Guermantes—as thinking of us only at the rare moments in which they set eyes on us. Whereas in fact this ideal oblivion in which we picture them as holding us is purely arbitrary. So much so that while in the silence of solitude, reminiscent of a clear and starlit night, we imagine the various queens of society pursuing their course in the heavens at an infinite distance, we cannot help an involuntary start of dismay or pleasure if there falls upon us from that starry height, like a meteorite engraved with our name which we supposed to be unknown on Venus or Cassiopeia, an invitation to dinner or a piece of wicked gossip.

Perhaps from time to time when, following the example of the Persian princes who, according to the Book of Esther, made their scribes read out to them the registers in which were enrolled the names of those of their subjects who had shown zeal in their service, Mme de Guermantes consulted her list of the well-disposed, she had said to herself, on coming to my name: "A man we must ask to dine some day." But other thoughts had distracted her until the moment she caught sight of me sitting alone like Mordecai at the palace gate; and, the sight of me having refreshed her memory, she wished, like Ahasuerus, to lavish her gifts upon me.

(Beset by surging cares, a Prince's mind  
Towards fresh matters ever is inclined)

I must however add that a surprise of a totally different sort was to follow the one which I had had on hearing Mme de Guermantes ask me to dine with her. Since I had felt that it would show great modesty on my part, and gratitude also, not to conceal this initial surprise but rather to exaggerate my expression of the delight that it gave me, Mme de Guermantes, who was getting ready to go on to another, final party, had said to me, almost as a justification and for fear of my not being quite certain who she was since I appeared so astonished at being invited to dine with her: "You know I'm the aunt of Robert de Saint-Loup who is very fond of you, and besides, we've already met each other here." In replying that I was aware of this I added that I also knew M. de Charlus, "who had been very kind to me at Balbec and in Paris." Mme de Guermantes appeared surprised and her eyes seemed to turn, as though for a verification of this statement, to some much earlier page of her internal register. "What, so you know Palamède, do you?" This name took on a considerable charm on the lips of Mme de Guermantes because of the instinctive simplicity with which she spoke of a man who was socially so brilliant a figure but for her was no more than her brother-in-law and the cousin with whom she had grown up. And on the dim greyness which the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes represented for me this name Palamède shed as it were the radiance of long summer days when she had played with him as a girl in the garden at Guermantes. Moreover, in that long-forgotten period of their lives, Oriane de Guermantes and her cousin Palamède had been very different from what they had since become: M. de Charlus in particular, entirely absorbed in artistic pursuits which he had so effectively curbed in later life that I was amazed to

learn that it was he who had painted the huge fan decorated with black and yellow irises which the Duchess was at this moment unfurling. She could also have shown me a little sonatina which he had once composed for her. I was completely unaware that the Baron possessed all these talents, of which he never spoke. Let me remark in passing that M. de Charlus did not at all relish being called "Palamède" by his family. That the form "Mémé" might not please him one could easily understand. These stupid abbreviations are a sign of the utter inability of the aristocracy to appreciate its own poetry (in Jewry, too, we may see the same defect, since a nephew of Lady Israels, whose name was Moses, was commonly known as "Momo") at the same time as its anxiety not to appear to attach any importance to what is aristocratic. Now on this point M. de Charlus had more poetic imagination and a more blatant pride. But the reason for his distaste for "Mémé" could not be this, since it extended also to the fine name Palamède. The truth was that, considering himself, knowing himself, to be of princely stock, he would have liked his brother and sister-in-law to refer to him as "Charlus," just as Queen Marie-Amélie and the Duc d'Orléans might speak of their sons and grandsons, brothers and nephews as "Joinville, Nemours, Chartres, Paris."

"What a humbug Mémé is!" she exclaimed. "We talked to him about you for hours, and he told us he would be delighted to make your acquaintance, just as if he had never set eyes on you. You must admit he's odd, and—though it's not very nice of me to say such a thing about a brother-in-law I'm devoted to and really do admire immensely—a trifle mad at times."

I was struck by the application of this last epithet to M. de Charlus, and thought to myself that this half-madness might perhaps account for certain things, such as his having appeared so delighted with his proposal that I should ask Bloch to beat his own mother. I decided that, by reason not only of the things he said but of the way in which he said them, M. de Charlus must be a little mad. The first time one listens to a barrister or an actor, one is surprised by his tone, so different from the conversational. But, observing that everyone else seems to find this quite natural, one says nothing about it to other people, one says nothing in fact to oneself, one is content to appreciate the degree of talent shown. At the most one may think, of an actor at the Théâtre-Français: "Why, instead of letting his raised arm fall naturally, did he bring it down in a series of little jerks broken by pauses for at least ten minutes?" or of a Labori: "Why, whenever he opened his mouth, did he utter those tragic, unexpected sounds to express the simplest things?" But as everybody accepts these things *a priori* one is not shocked by them. In the same way, on thinking it over, one said to oneself that M. de Charlus spoke of himself very grandiloquently, in a tone which was not in the least that of ordinary speech. One felt that people should have been saying to him every other minute: "But why are you shouting so loud? Why are you so offensive?" But everyone seemed to have tacitly agreed that it was quite all right. And one took one's place in the circle which applauded his perorations. But certainly there were moments when a stranger might have thought that he was listening to the ravings of a maniac.

"But," went on the Duchess with the faint insolence that went with her natural simplicity, "are you absolutely sure you're not thinking of someone else? Do you really mean my brother-in-law Palamède? I know he loves mystery, but this seems a bit much."

I replied that I was absolutely sure, and that M. de Charlus must have misheard my name.

"Well, I must leave you," said Mme de Guermantes, as though with regret. "I have to look in for a moment at the Princesse de Ligne's. You aren't going on there? No? You don't care for parties? You're very wise, they're too boring for words. If only I didn't have to go! But she's my cousin; it wouldn't be polite. I'm sorry, selfishly, for my own sake, because I could have taken you there, and brought you back afterwards, too. Good-bye then; I look forward to seeing you on Friday."

That M. de Charlus should have blushed to be seen with me by M. d'Argencourt was all very well. But that to his own sister-in-law, who had so high an opinion of him besides, he should deny all knowledge of me, a knowledge that was perfectly natural since I was a friend of both his aunt and his nephew, was something I could not understand.

I must end my account of this incident with the remark that from one point of view there was an element of true grandeur in Mme de Guermantes which consisted in the fact that she entirely obliterated from her memory what other people would have only partially forgotten. Had she never seen me waylaying her, following her, tracking her down on her morning walks, had she never responded to my daily salute with an irritated impatience, had she never sent Saint-Loup about his business when he begged her to invite me to her house, she could not have been more graciously and naturally amiable to me. Not only did she waste no time in retrospective inquiries, in hints, allusions or ambiguous smiles, not only was there in her present affability, without any harking back to the past, without the slightest reticence, something as proudly rectilinear as her majestic stature, but any resentment which she might have felt against someone in the past was so entirely reduced to ashes, and those ashes were themselves cast so utterly from her memory, or at least from her manner, that on studying her face whenever she had occasion to treat with the most exquisite simplicity what in so many other people would have been a pretext for reviving stale antipathies and recriminations, one had the impression of a sort of purification.

But if I was surprised by the modification that had occurred in her opinion of me, how much more did it surprise me to find an even greater change in my feelings for her! Had there not been a time when I could regain life and strength only if—always building new castles in the air!—I had found someone who would obtain for me an invitation to her house and, after this initial boon, would procure many others for my increasingly exacting heart? It was the impossibility of making any headway that had made me leave Paris for Doncières to visit Robert de Saint-Loup. And now it was indeed by the consequence of a letter from him that I was agitated, but on account this time of Mme de Stermaria, not of Mme de Guermantes.

Let me add further, to conclude my account of this evening, that in the course of it there occurred an incident, contradicted a few days later, which surprised me not a little, which caused a breach between myself and Bloch, and which constitutes in itself one of those curious paradoxes the explanation of which will be found in the next part of this work. At this party at Mme de Villeparisis's, Bloch kept on boasting to me about the friendly attentions shown him by M. de Charlus, who, when he passed him in the street, looked him straight in the face as though he recognised him, was anxious to know him personally, knew quite well who he was. I smiled at first, Bloch having expressed himself so violently at Balbec on the subject of the said M. de Charlus. And I supposed merely that Bloch, like his father in the case of Bergotte, knew the Baron "without actually knowing him," and that what he took for a friendly glance was an absent-minded stare. But finally Bloch produced such circumstantial details, and appeared so confident that on two or three occasions M. de Charlus had wished to address him that, remembering that I had spoken of my friend to the Baron, who had asked me various questions about him as we walked together from this very house, I came to the conclusion that Bloch was not lying, that M. de Charlus had heard his name, realised that he was my friend, and so forth. And so, some time later, at the theatre one evening, I asked M. de Charlus if I might introduce Bloch to him, and, on his assenting, went in search of my friend. But as soon as M. de Charlus caught sight of him an expression of astonishment, instantly repressed, appeared on his face, where it gave way to a blazing fury. Not only did he not offer Bloch his hand but whenever Bloch spoke to him he replied in the rudest manner, in an irate and wounding tone. So that Bloch, who, according to his version, had received nothing until then from the Baron but smiles, assumed that I had disparaged rather than recommended him during the brief conversation which, knowing M. de Charlus's liking for etiquette, I had had with him about my friend before bringing him up to be introduced. Bloch left us, exhausted and broken, like a man who has been trying to mount a horse which is constantly on the verge of bolting, or to swim against waves which continually fling him back on the shingle, and did not speak to me again for six months.

The days that preceded my dinner with Mme de Stermaria, far from being delightful, were almost unbearable for me. For as a general rule, the shorter the interval that separates us from our planned objective the longer it seems to us, because we apply to it a more minute scale of measurement, or simply because it occurs to us to measure it. The Papacy, we are told, reckons by centuries, and indeed may perhaps not bother to reckon time at all, since its goal is in eternity. Mine being no more than three days off, I counted by seconds, I gave myself up to those imaginings which are the adumbrations of caresses, of caresses which one itches to be able to make the woman herself reciprocate and complete—precisely those caresses, to the exclusion of all others. And on the whole, if it is true that in general the difficulty of attaining the object of a desire enhances that desire (the difficulty, not the impossibility, for that suppresses it altogether), yet in the case of a desire that is purely physical, the certainty that it will be realised at a specific and fairly imminent point in time is not much more stirring than uncertainty; almost as much as anxious doubt, the absence of doubt makes intolerable the period of waiting for the pleasure that is bound to come, because it makes of that suspense an innumerable rehearsed accomplishment and, by the frequency of our proleptic representations, divides time into sections as minute as any that could be carved by anguished uncertainty.

What I wanted was to possess Mme de Stermaria: for several days my desires had been actively and incessantly preparing my imagination for this pleasure, and this pleasure alone; any other pleasure (pleasure with another woman) would not have been ready, pleasure being but the realisation of a prior craving which is not always the same but changes according to the endless variations of one's fancies, the accidents of one's memory, the state of one's sexual disposition, the order of availability of one's desires, the most recently assuaged of which lie dormant until the disillusion of their fulfilment has been to some extent forgotten; I had already turned from the main road of general desires and had ventured along the path of a more particular desire; I should have had—in order to wish for a different assignation—to retrace my steps too far before rejoining the main road and taking another path. To take possession of Mme de Stermaria on the island in the Bois de Boulogne where I had asked her to dine with me: this was the pleasure that I pictured to myself all the time. It would naturally have been destroyed if I had dined on that island without Mme de Stermaria; but perhaps as greatly diminished had I dined, even with her, somewhere else. Besides, the attitudes according to which one envisages a pleasure are prior to the woman, to the type of woman suitable thereto. They dictate the pleasure, and the place as well, and for that reason bring to the fore alternatively, in our capricious fancy, this or that woman, this or that setting, this or that room, which in other weeks we should have dismissed with contempt. Daughters of the attitude that produced them, certain women will not appeal to us without the double bed in which we find peace by their side, while others, to be caressed with a more secret intention, require leaves blown by the wind, water rippling in the dark, things as light and fleeting as they are.

No doubt in the past, long before I received Saint-Loup's letter and when there was as yet no question of Mme de Stermaria, the island in the Bois had seemed to me to be specially designed for pleasure, because I had found myself going there to taste the bitterness of having no pleasure to enjoy there. It is to the shores of the lake from which one goes to that island, and along which, in the last weeks of summer, those ladies of Paris who have not yet left for the country take the air, that, not knowing where to look for her, or whether indeed she has not already left Paris, one wanders in the hope of seeing the girl go by with whom one fell in love at the last ball of the season, whom one will not have a chance of meeting again on any evening until the following spring. Sensing it to be at least the eve, if not the morrow, of the beloved's departure, one follows along the brink of the shimmering water those pleasant paths by which already a first red leaf is blooming like a last rose, one scans that horizon where, by a contrivance the opposite of that employed in those panoramas beneath whose rotundas the wax figures in the foreground impart to the painted canvas beyond them the



illusory appearance of depth and mass, our eyes, travelling without transition from the cultivated park to the natural heights of Meudon and the Mont Valérien, do not know where to set the boundary, and make the natural country trespass upon the handiwork of the gardener, the artificial charm of which they project far beyond its own limits; like those rare birds reared in liberty in a botanical garden which every day, wherever their winged excursions may chance to take them, sound an exotic note here or there in the surrounding woods. Between the last festivity of summer and one's winter exile, one anxiously ranges that romantic world of chance encounters and lover's melancholy, and one would be no more surprised to learn that it was situated outside the mapped universe than if, at Versailles, looking down from the terrace, an observatory round which the clouds gather against the blue sky in the manner of Van der Meulen, after having thus risen above the bounds of nature, one were informed that, there where nature begins again at the end of the great canal, the villages which one cannot make out, on a horizon as dazzling as the sea, are called Fleurus or Nijmegen.

And then, the last carriage having rolled by, when one feels with pain that she will not now come, one goes to dine on the island; above the quivering poplars which endlessly recall the mysteries of evening more than they respond to them, a pink cloud puts a last touch of living colour into the tranquil sky. A few drops of rain fall soundlessly on the ancient water which, in its divine infancy, remains always the colour of the weather and continually forgets the reflexions of clouds and flowers. And after the geraniums have vainly striven, by intensifying the brilliance of their scarlet, to resist the gathering twilight, a mist rises to envelop the now slumbering island; one walks in the moist darkness along the water's edge, where at the most the silent passage of a swan startles one like the momentarily wide-open eyes and the swift smile of a child in bed at night whom one did not suppose to be awake. Then one longs all the more to have a lover by one's side because one feels alone and can believe oneself to be far away.

But to this island, where even in summer there was often a mist, how much more gladly would I have brought Mme de Stermaria now that the cold season, the end of autumn had come! If the weather that had prevailed since Sunday had not in itself rendered grey and maritime the scenes in which my imagination was living—as other seasons made them balmy, luminous, Italian—the hope of making Mme de Stermaria mine in a few days' time would have been quite enough to raise, twenty times in an hour, a curtain of mist in my monotonously yearning imagination. In any event the fog which since yesterday had risen even in Paris not only made me think incessantly of the native province of the young woman whom I had invited, but since it was probable that it must after sunset invade the Bois, and especially the shores of the lake, far more thickly than the streets of the town, I felt that for me it would give the Isle of Swans a hint of that Breton island whose marine and misty atmosphere had always enveloped in my mind like a garment the pale silhouette of Mme de Stermaria. Of course when we are young, at the age I had reached at the time of my walks along the Méséglise way, our desires, our beliefs confer on a woman's clothing an individual personality, an irreducible essence. We pursue the reality. But by dint of allowing it to escape we end by noticing that, after all those vain endeavours which have led to nothing, something solid subsists, which is what we have been seeking. We begin to isolate, to identify what we love, we try to procure it for ourselves, if only by a stratagem. Then, in the absence of our vanished faith, costume fills the gap, by means of a deliberate illusion. I knew quite well that within half an hour of home I should not find myself in Brittany. But in walking arm in arm with Mme de Stermaria in the dusk of the island, by the water's edge, I should be acting like other men who, unable to penetrate the walls of a convent, do at least, before enjoying a woman, clothe her in the habit of a nun.

I could even look forward to hearing with her a lapping of waves, for, on the day before our dinner, a storm broke over Paris. I was beginning to shave before going to the island to engage the room (although at this time of year the island was empty and the restaurant deserted) and order the food for our dinner next day when Françoise came in to announce the arrival of Albertine. I had her shown in at once, indifferent to her finding me disfigured by a bristling chin, although at Balbec I had never felt smart enough for her and she had cost me as much agitation and distress as Mme de Stermaria did now. The latter, I was determined, must go away with the best possible impression from our evening together. Accordingly I asked Albertine to come with me there and then to the island to choose the menu. She to whom one gives everything is so quickly replaced by another that one is surprised to find oneself giving all that one has afresh at every moment, without any hope of future reward. At my suggestion the smiling rosy face beneath Albertine's flat toque, which came down very low, over her eyebrows, seemed to hesitate. She had probably other plans; if so she sacrificed them willingly, to my great satisfaction, for I attached the utmost importance to having with me a young housewife who would know a great deal more than me about ordering dinner.

It is certain that she had represented something utterly different for me at Balbec. But our intimacy with a woman with whom we are in love, even when we do not consider it close enough at the time, creates between her and us, in spite of the shortcomings that pain us while our love lasts, social ties which outlast our love and even the memory of our love. Then, in the woman who is now no more to us than a means of approach, an avenue towards others, we are just as astonished and amused to learn from our memory what her name meant originally to that other person we formerly were as if, after giving a cabman an address in the Boulevard des Capucines or the Rue du Bac, thinking only of the person we are going to see there, we remind ourselves that these names were once those of the Capuchin nuns whose convent stood on the site and of the ferry across the Seine.

At the same time, my Balbec desires had so generously ripened Albertine's body, had gathered and stored in it savours so fresh and sweet that, during our expedition to the Bois, while the wind like a careful gardener shook the trees, brought down the fruit, swept up the fallen leaves, I told myself that had there been any risk

of Saint-Loup's being mistaken, or of my having misunderstood his letter, so that my dinner with Mme de Stermaria might lead to no satisfactory result, I should have made an appointment for later the same evening with Albertine, in order to forget, during an hour of purely sensual pleasure, holding in my arms a body of which my curiosity had once computed, weighed up all the possible charms in which it now abounded, the emotions and perhaps the regrets of this burgeoning love for Mme de Stermaria. And certainly, if I could have supposed that Mme de Stermaria would grant me none of her favours at our first meeting, I should have formed a slightly depressing picture of my evening with her. I knew only too well from experience how bizarrely the two stages which succeed one another in the first phase of our love for a woman whom we have desired without knowing her, loving in her rather the particular kind of existence in which she is steeped than her still unfamiliar self—how bizarrely those two stages are reflected in the domain of reality, that is to say no longer in ourselves but in our meetings with her. Without ever having talked to her, we have hesitated, tempted as we were by the poetic charm which she represented for us. Shall it be this woman or another? And suddenly our dreams become focused on her, are indistinguishable from her. The first meeting with her which will shortly follow should reflect this dawning love. Nothing of the sort. As if it were necessary for material reality to have its first phase also, loving her already we talk to her in the most trivial fashion: "I asked you to come and dine on this island because I thought the surroundings would amuse you. Mind you, I've nothing particular to say to you. But it's rather damp, I'm afraid, and you may find it cold—" "Oh, no, not at all!" "You just say that out of politeness. Very well, Madame, I shall allow you to battle against the cold for another quarter of an hour, as I don't want to pester you, but in fifteen minutes I shall take you away by force. I don't want to have you catching a chill." And without having said anything to her we take her home, remembering nothing about her, at the most a certain look in her eyes, but thinking only of seeing her again. Then at the second meeting (when we do not even find that look, our sole memory of her, but nevertheless still only thinking—indeed even more so—of seeing her again), the first stage is transcended. Nothing has happened in the interval. And yet, instead of talking about the comfort or want of comfort of the restaurant, we say, without apparently surprising the new person, who seems to us positively plain but to whom we should like to think that people were talking about us at every moment in her life: "We're going to have our work cut out to overcome all the obstacles in our way. Do you think we shall be successful? Do you think we'll get the better of our enemies, live happily ever after?" But these contrasting conversations, trivial to begin with, then hinting at love, would not be required; Saint-Loup's letter was a guarantee of that. Mme de Stermaria would give herself on the very first evening, so that I should have no need to engage Albertine to come to me as a substitute later in the evening. It would be unnecessary; Robert never exaggerated, and his letter was quite clear.

Albertine spoke hardly at all, sensing that my thoughts were elsewhere. We went a little way on foot into the greenish, almost submarine grotto of a dense grove on the dome of which we heard the wind howl and the rain splash. I trod underfoot dead leaves which sank into the soil like sea-shells, and poked with my stick at fallen chestnuts prickly as sea-urchins.

On the boughs of the trees, the last clinging leaves, shaken by the wind, followed it only as far as their stems would allow, but sometimes these broke and they fell to the ground, along which they coursed to overtake it. I thought joyfully how much more remote still, if this weather lasted, the island would be the next day, and in any case quite deserted. We returned to our carriage and, as the squall had subsided, Albertine asked me to take her on to Saint-Cloud. As on the ground the drifting leaves, so up above the clouds were chasing the wind. And a stream of migrant evenings, of which a sort of conic section cut into the sky made visible the successive layers, pink, blue and green, were gathered in readiness for departure to warmer climes. To obtain a closer view of a marble goddess who had been carved in the act of springing from her pedestal and, alone in a great wood which seemed to be consecrated to her, filled it with the mythological terror, half animal, half divine, of her frenzied leaps, Albertine climbed a knoll while I waited for her in the road. She herself, seen thus from below, no longer coarse and plump as a few days earlier on my bed when the grain of her neck appeared under the magnifying-glass of my eyes, but delicately chiselled, seemed like a little statue on which our happy hours together at Balbec had left their patina. When I found myself alone again at home, remembering that I had been for an expedition that afternoon with Albertine, that I was to dine in two days' time with Mme de Guermantes and that I had to answer a letter from Gilberte, three women I had loved, I said to myself that our social existence, like an artist's studio, is filled with abandoned sketches in which we fancied for a moment that we could set down in permanent form our need of a great love, but it did not occur to me that sometimes, if the sketch is not too old, it may happen that we return to it and make of it a wholly different work, and one that is possibly more important than what we had originally planned.

The next day was cold and fine; winter was in the air—indeed the season was so far advanced that it was a miracle that we should have found in the already ravaged Bois a few domes of gilded green. When I awoke I saw, as from the window of the barracks at Doncières, a uniform, dead white mist which hung gaily in the sunlight, thick and soft as a web of spun sugar. Then the sun withdrew, and the mist thickened still further in the afternoon. Night fell early, and I washed and changed, but it was still too soon to start. I decided to send a carriage for Mme de Stermaria. I did not like to go for her in it myself, not wishing to force my company on her, but I gave the driver a note for her in which I asked whether she would mind my coming to call for her. Meanwhile I lay down on my bed, shut my eyes for a moment, then opened them again. Over the top of the curtains there was now only a thin strip of daylight which grew steadily dimmer. I recognised that vacant hour, the vast ante-room of pleasure, the dark, delicious emptiness of which I had learned at Balbec to know and to enjoy when, alone in my room as I was now, while everyone else was at dinner, I saw without regret

the daylight fade from above my curtains, knowing that presently, after a night of polar brevity, it was to be resuscitated in a more dazzling brightness in the lighted rooms at Rivebelle. I sprang from my bed, tied my black tie, brushed my hair, final gestures of a belated tidying-up, carried out at Balbec with my mind not on myself but on the women whom I should see at Rivebelle, while I smiled at them in anticipation in the mirror that stood across a corner of my room, gestures which for that reason had remained the harbingers of an entertainment in which music and lights would be mingled. Like magic signs they conjured it up, indeed already brought it into being; thanks to them I had as positive a notion of its reality, as complete an enjoyment of its intoxicating frivolous charm, as I had had at Combray, in the month of July, when I heard the hammer-blows ring on the packing cases and enjoyed the warmth and the sunshine in the coolness of my darkened room.

Thus it was no longer entirely Mme de Stermaria that I should have wished to see. Forced now to spend my evening with her, I should have preferred, as it was almost the last before the return of my parents, that it should remain free and that I should be able to seek out some of the women I had seen at Rivebelle. I gave my hands one more final wash and, my sense of pleasure keeping me on the move, dried them as I walked through the shuttered dining-room. It appeared to be open on to the lighted hall, but what I had taken for the bright crevice of the door, which in fact was closed, was only the gleaming reflexion of my towel in a mirror that had been laid against the wall in readiness to be fixed in its place before Mamma's return. I thought again of all the other illusions of the sort which I had discovered in different parts of the house, and which were not optical only, for when we first came there I had thought that our nextdoor neighbour kept a dog on account of the prolonged, almost human, yapping which came from a kitchen pipe whenever the tap was turned on. And the door on to the outer landing never closed by itself, very gently, against the draughts of the staircase, without rendering those broken, voluptuous, plaintive phrases that overlap the chant of the pilgrims towards the end of the Overture to *Tannhäuser*. I had in fact, just as I had put my towel back on its rail, an opportunity of hearing a fresh rendering of this dazzling symphonic fragment, for at a peal of the bell I hurried out to open the door to the driver who had come with Mme de Stermaria's answer. I thought that his message would be: "The lady is downstairs," or "The lady is waiting." But he had a letter in his hand. I hesitated for a moment before looking to see what Mme de Stermaria had written, which as long as she held the pen in her hand might have been different, but was now, detached from her, an engine of fate pursuing its course alone, which she was utterly powerless to alter. I asked the driver to wait downstairs for a moment, although he grumbled about the fog. As soon as he had gone I opened the envelope. On her card, inscribed *Vicomtesse Alix de Stermaria*, my guest had written: "Am so sorry—am unfortunately prevented from dining with you this evening on the island in the Bois. Had been so looking forward to it. Will write you a proper letter from Stermaria. Very sorry. Kindest regards." I stood motionless, stunned by the shock that I had received. At my feet lay the card and envelope, fallen like the spent cartridge from a gun when the shot has been fired. I picked them up, and tried to analyse her message. "She says that she cannot dine with me on the island in the Bois. One might conclude from that that she might be able to dine with me somewhere else. I shall not be so indiscreet as to go and fetch her, but, after all, that is quite a reasonable interpretation." And from the island in the Bois, since for the last few days my thoughts had been installed there in advance with Mme de Stermaria, I could not succeed in bringing them back to where I was. My desire continued to respond automatically to the gravitational force which had been impelling it now for so many hours, and in spite of this message, too recent to counteract that force, I went on instinctively getting ready to set out, just as a student, although ploughed by the examiners, tries to answer one question more. At last I decided to tell Françoise to go down and pay the driver. I went along the passage, and failing to find her, passed through the dining-room, where suddenly my feet ceased to ring out on the bare boards as they had been doing until then and were hushed to a silence which, even before I had realised the explanation of it, gave me a feeling of suffocation and confinement. It was the carpets which, with a view to my parents' return, the servants had begun to put down again, those carpets which look so well on bright mornings when amid their disorder the sun awaits you like a friend come to take you out to lunch in the country, and casts over them the dappled light and shade of the forest, but which now on the contrary were the first installations of the wintry prison from which, obliged as I should be to live and take my meals at home, I should no longer be free to escape when I chose.

"Take care you don't slip, sir; they're not tacked yet," Françoise called to me. "I ought to have lighted up. Oh, dear, it's the end of 'Sextember' already, the fine days are over."

In no time, winter; at the corner of a window, as in a Gallé glass, a vein of crusted snow; and even in the Champs-Élysées, instead of the girls one waits to see, nothing but solitary sparrows.

What added to my despair at not seeing Mme de Stermaria was that her answer led me to suppose that whereas, hour by hour, since Sunday, I had been living for this dinner alone, she had presumably never given it a second thought. Later on I learned of an absurd love match that she made with a young man whom she must already have been seeing at this time, and who had presumably made her forget my invitation. For if she had remembered it she would surely never have waited for the carriage, which I had not in fact arranged to send for her, to inform me that she was otherwise engaged. My dreams of a young feudal maiden on a misty island had opened up a path to a still non-existent love. Now my disappointment, my rage, my desperate desire to recapture her who had just refused me, were able, by bringing my sensibility into play, to make definite the possible love which until then my imagination alone had—though more feebly—offered me.

How many they are in our memories, how many more we have forgotten—those faces of girls and young women, all different, on which we have superimposed a certain charm and a frenzied desire to see them again only because at the last moment they eluded us! In the case of Mme de Stermaria there was a good deal more

than this, and it was enough now, in order to love her, for me to see her again so that I might refresh those impressions, so vivid but all too brief, which my memory would not otherwise have the strength to keep alive in her absence. Circumstances decided against me; I did not see her again. It was not she that I loved, but it might well have been. And one of the things that made most painful, perhaps, the great love which was presently to come to me was telling myself, when I thought of this evening, that given a slight modification of very simple circumstances, my love might have been transferred elsewhere, on to Mme de Stermaria; that, applied to her who inspired it in me so soon afterwards, it was not therefore—as I longed, so needed to believe—absolutely necessary and predestined.

Françoise had left me by myself in the dining-room with the remark that it was foolish of me to stay there before she had lighted the fire. She went to get me some dinner, for from this very evening, even before the return of my parents, my seclusion was beginning. I caught sight of a huge bundle of carpets, still rolled up, and propped against one end of the sideboard; and burying my head in it, swallowing its dust together with my own tears, as the Jews used to cover their heads with ashes in times of mourning, I began to sob. I shivered, not only because the room was cold, but because a distinct lowering of temperature (against the danger and, it must be said, the by no means disagreeable sensation of which we make no attempt to react) is brought about by a certain kind of tears which fall from our eyes, drop by drop, like a fine, penetrating, icy rain, and seem as though they will never cease to flow. Suddenly I heard a voice:

"May I come in? Françoise told me you might be in the dining-room. I looked in to see whether you would care to come out and dine somewhere, if it isn't bad for your throat—there's a fog outside you could cut with a knife."

It was Robert de Saint-Loup, who had arrived in Paris that morning, when I imagined him to be still in Morocco or on the sea.

I have already said (and it was precisely Robert himself who at Balbec had helped me, quite unwittingly, to arrive at this conclusion) what I think about friendship: to wit, that it is so trivial a thing that I find it hard to understand how men with some claim to genius—Nietzsche, for instance—can have been so ingenuous as to ascribe to it a certain intellectual merit, and consequently to deny themselves friendships in which intellectual esteem would have no part. Yes, it has always been a surprise to me to think that a man who carried honesty with himself to the point of cutting himself off from Wagner's music from scruples of conscience could have imagined that the truth can ever be attained by the mode of expression, by its very nature vague and inadequate, which actions in general and acts of friendship in particular constitute, or that there can be any kind of significance in the fact of one's leaving one's work to go and see a friend and shed tears with him on hearing the false report that the Louvre has been burned down. I had reached the point, at Balbec, of regarding the pleasure of playing with a troop of girls as less destructive of the spiritual life, to which at least it remains alien, than friendship, the whole effort of which is directed towards making us sacrifice the only part of ourselves that is real and incommunicable (otherwise than by means of art) to a superficial self which, unlike the other, finds no joy in its own being, but rather a vague, sentimental glow at feeling itself supported by external props, hospitalised in an extraneous individuality, where, happy in the protection that is afforded it there, it expresses its well-being in warm approval and marvels at qualities which it would denounce as failings and seek to correct in itself. Besides, the scornors of friendship can, without illusion and not without remorse, be the finest friends in the world, in the same way as an artist who is carrying a masterpiece within him and feels it his duty to live and carry on his work, nevertheless, in order not to be thought of or to run the risk of being selfish, gives his life for a futile cause, and gives it all the more gallantly in that the reasons for which he would have preferred not to give it were disinterested. But whatever might be my opinion of friendship, to mention only the pleasure that it procured me, of a quality so mediocre as to be like something half-way between physical exhaustion and mental boredom, there is no brew so deadly that it cannot at certain moments become precious and invigorating by giving us just the stimulus that was necessary, the warmth that we cannot generate ourselves.

It never entered my mind of course to ask Saint-Loup to take me to see some of the Rivebelle women, as I had wanted to do an hour ago; the scar left by my regret about Mme de Stermaria was too recent to be so quickly healed, but at the moment when I had ceased to feel in my heart any reason for happiness Saint-Loup's arrival was like a sudden apparition of kindness, gaiety, life, which were external to me, no doubt, but offered themselves to me, asked only to be made mine. He did not himself understand my cry of gratitude, my tears of affection. And is there anything indeed more paradoxically affectionate than one of those friends, be he diplomat, explorer, airman, or soldier like Saint-Loup, who, having to leave next day for the country whence they will go on heaven knows where, seem to derive from the evening they devote to us an impression which we are astonished to find so heart-warming for them, so rare and fleeting is it, and equally astonished, since it delights them so much, not to see them prolong further or repeat more often? A meal with us, an event so natural in itself, gives these travellers the same strange and exquisite pleasure as our boulevards give to an Asiatic.

We set off together to dine, and on the way downstairs I thought of Doncières, where every evening I used to meet Robert at his restaurant, and the little dining-rooms there that I had forgotten. I remembered one of these to which I had never given a thought, and which was not in the hotel where Saint-Loup dined but in another, far humbler, a cross between an inn and a boarding-house, where the waiting was done by the landlady and one of her servants. I had been forced to take shelter there once from a snowstorm. Besides, Robert was not to be dining at the hotel that evening and I had not cared to go any further. My food was brought to me in a little panelled room upstairs. The lamp went out during dinner and the serving-girl lighted

a couple of candles. Pretending that I could not see very well as I held out my plate while she helped me to potatoes, I took her bare forearm in my hand, as though to guide her. Seeing that she did not withdraw it, I began to fondle it, then, without saying a word, pulled her towards me, blew out the candles and told her to feel in my pocket for some money. For the next few days physical pleasure seemed to me to require, to be properly enjoyed, not only this serving-girl but the timbered dining-room, so remote and isolated. And yet it was to the other, in which Saint-Loup and his friends dined, that I returned every evening, from force of habit and from friendship, until I left Doncières. But even of this hotel, where he boarded with his friends, I had long ceased to think. We make little use of our experience, we leave unfulfilled on long summer evenings or premature winter nights the hours in which it had seemed to us that there might nevertheless be contained some element of peace or pleasure. But those hours are not altogether wasted. When new moments of pleasure call to us in their turn, moments which would pass by in the same way, equally bare and one-dimensional, the others recur, bringing them the groundwork, the solid consistency of a rich orchestration. They thus prolong themselves into one of those classic examples of happiness which we recapture only now and again but which continue to exist; in the present instance it was the abandonment of everything else to dine in comfortable surroundings, which by the help of memory embody in a scene from nature suggestions of the rewards of travel, with a friend who is going to stir our dormant life with all his energy, all his affection, to communicate to us a tender pleasure, very different from anything that we could derive from our own efforts or from social distractions; we are going to exist solely for him, to make vows of friendship which, born within the confines of the hour, remaining imprisoned in it, will perhaps not be kept on the morrow but which I need have no scruple in making to Saint-Loup since, with a courage that enshrined a great deal of common sense and the presentiment that friendship cannot be very deeply probed, on the morrow he would be gone.

If as I came downstairs I relived those evenings at Doncières, suddenly, when we reached the street, the almost total darkness, in which the fog seemed to have extinguished the lamps, which one could make out, glimmering very faintly, only when close at hand, took me back to a dimly remembered arrival by night at Combray, when the streets there were still lighted only at distant intervals and one groped one's way through a moist, warm, hallowed crib-like darkness in which there flickered here and there a dim light that shone no brighter than a candle. Between that year—to which in any case I could ascribe no precise date—of my Combray life and the evenings at Rivebelle which had, an hour earlier, been reflected above my drawn curtains, what a world of differences! I felt on perceiving them an enthusiasm which might have borne fruit had I remained alone and would thus have saved me the detour of many wasted years through which I was yet to pass before the invisible vocation of which this book is the history declared itself. Had the revelation come to me that evening, the carriage in which I sat would have deserved to rank as more memorable for me than Dr Percepied's, on the box seat of which I had composed that little sketch—which, as it happened, I had recently unearthed, altered and sent in vain to the *Figaro*—of the steeples of Martinville. Is it because we relive our past years not in their continuous sequence, day by day, but in a memory focused upon the coolness or sunshine of some morning or afternoon suffused with the shade of some isolated and enclosed setting, immovable, arrested, lost, remote from all the rest, and thus the changes gradually wrought not only in the world outside but in our dreams and our evolving character (changes which have imperceptibly carried us through life from one time to another, wholly different) are eliminated, that, if we relive another memory taken from a different year, we find between the two, thanks to lacunae, to vast stretches of oblivion, as it were the gulf of a difference in altitude or the incompatibility of two divergent qualities of breathed atmosphere and surrounding coloration? But between the memories that had now come to me in turn of Combray, of Doncières and of Rivebelle, I was conscious at that moment of much more than a distance in time, of the distance that there would be between two separate universes whose substance was not the same. If I had sought to reproduce in a piece of writing the material in which my most insignificant memories of Rivebelle appeared to me to be carved, I should have had to vein with pink, to render at once translucent, compact, cool and resonant, a substance hitherto analogous to the sombre, rugged sandstone of Combray.

But Robert, having finished giving his instructions to the driver, now joined me in the carriage. The ideas that had appeared before me took flight. They are goddesses who deign at times to make themselves visible to a solitary mortal, at a turning in the road, even in his bedroom while he sleeps, when, standing framed in the doorway, they bring him their annunciation. But as soon as a companion joins him they vanish; in the society of his fellows no man has ever beheld them. And I found myself thrown back upon friendship.

Robert on arriving had indeed warned me that there was a good deal of fog outside, but while we were talking it had grown steadily thicker. It was no longer merely the light mist which I had looked forward to seeing rise from the island and envelop Mme de Stermaria and myself. A few feet away from us the street lamps were blotted out and then it was night, as dark as in open fields, in a forest, or rather on a mild Breton island whither I should have liked to go; I felt lost, as on the stark coast of some northern sea where one risks one's life twenty times over before coming to the solitary inn; ceasing to be a mirage for which one seeks, the fog had become one of those dangers against which one has to fight, so that in finding our way and reaching a safe haven, we experienced the difficulties, the anxiety and finally the joy which safety, so little perceived by one who is not threatened with the loss of it, gives to the perplexed and benighted traveller. One thing only came near to destroying my pleasure during our adventurous ride, owing to the angry astonishment into which it flung me for a moment. "You know," Saint-Loup suddenly said to me, "I told Bloch that you didn't like him all that much, that you found him rather vulgar at times. I'm like that, you see, I like clear-cut situations," he wound up with a self-satisfied air and in an unanswerable tone of voice. I was astounded. Not only had I the most absolute confidence in Saint-Loup, in the loyalty of his friendship, and he had betrayed it

by what he had said to Bloch, but it seemed to me that he of all men ought to have been restrained from doing so by his defects as well as by his good qualities, by that astonishing veneer of breeding which was capable of carrying politeness to what was positively a want of frankness. Was his triumphant air the sort that we assume to cloak a certain embarrassment in admitting a thing which we know that we ought not to have done? Was it simply the expression of frivolity, stupidity, making a virtue out of a defect which I had not associated with him? Or a passing fit of ill-humour towards me, prompting him to make an end of our friendship, or the registering of a passing fit of ill humour against Bloch to whom he had wanted to say something disagreeable even though it would compromise me? Whatever it was, his face was seared, while he uttered these vulgar words, by a frightful sinuosity which I saw on it once or twice only in all the time I knew him, and which, beginning by running more or less down the middle of his face, when it came to his lips twisted them, gave them a hideous expression of baseness, almost of bestiality, quite transitory and no doubt inherited. There must have been at such moments, which recurred probably not more than once every other year, a partial eclipse of his true self by the passage across it of the personality of some ancestor reflecting itself upon him. Fully as much as his self-satisfied air, the words "I like clear-cut situations" encouraged the same doubt and should have incurred a similar condemnation. I felt inclined to say to him that if one likes clear-cut situations one ought to confine these outbursts of frankness to one's own affairs and not to acquire a too easy merit at the expense of others. But by this time the carriage had stopped outside the restaurant, the huge front of which, glazed and streaming with light, alone succeeded in piercing the darkness. The fog itself, lit up by the comfortable brightness of the interior, seemed to be waiting outside on the pavement to show one the way in with the joy of servants whose faces reflect the hospitable instincts of their master; shot with the most delicate shades of light, it pointed the way like the pillar of fire which guided the Hebrews. Many of these, as it happened, were to be found inside. For this was the place to which Bloch and his friends, intoxicated by their fast on coffee and political curiosity, a fast as famishing as the ritual fast which occurs only once a year, had long been in the habit of repairing in the evenings. Every mental excitement creating a value that overrides everything else, a quality superior to the habits bound up in it, there is no taste at all keenly developed that does not thus gather round it a society which it unites and in which the esteem of his fellows is what each of its members seeks before anything else from life. Here, in their café, be it in a little provincial town, you will find impassioned music-lovers; the greater part of their time and all their spare cash are spent in chamber-concerts, in meetings for musical discussion, in cafés where they find themselves among music-lovers and rub shoulders with musicians. Others, keen on flying, seek to stand well with the old waiter in the glazed bar perched on top of the aerodrome; sheltered from the wind as in the glass cage of a lighthouse, they can follow in the company of an airman who is not going up that day the gyrations of a pilot looping the loop, while another, invisible a moment ago, comes suddenly swooping down to land with the great winged roar of an Arabian roc. The little group which met to try to grasp and to perpetuate the fugitive emotions aroused by the Zola trial attached a similar importance to this particular café. But they were not viewed with favour by the young nobles who composed the other part of the clientele and had taken over a second room, separated from the other only by a flimsy parapet topped with a row of plants. These looked upon Dreyfus and his supporters as traitors, although twenty-five years later, ideas having had time to settle down and Dreyfusism to acquire a certain glamour in the light of history, the Bolshevistic and dance-mad sons of these same young nobles would declare to the "intellectuals" who questioned them that undoubtedly, had they been alive at the time, they would have been for Dreyfus, without having any clearer idea of what the Affair had been about than Comtesse Edmond de Pourtalès or the Marquise de Galliffet, other luminaries already extinct at the date of their birth. For on the night of the fog the noblemen of the café, who were in due course to become the fathers of these retrospectively Dreyfusard young intellectuals, were still bachelors. Naturally the idea of a rich marriage was present in the minds of all their families, but none of them had yet brought such a marriage off. Still only potential, this rich marriage which was the simultaneous ambition of several of them (there were indeed several "good matches" in view, but after all the number of big dowries was considerably below that of the aspirants to them) merely tended to create among these young men a certain amount of rivalry.

As ill luck would have it, Saint-Loup remaining outside for a few minutes to explain to the driver that he was to call for us again after dinner, I had to go in alone. Now, to begin with, once I had ventured into the turning door, a contrivance to which I was unaccustomed, I began to fear that I should never succeed in getting out again. (Let me note here for the benefit of lovers of verbal accuracy that the contrivance in question, despite its peaceful appearance, is known as a "revolver," from the English "revolving door.") That evening the proprietor, unwilling either to brave the elements outside or to desert his customers, nevertheless remained standing near the entrance so as to have the pleasure of listening to the joyful complaints of the new arrivals, all aglow with the satisfaction of people who had had trouble getting there and been afraid of getting lost. The smiling cordiality of his welcome was, however, dissipated by the sight of a stranger incapable of disengaging himself from the rotating sheets of glass. This flagrant sign of ignorance made him frown like an examiner who has a good mind not to utter the formula: *Dignus est intrare*. As a crowning error I went and sat down in the room set apart for the nobility, from which he came at once to root me out, with a rudeness to which all the waiters immediately conformed, and showed me to a place in the other room. This was all the less to my liking because the seat was in the middle of a crowded bench and I had opposite me the door reserved for the Hebrews which, since it did not revolve, opened and closed every other minute and kept me in a horrible draught. But the proprietor declined to move me, saying: "No, sir, I cannot disturb everybody just for you." Presently, however, he forgot this belated and troublesome guest, captivated as he was by the

arrival of each newcomer who, before calling for his beer, his wing of cold chicken, or his hot grog (it was by now long past dinner-time), must first, as in the old romances, sing for his supper by relating his adventure as soon as he entered this asylum of warmth and security where the contrast with the perils just escaped engendered the sort of gaiety and sense of comradeship that create a cheerful harmony round the camp fire.

One reported that his carriage, thinking it had got to the Pont de la Concorde, had circled the Invalides three times, another that his, in trying to make its way down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, had driven into a clump of trees at the Rond-Point, from which it had taken three-quarters of an hour to extricate itself. Then followed lamentations about the fog, the cold, the deathly silence of the streets, uttered and received with the same exceptionally jovial air that was attributable to the pleasant atmosphere of the room which, except where I sat, was warm, the dazzling light which set blinking eyes already accustomed to not seeing, and the buzz of talk which restored their activity to deafened ears.

The new arrivals had the greatest difficulty in keeping silence. The singularity of the mishaps which each of them thought unique set their tongues on fire, and their eyes roved in search of someone to engage in conversation. The proprietor himself lost all sense of social distinctions: "M. le Prince de Foix lost his way three times coming from the Porte Saint-Martin," he was not afraid to say with a laugh, actually pointing out, as though introducing one to the other, the illustrious nobleman to a Jewish barrister who on any evening but this would have been separated from him by a barrier far harder to surmount than the ledge of greenery. "Three times—fancy that!" said the barrister, touching his hat. This note of friendly interest was not at all to the Prince's liking. He belonged to an aristocratic group for whom the practice of rudeness, even at the expense of their fellow-nobles when these were not of the very highest rank, seemed to be the sole occupation. Not to acknowledge a greeting; if the polite stranger repeated the offence, to laugh with sneering contempt or fling back one's head with a look of fury; to pretend not to recognise some elderly man who had done them a service; to reserve their handshakes for dukes and the really intimate friends of dukes whom the latter introduced to them: such was the attitude of these young men, and especially of the Prince de Foix. Such an attitude was encouraged by the thoughtlessness of youth (a period in which, even in the middle class, one appears ungrateful and behaves boorishly because, having forgotten for months to write to a benefactor who has just lost his wife, one then ceases to greet him in the street so as to simplify matters), but it was inspired above all by an acute caste snobbery. It is true that, after the fashion of certain nervous disorders the symptoms of which grow less pronounced in later life, this snobbishness would generally cease to express itself in so offensive a form in these men who had been so intolerable when young. Once youth is outgrown, it is rare for a man to remain confined in insolence. He had supposed it to be the only thing in the world; suddenly he discovers, prince though he is, that there are also such things as music, literature, even standing for parliament. The scale of human values is correspondingly altered and he engages in conversation with people whom at one time he would have dismissed with a withering glance. Good luck to those of the latter who have had the patience to wait, and who are of such a good disposition—if "good" is the right word—that they accept with pleasure in their forties the civility and welcome that had been coldly withheld from them at twenty.

Since we are on the subject of the Prince de Foix, it may be mentioned here that he belonged to a set of a dozen or fifteen young men and to an inner group of four. The dozen or fifteen shared the characteristic (from which the Prince, I fancy, was exempt) that each of them presented a dual aspect to the world. Up to their eyes in debt, they were regarded as bounders by their tradesmen, notwithstanding the pleasure these took in addressing them as "Monsieur le Comte," "Monsieur le Marquis," "Monsieur le Duc." They hoped to retrieve their fortunes by means of the famous rich marriage ("moneybags" as the expression still was) and, as the fat dowries which they coveted numbered at the most four or five, several of them were secretly setting their sights on the same damsel. And the secret would be so well kept that when one of them, on arriving at the café, announced: "My dear fellows, I'm too fond of you all not to tell you of my engagement to Mlle d'Ambresac," there would be a general outburst, more than one of the others imagining that the marriage was as good as settled already between Mlle d'Ambresac and himself, and not having the self-control to stifle a spontaneous cry of stupefaction and rage. "So you like the idea of marriage, do you, Bibi?" the Prince de Châtellerault could not help exclaiming, dropping his fork in surprise and despair, for he had been fully expecting the engagement of this identical Mlle d'Ambresac to be announced, but with himself, Châtellerault, as her bridegroom. And heaven only knew all that his father had cunningly hinted to the Ambresacs about Bibi's mother. "So you think it'll be fun, being married, do you?" he could not help repeating for the second time to Bibi, who, better prepared because he had had plenty of time to decide on the right attitude to adopt since the engagement had reached the semi-official stage, would reply with a smile: "I'm pleased, not to be getting married, which I didn't particularly want to do, but to be marrying Daisy d'Ambresac whom I find charming." In the time taken up by this response M. de Châtellerault would have recovered his composure, but then he would think that he must at the earliest possible moment execute an about-face in the direction of Mlle de la Canourgue or Miss Foster, numbers two and three on the list of heiresses, pacify somehow the creditors who were expecting the Ambresac marriage, and, finally, explain to the people to whom he too had declared that Mlle de Ambresac was charming that this marriage was all very well for Bibi, but that he himself would have had all his family down on him like a ton of bricks if he had married her. Mme Soléon (he would say) had actually gone so far as to announce that she would not have them in her house.

But if in the eyes of tradesmen, restaurant proprietors and the like they seemed of little account, conversely, being creatures of dual personality, the moment they appeared in society they ceased to be judged by the dilapidated state of their fortunes and the sordid occupations by which they sought to repair them. They

became once more M. le Prince this, M. le Duc that, and were judged only by their quarterings. A duke who was practically a multimillionaire and seemed to combine in his person every possible distinction would give precedence to them because, being the heads of their various houses, they were by descent sovereign princes of small territories in which they were entitled to mint money and so forth. Often, in this café, one of them would lower his eyes when another came in so as not to oblige the newcomer to greet him. This was because in his imaginative pursuit of riches he had invited a banker to dine. Every time a man about town enters into relations with a banker in such circumstances, the latter leaves him the poorer by a hundred thousand francs, which does not prevent the man about town from at once repeating the process with another. We continue to burn candles in churches and to consult doctors.

But the Prince de Foix, who was himself rich, belonged not only to this fashionable set of fifteen or so young men, but to a more exclusive and inseparable group of four, which included Saint-Loup. These were never asked anywhere separately, they were known as the four gigolos, they were always to be seen riding together, and in country houses their hostesses gave them communicating bedrooms, with the result that, especially as they were all four extremely good-looking, rumours were current as to the extent of their intimacy. I was in a position to give these the lie direct so far as Saint-Loup was concerned. But the curious thing is that if, later on, it was discovered that these rumours were true of all four, each of the quartet had been entirely in the dark as to the other three. And yet each of them had done his utmost to find out about the others, to gratify a desire or (more probably) a grudge, to prevent a marriage or to secure a hold over the friend whose secret he uncovered. A fifth (for in groups of four there are always more than four) had joined this platonic party who was more so than any of the others. But religious scruples restrained him until long after the group had broken up and he himself was a married man, the father of a family, fervently praying at Lourdes that the next baby might be a boy or a girl, and in the meantime flinging himself upon soldiers.

Despite the Prince's arrogant ways, the fact that the barrister's comment, though uttered in his hearing, had not been directly addressed to him made him less angry than he would otherwise have been. Besides, this evening was somehow exceptional. And in any case the barrister had no more chance of getting to know the Prince de Foix than the cabman who had driven that noble lord to the restaurant. The Prince accordingly felt that he might allow himself to reply—in an arrogant tone, however, and as though to the company at large—to this stranger who, thanks to the fog, was in the position of a travelling companion whom one meets at some seaside place at the ends of the earth, scoured by all the winds of heaven or shrouded in mist: "Losing your way isn't so bad; the trouble is finding it again." The wisdom of this aphorism impressed the proprietor, for he had already heard it several times in the course of the evening.

He was, indeed, in the habit of always comparing what he heard or read with an already familiar canon, and felt his admiration quicken if he could detect no difference. This state of mind is by no means to be ignored, for, applied to political conversations, to the reading of newspapers, it forms public opinion and thereby makes possible the greatest events in history. A large number of German café owners, simply by being impressed by a customer or a newspaper when they said that France, England and Russia were "provoking" Germany, made war possible at the time of Agadir, even if no war occurred. Historians, if they have not been wrong to abandon the practice of attributing the actions of peoples to the will of kings, ought to substitute for the latter the psychology of the individual, the inferior individual at that.

In politics the proprietor of this particular café had for some time now applied his recitation-teacher's mentality to a certain number of set-pieces on the Dreyfus case. If he did not find the terms that were familiar to him in the remarks of a customer or the columns of a newspaper he would pronounce the article boring or the speaker insincere. The Prince de Foix, however, impressed him so forcibly that he barely gave him time to finish his sentence. "Well said, Prince, well said" (which meant, more or less, "faultlessly recited"), "that's it, that's exactly it," he exclaimed, "swelling up," as they say in the *Arabian Nights*, "to the extreme limit of satisfaction." But the Prince had already vanished into the smaller room. Then, as life resumes its normal course after even the most sensational happenings, those who had emerged from the sea of fog began to order whatever they wanted to eat or drink; among them a party of young men from the Jockey Club who, in view of the abnormality of the occasion, had no hesitation in taking their places at a couple of tables in the big room, and were thus quite close to me. So the cataclysm had established even between the smaller room and the bigger, among all these people stimulated by the comfort of the restaurant after their long wanderings across the ocean of fog, a familiarity from which I alone was excluded and which was not unlike the spirit that must have prevailed in Noah's ark.

Suddenly I saw the landlord bent double, bowing and scraping, and the waiters hurrying to support him in full force, a scene which drew every eye towards the door. "Quick, send Cyprien here, a table for M. le Marquis de Saint-Loup," cried the proprietor, for whom Robert was not merely a great nobleman who enjoyed genuine prestige even in the eyes of the Prince de Foix, but a customer who burned the candle at both ends and spent a great deal of money in this restaurant. The customers in the big room looked on with curiosity, those in the small room vied with one another in hailing their friend as he finished wiping his shoes. But just as he was about to make his way into the small room he caught sight of me in the big one. "Good God," he exclaimed, "what on earth are you doing there? And with the door wide open too?" he added with a furious glance at the proprietor, who ran to shut it, throwing the blame on his staff: "I'm always telling them to keep it shut."

I had been obliged to shift my own table and to disturb others which stood in the way in order to reach him. "Why did you move? Would you sooner dine here than in the little room? Why, my poor fellow, you're freezing. You will oblige me by keeping that door permanently locked," he said to the proprietor. "This very



instant, Monsieur le Marquis. The customers who arrive from now on will have to go through the little room, that's all." And the better to prove his zeal, he detailed for this operation a head waiter and several satellites, vociferating the most terrible threats if it were not properly carried out. He proceeded to show me exaggerated marks of respect, to make me forget that these had begun not upon my arrival but only after that of Saint-Loup, while, lest I should think them to have been prompted by the friendliness shown me by this rich and noble client, he gave me now and again a surreptitious little smile which seemed to indicate a regard that was wholly personal.

Something said by one of the diners behind me made me turn my head for a moment. I had caught, instead of the words: "Wing of chicken, excellent; and a glass of champagne, only not too dry," these: "I should prefer glycerine. Yes, hot, excellent." I had wanted to see who the ascetic was who was inflicting upon himself such a diet, but I quickly turned back to Saint-Loup in order not to be recognised by the man of strange appetite. It was simply a doctor whom I happened to know and of whom another customer, taking advantage of the fog to buttonhole him here in the café, was asking his professional advice. Like stockbrokers, doctors employ the first person singular.

Meanwhile I looked as follows. There were at Robert, and my thoughts ran in this café, and I had myself known at other times in my life, plenty of foreigners, intellectuals, budding geniuses of all sorts, resigned to the laughter excited by their pretentious capes, their 1830 ties and still more by the clumsiness of their movements, going so far as to provoke that laughter in order to show that they paid no heed to it, who yet were men of real intellectual and moral worth, of profound sensibility. They repelled—the Jews among them principally, the unassimilated Jews, that is to say, for with the other kind we are not concerned—those who could not endure any oddity or eccentricity of appearance (as Bloch repelled Albertine). Generally speaking, one realised afterwards that, if it could be held against them that their hair was too long, their noses and eyes were too big, their gestures abrupt and theatrical, it was puerile to judge them by this, that they had plenty of wit and good-heartedness, and were men to whom, in the long run, one could become closely attached. Among the Jews especially there were few whose parents and kinsfolk had not a warmth of heart, a breadth of mind, a sincerity, in comparison with which Saint-Loup's mother and the Duc de Guermantes cut the poorest of moral figures by their aridity, their skin-deep religiosity which denounced only the most open scandal, their apology for a Christianity which led invariably (by the unexpected channels of the uniquely prized intellect) to a colossally mercenary marriage. But in Saint-Loup, when all was said, however the faults of his parents had combined to create a new blend of qualities, there reigned the most charming openness of mind and heart. And whenever (it must be allowed to the undying glory of France) these qualities are found in a man who is purely French, whether he belongs to the aristocracy or the people, they flower—flourish would be too strong a word, for moderation persists in this field, as well as restriction—with a grace which the foreigner, however estimable he may be, does not present to us. Of these intellectual and moral qualities others undoubtedly have their share, and, if we have first to overcome what repels us and what makes us smile, they remain no less precious. But it is all the same a pleasant thing, and one which is perhaps exclusively French, that what is fine in all equity of judgment, what is admirable to the mind and the heart, should be first of all attractive to the eyes, pleasingly coloured, consummately chiselled, should express as well in substance as in form an inner perfection. I looked at Saint-Loup, and I said to myself that it is a thing to be glad of when there is no lack of physical grace to serve as vestibule to the graces within, and when the curves of the nostrils are as delicate and as perfectly designed as the wings of the little butterflies that hover over the field-flowers round Combray; and that the true *opus franci-genum*, the secret of which was not lost in the thirteenth century, and would not perish with our churches, consists not so much in the stone angels of Saint-André-des-Champs as in the young sons of France, noble, bourgeois or peasant, whose faces are carved with that delicacy and boldness which have remained as traditional as on the famous porch, but are creative still.

After leaving us for a moment in order to supervise personally the barring of the door and the ordering of our dinner (he laid great stress on our choosing "butcher's meat," the fowls being presumably nothing to boast of) the proprietor came back to inform us that M. le Prince de Foix would esteem it a favour if M. le Marquis would allow him to dine at a table next to his. "But they are all taken," objected Robert, casting an eye over the tables which blocked the way to mine. "That doesn't matter in the least. If M. le Marquis is agreeable, I can easily ask these people to move to another table. It is always a pleasure to do anything for M. le Marquis!" "But you must decide," said Saint-Loup to me. "Foix is a good fellow. I don't know whether he'd bore you, but he's not such a fool as most of them." I told Robert that of course I should like to meet his friend but that now that I was dining with him for once in a way and was so happy to be doing so, I should be just as pleased to have him to myself. "He's got a very fine cloak, the Prince has," the proprietor broke in upon our deliberation. "Yes, I know," said Saint-Loup. I wanted to tell Robert that M. de Charlus had concealed from his sister-in-law the fact that he knew me, and ask him what could be the reason for this, but I was prevented from doing so by the arrival of M. de Foix. He had come to see whether his request had been favourably received, and we caught sight of him standing a few feet away. Robert introduced us, but made no secret of the fact that as we had things to talk about he would prefer us to be left alone. The Prince withdrew, adding to the farewell bow which he made me a smile which, pointed at Saint-Loup, seemed to transfer to him the responsibility for the shortness of a meeting which the Prince himself would have liked to see prolonged. But at that moment Robert, apparently struck by a sudden thought, went off with his friend after saying to me: "Do sit down and start your dinner, I shall be back in a moment," and vanished into the smaller room. I was pained to hear the smart young men whom I did not know telling the most absurd and malicious stories about

the adoptive Grand Duke of Luxembourg (formerly Comte de Nassau) whom I had met at Balbec and who had given me such delicate proofs of sympathy during my grandmother's illness. According to one of these young men, he had said to the Duchesse de Guermantes: "I expect everyone to get up when my wife comes in," to which the Duchess had retorted (with as little truth, had she said any such thing, as wit, the grandmother of the young Princess having always been the very pink of propriety): "Get up when your wife comes in, do they? Well, that's a change from her grandmother—she expected the gentlemen to lie down." Then someone alleged that, having gone down to see his aunt the Princesse de Luxembourg at Balbec, and put up at the Grand Hotel, he had complained to the manager (my friend) that the royal standard of Luxembourg was not flown in front of the hotel, and that this flag being less familiar and less generally in use than the British or Italian, it had taken him several days to procure one, greatly to the young Grand Duke's annoyance. I did not believe a word of this story, but made up my mind, as soon as I went to Balbec, to question the manager in order to satisfy myself that it was pure invention. While waiting for Saint-Loup to return I asked the restaurant proprietor for some bread. "Certainly, Monsieur le Baron!" "I am not a baron," I told him in a tone of mock sadness. "Oh, beg pardon, Monsieur le Comte!" I had no time to lodge a second protest which would certainly have promoted me to the rank of marquis: faithful to his promise of an immediate return, Saint-Loup reappeared in the doorway carrying over his arm the thick vicuna cloak of the Prince de Foix, from whom I guessed that he had borrowed it in order to keep me warm. He signed to me not to get up, and came towards me, but either my table would have to be moved again, or I must change my seat if he was to get to his. On entering the big room he sprang lightly on to one of the red plush benches which ran round its walls and on which, apart from myself, there were sitting three or four of the young men from the Jockey Club, friends of his, who had not managed to find places in the other room. Between the tables and the wall electric wires were stretched at a certain height; without the slightest hesitation Saint-Loup jumped nimbly over them like a steeplechaser taking a fence; embarrassed that it should be done wholly for my benefit and to save me the trouble of a very minor disturbance, I was at the same time amazed at the precision with which my friend performed this feat of acrobatics; and in this I was not alone; for although they would probably have been only moderately appreciative of a similar display on the part of a more humbly born and less generous client, the proprietor and his staff stood fascinated, like race-goers in the enclosure; one underling, apparently rooted to the ground, stood gaping with a dish in his hand for which a party close beside him were waiting; and when Saint-Loup, having to get past his friends, climbed on to the back of the bench behind them and ran along it, balancing himself like a tight-rope walker, discreet applause broke from the body of the room. On coming to where I was sitting, he checked his momentum with the precision of a tributary chieftain before the throne of a sovereign, and, stooping down, handed to me with an air of courtesy and submission the vicuna cloak which a moment later, having taken his place beside me, without my having to make a single movement, he arranged as a light but warm shawl about my shoulders.

"By the way, while I think of it, my uncle Charlus has something to say to you. I promised I'd send you round to him tomorrow evening."

"I was just going to speak to you about him. But tomorrow evening I'm dining out with your aunt Guermantes."

"Yes, there's a full-scale blow-out tomorrow at Oriane's. I'm not asked. But my uncle Palamède doesn't want you to go there. You can't get out of it, I suppose? Well, anyhow, go on to my uncle's afterwards. I think he's very anxious to see you. Surely you could manage to get there by eleven. Eleven o'clock, don't forget. I'll let him know. He's very touchy. If you don't turn up he'll never forgive you. And Oriane's parties are always over quite early. If you're only going to dine there you can quite easily be at my uncle's by eleven. Actually I ought to go and see Oriane, about getting a transfer from Morocco. She's so nice about all that sort of thing, and she can get anything she likes out of General de Saint-Joseph, who's the man in charge. But don't say anything about it to her. I've mentioned it to the Princesse de Parme, everything will be all right. Interesting place, Morocco. I could tell you all sorts of things. Very fine lot of men out there. One feels they're on one's own level, mentally."

"You don't think the Germans are going to go to war over it?"

"No, they're annoyed with us, as after all they have every right to be. But the Kaiser is out for peace. They're always making us think they want war, to force us to give in. Pure bluff, you know, like poker. The Prince of Monaco, one of Wilhelm II's agents, comes and tells us in confidence that Germany will attack us if we don't give in. So then we give in. But if we didn't give in, there wouldn't be war in any shape or form. You have only to think what a cosmic thing a war would be today. It'd be a bigger catastrophe than the Flood and the *Götterdämmerung* rolled into one. Only it wouldn't last so long."

He spoke to me of friendship, affection, regret, although like all travellers of his sort he was going off the next morning for some months which he was to spend in the country and would only be staying a couple of nights in Paris on his way back to Morocco (or elsewhere); but the words which he thus let fall into the warm furnace of my heart this evening kindled a pleasant glow there. Our infrequent meetings, and this one in particular, have since assumed epoch-making proportions in my memory. For him, as for me, this was the evening of friendship. And yet the friendship that I felt for him at this moment was scarcely, I feared (and felt therefore some remorse at the thought), what he would have liked to inspire. Suffused still with the pleasure that I had had in seeing him canter towards me and come gracefully to a halt on arriving at his goal, I felt that this pleasure lay in my recognising that each of the movements which he had executed on the bench, along the wall, had its meaning, its cause, in Saint-Loup's own personal nature perhaps, but even more in that which by birth and upbringing he had inherited from his race.

A certainty of taste in the domain not of aesthetics but of behaviour, which when he was faced by a novel combination of circumstances enabled the man of breeding to grasp at once—like a musician who has been asked to play a piece he has never seen—the attitude and the action required and to apply the appropriate mechanism and technique, and then allowed this taste to be exercised without the constraint of any other consideration by which so many young men of the middle class would have been paralysed from fear both of making themselves ridiculous in the eyes of strangers by a breach of propriety and of appearing over-zealous in those of their friends, and which in Robert's case was replaced by a lofty disdain that certainly he had never felt in his heart but had received by inheritance in his body, and that had fashioned the attitudes of his ancestors into a familiarity which, they imagined, could only flatter and enchant those to whom it was addressed; together with a noble liberality which, far from taking undue heed of his boundless material advantages (lavish expenditure in this restaurant had succeeded in making him, here as elsewhere, the most fashionable customer and the general favourite, a position underlined by the deference shown him not only by the waiters but by all its most exclusive young patrons), led him to trample them underfoot, just as he had actually and symbolically trodden upon those crimson benches, suggestive of some ceremonial way which pleased my friend only because it enabled him more gracefully and swiftly to arrive at my side: such were the quintessentially aristocratic qualities that shone through the husk of this body—not opaque and dim as mine would have been, but limpid and revealing—as, through a work of art, the industrious, energetic force which has created it, and rendered the movements of that light-footed course which Robert had pursued along the wall as intelligible and charming as those of horsemen on a marble frieze. “Alas!” Robert might have thought, “was it worth while to have grown up despising birth, honouring only justice and intellect, choosing, outside the ranks of the friends provided for me, companions who were awkward and ill-dressed but had the gift of eloquence, only to find that the sole personality apparent in me which remains a treasured memory is not the one that my will, with the most praiseworthy effort, has fashioned in my likeness, but one that is not of my making, that is not myself, that I have always despised and striven to overcome; was it worth while to love my chosen friend as I have done, only to find that the greatest pleasure he derives from my company is that of discovering in it something far more general than myself, a pleasure which is not in the least (as he says, though he cannot seriously believe it) the pleasure of friendship, but an intellectual and detached, a sort of artistic pleasure?” This is what I now fear that Saint-Loup may at times have thought. If so, he was mistaken. If he had not (as he steadfastly had) cherished something more lofty than the innate suppleness of his body, if he had not been detached for so long from aristocratic arrogance, there would have been something more studied, more heavy-handed in this very agility, a self-important vulgarity in his manners. Just as a strong vein of seriousness had been necessary for Mme de Villeparisis to convey in her conversation and in her *Memoirs* a sense of the frivolous, which is intellectual, so, in order that Saint-Loup's body should be imbued with so much nobility, the latter had first to desert his mind, which was straining towards higher things, and, reabsorbed into his body, to establish itself there in unconsciously aristocratic lines. In this way his distinction of mind was not inconsistent with a physical distinction which otherwise would not have been complete. An artist has no need to express his thought directly in his work for the latter to reflect its quality; it has even been said that the highest praise of God consists in the denial of him by the atheist who finds creation so perfect that it can dispense with a creator. And I was well aware, too, that it was not merely a work of art that I was admiring in this young man unfolding along the wall the frieze of his flying course; the young prince (a descendant of Catherine de Foix, Queen of Navarre and grand-daughter of Charles VII) whom he had just left for my sake, the endowments of birth and fortune which he was laying at my feet, the proud and shapely ancestors who survived in the assurance, the agility and the courtesy with which he had arranged about my shivering body the warm woollen cloak—were not all these like friends of longer standing in his life, by whom I might have expected that we should be permanently kept apart, and whom, on the contrary, he was sacrificing to me by a choice that can be made only in the loftiest places of the mind, with that sovereign liberty of which Robert's movements were the image and the symbol and in which perfect friendship is enshrined?

The vulgar arrogance that was to be detected in the familiarity of a Guermantes—as opposed to the distinction that it had in Robert, because hereditary disdain was in him only the outer garment, transmuted into an unconscious grace, of a genuine moral humility—had been brought home to me, not by M. de Charlus, in whom certain characteristic faults for which I had so far been unable to account were superimposed on his aristocratic habits, but by the Duc de Guermantes. And yet he too, in the general impression of commonness which had so repelled my grandmother when she had met him years earlier at Mme de Villeparisis's, showed glimpses of ancient grandeur of which I became conscious when I went to dine at his house the following evening.

They had not been apparent to me either in himself or in the Duchess when I had first met them in their aunt's drawing-room, any more than I had discerned, on first seeing her, the differences that set Berma apart from her colleagues, although in her case the distinctive qualities were infinitely more striking than in any social celebrity, since they become more marked in proportion as the objects are more real, more conceivable by the intellect. And yet, however slight the shades of social distinction may be (and so slight are they that when an accurate portrayer like Sainte-Beuve tries to indicate the shades of difference between the salons of Mme Geoffrin, Mme Récamier and Mme de Boigne, they appear so alike that the cardinal truth which, unknown to the author, emerges from his investigations is the vacuity of that form of life), nevertheless, for the same reason as with Berma, when I had ceased to be dazzled by the Guermantes and their droplet of

originality was no longer vaporised by my imagination, I was able to distil and analyse it, imponderable as it was.

The Duchess having made no reference to her husband at her aunt's party, I wondered whether, in view of the rumours of divorce, he would be present at the dinner. But I was soon enlightened on that score, for through the crowd of footmen who stood about in the hall and who (since they must until then have regarded me much as they regarded the children of the evicted cabinet-maker, that is to say with more fellow-feeling perhaps than their master but as a person incapable of being admitted to his house) must have been asking themselves to what this social revolution could be due, I caught sight of M. de Guermantes, who had been watching for my arrival so as to receive me on his threshold and take off my overcoat with his own hands.

"Mme de Guermantes will be as pleased as Punch," he said to me in a glibly persuasive tone. "Let me help you off with your duds." (He felt it to be at once companionable and comic to use popular colloquialisms.) "My wife was just the least bit afraid you might defect, although you had fixed a date. We've been saying to each other all day: 'Depend upon it, he'll never turn up.' I'm bound to say that Mme de Guermantes was a better prophet than I was. You are not an easy man to get hold of, and I was quite sure you were going to let us down." And the Duke was such a bad husband, so brutal even (people said), that one felt grateful to him, as one feels grateful to wicked people for their occasional kindness of heart, for those words "Mme de Guermantes" with which he appeared to be spreading a protective wing over the Duchess, so that she might be one with him. Meanwhile, taking me familiarly by the hand, he set about introducing me into his household. Just as some common expression may delight us coming from the lips of a peasant if it points to the survival of a local tradition or shows the trace of some historic event, unknown, it may be, to the person who thus alludes to it, so this politeness on the part of M. de Guermantes, which he was to continue to show me throughout the evening, charmed me as a survival of habits many centuries old, habits of the seventeenth century in particular. The people of bygone ages seem infinitely remote from us. We do not feel justified in ascribing to them any underlying intentions beyond those they formally express; we are amazed when we come upon a sentiment more or less akin to what we feel today in a Homeric hero, or a skilful tactical feint by Hannibal during the battle of Cannae, where he let his flank be driven back in order to take the enemy by surprise and encircle him; it is as though we imagined the epic poet and the Carthaginian general to be as remote from ourselves as an animal seen in a zoo. Even with certain personages of the court of Louis XIV, when we find signs of courtesy in letters written by them to some man of inferior rank who could be of no service to them whatever, these letters leave us astonished because they reveal to us suddenly in these great noblemen a whole world of beliefs which they never directly express but which govern their conduct, and in particular the belief that they are bound in politeness to feign certain sentiments and to exercise with the most scrupulous care certain obligations of civility.

This imagined remoteness of the past is perhaps one of the things that may enable us to understand how even great writers have found an inspired beauty in the works of mediocre mystifiers such as Ossian. We are so astonished that bards long dead should have modern ideas that we marvel if in what we believe to be an ancient Gaelic epic we come across one which we should have thought as most ingenious in a contemporary. A translator of talent has only to add to an ancient writer whom he is reconstructing more or less faithfully a few passages which, signed with a contemporary name and published separately, would seem agreeable merely; at once he imparts a moving grandeur to his poet, who is thus made to play upon the keyboards of several ages at once. The translator was capable only of a mediocre book, if that book had been published as his original work. Offered as a translation, it seems a masterpiece. The past is not fugitive, it stays put. It is not only months after the outbreak of a war that laws passed without haste can effectively influence its course, it is not only fifteen years after a crime which has remained obscure that a magistrate can still find the vital evidence which will throw light on it; after hundreds and thousands of years the scholar who has been studying the place-names and the customs of the inhabitants of some remote region may still extract from them some legend long anterior to Christianity, already unintelligible, if not actually forgotten, at the time of Herodotus, which in the name given to a rock, in a religious rite, still dwells in the midst of the present, like a denser emanation, immemorial and stable. There was an emanation too, though far less ancient, of the life of the court, if not in the manners of M. de Guermantes, which were often vulgar, at least in the mind that controlled them. I was to experience it again, like an ancient odour, when I rejoined him a little later in the drawing-room. For I did not go there at once.

As we left the outer hall, I had mentioned to M. de Guermantes that I was extremely anxious to see his Elstirs. "I am at your service. Is M. Elstir a friend of yours, then? I'm mortified not to have known that you were so interested in him. I know him slightly, he's an amiable man, what our fathers used to call an 'honest fellow.' I might have asked him to honour us with his company at dinner tonight. I'm sure he would have been highly flattered at being invited to spend the evening in your company." Very untrue to the old world when he tried thus to assume its manner, the Duke then relapsed into it unconsciously. After inquiring whether I wished him to show me the pictures, he conducted me to them, gracefully standing aside for me at each door, apologising when, to show me the way, he was obliged to precede me, a little scene which (since the time when Saint-Simon relates that an ancestor of the Guermantes did him the honours of his house with the same punctilious exactitude in the performance of the frivolous duties of a gentleman) before reaching our day must have been enacted by many another Guermantes for many another visitor. And as I had said to the Duke that I would like very much to be left alone for a few minutes with the pictures, he discreetly withdrew, telling me that I should find him in the drawing-room when I had finished.

However, once I was face to face with the Elstirs, I completely forgot about dinner and the time; here again as at Balbec I had before me fragments of that world of new and strange colours which was no more than the projection of that great painter's peculiar vision, which his speech in no way expressed. The parts of the walls that were covered by paintings of his, all homogeneous with one another, were like the luminous images of a magic lantern which in this instance was the brain of the artist, and the strangeness of which one could never have suspected so long as one had known only the man, in other words so long as one had only seen the lantern boxing its lamp before any coloured slide had been slid into its groove. Among these pictures, some of those that seemed most absurd to people in fashionable society interested me more than the rest because they re-created those optical illusions which prove to us that we should never succeed in identifying objects if we did not bring some process of reasoning to bear on them. How often, when driving, do we not come upon a bright street beginning a few feet away from us, when what we have actually before our eyes is merely a patch of wall glaringly lit which has given us the mirage of depth. This being the case, it is surely logical, not from any artifice of symbolism but from a sincere desire to return to the very root of the impression, to represent one thing by that other for which, in the flash of a first illusion, we mistook it. Surfaces and volumes are in reality independent of the names of objects which our memory imposes on them after we have recognised them. Elstir sought to wrest from what he had just felt what he already knew; he had often been at pains to break up that medley of impressions which we call vision.

The people who detested these "horrors" were astonished to find that Elstir admired Chardin, Perronneau, and many other painters whom they, the ordinary men and women of society, liked. They did not realise that Elstir for his own part, in striving to reproduce reality (with the particular trademark of his taste for certain experiments), had made the same effort as a Chardin or a Perronneau and that consequently, when he ceased to work for himself, he admired in them attempts of the same kind, anticipatory fragments, so to speak, of works of his own. Nor did these society people add to Elstir's work in their mind's eye that temporal perspective which enabled them to like, or at least to look without discomfort at, Chardin's painting. And yet the older among them might have reminded themselves that in the course of their lives they had gradually seen, as the years bore them away from it, the unbridgeable gulf between what they considered a masterpiece by Ingres and what they had supposed must for ever remain a "horror" (Manet's *Olympia*, for example) shrink until the two canvases seemed like twins. But we never learn, because we lack the wisdom to work backwards from the particular to the general, and imagine ourselves always to be faced with an experience which has no precedents in the past.

I was moved by the discovery in two of the pictures (more realistic, these, and in an earlier manner) of the same person, in one of them in evening dress in his own drawing-room, in the other wearing a frock-coat and tall hat at some popular seaside festival where he had evidently no business to be, which proved that for Elstir he was not only a regular sitter but a friend, perhaps a patron, whom he liked to introduce into his paintings, as Carpaccio introduced—and in the most speaking likenesses—prominent Venetian noblemen into his; in the same way as Beethoven, too, found pleasure in inscribing at the top of a favourite work the beloved name of the Archduke Rudolph. There was something enchanting about this waterside carnival. The river, the women's dresses, the sails of the boats, the innumerable reflexions of one thing and another jostled together enchantingly in this little square panel of beauty which Elstir had cut out of a marvellous afternoon. What delighted one in the dress of a woman who had stopped dancing for a moment because she was hot and out of breath shimmered too, and in the same way, in the cloth of a motionless sail, in the water of the little harbour, in the wooden landing-stage, in the leaves of the trees and in the sky. Just as, in one of the pictures that I had seen at Balbec, the hospital, as beautiful beneath its lapis lazuli sky as the cathedral itself, seemed (more daring than Elstir the theorist, than Elstir the man of taste, the lover of things mediaeval) to be intoning: "There is no such thing as Gothic, there is no such thing as a masterpiece, a hospital with no style is just as good as the glorious porch," so I now heard: "The slightly vulgar lady whom a man of discernment wouldn't bother to look at as he passed her by, whom he would exclude from the poetical composition which nature has set before him—she is beautiful too; her dress is receiving the same light as the sail of that boat, everything is equally precious; the commonplace dress and the sail that is beautiful in itself are two mirrors reflecting the same image; their virtue is all in the painter's eye." This eye had succeeded in arresting for all time the motion of the hours at this luminous instant when the lady had felt hot and had stopped dancing, when the tree was encircled with a perimeter of shadow, when the sails seemed to be gliding over a golden glaze. But precisely because that instant impressed itself on one with such force, this unchanging canvas gave the most fleeting impression: one felt that the lady would presently go home, the boats drift away, the shadow change place, night begin to fall; that pleasure comes to an end, that life passes and that instants, illuminated by the convergence at one and the same time of so many lights, cannot be recaptured. I recognised yet another aspect, quite different it is true, of what the Moment means, in a series of water-colours of mythological subjects, dating from Elstir's first period, which also adorned this room. Society people who held "advanced" views on art went "as far as" this earliest manner, but no further. It was certainly not the best work he had done, but already the sincerity with which the subject had been thought out took away its coldness. Thus the Muses, for instance, were represented as though they were creatures belonging to a species now fossilised, but creatures it would not have been surprising in mythological times to see pass by in the evening, in twos or threes, along some mountain path. Here and there a poet, of a race that would also have been of peculiar interest to a zoologist (characterised by a certain sexlessness), strolled with a Muse, as one sees in nature creatures of different but of kindred species consort together. In one of these water-colours one saw a poet exhausted by a long journey in the mountains, whom a Centaur, meeting him and moved to pity by his

weakness, has taken on his back and is carrying home. In others, the vast landscape (in which the mythical scene, the fabulous heroes occupied a minute place and seemed almost lost) was rendered, from the mountain tops to the sea, with an exactitude which told one more than the hour, told one to the very minute what time of day it was, thanks to the precise angle of the setting sun and the fleeting fidelity of the shadows. In this way the artist had managed, by making it instantaneous, to give a sort of lived historical reality to the fable, painted it and related it in the past tense.

While I was examining Elstir's paintings, the bell, rung by arriving guests, had been pealing uninterruptedly and had lulled me into a pleasing unawareness. But the silence which followed its clangour and had already lasted for some time finally succeeded—less rapidly, it is true—in awakening me from my reverie as the silence that follows Lindor's music arouses Bartolo from his sleep. I was afraid that I might have been forgotten, that they might already have sat down to dinner, and I hurried to the drawing-room. At the door of the Elstir gallery I found a servant waiting for me, white-haired, though whether with age or powder I could not say, and reminiscent of a Spanish minister, though he treated me with the same respect that he would have shown to a king. I felt from his manner that he would have waited for me for another hour, and I thought with alarm of the delay I had caused in the service of dinner, especially as I had promised to be at M. de Charlus's by eleven.

It was the Spanish minister (though I also met on the way the footman persecuted by the porter, who, radiant with delight when I inquired after his fiancée, told me that tomorrow was a "day off" for both of them, so that he would be able to spend the whole day with her, and extolled the kindness of Madame la Duchesse) who conducted me to the drawing-room, where I was afraid of finding M. de Guermantes in a bad humour. He welcomed me, on the contrary, with a joy that was obviously to some extent factitious and dictated by politeness, but was in other respects sincere, prompted both by his stomach which so long a delay had begun to famish, and his consciousness of a similar impatience in all his other guests, who completely filled the room. Indeed I learned afterwards that I had kept them waiting for nearly three quarters of an hour. The Duc de Guermantes probably thought that to prolong the general torment for two minutes more would make it no worse and that, politeness having driven him to postpone for so long the moment of moving into the dining-room, this politeness would be more complete if, by not having dinner announced immediately, he could succeed in persuading me that I was not late and they had not been waiting for me. And so he asked me, as if we still had an hour before dinner and some of the party had not yet arrived, what I thought of his Elstirs. But at the same time, and without letting the cravings of his stomach become too apparent, in order not to lose another moment he proceeded in concert with the Duchess to the ceremony of introduction. It was only then that I perceived that, having until this evening—save for my novitiate in Mme Swann's salon—been accustomed in my mother's drawing-room, in Combray and in Paris, to the patronising or defensive attitudes of prim bourgeois ladies who treated me as a child, I was now witnessing a change of surroundings comparable to that which introduces Parsifal suddenly into the midst of the flower-maidens. Those who surrounded me now, their necks and shoulders entirely bare (the naked flesh appearing on either side of a sinuous spray of mimosa or the petals of a full-blown rose), accompanied their salutations with long, caressing glances, as though shyness alone restrained them from kissing me. Many of them were nevertheless highly respectable from the moral standpoint; many, not all, for the more virtuous did not feel the same revulsion as my mother would have done for those of easier virtue. The vagaries of conduct, denied by saintlier friends in the face of the evidence, seemed in the Guermantes world to matter far less than the social relations one had been able to maintain. One pretended not to know that the body of a hostess was at the disposal of all comers, provided that her visiting list showed no gaps.

As the Duke showed very little concern for his other guests (from whom he had for long had as little to learn as they from him), but a great deal for me, whose particular kind of superiority, being outside his experience, inspired in him something akin to the respect which the great noblemen of the court of Louis XIV used to feel for his bourgeois ministers, he evidently considered that the fact of my not knowing his guests mattered not at all—to me at least, though it might to them—and while I was anxious, on his account, as to the impression that I might make on them, he was thinking only of the impression they would make on me.

At the very outset, indeed, there was a little twofold imbroglio. No sooner had I entered the drawing-room than M. de Guermantes, without even allowing me time to shake hands with the Duchess, led me, as though to give a pleasant surprise to the person in question to whom he seemed to be saying: "Here's your friend! You see, I'm bringing him to you by the scruff of the neck," towards a lady of smallish stature. Well before I arrived in her vicinity, the lady had begun to flash at me continuously from her large, soft, dark eyes the sort of knowing smiles which we address to an old friend who perhaps has not recognised us. As this was precisely the case with me and I could not for the life of me remember who she was, I averted my eyes as the Duke propelled me towards her, in order not to have to respond until our introduction should have released me from my predicament. Meanwhile the lady continued to maintain in precarious balance the smile she was aiming at me. She looked as though she was in a hurry to be relieved of it and to hear me say: "Ah, Madame, of course! How delighted Mamma will be to hear that we've met again!" I was as impatient to learn her name as she was to see that I did finally greet her with every indication of recognition, so that her smile, indefinitely prolonged like the note of a tuning-fork, might at length be given a rest. But M. de Guermantes managed things so badly (to my mind, at least) that it seemed to me that only my own name was mentioned and I was given no clue as to the identity of my unknown friend, to whom it never occurred to name herself, so obvious did the grounds of our intimacy, which baffled me completely, seem to her. Indeed, as soon as I had come within reach, she did not offer me her hand, but took mine in a familiar clasp, and spoke to me

exactly as though I had been as aware as she was of the pleasant memories to which her mind reverted. She told me how sorry Albert (who I gathered was her son) would be to have missed seeing me. I tried to remember which of my schoolfriends had been called Albert, and could think only of Bloch, but this could not be Bloch's mother since she had been dead for many years. In vain I struggled to identify the past experience common to herself and me to which her thoughts had been carried back. But I could no more distinguish it through the translucent jet of her large, soft pupils which allowed only her smile to pierce their surface than one can distinguish a landscape that lies on the other side of a pane of smoked glass even when the sun is blazing on it. She asked me whether my father was not working too hard, if I would like to come to the theatre some evening with Albert, if my health was better, and as my replies, stumbling through the mental darkness in which I was plunged, became distinct only to explain that I was not feeling well that evening, she pushed forward a chair for me herself, putting herself out in a way to which I had never been accustomed by my parents' other friends. At length the clue to the riddle was furnished me by the Duke: "She thinks you're charming," he murmured in my ear, which felt somehow that it had heard these words before. They were the words Mme de Villeparisis had spoken to my grandmother and myself after we had made the acquaintance of the Princesse de Luxembourg. Everything was now clear; the present lady had nothing in common with Mme de Luxembourg, but from the language of the man who served her up to me I could discern the nature of the beast. She was a royal personage. She had never before heard of either my family or myself, but, a scion of the noblest race and endowed with the greatest fortune in the world (for, a daughter of the Prince de Parme, she had married an equally princely cousin), she sought always, in gratitude to her Creator, to testify to her neighbour, however poor or lowly he might be, that she did not look down upon him. And indeed I ought to have guessed this from her smile, for I had seen the Princesse de Luxembourg buy little rye-cakes on the beach at Balbec to give to my grandmother, as though to a caged deer in the zoo. But this was only the second princess of the blood royal to whom I had been presented, and I might be excused my failure to discern in her the generic features of the affability of the great. Besides, had not they themselves gone out of their way to warn me not to count too much on this affability, since the Duchesse de Guermantes, who had waved me so effusive a greeting with her gloved hand at the Opéra, had appeared furious when I bowed to her in the street, like the people who, having once given somebody a sovereign, feel that this has released them from any further obligation towards him. As for M. de Charlus, his ups and downs were even more sharply contrasted. And I was later to know, as the reader will learn, highnesses and majesties of another sort altogether, queens who play the queen and speak not after the conventions of their kind but like the queens in Sardou's plays.

If M. de Guermantes had been in such haste to present me, it was because the presence at a gathering of anyone not personally known to a royal personage is an intolerable state of things which must not be prolonged for a single instant. It was similar to the haste which Saint-Loup had shown to be introduced to my grandmother. By the same token, in a fragmentary survival of the old life of the court which is called social etiquette and is by no means superficial, wherein, rather, by a sort of outside-in reversal, it is the surface that becomes essential and profound, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes regarded as a duty more essential and more inflexible than those (all too often neglected by one at least of the pair) of charity, chastity, pity and justice, that of rarely addressing the Princesse de Parme save in the third person.

Failing the visit to Parma which I had never yet made (and which I had wanted to make ever since certain Easter holidays long ago), meeting its Princess—who, I knew, owned the finest palace in that unique city where in any case everything must be homogeneous, isolated as it was from the rest of the world within its polished walls, in the atmosphere, stifling as an airless summer evening on the piazza of a small Italian town, of its compact and almost cloying name—ought to have substituted in a flash, for what I had so often tried to imagine, all that did really exist at Parma, in a sort of fragmentary arrival there without having moved; it was, in the algebra of my imagined journey to the city of Giorgione,<sup>21</sup> a simple equation, so to speak, with that unknown quantity. But if I had for many years past—like a perfumer impregnating a solid block of fat—saturated this name, Princesse de Parme, with the scent of thousands of violets, in return, when I set eyes on the Princess, who until then I would have sworn must be the Sanseverina herself, a second process began which was not, I may say, completed until several months had passed, and consisted in expelling, by means of fresh chemical combinations, all the essential oil of violets and all the Stendhalian fragrance from the name of the Princess, and implanting there in their place the image of a little dark woman taken up with good works and so humbly amiable that one felt at once in how exalted a pride that amiability had its roots. Moreover, while identical, barring a few points of difference, with any other great lady, she was as little Stendhalian as is, for example, in the Europe district of Paris, the Rue de Parme, which bears far less resemblance to the name of Parma than to any or all of the neighbouring streets, and reminds one not nearly so much of the Charterhouse in which Fabrice ends his days as of the concourse in the Gare Saint-Lazare.

Her amiability sprang from two causes. The first and more general was the upbringing which this daughter of kings had received. Her mother (not merely related to all the royal families of Europe but furthermore—in contrast to the ducal house of Parma—richer than any reigning princess) had instilled into her from her earliest childhood the arrogantly humble precepts of an evangelical snobbery; and today every line of the daughter's face, the curve of her shoulders, the movements of her arms, seemed to repeat the lesson: "Remember that if God has caused you to be born on the steps of a throne you ought not to make that a reason for looking down upon those to whom Divine Providence has willed (wherefore His Name be praised) that you should be superior by birth and fortune. On the contrary, you must be kind to the lowly. Your ancestors were Princes of Cleves and Juliers from the year 647; God in His bounty has decreed that you should hold practically all the shares in the Suez Canal and three times as many Royal Dutch as Edmond de

Rothschild; your pedigree in a direct line has been established by genealogists from the year 63 of the Christian era; you have as sisters-in-law two empresses. Therefore never seem in your speech to be recalling these great privileges, not that they are precarious (for nothing can alter the antiquity of blood, and the world will always need oil), but because it is unnecessary to point out that you are better born than other people or that your investments are all gilt-edged, since everyone knows these facts already. Be helpful to the needy. Give to all those whom the bounty of heaven has been graciously pleased to put beneath you as much as you can give them without forfeiting your rank, that is to say help in the form of money, even caring for the sick, but of course never any invitations to your soirées, which would do them no possible good and, by diminishing your prestige, would detract from the efficacy of your benevolent activities.”

And so, even at moments when she could not do good, the Princess endeavoured to demonstrate, or rather to let it be thought, by all the external signs of dumb-show, that she did not consider herself superior to the people among whom she found herself. She treated each of them with that charming courtesy with which well-bred people treat their inferiors and was continually, to make herself useful, pushing back her chair so as to leave more room, holding my gloves, offering me all those services which would demean the proud spirit of a commoner but are willingly rendered by sovereign ladies or, instinctively and from force of professional habit, by old servants.

The other reason for the amiability shown me by the Princesse de Parme was a more special one, yet in no way dictated by a mysterious liking for me. But for the moment I did not have time to get to the bottom of it. For already the Duke, who seemed in a hurry to complete the round of introductions, had led me off to another of the flower-maidens. On hearing her name I told her that I had passed by her country house, not far from Balbec. “Oh, I should have been so pleased to show you round it,” she said to me almost in a whisper as though to emphasise her modesty, but in a heartfelt tone filled with regret for the loss of an opportunity to enjoy a quite exceptional pleasure; and she added with a meaning look: “I do hope you will come again some day. But I must say that what would interest you even more would be my aunt Brancas’s place. It was built by Mansard and it’s the jewel of the province.” It was not only she herself who would have been glad to show me over her house, but her aunt Brancas would have been no less delighted to do me the honours of hers, or so I was assured by this lady who evidently thought that, especially at a time when the land showed a tendency to pass into the hands of financiers who had no idea how to live, it was important that the great should keep up the lofty traditions of lordly hospitality, by speeches which did not commit them to anything. It was also because she sought, like everyone in her world, to say the things that would give most pleasure to the person she was addressing, to give him the highest idea of himself, to make him think that he flattered people by writing to them, that he honoured those who entertained him, that everyone was longing to know him. The desire to give other people this comforting idea of themselves does, it is true, sometimes exist even among the middle classes. We find there that amiable disposition, in the form of an individual quality compensating for some other defect, not alas in the most trusty male friends but at any rate in the most agreeable female companions. But there it flourishes only in isolation. In an important section of the aristocracy, on the other hand, this characteristic has ceased to be individual; cultivated by upbringing, sustained by the idea of a personal grandeur that need fear no humiliation, that knows no rival, is aware that by being gracious it can make people happy and delights in doing so, it has become the generic feature of a class. And even those whom personal defects of too incompatible a kind prevent from keeping it in their hearts bear the unconscious trace of it in their vocabulary or their gesticulation.

“She’s a very kind woman,” said the Duc de Guermantes of the Princesse de Parme, “and she knows how to play the *grande dame* better than anyone.”

While I was being introduced to the ladies, one of the gentlemen of the party had been showing various signs of agitation: this was Comte Hannibal de Bréauté-Consalvi. Having arrived late, he had not had time to investigate the composition of the party, and when I entered the room, seeing in me a guest who was not one of the Duchess’s regular circle and must therefore have some quite extraordinary claim to admission, installed his monocle beneath the groined arch of his eyebrow, thinking that this would help him, far more than to see me, to discern what manner of man I was. He knew that Mme de Guermantes had (the priceless appanage of truly superior women) what was called a “salon,” that is to say added occasionally to the people of her own set some celebrity who had recently come into prominence by the discovery of a new cure for something or the production of a masterpiece. The Faubourg Saint-Germain had not yet recovered from the shock of learning that the Duchess had not been afraid to invite M. Detaille<sup>22</sup> to the reception which she had given to meet the King and Queen of England. The clever women of the Faubourg were not easily consolable for not having been invited, so deliciously thrilling would it have been to come into contact with that strange genius. Mme de Courvoisier averred that M. Ribot had been there as well, but this was a pure invention designed to make people believe that Oriane was aiming at an embassy for her husband. To cap it all, M. de Guermantes, with a gallantry that would have done credit to Marshal Saxe, had presented himself at the stage door of the Comédie-Française and had persuaded Mlle Reichenberg to come and recite before the King, something that constituted an event without precedent in the annals of routs. Remembering all these unexpected happenings, which moreover had his entire approval, his own presence being both an ornament to and, in the same way as that of the Duchesse de Guermantes but in the masculine gender, an endorsement for any salon, M. de Bréauté, when he asked himself who I could be, felt that the field of inquiry was very wide. For a moment the name of M. Widor flashed before his mind, but he decided that I was too young to be an organist, and M. Widor not prominent enough to be “received.” It seemed on the whole more plausible to regard me simply as the new attaché at the Swedish Legation of whom he had heard, and he was preparing to ask me for the latest news of



King Oscar, by whom he had several times been very hospitably received; but when the Duke, in introducing me, had mentioned my name to M. de Bréauté, the latter, finding the name to be completely unknown to him, had no longer any doubt that, since I was there, I must be a celebrity of some sort. It was absolutely typical of Oriane, who had the knack of attracting to her salon men who were in the public eye, in a ratio that of course never exceeded one in a hundred, otherwise she would have lowered its tone. Accordingly M. de Bréauté began to lick his chops and to sniff the air greedily, his appetite whetted not only by the good dinner he could count on, but by the character of the party, which my presence could not fail to make interesting and which would furnish him with an intriguing topic of conversation next day at the Duc de Chartres's luncheon-table. He was not yet enlightened as to whether I was the man who had just been making those experiments with a serum against cancer, or the author of the new "curtain-raiser" then in rehearsal at the Théâtre-Français; but, a great intellectual, a great collector of "travellers' tales," he lavished on me an endless series of bows, signs of mutual understanding, smiles filtered through the glass of his monocle, either in the misapprehension that a man of standing would esteem him more highly if he could manage to instil into me the illusion that for him, the Comte de Bréauté-Consalvi, the privileges of the mind were no less deserving of respect than those of birth, or simply from the need to express and the difficulty of expressing his satisfaction, in his ignorance of the language in which he ought to address me, precisely as if he had found himself face to face with one of the "natives" of an undiscovered country on which his raft had landed, from whom, in the hope of ultimate profit, he would endeavour, observing with interest the while their quaint customs and without interrupting his demonstrations of friendship or forgetting to utter loud cries of benevolence like them, to obtain ostrich eggs and spices in exchange for glass beads. Having responded as best I could to his joy, I shook hands with the Duc de Châtellerauld, whom I had already met at Mme de Villeparisis's and who observed that she was "a sharp customer." He was typically Guermantes with his fair hair, his aquiline profile, the points where the skin of the cheeks was blemished, all of which may be seen in the portraits of that family which have come down to us from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But, as I was no longer in love with the Duchess, her reincarnation in the person of a young man offered me no attraction. I interpreted the hook made by the Duc de Châtellerauld's nose as if it had been the signature of a painter whose work I had long studied but who no longer interested me in the least. Next, I said good evening also to the Prince de Foix, and to the detriment of my knuckles, which emerged crushed and mangled, let them be caught in the vice of a German handclasp, accompanied by an ironical or good-natured smile, from the Prince von Faffenheim, M. de Norpois's friend, who, by virtue of the craze for nicknames which prevailed in this circle, was known so universally as Prince Von that he himself used to sign his letters "Prince Von," or, when he wrote to his intimates, "Von." At least this abbreviation was understandable, in view of his triple-barrelled name. It was less easy to grasp the reasons which caused "Elizabeth" to be replaced, now by "Lili," now by "Bebeth," just as another world swarmed with "Kikis." One can understand how people, idle and frivolous though they in general were, should have come to adopt "Quiou" in order not to waste the precious time that it would have taken them to pronounce "Montesquiou." But it is less easy to see what they gained by nicknaming one of their cousins "Dinand" instead of "Ferdinand." It must not be thought, however, that in the invention of nicknames the Guermantes invariably proceeded by curtailing or duplicating syllables. Thus two sisters, the Comtesse de Montpeyroux and the Vicomtesse de Vélude, who were both of them enormously stout, invariably heard themselves addressed, without the least trace of annoyance on their part or of amusement on other people's, so long established was the custom, as "Petite" and "Mignonne." Mme de Guermantes, who adored Mme de Montpeyroux, would, if the latter had fallen seriously ill, have flown to the sister with tears in her eyes and exclaimed: "I hear Petite is dreadfully bad!" Mme de l'Ecluse, who wore her hair in bands that entirely hid her ears, was never called anything but "Hungry belly."<sup>23</sup> In some cases people simply added an "a" to the surname or Christian name of the husband to designate the wife. The most miserly, most sordid, most inhuman man in the Faubourg having been christened Raphael, his charmer, his flower springing also from the rock, always signed herself "Raphaëla." But these are merely a few specimens of countless rules to which we can always return later on if the occasion arises, and explain some of them.

I then asked the Duke to introduce me to the Prince d'Agrigente. "What! do you mean to say you don't know the good Gri-gri!" exclaimed M. de Guermantes, and gave M. d'Agrigente my name. His own, so often quoted by Françoise, had always appeared to me like a transparent sheet of coloured glass through which I beheld, struck by the slanting rays of a golden sun, on the shore of the violet sea, the pink marble cubes of an ancient city of which I had not the least doubt that the Prince—who happened by some brief miracle to be passing through Paris—was himself, as luminously Sicilian and as gloriously weathered, the absolute sovereign. Alas, the vulgar drone to whom I was introduced, and who wheeled round to bid me good evening with a ponderous nonchalance which he considered elegant, was as independent of his name as of a work of art that he owned without betraying in his person any reflexion of it, without, perhaps, ever having looked at it. The Prince d'Agrigente was so entirely devoid of anything princely, anything remotely reminiscent of Agrigento, that one was led to suppose that his name, entirely distinct from himself, bound by no ties to his person, had had the power of attracting to itself every iota of vague poetry that there might have been in this man, as in any other, and enclosing it, after this operation, in the enchanted syllables. If any such operation had been performed, it had certainly been done most efficiently, for there remained not an atom of charm to be drawn from this kinsman of the Guermantes. With the result that he found himself at one and the same time the only man in the world who was Prince d'Agrigente and of all the men in the world the one who was perhaps least so. He was, for all that, very glad to be what he was, but as a banker is glad to hold a number of shares in a mine, without caring whether the said mine answers to the charming name of Ivanhoe or Primrose, or is

called merely the Premier. Meanwhile, as these introductions which have taken so long to recount but which, beginning as soon as I entered the room, had lasted only a few moments, were drawing to an end at last, and Mme de Guermites was saying to me in an almost suppliant tone: "I'm sure Basin is tiring you, dragging you round like that from one person to the next. We want you to know our friends, but we're a great deal more anxious not to tire you, so that you may come again often," the Duke, with a somewhat awkward and timorous wave of the hand, gave the signal (which he would gladly have given at any time during the hour I had spent in contemplation of the Elstirs) that dinner might now be served.

I should add that one of the guests was still missing, M. de Grouchy, whose wife, a Guermites by birth, had arrived by herself, her husband being due to come straight from the country where he had been shooting all day. This M. de Grouchy, a descendant of his namesake of the First Empire, of whom it has been falsely said that his absence at the start of the Battle of Waterloo was the principal cause of Napoleon's defeat, came of an excellent family which, however, was not good enough in the eyes of certain fanatics for blue blood. Thus the Prince de Guermites, who was to prove less fastidious in later life as far as he himself was concerned, was in the habit of saying to his nieces: "What a misfortune for that poor Mme de Guermites" (the Vicomtesse de Guermites, Mme de Grouchy's mother) "that she has never succeeded in marrying any of her children." "But, uncle, the eldest girl married M. de Grouchy." "I don't call that a husband! However, they say that your uncle François has proposed to the youngest one, so perhaps they won't all die old maids."

No sooner had the order to serve dinner been given than with a vast gyratory whirr, multiple and simultaneous, the double doors of the dining-room swung apart; a butler with the air of a court chamberlain bowed before the Princesse de Parme and announced the tidings "Madame is served," in a tone such as he would have employed to say "Madame is dead," which, however, cast no gloom over the assembly for it was with a sprightly air and as, in summer, at Robinson<sup>24</sup> that the couples advanced one behind the other to the dining-room, separating when they had reached their places, where footmen thrust their chairs in behind them; last of all, Mme de Guermites advanced towards me to be taken in to dinner, without my feeling the least shadow of the timidity that I might have feared, for, like a huntress whose muscular dexterity has endowed her with natural ease and grace, observing no doubt that I had placed myself on the wrong side of her, she pivoted round me so adroitly that I found her arm resting on mine and was at once naturally attuned to a rhythm of precise and noble movements. I yielded to them all the more readily because the Guermites attached no more importance to them than does to learning a truly learned man in whose company one is less cowed than in that of a dunce. Other doors opened through which there entered the steaming soup, as though the dinner were being held in a skilfully contrived puppet-theatre, where, at a signal from the puppet-master, the belated arrival of the young guest set all the machinery in motion.

Timid, rather than majestically sovereign, had been this signal from the Duke, to which that vast, ingenious, subservient and sumptuous clockwork, mechanical and human, had responded. The indecisiveness of the gesture did not spoil for me the effect of the spectacle that was attendant upon it. For I sensed that what had made it hesitant and embarrassed was the fear of letting me see that they had been waiting only for me to begin dinner and that they had been waiting for a long time, in the same way as Mme de Guermites was afraid that, after looking at so many pictures, I would find it tiring and would be hindered from taking my ease among them if her husband engaged me in a continuous flow of introductions. So that it was the absence of grandeur in this gesture that disclosed the true grandeur which lay in the Duke's indifference to the splendour of his surroundings, in contrast to his deference towards a guest, however insignificant in himself, whom he desired to honour.

Not that M. de Guermites was not in certain aspects thoroughly commonplace, showing indeed some of the absurd weaknesses of a man with too much money, the arrogance of an upstart which he certainly was not. But just as a public official or a priest sees his own humble talents multiplied to infinity (as a wave is by the whole mass of the sea which presses behind it) by the forces that stand behind him, the Government of France or the Catholic Church, so M. de Guermites was borne up by that other force, aristocratic courtesy in its truest form. This courtesy excluded a large number of people. Mme de Guermites would not have entertained Mme de Cambremer or M. de Forcheville. But the moment that anyone (as was the case with me) appeared eligible for admission into the Guermites world, this courtesy disclosed a wealth of hospitable simplicity more splendid still, if possible, than those historic rooms and the marvellous furniture that remained in them.

When he wished to give pleasure to someone, M. de Guermites went about making him the most important personage on that particular day with an art and a skill that made the most of the circumstances and the place. No doubt at Guermites his "distinctions" and "favourites" would have assumed another form. He would have ordered his carriage to take me for a drive alone with himself before dinner. Such as they were, one could not help feeling touched by his courteous ways, as one is, when one reads the memoirs of the period, by those of Louis XIV when he replies benignly, with a smile and a half-bow, to someone who has come to solicit his favour. It must however, in both instances, be borne in mind that this "politeness" did not go beyond the strict meaning of the word.

Louis XIV (with whom the sticklers for pure nobility of his day nevertheless find fault for his scant regard for etiquette, so much so that, according to Saint-Simon, he was only a very minor king, in terms of rank, by comparison with such monarchs as Philippe de Valois or Charles V) has the most meticulous instructions drawn up so that princes of the blood and ambassadors may know to what sovereigns they ought to give precedence. In certain cases, in view of the impossibility of arriving at an agreement, a compromise is arranged by which the son of Louis XIV, Monseigneur, shall entertain a certain foreign sovereign only out of

doors, in the open air, so that it may not be said that in entering the palace one has preceded the other; and the Elector Palatine, entertaining the Duc de Chevreuse to dinner, in order not to have to give way to his guest, pretends to be taken ill and dines with him lying down, thus solving the difficulty. When M. le Duc avoids occasions when he must wait upon Monsieur, the latter, on the advice of the King, his brother, who is incidentally extremely attached to him, seizes an excuse for making his cousin attend his levee and forcing him to put on the royal shirt. But as soon as deeper feelings are involved, matters of the heart, this rule of duty, so inflexible when politeness only is at stake, changes entirely. A few hours after the death of this brother, one of the people whom he most dearly loved, when Monsieur, in the words of the Duc de Montfort, is "still warm," we find Louis XIV singing snatches from operas, astonished that the Duchesse de Bourgogne, who can scarcely conceal her grief, should be looking so woebegone, and, anxious that the gaiety of the court shall be at once resumed, encouraging his courtiers to sit down to the card-tables by ordering the Duc de Bourgogne to start a game of *brellan*. Now, not only in his social or business activities, but in his most spontaneous utterances, his ordinary preoccupations, his daily routine, one found a similar contrast in M. de Guermantes. The Guermantes were no more susceptible to grief than other mortals; it could indeed be said that they had less real sensibility; on the other hand one saw their names every day in the social columns of the *Gaulois* on account of the prodigious number of funerals at which they would have felt it culpable of them not to have their presence recorded. As the traveller discovers, almost unaltered, the houses roofed with turf, the terraces which may have met the eyes of Xenophon or St Paul, so in the manners of M. de Guermantes, a man who was heart-warming in his graciousness and revolting in his hardness, a slave to the pettiest obligations and derelict as regards the most solemn pacts, I found still intact after more than two centuries that aberration, peculiar to the life of the court under Louis XIV, which transfers the scruples of conscience from the domain of the affections and morality to questions of pure form.

The other reason for the friendliness shown me by the Princesse de Parme was that she was convinced beforehand that everything that she saw at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, people and things alike, was of a superior quality to anything she had at home. It is true that in every other house she also behaved as if this was the case; not merely did she go into raptures over the simplest dish, the most ordinary flowers, but she would ask permission to send round next morning, for the purpose of copying the recipe or examining the variety of blossom, her head cook or head gardener, personages with large emoluments who kept their own carriages and above all their professional pretensions, and were deeply humiliated at having to come to inquire after a dish they despised or to take a cutting of a variety of carnation that was not half as fine, as variegated, did not produce as large a blossom as those which they had long been growing for her at home. But if, wherever she went, this astonishment on the part of the Princess at the sight of the most commonplace things was factitious, and intended to show that she did not derive from the superiority of her rank and riches a pride forbidden by her early instructors, habitually dissembled by her mother and intolerable in the sight of her Creator, it was, on the other hand, in all sincerity that she regarded the drawing-room of the Duchesse de Guermantes as a privileged place in which she could progress only from surprise to delight. To a certain extent, it is true, though not nearly enough to justify this state of mind, the Guermantes were different from the rest of society; they were more precious and rare. They had given me at first sight the opposite impression; I had found them vulgar, similar to all other men and women, but this was because before meeting them I had seen them, as I saw Balbec, Florence or Parma, as names. Naturally enough, in this drawing-room, all the women whom I had imagined as being like Dresden figures were after all more like the great majority of women. But, in the same way as Balbec or Florence, the Guermantes, after first disappointing the imagination because they resembled their fellow-men rather more than their name, could subsequently, though to a lesser degree, hold out to one's intelligence certain distinctive characteristics. Their physique, the colour—a peculiar pink that merged at times into purple—of their skins, a certain almost lustrous blondness of the finely spun hair even in the men, massed in soft golden tufts, half wall-growing lichen, half catlike fur (a luminous brilliance to which corresponded a certain intellectual glitter, for if people spoke of the Guermantes complexion, the Guermantes hair, they spoke also of the Guermantes wit, as of the wit of the Mortemarts), a certain social quality whose superior refinement—pre-Louis XIV—was all the more universally recognised because they promulgated it themselves—all this meant that in the actual substance, however precious it might be, of the aristocratic society in which they were to be found embedded here and there, the Guermantes remained recognisable, easy to detect and to follow, like the veins whose paleness streaks a block of jasper or onyx, or, better still, like the supple undulation of those tresses of light whose loosened hairs run like flexible rays along the sides of a moss-agate.

The Guermantes—those at least who were worthy of the name—were not only endowed with an exquisite quality of flesh, of hair, of transparency of gaze, but had a way of holding themselves, of walking, of bowing, of looking at one before they shook one's hand, of shaking hands, which made them as different in all these respects from an ordinary member of fashionable society as he in turn was from a peasant in a smock. And despite their affability one asked oneself: "Have they not indeed the right, though they waive it, when they see us walk, bow, leave a room, do any of those things which when performed by them become as graceful as the flight of a swallow or the droop of a rose on its stem, to think: 'These people are of a different breed from us, and we are the lords of creation'?" Later on, I realised that the Guermantes did indeed regard me as being of a different breed, but one that aroused their envy because I possessed merits unknown to myself which they professed to prize above all others. Later still I came to feel that this profession of faith was only half sincere and that in them scorn or amazement could co-exist with admiration and envy. The physical flexibility peculiar to the Guermantes was twofold: on the one hand always in action, at every moment, so that if, for

example, a male Guermantes were about to salute a lady, he produced a silhouette of himself formed from the tension between a series of asymmetrical and energetically compensated movements, one leg dragging a little, either on purpose or because, having been broken so often in the hunting-field, it imparted to his trunk in its effort to keep pace with the other a curvature to which the upward thrust of one shoulder gave a counterpoise, while the monocle was inserted in the eye and raised an eyebrow just as the tuft of hair on the forehead flopped downward in the formal bow; on the other hand, like the shape which wave or wind or wake have permanently imprinted on a shell or a boat, this flexibility was so to speak stylised into a sort of fixed mobility, curving the arched nose which, beneath the blue, protruding eyes, above the thin lips from which, in the women, there emerged a husky voice, recalled the fabulous origin attributed in the sixteenth century by the complaisance of parasitic and Hellenising genealogists to this race, ancient beyond dispute, but not to the extent which they claimed when they gave as its source the mythological impregnation of a nymph by a divine Bird.

The Guermantes were no less idiosyncratic from the intellectual than from the physical point of view. With the exception of Prince Gilbert, the husband of "Marie-Gilbert" with the antiquated ideas, who made his wife sit on his left when they drove out together because her blood, though royal, was inferior to his own (but he was an exception and a perpetual laughing-stock, behind his back, to the rest of his family, for whom he provided an endless source of fresh anecdotes), the Guermantes, while living among the cream of the aristocracy, affected to set no store by nobility. The theories of the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, it must be said, by virtue of being a Guermantes, had become to a certain extent something different and more attractive, put intelligence so much above everything else and were in politics so socialistic that one wondered where in her mansion could be the hiding-place of the genie whose duty it was to ensure the maintenance of the aristocratic way of life and who, always invisible but evidently lurking at one moment in the entrance hall, at another in the drawing-room, at a third in her dressing-room, reminded the servants of this woman who did not believe in titles to address her as "Madame la Duchesse," and reminded this woman herself, who cared only for reading and was no respecter of persons, to go out to dinner with her sister-in-law when eight o'clock struck, and to put on a low-necked dress for the occasion.

The same family genie represented to Mme de Guermantes the social duties of duchesses, at least of the foremost among them who like herself were also multimillionaires—the sacrifice to boring tea-parties, grand dinners, routs of every kind, of hours in which she might have read interesting books—as unpleasant necessities like rain, which Mme de Guermantes accepted while bringing her irreverent humour to bear on them, though without going so far as to examine the reasons for her acceptance. The curious coincidence whereby Mme de Guermantes's butler invariably said "Madame la Duchesse" to this woman who believed only in the intellect did not appear to shock her. Never had it entered her head to request him to address her simply as "Madame." Giving her the utmost benefit of the doubt one might have supposed that, being absent-minded, she caught only the word "Madame" and that the suffix appended to it remained unheard. Only, though she might feign deafness, she was not dumb. And the fact was that whenever she had a message to give to her husband she would say to the butler: "Remind Monsieur le Duc——"

The family genie had other occupations as well, one of which was to inspire them to talk morality. It is true that there were Guermantes who went in for intellect and Guermantes who went in for morals, and that these two groups did not as a rule coincide. But the former—including a Guermantes who had forged cheques, who cheated at cards and was the most delightful of them all, with a mind open to every new and sensible idea—spoke even more eloquently about morals than the others, and in the same strain as Mme de Villeparisis, at the moments when the family genie expressed itself through the lips of the old lady. At corresponding moments one saw the Guermantes suddenly adopt a tone almost as antiquated and as affable as, and (since they themselves had more charm) more affecting than that of the Marquise, to say of a servant: "One feels that she has a thoroughly sound nature, she's not at all a common girl, she must come of decent parents, she's certainly a girl who has never gone astray." At such moments the family genie adopted the form of a tone of voice. But at times it could reveal itself in the bearing also, in the expression on the face, the same in the Duchess as in her grandfather the Marshal, a sort of imperceptible convulsion (like that of the Snake, the genius of the Carthaginian family of Barca) by which my heart had more than once been made to throb, on my morning walks, when before I had recognised Mme de Guermantes I felt her eyes fastened upon me from the inside of a little dairy. This family genie had intervened in a situation which was far from immaterial not merely to the Guermantes but to the Courvoisiers, the rival faction of the family and, though of as noble stock as the Guermantes (it was, indeed, through his Courvoisier grandmother that the Guermantes explained the obsession which led the Prince de Guermantes always to speak of birth and titles as though they were the only things that mattered), their opposite in every respect. Not only did the Courvoisiers not assign to intelligence the same importance as the Guermantes, they had a different notion of it. For a Guermantes (however stupid), to be intelligent meant to have a sharp tongue, to be capable of saying scathing things, to give short shrift; but it meant also the capacity to hold one's own equally in painting, music, architecture, and to speak English. The Courvoisiers had a less favourable notion of intelligence, and unless one belonged to their world, being intelligent was almost tantamount to "having probably murdered one's father and mother." For them intelligence was the sort of burglar's jemmy by means of which people one did not know from Adam forced the doors of the most reputable drawing-rooms, and it was common knowledge among the Courvoisiers that you always had to pay in the long run for having "those sort" of people in your house. To the most trivial statements made by intelligent people who were not "in society" the Courvoisiers opposed a systematic distrust. Someone having once remarked: "But Swann is younger than Palamède," Mme de Gallardon had

retorted: "So he says, at any rate, and if he says it you may be sure it's because he thinks it's in his interest!" Better still, when someone said of two highly distinguished strangers whom the Guermantes had entertained that one of them had been sent in first because she was the elder: "But is she really the elder?" Mme de Gallardon had inquired, not positively as though that sort of person did not have an age, but as if, being very probably devoid of civil or religious status, of definite traditions, they were both more or less of an age, like two kittens of the same litter between which only a veterinary surgeon would be competent to decide. The Courvoisiers however, more than the Guermantes, maintained in a certain sense the integrity of the titled class thanks at once to the narrowness of their minds and the malevolence of their hearts. Just as the Guermantes (for whom, below the royal families and a few others like the Lignes, the La Trémoilles and so forth, all the rest were a vague jumble of indistinguishable small-fry) were insolent towards various people of ancient stock who lived round Guermantes, precisely because they paid no attention to those secondary distinctions by which the Courvoisiers set enormous store, so the absence of such distinctions affected them little. Certain women who did not enjoy a very exalted rank in their native provinces but had made glittering marriages and were rich, pretty, beloved of duchesses, were for Paris, where people are never very well up in who one's "father and mother" were, desirable and elegant imports. It might happen, though rarely, that such women were, through the medium of the Princesse de Parme, or by virtue of their own attractions, received by certain Guermantes. But towards these the indignation of the Courvoisiers was unrelenting. Having to meet at their cousin's, between five and six in the afternoon, people with whose relatives their own relatives did not care to be seen mixing down in the Perche became for them an ever-increasing source of rage and an inexhaustible fount of rhetoric. Whenever, for instance, the charming Comtesse G—— entered the Guermantes drawing-room, the face of Mme de Villebon assumed exactly the expression that would have befitted it had she been called upon to recite the line:

And if but one is left, then that one will be me,

a line which for that matter was unknown to her. This Courvoisier had consumed, almost every Monday, éclairs stuffed with cream within a few feet of the Comtesse G——, but to no consequence. And Mme de Villebon confessed in secret that she could not conceive how her cousin Guermantes could allow a woman into her house who was not even in the second-best society of Châteaudun. "I really fail to see why my cousin should make such a fuss about whom she knows; she really has got a nerve!" concluded Mme de Villebon with a change of facial expression, now smilingly sardonic in its despair, to which, in a charade, another line of verse would have been applied, one with which she was no more familiar than with the first:

Thanks to the gods! Mischance outstrips my esperance.

We may here anticipate events to explain that the *perseverance* (which rhymes, in the following line, with *esperance*) shown by Mme de Villebon in snubbing Mme G—— was not entirely wasted. In the eyes of Mme G—— it invested Mme de Villebon with a distinction so supreme, though purely imaginary, that when the time came for Mme G——'s daughter, who was the prettiest girl and the greatest heiress in the ballrooms of that season, to marry, people were astonished to see her refuse all the dukes in succession. The fact was that her mother, remembering the weekly snubs she had to endure in the Rue de Grenelle in memory of Châteaudun, could think of only one possible husband for her daughter—a Villebon son.

A single point at which Guermantes and Courvoisiers converged was the art (one, moreover, of infinite variety) of keeping distances. The Guermantes manners were not absolutely uniform throughout the family. And yet, to take an example, all of them, all those who were genuine Guermantes, when you were introduced to them proceeded to perform a sort of ceremony almost as though the fact that they had held out their hands to you were as significant as if they had been dubbing you a knight. At the moment when a Guermantes, were he no more than twenty, but treading already in the footsteps of his ancestors, heard your name uttered by the person who introduced you, he let fall on you as though he had by no means made up his mind to say "How d'ye do" to you a gaze generally blue and always of the coldness of a steel blade which he seemed ready to plunge into the deepest recesses of your heart. Which was as a matter of fact what the Guermantes imagined themselves to be doing, since they all regarded themselves as psychologists of the first water. They felt moreover that they enhanced by this inspection the affability of the salute which was to follow it, and would not be rendered you without full knowledge of your deserts. All this occurred at a distance from yourself which, little enough had it been a question of a passage of arms, seemed immense for a handclasp and had as chilling an effect in the latter case as it would have had in the former, so that when a Guermantes, after a rapid tour round the last hiding-places of your soul to establish your credentials, had deemed you worthy to consort with him thereafter, his hand, directed towards you at the end of an arm stretched out to its fullest extent, appeared to be presenting a rapier to you for a single combat, and that hand was on the whole placed so far in advance of the Guermantes himself at that moment that when he proceeded to bow his head it was difficult to distinguish whether it was yourself or his own hand that he was saluting. Certain Guermantes, lacking any sense of moderation, or being incapable of refraining from repeating themselves incessantly, went further and repeated this ceremony afresh every time they met you. Seeing that they had no longer any need to conduct the preliminary psychological investigation for which the "family genie" had delegated its powers to them and the result of which they had presumably kept in mind, the insistency of the piercing gaze preceding the handclasp could be explained only by the automatism which their gaze had acquired or by some hypnotic

power which they believed themselves to possess. The Courvoisiers, whose physique was different, had tried in vain to acquire that searching gaze and had had to fall back upon a haughty stiffness or a hurried negligence. On the other hand, it was from the Courvoisiers that certain very rare Guermantes of the gentler sex seemed to have borrowed the feminine form of greeting. At the moment when you were presented to one of these, she made you a sweeping bow in which she carried towards you, almost at an angle of forty-five degrees, her head and bust, the rest of her body (which was very tall) up to the belt which formed a pivot, remaining stationary. But no sooner had she projected thus towards you the upper part of her person, than she flung it backwards beyond the vertical with a brusque withdrawal of roughly equal length. This subsequent withdrawal neutralised what appeared to have been conceded to you; the ground which you believed yourself to have gained did not even remain in your possession as in a duel; the original positions were retained. This same annulment of affability by the resumption of distance (which was Courvoisier in origin and intended to show that the advances made in the first movement were no more than a momentary feint) displayed itself equally clearly, in the Courvoisier ladies as in the Guermantes, in the letters which you received from them, at any rate in the first period of your acquaintance. The "body" of the letter might contain sentences such as one writes only (you would suppose) to a friend, but in vain might you have thought yourself entitled to boast of being in that relation to the lady, since the letter would begin with "Monsieur" and end with "Croyez, monsieur, à mes sentiments distingués." After which, between this cold opening and frigid conclusion which altered the meaning of all the rest, there might (were it a reply to a letter of condolence) come a succession of the most touching pictures of the grief which the Guermantes lady had felt on losing her sister, of the intimacy that had existed between them, of the beauty of the place in which she was staying, of the consolation that she found in the charm of her grandchildren, in other words it was simply a letter such as one finds in printed collections, the intimate character of which implied, however, no more intimacy between yourself and the writer than if she had been Pliny the Younger or Mme de Simiane.

It is true that certain Guermantes ladies wrote to you from the first as "My dear friend," or "Dear friend." These were not always the most homely among them, but rather those who, living only in the society of kings and being at the same time "of easy virtue," assumed in their pride the certainty that everything that came from them gave pleasure and in their corruption the habit of not grudging you any of the satisfactions they had to offer. However, since to have had a common great-great-grandmother in the reign of Louis XIII was enough to make a young Guermantes invariably refer to the Marquise de Guermantes as "Aunt Adam," the Guermantes were so numerous a clan that, even with these simple rites, that for example of the form of greeting adopted on introduction to a stranger, there existed a wide divergence. Each sub-group of any refinement had its own, which was handed down from parents to children like the prescription for a liniment or a special way of making jam. Thus we have seen Saint-Loup's handshake unleashed as though involuntarily as soon as he heard one's name, without any participation by his eyes, without the addition of a nod or a bow. Any unfortunate commoner who for a particular reason—which in fact very rarely occurred—was presented to a member of the Saint-Loup sub-group would scratch his head over this abrupt minimum of a greeting, which deliberately assumed the appearance of non-recognition, wondering what in the world the Guermantes—male or female—could have against him. And he was highly surprised to learn that the said Guermantes had thought fit to write specially to the introducer to tell him how delighted he or she had been with the stranger, whom he or she looked forward to meeting again. As characteristic as the mechanical gestures of Saint-Loup were the complicated and rapid capers (which M. de Charlus condemned as ridiculous) of the Marquis de Fierbois, or the grave and measured paces of the Prince de Guermantes. But it is impossible to describe here the richness of this Guermantes choreography because of the sheer extent of the corps de ballet.

To return to the antipathy which animated the Courvoisiers against the Duchesse de Guermantes, the former might have had the consolation of feeling sorry for her so long as she was still unmarried, for she was then of comparatively slender means. Unfortunately, at all times and seasons, a sort of fuliginous emanation, quite *sui generis*, enveloped and concealed from view the wealth of the Courvoisiers which, however great it might be, remained obscure. In vain might a young Courvoisier with an enormous dowry find a most eligible bridegroom; it invariably happened that the young couple had no house of their own in Paris, would "descend on" their parents-in-law, and for the rest of the year lived down in the country in the midst of a society that was unadulterated but undistinguished. Whereas Saint-Loup, who was up to the eyes in debt, dazzled Doncières with his carriage-horses, a Courvoisier who was extremely rich always went by tram. Similarly (though of course many years earlier) Mlle de Guermantes (Oriane), who had scarcely a penny to her name, created more stir with her clothes than all the Courvoisiers put together. The very scandalousness of her remarks was a sort of advertisement for her style of dressing and doing her hair. She had had the audacity to say to the Russian Grand Duke: "Well, sir, it appears you would like to have Tolstoy assassinated?" at a dinner-party to which none of the Courvoisiers, in any case ill-informed about Tolstoy, had been asked. They were no better informed about the Greek authors, if we may judge by the Dowager Duchesse de Gallardon (mother-in-law of the Princesse de Gallardon who at that time was still a girl) who, not having been honoured by Oriane with a single visit in five years, replied to someone who asked her the reason for this abstention: "It seems she recites Aristotle" (meaning Aristophanes) "in society. I won't tolerate that sort of thing in my house!"

One can imagine how greatly this "sally" by Mlle de Guermantes on the subject of Tolstoy, if it enraged the Courvoisiers, delighted the Guermantes, and beyond them everyone who was not merely closely but even remotely attached to them. The Dowager Comtesse d'Argencourt (*née* Seineport), who entertained more or less everyone because she was a blue-stocking and in spite of her son's being a terrible snob, retailed the remark to her literary friends with the comment: "Oriane de Guermantes, you know, she's as sharp as a needle, as mischievous as a monkey, gifted at everything, does water-colours worthy of a great painter, and writes better verses than most of the great poets, and as for family, you couldn't imagine anything better, her grandmother was Mlle de Montpensier, and she's the eighteenth Oriane de Guermantes in succession, without a single misalliance; it's the purest, the oldest blood in the whole of France." And so the sham men of letters, the pseudo-intellectuals whom Mme d'Argencourt entertained, picturing Oriane de Guermantes, whom they would never have an opportunity of knowing personally, as something more wonderful and more extraordinary than Princess Bedr-el-Budur, not only felt ready to die for her on learning that so noble a person glorified Tolstoy above all others, but felt also a quickening in their hearts of their own love of Tolstoy, their longing to resist Tsarism. These liberal ideas might have languished in them, they might have begun to doubt their importance, no longer daring to confess to them, when suddenly from Mlle de Guermantes herself, that is to say from a girl so indisputably cultured and authoritative, who wore her hair flat on her forehead (a thing that no Courvoisier would ever have dreamed of doing), came this vehement support. A certain number of realities, good or bad in themselves, gain enormously in this way by receiving the adhesion of people who are in authority over us. For instance, among the Courvoisiers the rites of civility in a public thoroughfare consisted in a certain form of greeting, very ugly and far from affable in itself, which people nevertheless knew to be the distinguished way of bidding a person good-day, with the result that everyone else, suppressing their instinctive smiles of welcome, endeavoured to imitate these frigid gymnastics. But the Guermantes in general and Oriane in particular, while more conversant than anyone with these rites, did not hesitate, if they caught sight of you from a carriage, to greet you with a friendly wave, and in a drawing-room, leaving the Courvoisiers to give their stiff, self-conscious salutes, offered the most charming bows, held out their hands as though to a comrade with a smile from their blue eyes, so that suddenly, thanks to the Guermantes, there entered into the substance of stylish manners, hitherto rather hollow and dry, everything that one would naturally have liked and had forced oneself to eschew, a genuine welcome, the warmth of true friendliness,

spontaneity. It is in a similar fashion (but by a rehabilitation which in this case is less justified) that the people who are most strongly imbued with an instinctive taste for bad music and for melodies, however commonplace, which have something facile and caressing about them, succeed, by dint of education in symphonic culture, in mortifying that appetite. But once they have arrived at this point, when, dazzled—and rightly so—by the brilliant orchestral colouring of Richard Strauss, they see that musician adopt the most vulgar motifs with a self-indulgence worthy of Auber, what those people originally admired finds suddenly in so high an authority a justification which delights them, and they wallow without qualms and with a twofold gratitude, when they listen to *Salomé*, in what it would have been impossible for them to admire in *Les Diamants de la Couronne*.

Authentic or not, Mlle de Guermantes's apostrophe to the Grand Duke, retailed from house to house, provided an opportunity to relate with what excessive elegance Oriane had been turned out at the dinner-party in question. But if such splendour (and this is precisely what rendered it inaccessible to the Courvoisiers) springs not from wealth but from prodigality, the latter nevertheless lasts longer if it enjoys the constant support of the former, which then allows it to pull out all the stops. Now, given the principles openly paraded not only by Oriane but by Mme de Villeparisis, namely that nobility does not count, that it is ridiculous to bother one's head about rank, that money doesn't bring happiness, that intellect, heart, talent are alone of importance, the Courvoisiers were justified in hoping that, as a result of the training she had received from the Marquise, Oriane would marry someone who was not in society, an artist, an ex-convict, a tramp, a free-thinker, that she would enter for good and all into the category of what the Courvoisiers called "black sheep." They were all the more justified in this hope because, inasmuch as Mme de Villeparisis was at that time going through an awkward crisis from the social point of view (none of the few bright stars whom I was to meet in her drawing-room had as yet reappeared there), she professed an intense horror of the society which thus excluded her. Even when she spoke of her nephew the Prince de Guermantes, whom she did still see, she never ceased mocking him because he was so infatuated with his pedigree. But the moment it became a question of finding a husband for Oriane, it was no longer the principles publicly paraded by aunt and niece that had guided the operation; it was the mysterious "family genie." As unerringly as if Mme de Villeparisis and Oriane had never spoken of anything but rent-rolls and pedigrees instead of literary merit and depth of character, and as if the Marquise for the space of a few days, had been—as she would ultimately be—dead and in her coffin in the church at Combray, where each member of the family became simply a Guermantes, with a forfeiture of individuality and baptismal names attested on the voluminous black drapery of the pall by the single "G" in purple surmounted by the ducal coronet, it was on the wealthiest and the most nobly born, on the most eligible bachelor of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, on the eldest son of the Duc de Guermantes, the Prince des Laumes, that the family genie had fixed the choice of the intellectual, the rebellious, the evangelical Mme de Villeparisis. And for a couple of hours, on the day of the wedding, Mme de Villeparisis received in her drawing-room all the noble persons whom she had been in the habit of deriding, whom she even derided with the few bourgeois intimates whom she had invited and on whom the Prince des Laumes promptly left cards, preparatory to "cutting the painter" in the following year. And then, making the Courvoisiers' cup of bitterness overflow, the same old maxims according to which intellect and talent were the sole claims to social pre-eminence began once more to be trotted out in the household of the Princesse des Laumes immediately after her marriage. And in this respect, be it said in passing, the point of view which Saint-Loup upheld when he lived with Rachel, frequented the friends of Rachel, would have liked to marry Rachel, entailed—whatever the horror that it inspired in the family—less falsehood than that of the Guermantes young ladies in general, extolling the intellect, barely allowing the possibility that anyone could question the equality of mankind, all of which led, when it came to the point, to the same result as if they had professed the opposite principles, that is to say to marrying an extremely wealthy duke. Saint-Loup, on the contrary, acted in conformity with his theories, which led people to say that he was treading in evil ways. Certainly from the moral standpoint Rachel was not altogether satisfactory. But it is by no means certain that, if she had been no more virtuous but a duchess or the heiress to many millions, Mme de Marsantes would not have been in favour of the match.

However, to return to Mme des Laumes (shortly afterwards Duchesse de Guermantes, on the death of her father-in-law), it was the last agonising straw for the Courvoisiers that the theories of the young Princess, remaining thus confined to her speech, should in no way have guided her conduct; with the result that this philosophy (if one may so call it) did not impair the aristocratic elegance of the Guermantes drawing-room. No doubt all the people whom Mme de Guermantes did not invite imagined that it was because they were not clever enough, and a rich American lady who had never possessed any other book except a little old copy, never opened, of Parry's poems, arranged because it was "of the period" on one of the tables in her small drawing-room, showed how much store she set by the things of the mind by the devouring gaze which she fastened on the Duchesse de Guermantes when that lady made her appearance at the Opéra. No doubt, too, Mme de Guermantes was sincere when she elected a person on account of his or her intelligence. When she said of a woman: "It appears she's quite charming!" or of a man that he was the "cleverest person in the world," she imagined herself to have no other reason for consenting to receive them than this charm or cleverness, the family genie not interposing itself at the last moment; more deeply rooted, stationed at the obscure entrance to the region in which the Guermantes exercised their judgment, this vigilant spirit precluded them from finding the man clever or the woman charming if they had no social merit, actual or potential. The man was pronounced learned, but like a dictionary, or, on the contrary, common, with the mind of a commercial traveller, the woman pretty, but with a terribly bad style, or too talkative. As for the people



who had no definite position, they were simply dreadful—such snobs! M. de Bréauté, whose country house was quite close to Guermantes, mixed with no one below the rank of Highness. But he was totally indifferent to them and longed only to spend his days in museums. Accordingly Mme de Guermantes was indignant when anyone spoke of M. de Bréauté as a snob. “Babal a snob! But, my dear man, you must be mad, he’s just the opposite. He loathes smart people; he won’t let himself be introduced to anyone. Even in my house! If I invite him to meet someone he doesn’t know, he never stops grumbling when he comes.”

This was not to say that, even in practice, the Guermantes did not set altogether more store by intelligence than the Courvoisiers. In a positive sense, this difference between the Guermantes and the Courvoisiers had already begun to bear very promising fruit. Thus the Duchesse de Guermantes, enveloped moreover in a mystery which had set so many poets dreaming of her from afar, had given that ball to which I have already referred, at which the King of England had enjoyed himself more thoroughly than anywhere else, for she had had the idea, which would never have occurred to the Courvoisier mind, of inviting, and the audacity, from which the Courvoisier courage would have recoiled, to invite, apart from the personages already mentioned, the musician Gaston Lemaire and the dramatist Grandmougin. But it was chiefly from the negative point of view that intellectuality made itself felt. If the necessary coefficient of cleverness and charm declined steadily as the rank of the person who sought an invitation from the Duchesse de Guermantes became more exalted, vanishing to zero when it came to the principal crowned heads of Europe, conversely the further they fell below this royal level the higher the coefficient rose. For instance, at the Princesse de Parme’s receptions there were a number of people whom Her Royal Highness invited because she had known them as children, or because they were related to some duchess, or attached to the person of some sovereign, they themselves being quite possibly ugly, boring or stupid. Now, in the case of a Courvoisier reasons such as “a favourite of the Princesse de Parme,” or “a half-sister of the Duchesse d’Arpajon on the mother’s side,” or “spends three months every year with the Queen of Spain,” would have been sufficient to make her invite such people to her house, but Mme de Guermantes, who had politely acknowledged their greetings for ten years at the Princesse de Parme’s, had never once allowed them to cross her threshold, considering that the same rule applied to a drawing-room in a social as in a physical sense, where it only needed a few pieces of furniture which had no particular beauty, but were left there to fill the room and as a sign of the owner’s wealth, to render it hideous. Such a drawing-room resembled a book in which the author cannot refrain from the use of language advertising his own learning, brilliance, fluency. Like a book, like a house, the quality of a “salon,” Mme de Guermantes rightly thought, is based on the corner-stone of sacrifice.

Many of the friends of the Princesse de Parme, with whom the Duchesse de Guermantes had confined herself for years past to the same conventional greeting, or to returning their cards, without ever inviting them to her house or going to theirs, complained discreetly of these omissions to Her Highness who, on days when M. de Guermantes came by himself to see her, dropped a hint of it to him. But the wily nobleman, a bad husband to the Duchess in so far as he kept mistresses, but her most tried and trusty friend in everything that concerned the proper functioning of her salon (and her own wit, which formed its chief attraction), replied: “But does my wife know her? Indeed! Oh, well, I dare say she ought to have. But the truth is, Ma’am, that Oriane doesn’t care for women’s conversations. She lives surrounded by a court of superior minds—I’m not her husband, I’m only the senior valet. Except for quite a small number, who are all of them very witty indeed, women bore her. Surely, Ma’am, Your Highness with all her fine judgment is not going to tell me that the Marquise de Souvré has any wit. Yes, I quite understand, Your Highness receives her out of kindness. Besides, Your Highness knows her. You tell me that Oriane has met her; it’s quite possible, but once or twice at the most, I assure you. And then, I must explain to Your Highness, it’s really a little my fault as well. My wife is very easily tired, and she’s so anxious to be friendly always that if I allowed her she would never stop going to see people. Only yesterday evening, although she had a temperature, she was afraid of hurting the Duchesse de Bourbon’s feelings by not going to see her. I had to show my teeth, I can tell you; I positively forbade them to bring the carriage round. Do you know, Ma’am, I’ve a very good mind not to mention to Oriane that you’ve spoken to me about Mme de Souvré. Oriane is so devoted to Your Highness that she’ll go round at once to invite Mme de Souvré to the house; that will mean another call to be paid, it will oblige us to make friends with the sister, whose husband I know quite well. I think I shall say nothing at all about it to Oriane, if Your Highness has no objection. We’ll save her a great deal of strain and agitation. And I assure you that it will be no loss to Mme de Souvré. She goes everywhere, moves in the most brilliant circles. We scarcely entertain at all, really, just a few little friendly dinners. Mme de Souvré would be bored to death.” The Princesse de Parme, innocently convinced that the Duc de Guermantes would not transmit her request to the Duchess, and dismayed by her failure to procure the invitation that Mme de Souvré sought, was all the more flattered to think that she herself was one of the regular frequenters of so exclusive a household. No doubt this satisfaction had its drawbacks also. Thus whenever the Princesse de Parme invited Mme de Guermantes to her own parties she had to rack her brains to be sure that there was no one else on her list whose presence might offend the Duchess and make her refuse to come again.

On her habitual evenings, after dinner, to which she always invited a few people (very early, for she clung to old customs), the Princesse de Parme’s drawing-room was thrown open to her regular guests and, generally speaking, to the whole of the higher aristocracy, French and foreign. The order of her receptions was as follows: on issuing from the dining-room the Princess sat down on a settee in front of a large round table and chatted with two of the most important ladies who had dined with her, or else cast her eyes over a magazine, or sometimes played cards (or pretended to play, following a German court custom), either a game of patience or selecting as her real or pretended partner some prominent personage. By nine o’clock the double doors of

the big drawing-room were in constant action, opening and shutting and opening again to admit the visitors who had dined hurriedly at home (or if they had dined "out," skipped coffee, promising to return later, having intended only "to go in at one door and out at the other") in order to conform with the Princess's time-table. She, meanwhile, attentive to her game or conversation, made a show of not seeing the new arrivals, and it was not until they were actually within reach of her that she rose graciously from her seat, with a benevolent smile for the women. The latter thereupon sank before the standing Princess in a curtsy which was tantamount to a genuflection, in such a way as to bring their lips down to the level of the beautiful hand which hung very low, and to kiss it. But at that moment the Princess, just as if she had been surprised each time by a protocol with which nevertheless she was perfectly familiar, raised the kneeling lady as though by main force, but with incomparable grace and sweetness, and kissed her on both cheeks. A grace and sweetness that were conditional, you may say, upon the meekness with which the arriving guest bent her knee. Very likely; and it would seem that in an egalitarian society social etiquette would vanish, not, as is generally supposed, from want of breeding, but because on the one side would disappear the deference due to a prestige which must be imaginary to be effective, and on the other, more completely still, the affability that is gracefully and generously dispensed when it is felt to be of infinite price to the recipient, a price which, in a world based on equality, would at once fall to nothing like everything that has only a fiduciary value. But this disappearance of social distinctions in a reconstructed society is by no means a foregone conclusion, and we are at times too ready to believe that present circumstances are the only ones in which a state of things can survive. People of first-rate intelligence believed that a republic could not have any diplomacy or foreign alliances, and that the peasant class would not tolerate the separation of Church and State. After all, the survival of etiquette in an egalitarian society would be no more miraculous than the practical success of the railways or the use of the aeroplane in war. Besides, even if politeness were to vanish, there is nothing to show that this would be a misfortune. Finally, would not society become secretly more hierarchical as it became outwardly more democratic? Very possibly. The political power of the Popes has grown enormously since they ceased to possess either States or an army; our cathedrals meant far less to a devout Catholic of the seventeenth century than they mean to an atheist of the twentieth, and if the *Princesse de Parme* had been the sovereign ruler of a State, no doubt I should have felt moved to speak of her about as much as of a President of the Republic, that is to say not at all.

As soon as the postulant had been raised up and embraced by the Princess, the latter resumed her seat and returned to her game of patience, unless the newcomer was a lady of some distinction, in which case she sat her down in an armchair and chatted to her for a while.

When the room became too crowded the lady-in-waiting who had to control the traffic cleared some space by leading the regular guests into an immense hall on to which the drawing-room opened, a hall filled with portraits and minor trophies relating to the House of Bourbon. The intimate friends of the Princess would then volunteer as guides and tell interesting anecdotes, to which the young people had not the patience to listen, more interested in the spectacle of living royalty (with the possibility of getting themselves presented to it by the lady-in-waiting and the maids of honour) than in examining the relics of dead sovereigns. Too occupied with the acquaintances they might be able to make and the invitations they might be able to pick up, they knew absolutely nothing, even after several years, of what there was in this priceless museum of the archives of the monarchy, and could only recall vaguely that it was decorated with cacti and giant palms which gave this centre of social elegance a look of the palmarium in the Zoological Gardens.

Of course the *Duchesse de Guermantes*, by way of self-mortification, did occasionally appear on these evenings to pay an "after dinner" call on the Princess, who kept her all the time by her side, while exchanging pleasantries with the Duke. But on evenings when the Duchess came to dine, the Princess took care not to invite her regular party, and closed her doors to the world on rising from table, for fear lest a too liberal selection of guests might offend the exacting Duchess. On such evenings, were any of the faithful who had not received warning to present themselves on the royal doorstep, they would be informed by the porter: "Her Royal Highness is not at home this evening," and would turn away. But many of the Princess's friends would have known in advance that on the day in question they would not be asked to her house. These were a special category of parties, a category barred to many who must have longed for admission. Those who were excluded could with virtual certainty enumerate the roll of the elect, and would say irritably among themselves: "You know, of course, that Oriane de Guermantes never goes anywhere without her entire general staff." With the help of this body, the *Princesse de Parme* sought to surround the Duchess as with a protective rampart against those persons the chance of whose making a good impression on her was at all doubtful. But there were several of the Duchess's favourites, several members of this glittering "staff," for whom the *Princesse de Parme* resented having to put herself out, seeing that they paid little or no attention to herself. No doubt the Princess was fully prepared to admit that people might derive more enjoyment from the company of the *Duchesse de Guermantes* than from her own. She could not deny that there was always a "crush" at the Duchess's "at homes," or that she herself often met there three or four royal personages who thought it sufficient to leave their cards upon her. And in vain might she commit to memory Oriane's witty sayings, copy her gowns, serve at her own tea-parties the same strawberry tarts, there were occasions on which she was left by herself all afternoon with a lady-in-waiting and some councillor from a foreign legation. And so whenever (as had been the case with Swann, for instance, at an earlier period) there was anyone who never let a day pass without going to spend an hour or two at the Duchess's and paid a call once every two years on the *Princesse de Parme*, the latter felt no great desire, even for the sake of amusing Oriane, to make "advances" to this Swann or whoever he was by inviting him to dinner. In a word, having the Duchess in her house was

for the Princess a source of endless perplexity, so haunted was she by the fear that Oriane would find fault with everything. But in return, and for the same reason, when the Princesse de Parme came to dine with Mme de Guermantes she could be certain in advance that everything would be perfect, delightful, and she had only one fear, which was that of being unable to understand, remember, give satisfaction, being unable to assimilate new ideas and people. On this score, my presence aroused her attention and excited her cupidity, just as might a new way of decorating the dinner-table with garlands of fruit, uncertain as she was which of the two—the table decorations or my presence—was the more distinctively one of those charms which were the secret of the success of Oriane's receptions, and in her uncertainty firmly resolved to try to have them both at her own next dinner-party. What in fact fully justified the enraptured curiosity which the Princesse de Parme brought to the Duchess's house was that unique, dangerous, exciting element into which the Princess used to plunge with a thrill of anxiety, shock and delight (as at the seaside on one of those days of "heavy seas" of the danger of which the bathing-attendants warn one for the simple reason that none of them can swim), and from which she would emerge feeling braced, happy, rejuvenated—the element known as the wit of the Guermantes. The wit of the Guermantes—a thing as non-existent as the squared circle, according to the Duchess who regarded herself as the sole Guermantes to possess it—was a family reputation like that of the minced pork of Tours or the biscuits of Rheims. However (since an intellectual characteristic does not employ for its propagation the same channels as the colour of hair or complexion) certain intimate friends of the Duchess who were not of her blood were nevertheless endowed with this wit, which on the other hand had failed to inculcate itself into various Guermantes who were all too resistant to wit of any kind. For the most part, the custodians of the Guermantes wit who were not related to the Duchess shared the characteristic feature of having been brilliant men, eminently fitted for a career to which, whether in the arts, diplomacy, parliamentary eloquence or the army, they had preferred the life of society. Possibly this preference could be explained by a certain lack of originality, of initiative, of will power, of health or of luck, or possibly by snobbishness.

With certain of them (though these, it must be admitted, were the exception), if the Guermantes drawing-room had been the stumbling-block in their careers, it had been against their will. Thus a doctor, a painter and a diplomat of great promise had failed to achieve success in the careers for which they were nevertheless more brilliantly endowed than most because their friendship with the Guermantes had resulted in the first two being regarded as men of fashion and the third as a reactionary, and this had prevented all three from winning the recognition of their peers. The mediaeval gown and red cap which are still donned by the electoral colleges of the Faculties are (or were, at least, not so long since) something more than a purely outward survival from a narrow-minded past, from a rigid sectarianism. Under the cap with its golden tassels, like the high priests in the conical mitre of the Jews, the "professors" were still, in the years that preceded the Dreyfus case, fast rooted in rigorously pharisaical ideas. Du Boulbon was at heart an artist, but was safe because he did not care for society. Cottard was always at the Verdurins', but Mme Verdurin was a patient, he was moreover protected by his vulgarity, and at his own house he entertained no one outside the Faculty, at banquets over which there floated an aroma of carbolic acid. But in strongly corporate bodies, where moreover the rigidity of their prejudices is but the price that must be paid for the noblest integrity, the most lofty conceptions of morality, which wither in more tolerant, more liberal, ultimately more corrupt atmospheres, a professor in his gown of scarlet satin faced with ermine, like that of a Doge (which is to say a Duke) of Venice shut away in the ducal palace, was as virtuous, as deeply attached to noble principles, but as pitiless towards any alien element as that other admirable but fearsome duke, M. de Saint-Simon. The alien, here, was the worldly doctor, with other manners, other social relations. To make good, the unfortunate of whom we are now speaking, so as not to be accused by his colleagues of looking down on them (who but a man of fashion would think of such an idea!) if he concealed the Duchesse de Guermantes from them, hoped to disarm them by giving mixed dinner-parties in which the medical element was merged in the fashionable. He was unaware that in so doing he signed his own death-warrant, or rather he discovered this when the Council of Ten (a little larger in number) had to fill a vacant chair, and it was invariably the name of another doctor, more normal if more mediocre, that emerged from the fatal urn, and the "Veto" thundered round the ancient Faculty, as solemn, as absurd and as terrible as the "Juro" that spelt the death of Molière. So too with the painter permanently labelled man of fashion, when fashionable people who dabbled in art had succeeded in getting themselves labelled artists; so with the diplomat who had too many reactionary associations.

But these cases were rare. The prototype of the distinguished men who formed the main substance of the Guermantes salon was someone who had voluntarily (or at least they supposed) renounced all else, everything that was incompatible with the wit of the Guermantes, with the courtesy of the Guermantes, with that indefinable charm odious to any "body" that is at all "corporate."

And the people who were aware that one of the habitués of the Duchess's drawing-room had once been awarded the gold medal of the Salon, that another, Secretary to the Bar Council, had made a brilliant début in the Chamber, that a third had ably served France as chargé d'affaires, might have been led to regard as "failures" people who had now done nothing for twenty years. But there were few who were thus "in the know," and the persons concerned would themselves have been the last to remind one, finding these old distinctions valueless, precisely by virtue of the Guermantes wit: for did this not encourage them to denounce on the one hand as a bore and a pedant, on the other as a counter-jumper, a pair of eminent ministers, one a trifle solemn, the other addicted to puns, whose praises the newspapers were constantly singing but in whose company Mme de Guermantes would begin to yawn and show signs of impatience if a hostess had rashly placed either of them next to her at the dinner-table? Since being a statesman of the first rank was in no sense

a recommendation in the eyes of the Duchess, those of her friends who had abandoned the "Career" or the "Service," who had never stood for parliament, felt, as they came day after day to have lunch and talk with their great friend, or when they met her in the houses of royal personages—incidentally held in low esteem by them (or so they said)—that they had chosen the better part, albeit their melancholy air, even in the midst of the gaiety, seemed somehow to impugn the validity of this judgment.

And it must be acknowledged that the refinement of social life, the sparkle of the conversation at the Guermites, did have something real about it, however exiguous it may have been. No official title was worth more than the personal charm of certain of Mme de Guermites's favourites whom the most powerful ministers would have been unable to attract to their houses. If in this drawing-room so many intellectual ambitions and even noble efforts had been for ever buried, still at least from their dust the rarest flowering of civilised society had sprung to life. Certainly men of wit, such as Swann for instance, regarded themselves as superior to men of merit, whom they despised, but that was because what the Duchess valued above everything else was not intelligence but—a superior form of intelligence, according to her, rarer, more exquisite, raising it up to a verbal variety of talent—wit. And long ago at the Verdurins', when Swann denounced Brichot and Elstir, one as a pedant and the other as an oaf, despite all the learning of the one and the genius of the other, it was the infiltration of the Guermites spirit that had led him to classify them thus. Never would he have dared to introduce either of them to the Duchess, conscious instinctively of the air with which she would have listened to Brichot's perorations and Elstir's "balderdash," the Guermites spirit consigning pretentious and prolix speech, whether in a serious or a farcical vein, to the category of the most intolerable imbecility.

As for the Guermites of the true flesh and blood, if the Guermites spirit had not infected them as completely as we see occur in, for example, those literary coteries in which everyone has the same way of pronouncing, enunciating and consequently thinking, it was certainly not because originality is stronger in social circles and inhibits imitation therein. But imitation requires not only the absence of any unconquerable originality but also a relative fineness of ear which enables one first of all to discern what one is afterwards to imitate. And there were several Guermites in whom this musical sense was as entirely lacking as in the Courvoisiers.

To take as an instance what is called, in another sense of the word imitation, "giving imitations" (or among the Guermites was called "taking off"), for all that Mme de Guermites could bring these off to perfection, the Courvoisiers were as incapable of appreciating it as if they had been a tribe of rabbits instead of men and women, because they had never managed to observe the particular defect or accent that the Duchess was endeavouring to mimic. When she "imitated" the Duc de Limoges, the Courvoisiers would protest: "Oh, no, he doesn't really speak like that. I dined with him again at Bebeth's last night; he talked to me all evening and he didn't speak like that at all!" whereas any Guermites who was at all cultivated would exclaim: "Goodness, how droll Oriane is! The amazing thing is that when she's mimicking him she looks exactly like him! I feel I'm listening to him. Oriane, do give us a little more Limoges!" Now these Guermites (without even including those absolutely remarkable members of the clan who, when the Duchess imitated the Duc de Limoges, would say admiringly: "Oh, you really have got him," or "You do hit him off!") might be devoid of wit according to Mme de Guermites (in this respect she was right), but by dint of hearing and repeating her sayings they had come to imitate more or less her way of expressing herself, of criticising people, of what Swann, like the Duchess herself, would have called her way of "phrasing" things, so that they presented in their conversation something which to the Courvoisiers appeared appallingly similar to Oriane's wit and was treated by them collectively as the Guermites wit. As these Guermites were to her not merely kinsfolk but admirers, Oriane (who kept the rest of the family rigorously at arm's-length and now avenged by her disdain the spitefulness they had shown her in her girlhood) went to call on them now and then, generally in the company of the Duke, when she drove out with him in the summer months. These visits were an event. The Princesse d'Epinay's heart would begin to beat more rapidly, as she entertained in her big drawing-room on the ground floor, when she saw from a distance, like the first glow of an innocuous fire, or the scouting party of an unexpected invasion, making her way slowly across the courtyard in a diagonal course, the Duchess wearing a ravishing hat and holding ailt a sunshade redolent with a summer fragrance. "Why, here comes Oriane," she would say, like an "On guard!" intended to convey a prudent warning to her visitors, so that they should have time to beat an orderly retreat, to evacuate the rooms without panic. Half of those present dared not remain, and rose at once to go. "But no, why? Sit down again, I insist on keeping you a little longer," the Princess would say in an airy, off-hand manner (to show herself the great lady) but in a voice that suddenly rang false. "But you may want to talk to each other." "Really, you're in a hurry? Oh, very well, I shall come and see you," the lady of the house would reply to those whom she would just as soon see leave. The Duke and Duchess would give a very civil greeting to people whom they had seen there regularly for years though without coming to know them any better, while these in return barely said good-day to them, from discretion. Scarcely had they left the room before the Duke would begin asking good-naturedly who they were, so as to appear to be taking an interest in the intrinsic quality of people whom he never saw in his own house owing to the malevolence of fate or the state of Oriane's nerves which the company of women was bad for:

"Tell me, who was that little woman in the pink hat?"

"Why, my dear cousin, you've seen her hundreds of times, she's the Vicomtesse de Tours, who was a Lamarzelle."

"But, do you know, she's very pretty, and she has a witty look. If it weren't for a little flaw in her upper lip she'd be a regular charmer. If there's a Vicomte de Tours, he can't have any too bad a time. Oriane, do you

know who her eyebrows and the way her hair grows reminded me of? Your cousin Hedwige de Ligne."

The Duchesse de Guermantes, who languished whenever people spoke of the beauty of any woman other than herself, let the subject drop. She had reckoned without the weakness of her husband for letting it be seen that he knew all about the people who did not come to his house, whereby he believed that he showed himself to be more "serious" than his wife.

"But," he would suddenly resume with emphasis, "you mentioned the name Lamarzelle. I remember, when I was in the Chamber, hearing a really remarkable speech made ..."

"That was the uncle of the young woman you saw just now."

"Indeed! What talent! No, my dear girl," he assured the Vicomtesse d'Egremont, whom Mme de Guermantes could not endure but who, refusing to stir from the Princesse d'Epinay's drawing-room where she willingly stooped to the role of parlour-maid (though it did not prevent her from slapping her own on returning home), stayed there, tearful and abashed, but nevertheless stayed, when the ducal couple were there, taking their cloaks, trying to make herself useful, discreetly offering to withdraw into the next room, "you're not to make tea for us, let's just sit and talk quietly, we're simple, homely souls. Besides," he went on, turning to the Princesse d'Epinay (leaving the Egremont lady blushing, humble, ambitious and full of zeal), "we can only spare you a quarter of an hour."

This quarter of an hour would be entirely taken up with a sort of exhibition of the witty things which the Duchess had said during the previous week, and to which she herself would certainly have refrained from alluding had not her husband, with great adroitness, by appearing to be rebuking her with reference to the incidents that had provoked them, obliged her as though against her will to repeat them.

The Princesse d'Epinay, who was fond of her cousin and knew that she had a weakness for compliments, would go into ecstasies over her hat, her sunshade, her wit. "Talk to her as much as you like about her clothes," the Duke would say in the surly tone which he had adopted and now tempered with a mocking smile so that his displeasure should not be taken seriously, "but for heaven's sake don't speak of her wit. I could do without having such a witty wife. You're probably alluding to the shocking pun she made about my brother Palamède," he went on, knowing quite well that the Princess and the rest of the family had not yet heard this pun, and delighted to have an opportunity of showing off his wife. "In the first place I consider it unworthy of a person who has occasionally, I must admit, said some quite good things, to make bad puns, but especially about my brother, who is very touchy, and if it's going to lead to bad blood between us, that would really be too much of a good thing."

"But we've no idea! One of Oriane's puns? It's sure to be delicious. Oh, do tell us!"

"No, no," the Duke went on, still surly though with a broader smile, "I'm delighted you haven't heard it. Seriously, I'm very fond of my brother."

"Look here, Basin," the Duchess would break in, the moment having come for her to take up her husband's cue, "I can't think why you should say that it might annoy Palamède, you know quite well it would do nothing of the sort. He's far too intelligent to be offended by a stupid joke which has nothing offensive about it. You'll make them think I said something nasty; I simply made a remark which wasn't in the least funny, it's you who make it seem important by getting so indignant. I don't understand you."

"You're being horribly tantalising. What's it all about?"

"Oh, obviously nothing serious!" cried M. de Guermantes. "You may have heard that my brother offered to give Brézé, the place he got from his wife, to his sister Marsantes."

"Yes, but we were told she didn't want it, that she didn't care for that part of the country, that the climate didn't suit her."

"Precisely. Well, someone was telling my wife all that and saying that if my brother was giving this place to our sister it wasn't so much to please her as to tease her. 'He's such a teaser, Charlus,' was what they actually said. Well, you know Brézé is really impressive, I should say it's worth millions, it used to be part of the crown lands, it includes one of the finest forests in France. There are plenty of people who would be only too delighted to be teased to that tune. And so when she heard the words 'teaser' applied to Charlus because he was giving away such a magnificent property, Oriane couldn't help exclaiming, quite involuntarily, I must admit, without the slightest suggestion of malice, for it came out like a flash of lightning: 'Teaser, teaser? Then he must be Teaser Augustus!' You understand," he went on, resuming his surly tone, having first cast a sweeping glance round the room in order to judge the effect of his wife's witticism—and in some doubt as to the extent of Mme d'Epinay's acquaintance with ancient history, "you understand, it's an allusion to Augustus Caesar, the Roman Emperor. It's too stupid, a bad play on words, quite unworthy of Oriane. And then, you see, I'm more circumspect than my wife. Even if I haven't her wit, I think of the consequences. If anyone should be so ill-advised as to repeat the remark to my brother there'll be the devil to pay. All the more so," he went on, "because as you know Palamède is very high and mighty, and also very captious, given to tittle-tattle, so that quite apart from the question of his giving away Brézé you must admit that 'Teaser Augustus' suits him down to the ground. That's what justifies my wife's quips; even when she stoops to feeble puns, she's always witty and does really describe people rather well."

And so, thanks on one occasion to "Teaser Augustus," on another to something else, the visits paid by the Duke and Duchess to their kinsfolk replenished the stock of anecdotes, and the excitement they had caused lasted long after the departure of the sparkling lady and her impresario. The hostess would begin by going over again with the privileged persons who had been at the entertainment (those who had remained) the clever things that Oriane had said. "You hadn't heard 'Teaser Augustus'?" the Princesse d'Epinay would ask. "Yes," the Marquise de Baveno would reply, blushing as she spoke, "the Princesse de Sarsina-La Rochefoucauld

mentioned it to me, not quite in the same terms. But of course it was far more interesting to hear it repeated like that with my cousin in the room," she went on, as though speaking of a song that had been accompanied by the composer himself. "We were speaking of Oriane's latest—she was here just now," her hostess would greet a visitor who was very disconsolate at not having arrived an hour earlier.

"What! has Oriane been here?"

"Yes, if you'd come a little sooner ..." the Princesse d'Epinay replied, not in reproach but making it clear how much the blunderer had missed. It was her fault alone if she had not been present at the creation of the world or at Mme Carvalho's last performance. "What do you think of Oriane's latest? I must say I do like 'Teaser Augustus,' " and the quip would be served up again cold next day at lunch before a few intimate friends invited for the purpose, and would reappear under various sauces throughout the week. Indeed Mme d'Epinay happening in the course of that week to pay her annual visit to the Princesse de Parme, seized the opportunity to ask whether Her Royal Highness had heard the pun, and repeated it to her. "Ah! Teaser Augustus," said the Princesse de Parme, wide-eyed with an *a priori* admiration, which begged however for a complementary elucidation which Mme d'Epinay was not loath to furnish. "I must say Teaser Augustus pleases me enormously as a piece of 'phrasing,' " she concluded. As a matter of fact the word "phrasing" was not in the least applicable to this pun, but the Princesse d'Epinay, who claimed to have assimilated her share of the Guermantes wit, had borrowed from Oriane the expressions "phrased" and "phrasing" and employed them without much discrimination. Now the Princesse de Parme, who was not at all fond of Mme d'Epinay, whom she considered plain, knew to be miserly, and believed, on the authority of the Courvoisiers, to be malicious, recognised this word "phrasing" which she had heard on Mme de Guermantes's lips but would not herself have known how or when to apply. She concluded that it must indeed be its "phrasing" that formed the charm of "Teaser Augustus" and, without altogether forgetting her antipathy towards the plain and miserly lady, could not repress an impulse of admiration for a person endowed to such a degree with the Guermantes wit, so much so that she was on the point of inviting the Princesse d'Epinay to the Opéra. She was held in check only by the reflexion that it would be wiser perhaps to consult Mme de Guermantes first. As for Mme d'Epinay, who, unlike the Courvoisiers, was endlessly obliging towards Oriane and was genuinely fond of her, but was jealous of her exalted friends and slightly irritated by the fun which the Duchess used to make of her in front of everyone on account of her meanness, she reported on her return home how much difficulty the Princesse de Parme had had in grasping the point of "Teaser Augustus," and declared what a snob Oriane must be to number such a goose among her friends. "I should never have been able to see much of the Princesse de Parme even if I had wanted to, because M. d'Epinay would never have allowed it on account of her immorality," she told the friends who were dining with her, alluding to certain purely imaginary excesses on the part of the Princess. "But even if I had had a husband less strict in his views, I must say I could never have made friends with her. I don't know how Oriane can bear to see her every other day, as she does. I go there once a year, and it's all I can do to sit out my call."

As for those of the Courvoisiers who happened to be at Victurnienne's on the day of Mme de Guermantes's visit, the arrival of the Duchess generally put them to flight owing to the exasperation they felt at the "ridiculous salaams" that were made to her there. One alone remained on the evening of "Teaser Augustus." He did not entirely see the point, but he half-understood it, being an educated man. And the Courvoisiers went about repeating that Oriane had called uncle Palamède "Caesar Augustus," which was, according to them, a good enough description of him. But why all this endless talk about Oriane, they went on. People couldn't make more fuss about a queen. "After all, what is Oriane? I don't say the Guermantes aren't an old family, but the Courvoisiers are inferior to them in nothing, neither in illustriousness, nor in antiquity, nor in alliances. We mustn't forget that on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, when the King of England asked François I who was the noblest of the lords there present, 'Sire,' said the King of France, 'Courvoisier.' " But even if all the Courvoisiers had stayed in the room to hear them, Oriane's witticisms would have fallen on deaf ears, since the incidents that usually gave rise to them would have been regarded by them from a totally different point of view. If, for instance, a Courvoisier found herself running short of chairs in the middle of a reception she was giving, or if she used the wrong name in greeting a guest whose face she did not remember, or if one of her servants said something stupid, the Courvoisier lady, extremely annoyed, flushed, quivering with agitation, would deplore so unfortunate an occurrence. And when she had a visitor in the room, and Oriane was expected, she would ask in an anxious and imperious tone: "Do you know her?", fearing that if the visitor did not know her his presence might make a bad impression on Oriane. But Mme de Guermantes on the contrary drew from such incidents opportunities for stories which made the Guermantes laugh until the tears streamed down their cheeks, so that one was obliged to envy the lady for having run short of chairs, for having herself made or allowed her servant to make a gaffe, for having had at a party someone whom nobody knew, as one is obliged to be thankful that great writers have been kept at a distance by men and betrayed by women when their humiliations and their sufferings have been if not the direct stimulus of their genius at any rate the subject matter of their works.

The Courvoisiers were equally incapable of rising to the spirit of innovation which the Duchesse de Guermantes introduced into the life of society and which, by adapting it with an unerring instinct to the necessities of the moment, made it into something artistic, where the purely rational application of cut and dried rules would have produced results as unfortunate as would greet a man who, anxious to succeed in love or in politics, reproduced to the letter in his own life the exploits of Bussy d'Amboise. If the Courvoisiers gave a family dinner or a dinner to meet some prince, the addition of a recognised wit, of some friend of their son, seemed to them an anomaly capable of producing the direst consequences. A Courvoisier lady whose father

had been a minister under the Empire, having to give an afternoon party in honour of the Princesse Mathilde, deduced with a geometrical logic that she could invite no one but Bonapartists—of whom she knew practically none. All the smart women of her acquaintance, all the amusing men, were ruthlessly barred because, with their Legitimist views or connexions, they might, according to Courvoisier logic, have given offence to the Imperial Highness. The latter, who in her own house entertained the flower of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was somewhat surprised when she found at Mme de Courvoisier's only a notorious old sponger whose husband had been a prefect under the Empire, the widow of the Director of Posts, and sundry others known for their loyalty to Napoleon III, for their stupidity and for their dullness. The Princesse Mathilde nevertheless in no way constrained the sweet and generous outpouring of her sovereign grace over these calamitous ugly ducklings, whom the Duchesse de Guermantes, for her part, took good care not to invite when it was her turn to entertain the Princess, but substituted for them, without any *a priori* reasoning about Bonapartism, the most brilliant coruscation of all the beauties, all the talents, all the celebrities whom, by some subtle sixth sense, she felt likely to be acceptable to the niece of the Emperor even when they actually belonged to the Royal House. Not even the Duc d'Aumale was excluded, and when, on withdrawing, the Princess, raising Mme de Guermantes from the ground where she had sunk in a curtsy and was about to kiss the august hand, embraced her on both cheeks, it was from the bottom of her heart that she was able to assure the Duchess that never had she spent a happier afternoon nor attended so successful a party. The Princesse de Parme was Courvoisier in her incapacity for innovation in social matters but unlike the Courvoisiers in that the surprise that was perpetually caused her by the Duchesse de Guermantes engendered in her not, as in them, antipathy, but wonderment. This feeling was still further enhanced by the infinitely backward state of the Princess's education. Mme de Guermantes was herself a great deal less advanced than she supposed. But she had only to be a little ahead of Mme de Parme to astound that lady, and, as the critics of each generation confine themselves to maintaining the direct opposite of the truths acknowledged by their predecessors, she had only to say that Flaubert, that arch-enemy of the bourgeoisie, had been bourgeois through and through, or that there was a great deal of Italian music in Wagner, to open before the Princess, at the cost of a nervous exhaustion that was constantly renewed, as before the eyes of a swimmer in a stormy sea, horizons that seemed to her unimaginable and remained for ever dim. A stupefaction caused also by the paradoxes uttered not only in connexion with works of art but with persons of their acquaintance and with current social events. Doubtless the incapacity that prevented Mme de Parme from distinguishing the true wit of the Guermantes from certain rudimentarily acquired forms of that wit (which made her believe in the high intellectual worth of certain Guermantes, especially certain female Guermantes, of whom afterwards she was bewildered to hear the Duchess confide to her with a smile that they were mere nitwits) was one of the causes of the astonishment which the Princess always felt on hearing Mme de Guermantes criticise other people. But there was another cause also, one which I, who knew at that time more books than people and literature better than life, explained to myself by thinking that the Duchess, living this worldly life the idleness and sterility of which are to a true social activity what, in art, criticism is to creation, extended to the persons who surrounded her the instability of viewpoint, the unhealthy thirst, of the caviller who, to slake a mind that has grown too dry, goes in search of no matter what paradox that is still fairly fresh, and will not hesitate to uphold the thirst-quenching opinion that the really great *Iphigenia* is Piccinni's and not Gluck's, and at a pinch that the true *Phèdre* is that of Pradon.

When an intelligent, witty, educated woman had married a shy bumpkin whom one seldom saw and never heard, Mme de Guermantes one fine day would find a rare intellectual pleasure not only in decrying the wife but in "discovering" the husband. In the Cambremer household, for example, if she had lived in that section of society at the time, she would have decreed that Mme de Cambremer was stupid, and on the other hand, that the interesting person, misunderstood, delightful, condemned to silence by a chattering wife but himself worth a thousand of her, was the Marquis, and the Duchess would have felt on declaring this the same kind of refreshment as the critic who, after people have been admiring *Hernani* for seventy years, confesses to a preference for *Le Lion amoureux*. And from this same morbid need of arbitrary novelties, if from her girlhood everyone had been pitying a model wife, a true saint, for being married to a scoundrel, one fine day Mme de Guermantes would assert that this scoundrel was perhaps a frivolous man but one with a heart of gold, whom the implacable harshness of his wife had driven to behave irrationally. I knew that it was not only between the works of different artists, in the long course of the centuries, but between the different works of the same artist, that criticism enjoyed thrusting back into the shade what for too long had been radiant and bringing to the fore what seemed doomed to permanent obscurity. I had not only seen Bellini, Winterhalter, the Jesuit architects, a Restoration cabinet-maker, come to take the place of men of genius who were described as tired simply because idle intellectuals had grown tired of them, as neurasthenics are always tired and fickle; I had seen Sainte-Beuve preferred alternately as critic and as poet, Musset rejected so far as his poetry went save for a few insignificant pieces, and extolled as a story-teller. No doubt certain essayists are mistaken when they set above the most famous scenes in *Le Cid* or *Polyeucte* some speech from *Le menteur* which, like an old plan, gives us information about the Paris of the day, but their predilection, justified if not by considerations of beauty at least by a documentary interest, is still too rational for our criticism run mad. It will barter the whole of Molière for a line from *L'Etourdi*, and even when it pronounces Wagner's *Tristan* a bore will except a "charming note on the horns" at the point where the hunt goes by. This depravity of taste helped me to understand the similar perversity in Mme de Guermantes that made her decide that a man of their world, who was recognised as a good fellow but a fool, was a monster of egoism, sharper than people thought, that another who was well known for his generosity might be considered the personification of avarice, that a good mother paid no

attention to her children, and that a woman generally supposed to be vicious was really actuated by the noblest sentiments. As though corrupted by the nullity of life in society, the intelligence and sensibility of Mme de Guermantes were too vacillating for disgust not to follow pretty swiftly in the wake of infatuation (leaving her still ready to be attracted afresh by the kind of cleverness which she had alternately sought and abandoned) and for the charm which she had found in some warm-hearted man not to change, if he came too often to see her, sought too freely from her a guidance which she was incapable of giving him, into an irritation which she believed to be produced by her admirer but which was in fact due to the utter impossibility of finding pleasure when one spends all one's time seeking it. The Duchess's vagaries of judgment spared no one, except her husband. He alone had never loved her; in him she had always felt an iron character, indifferent to her whims, contemptuous of her beauty, violent, one of those unbreakable wills under whose rule alone highly-strung people can find tranquillity. M. de Guermantes for his part, pursuing a single type of feminine beauty but seeking it in mistresses whom he constantly replaced, had, once he had left them, and to share with him in mocking them, one lasting and identical partner, who irritated him often by her chatter but whom he knew that everyone regarded as the most beautiful, the most virtuous, the cleverest, the best-read member of the aristocracy, as a wife whom he, M. de Guermantes, was only too fortunate to have found, who covered up for all his irregularities, entertained like no one else in the world, and upheld for their salon its position as the premier in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. This common opinion he himself shared; often bad-tempered with his wife, he was proud of her. If, being as niggardly as he was ostentatious, he refused her the most trifling sums for her charities or for the servants, yet he insisted on her having the most sumptuous clothes and the finest equipages in Paris. And finally, he enjoyed bringing out his wife's wit. Now, whenever Mme de Guermantes had just thought up, with reference to the merits and defects, suddenly transposed, of one of their friends, a new and succulent paradox, she longed to try it out on people capable of appreciating it, to bring out the full savour of its psychological originality and the brilliance of its epigrammatic malice. Of course these new opinions contained as a rule no more truth than the old, often less; but this very element of arbitrariness and unexpectedness conferred on them an intellectual quality which made them exciting to communicate. However, the patient on whom the Duchess was exercising her psychological skill was generally an intimate friend as to whom the people to whom she longed to hand on her discovery were entirely unaware that he was not still at the apex of her favour; thus Mme de Guermantes's reputation for being an incomparable friend, sentimental, tender and devoted, made it difficult for her to launch the attack herself; she could at the most intervene later on, as though under constraint, by taking up a cue in order to appease, to contradict in appearance but actually to support a partner who had taken it on himself to provoke her; this was precisely the role in which M. de Guermantes excelled.

As for social activities, Mme de Guermantes enjoyed yet another arbitrarily theatrical pleasure in expressing thereon some of those unexpected judgments which whipped the Princesse de Parme into a state of perpetual and delicious surprise. In the case of this particular pleasure of the Duchess's, it was not so much with the help of literary criticism as from the example of political life and the reports of parliamentary debates that I tried to understand in what it might consist. The successive and contradictory edicts by which Mme de Guermantes continually reversed the scale of values among the people of her world no longer sufficing to distract her, she sought also in the manner in which she ordered her own social behaviour, in which she accounted for her own most trifling decisions on points of fashion, to savour those artificial emotions, to fulfil those factitious obligations, which stir the feelings of parliaments and impress themselves on the minds of politicians. We know that when a minister explains to the Chamber that he believed himself to be acting rightly in following a line of conduct which does indeed appear quite straightforward to the commonsense person who reads the report of the sitting in his newspaper next morning, this commonsense reader nevertheless feels suddenly stirred and begins to doubt whether he has been right in approving the minister's conduct when he sees that the latter's speech was listened to in an uproar and punctuated with expressions of condemnation such as: "It's most serious!" pronounced by a Deputy whose name and titles are so long, and followed in the report by reactions so emphatic, that in the whole interruption the words "It's most serious!" occupy less room than a hemistich in an alexandrine. For instance in the days when M. de Guermantes, Prince des Laumes, sat in the Chamber, one used to read now and then in the Paris newspapers, although it was intended primarily for the Méséglise constituency, to show the electors there that they had not given their votes to an inactive or voiceless representative:

MONSIEUR DE GUERMANTES—BOUILLON, PRINCE DES LAUMES: "This is serious!" (*"Hear, hear!" from the centre and some of the benches on the right, loud exclamations from the extreme left.*)

The commonsense reader still retains a glimmer of loyalty to the sage minister, but his heart is convulsed with a fresh palpitation by the first words of the speaker who rises to reply:

"The astonishment, it is not too much to say the stupor" (*keen sensation on the right side of the House*) "that I have felt at the words of one who is still, I presume, a member of the Government ..." (*thunderous applause; several Deputies then rush towards the ministerial bench. The Under-Secretary of State for Posts and Telegraphs, without rising from his seat, gives an affirmative nod.*)

This "thunderous applause" carries away the last shred of resistance in the mind of the commonsense reader: he regards as an insult to the Chamber, monstrous in fact, a way of proceeding which in itself is of no great significance. It may be some quite straightforward item, such as wanting to make the rich pay more than the poor, bringing to light some piece of injustice, preferring peace to war, but he will find it scandalous and will see it as an offence to certain principles to which in fact he had never given a thought, which are not



engraved in the heart of man, but which move him strongly by reason of the acclamations which they provoke and the majorities which they assemble.

It must at the same time be recognised that this subtlety of the politician which served to explain to me the Guermantes circle, and other groups in society later on, is no more than the perversion of a certain nicety of interpretation often described by the expression "reading between the lines." If in representative assemblies there is absurdity owing to the perversion of this quality, there is equally stupidity, through the lack of it, in the public who take everything literally, who do not suspect a dismissal when a high dignitary is relieved of his office "at his own request," and say: "He cannot have been dismissed, since it was he who asked to go," or a defeat when, in the face of the Japanese advance, the Russians by a strategic manoeuvre fall back on stronger positions, prepared in advance, or a refusal when, a province having demanded its independence from the German Emperor, he grants it religious autonomy. It is possible, moreover (to revert to these sittings of the Chamber), that when they open the Deputies themselves are like the commonsense person who will read the published report. Learning that certain workers on strike have sent their delegates to confer with a minister, they may ask themselves naïvely: "There now, I wonder what they can have been saying; let's hope it's all settled," at the moment when the minister himself rises to address the House in a solemn silence which has already brought artificial emotions into play. The minister's first words: "There is no necessity for me to inform the Chamber that I have too high a sense of what is the duty of the Government to have received a deputation of which the authority entrusted to me could take no cognisance," produce a dramatic effect, for this was the one hypothesis which the commonsense of the Deputies had failed to foresee. But precisely because of its dramatic effect it is greeted with such applause that it is only after several minutes have passed that the minister can succeed in making himself heard, and on returning to his bench he will receive the congratulations of his colleagues. They are as deeply moved as on the day when the same minister failed to invite to a big official reception the chairman of the municipal council who supported the Opposition, and they declare that on this occasion as on the other he has acted with true statesmanship.

M. de Guermantes at this period of his life had, to the great scandal of the Courvoisiers, frequently been among the crowd of Deputies who came forward to congratulate the minister. I later heard it said that even at a time when he was playing a fairly important role in the Chamber and was being thought of in connexion with ministerial office or an embassy, he was, when a friend came to ask a favour of him, infinitely more simple, behaved politically a great deal less like a person of importance, than anyone else who did not happen to be Duc de Guermantes. For if he said that nobility was of no account, that he regarded his colleagues as equals, he did not believe it for a moment. He sought, and pretended to value, but really despised political position, and as he remained in his own eyes M. de Guermantes it did not envelop his person in that starchiness of high office which makes others unapproachable. And in this way his pride protected against every assault not only his manners, which were of an ostentatious familiarity, but also such true simplicity as he might actually possess.

To return to those artificial and dramatic decisions of hers, so like those of politicians, Mme de Guermantes was no less disconcerting to the Guermantes, the Courvoisiers, the Faubourg in general and, more than anyone, the Princesse de Parme, in her habit of issuing unaccountable decrees behind which one sensed latent principles which impressed one all the more the less one was aware of them. If the new Greek Minister gave a fancy-dress ball, everyone chose a costume and wondered what the Duchess would wear. One thought that she would appear as the Duchesse de Bourgogne, another suggested as probable the guise of Princess of Deryabar, a third Psyche. Finally a Courvoisier, having asked her: "What are you going as, Oriane?", provoked the one response of which nobody had thought: "Why, nothing at all!", which at once set every tongue wagging, as revealing Oriane's opinion as to the true social position of the new Greek Minister and the proper attitude to adopt towards him, that is to say the opinion which ought to have been foreseen, namely that a duchess "wasn't obliged" to attend the fancy-dress ball given by this new minister. "I don't see that there's any necessity to go to the Greek Minister's. I don't know him; I'm not Greek; why should I go to his house? I have nothing to do with him," said the Duchess.

"But everybody will be there, they say it's going to be charming!" cried Mme de Gallardon.

"But it's just as charming sometimes to sit by one's own fireside," replied Mme de Guermantes.

The Courvoisiers could not get over this, but the Guermantes, without copying their cousin, approved: "Naturally, everybody isn't in a position like Oriane to break with all the conventions. But if you look at it in one way you can't say she's wrong to want to show that we do go rather too far in grovelling before these foreigners who appear from heaven knows where."

Naturally, knowing the stream of comment which one or other attitude would not fail to provoke, Mme de Guermantes took as much pleasure in appearing at a party to which her hostess had not dared to count on her coming as in staying at home or spending the evening at the theatre with her husband on the night of a party to which "everybody was going," or, again, when people imagined that she would eclipse the finest diamonds with some historic diadem, by stealing into the room without a single jewel, and in another style of dress than what had been wrongly supposed to be essential to the occasion. Although she was anti-Dreyfusard (while believing Dreyfus to be innocent, just as she spent her life in the social world while believing only in ideas), she had created an enormous sensation at a party at the Princesse de Ligne's, first of all by remaining seated when all the ladies had risen to their feet as General Mercier entered the room, and then by getting up and asking for her carriage in a loud voice when a nationalist orator had begun to address the gathering, thereby showing that she did not consider that society was meant for talking politics in; and all heads had turned towards her at a Good Friday concert at which, although a Voltairean, she had refused to remain because she

thought it indecent to bring Christ on the stage. We know how important, even for the great queens of society, is that moment of the year at which the round of entertainment begins: so much so that the Marquise d'Amoncourt, who, from a need to say something, a psychological quirk, and also from a lack of sensitivity, was always making a fool of herself, had actually replied to somebody who had called to condole with her on the death of her father, M. de Montmorency: "What perhaps makes it still sadder is that it should come at a time when one's mirror is simply stuffed with cards!" Well, at this point in the social year, when people invited the Duchesse de Guermantes to dinner, hurrying so as to make sure that she was not already engaged, she declined for the one reason of which nobody in society would ever have thought: she was just setting off on a cruise in the Norwegian fjords, which were so interesting. The fashionable world was stunned, and, without any thought of following the Duchess's example, derived nevertheless from her action that sense of relief which one has in reading Kant when, after the most rigorous demonstration of determinism, one finds that above the world of necessity there is the world of freedom. Every invention of which no one had ever thought before excites the interest even of people who can derive no benefit from it. That of steam navigation was a small thing compared with the employment of steam navigation at that sedentary time of year called "the season." The idea that anyone could voluntarily renounce a hundred dinners or luncheons, twice as many afternoon teas, three times as many receptions, the most brilliant Mondays at the Opéra and Tuesdays at the Comédie-Française to visit the Norwegian fjords seemed to the Courvoisiers no more explicable than the idea of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, but conveyed to them a similar impression of independence and charm. So that not a day passed on which somebody might not be heard to ask, not merely: "You've heard Oriane's latest joke?" but "You know Oriane's latest?" and on "Oriane's latest" as on "Oriane's latest joke" would follow the comment: "How typical of Oriane!" "Isn't that pure Oriane?" Oriane's latest might be, for instance, that, having to write on behalf of a patriotic society to Cardinal X——, Bishop of Mâcon (whom M. de Guermantes when he spoke of him invariably called "Monsieur de Mascon," thinking this to be "old French"), when everyone was trying to imagine what form the letter would take, and had no difficulty as to the opening words, the choice lying between "Eminence" and "Monseigneur," but was puzzled as to the rest, Oriane's letter, to the general astonishment, began: "Monsieur le Cardinal," following an old academic form, or: "My cousin," this term being in use among the Princes of the Church, the Guermantes and crowned heads, who prayed to God to take each and all of them into "His fit and holy keeping." To start people on the topic of an "Oriane's latest" it was sufficient that at a performance at which all Paris was present and a most charming play was being given, when they looked for Mme de Guermantes in the boxes of the Princesse de Parme, the Princesse de Guermantes, countless other ladies who had invited her, they discovered her sitting by herself, in black, with a tiny hat on her head, in a stall in which she had arrived before the curtain rose. "You hear better, when it's a play that's worth listening to," she explained, to the scandal of the Courvoisiers and the admiring bewilderment of the Guermantes and the Princesse de Parme, who suddenly discovered that the "fashion" of hearing the beginning of a play was more up to date, was a proof of greater originality and intelligence (which need not astonish them, coming from Oriane) than arriving for the last act after a big dinner-party and having put in an appearance at a reception. Such were the various kinds of surprise for which the Princesse de Parme knew that she ought to be prepared if she put a literary or social question to Mme de Guermantes, and because of which, during these dinner-parties at Oriane's, Her Royal Highness never ventured upon the slightest topic save with the uneasy and enraptured prudence of the bather emerging from between two breakers.

Among the elements which, absent from the three or four other more or less equivalent salons that set the fashion for the Faubourg Saint-Germain, differentiated that of the Duchesse de Guermantes from them, just as Leibniz allows that each monad, while reflecting the entire universe, adds to it something of its own, one of the least attractive was habitually furnished by one or two extremely good-looking women who had no other right to be there but their beauty and the use that M. de Guermantes had made of them, and whose presence revealed at once, as does in other drawing-rooms that of certain otherwise unaccountable pictures, that in this household the husband was an ardent appreciator of feminine graces. They were all more or less alike, for the Duke had a taste for tall women, at once statuesque and airy, of a type half-way between the Venus de Milo and the Winged Victory; often fair, rarely dark, sometimes auburn, like the most recent, who was at this dinner, that Vicomtesse d'Arpajon whom he had loved so well that for a long time he had obliged her to send him as many as ten telegrams daily (which slightly irritated the Duchess) and corresponded with her by carrier pigeon when he was at Guermantes, and from whom moreover he had long been so incapable of tearing himself away that, one winter which he had had to spend at Parma, he travelled back regularly every week to Paris, spending two days in the train, in order to see her.

As a rule these handsome supernumeraries had been his mistresses but were no longer (as was Mme d'Arpajon's case) or were on the point of ceasing to be. It may well have been that the glamour which the Duchess enjoyed in their eyes and the hope of being invited to her house, though they themselves came from thoroughly aristocratic backgrounds, if of the second rank, had prompted them, even more than the good looks and generosity of the Duke, to yield to his desires. Not that the Duchess would have placed any insuperable obstacle in the way of their crossing her threshold: she was aware that in more than one of them she had found an ally thanks to whom she had obtained countless things which she wanted but which M. de Guermantes pitilessly denied his wife so long as he was not in love with someone else. And so the reason why they were not received by the Duchess until their liaison was already far advanced lay principally in the fact that the Duke, each time he embarked on a love affair, had imagined no more than a brief fling, as a reward for which he considered an invitation from his wife excessive. And yet he found himself offering this as the

price for far less, for a first kiss in fact, because he had met with unexpected resistance or, on the contrary, because there had been no resistance. In love it often happens that gratitude, the desire to give pleasure, make us generous beyond the limits of what hope and self-interest had foreseen. But then the realisation of this offer was hindered by conflicting circumstances. In the first place, all the women who had responded to M. de Guermantes's love, and sometimes even when they had not yet given themselves to him, he had one after another kept cut off from the world. He no longer allowed them to see anyone, spent almost all his time in their company, looked after the education of their children, to whom now and again, if one was to judge by certain striking resemblances later on, he had occasion to present a little brother or sister. And then if, at the start of the liaison, the prospect of an introduction to Mme de Guermantes, which had never been envisaged by the Duke, had played a part in the mistress's mind, the liaison in itself had altered the lady's point of view; the Duke was no longer for her merely the husband of the smartest woman in Paris, but a man with whom the new mistress was in love, a man moreover who had given her the means and the inclination for a more luxurious style of living and had transposed the relative importance in her mind of questions of social and of material advantage; while now and then a composite jealousy of Mme de Guermantes, into which all these factors entered, animated the Duke's mistresses. But this case was the rarest of all; besides, when the day appointed for the introduction at length arrived (at a point when as a rule it had more or less become a matter of indifference to the Duke, whose actions, like everyone else's, were more often dictated by previous actions than by the original motive which had ceased to exist), it frequently happened that it was Mme de Guermantes who had sought the acquaintance of the mistress in whom she hoped, and so greatly needed, to find a valuable ally against her dread husband. This is not to say that, except at rare moments, in their own house, when, if the Duchess talked too much, he let fall a few words or, more dreadful still, preserved a silence which petrified her, M. de Guermantes failed in his outward relations with his wife to observe what are called the forms. People who did not know them might easily be taken in. Sometimes in autumn, between racing at Deauville, taking the waters, and returning to Guermantes for the shooting, in the few weeks which people spend in Paris, since the Duchess had a liking for café-concerts, the Duke would go with her to spend the evening at one of these. The audience remarked at once, in one of those little open boxes in which there is just room for two, this Hercules in his "smoking" (for in France we give to everything that is more or less British the one name that it happens not to bear in England), his monocle screwed in his eye, a fat cigar, from which now and then he drew a puff of smoke, in his plump but finely shaped hand, on the ring-finger of which a sapphire glowed, keeping his eyes for the most part on the stage but, when he did let them fall upon the audience in which there was absolutely no one whom he knew, softening them with an air of gentleness, reserve, courtesy and consideration. When a song struck him as amusing and not too indecent, the Duke would turn round with a smile to his wife, would share with her, with a twinkle of good-natured complicity, the innocent merriment which the new song had aroused in him. And the spectators might believe that there was no better husband in the world than he, nor anyone more enviable than the Duchess—that woman outside whom every interest in the Duke's life lay, that woman whom he did not love, to whom he had never ceased to be unfaithful; and when the Duchess felt tired, they saw M. de Guermantes rise, put on her cloak with his own hands, arranging her necklaces so that they did not get caught in the lining, and clear a path for her to the exit with an assiduous and respectful attention which she received with the coldness of the woman of the world who sees in such behaviour simply conventional good manners, at times even with the slightly ironical bitterness of the disabused spouse who has no illusion left to shatter. But despite these externals (another element of that politeness which has transferred duty from the inner depths to the surface, at a period already remote but which still continues for its survivors) the life of the Duchess was by no means easy. M. de Guermantes only became generous and human again for a new mistress, who would, as it generally happened, take the Duchess's side; the latter saw the possibility arising for her once again of generousities towards inferiors, charities to the poor, and even for herself, later on, a new and sumptuous motor-car. But from the irritation which was provoked as a rule pretty rapidly in Mme de Guermantes by people whom she found too submissive, the Duke's mistresses were not exempt. Presently the Duchess grew tired of them. As it happened, at that moment too the Duke's liaison with Mme d'Arpajon was drawing to an end. Another mistress was in the offing.

No doubt the love which M. de Guermantes had borne each of them in succession would begin one day to make itself felt anew: in the first place this love, in dying, bequeathed them to the household like beautiful marble statues—beautiful to the Duke, become thus in part an artist, because he had loved them and was appreciative now of lines which he would not have appreciated without love—which brought into juxtaposition in the Duchess's drawing-room their forms that had long been inimical, devoured by jealousies and quarrels, and finally reconciled in the peace of friendship; and then this friendship itself was an effect of the love which had made M. de Guermantes observe in those who had been his mistresses virtues which exist in every human being but are perceptible only to the carnal eye, so much so that the ex-mistress who has become "a good friend" who would do anything in the world for one has become a cliché, like the doctor or father who is not a doctor or a father but a friend. But during a period of transition, the woman whom M. de Guermantes was preparing to abandon bewailed her lot, made scenes, showed herself exacting, appeared indiscreet, became a nuisance. The Duke would begin to take a dislike to her. Then Mme de Guermantes had a chance to bring to light the real or imagined defects of a person who annoyed her. Known to be kind, she would receive the constant telephone calls, the confidences, the tears of the abandoned mistress and make no complaint. She would laugh at them, first with her husband, then with a few chosen friends. And imagining that the pity which she showed for the unfortunate woman gave her the right to make fun of her, even to her

face, whatever the lady might say, provided it could be included among the attributes of the ridiculous character which the Duke and Duchess had recently fabricated for her, Mme de Guermentes had no hesitation in exchanging glances of ironical connivance with her husband.

Meanwhile, as she sat down to table, the Princesse de Parme remembered that she had thought of inviting Mme d'Heudicourt to the Opéra, and, wishing to be assured that this would not in any way offend Mme de Guermentes, was preparing to sound her.

At this moment M. de Grouchy entered, his train having been held up for an hour owing to a derailment. He made what excuses he could. His wife, had she been a Courvoisier, would have died of shame. But Mme de Grouchy was not a Guermentes for nothing. As her husband was apologising for being late, "I see," she broke in, "that even in little things arriving late is a tradition in your family."

"Sit down, Grouchy, and don't let them fluster you," said the Duke. "Although I move with the times, I must admit that the Battle of Waterloo had its points, since it brought about the Restoration of the Bourbons, and, better still, in a way that made them unpopular. But you seem to be a regular Nimrod!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I did get quite a good bag. I shall take the liberty of sending the Duchess six brace of pheasant tomorrow."

An idea seemed to flicker in the eyes of Mme de Guermentes. She insisted that M. de Grouchy must not give himself the trouble of sending the pheasants. And making a sign to the betrothed footman with whom I had exchanged a few words on my way from the Elstir room, "Poullein," she told him, "you will go tomorrow and fetch M. le Comte's pheasants and bring them straight back—you won't mind, will you, Grouchy, if I make a few little presents. Basin and I can't eat a dozen pheasants by ourselves."

"But the day after tomorrow will be soon enough," said M. de Grouchy.

"No, tomorrow suits me better," the Duchess insisted.

Poullein had turned pale; he would miss his rendezvous with his sweetheart. This was quite enough for the diversion of the Duchess, who liked to appear to be taking a human interest in everyone.

"I know it's your day off," she went on to Poullein, "all you've got to do is change with Georges; he can take tomorrow off and stay in the day after."

But the day after, Poullein's sweetheart would not be free. He had no interest in going out then. As soon as he had left the room, everyone complimented the Duchess on her kindness towards her servants.

"But I only behave towards them as I'd like people to behave to me."

"That's just it. They can say they've found a good place with you all right."

"Oh, nothing so very wonderful. But I think they all like me. That one is a little irritating because he's in love. He thinks it incumbent on him to go about with a long face."

At this point Poullein reappeared.

"You're quite right," said M. de Grouchy, "he doesn't look very cheerful. With those fellows one has to be kind but not too kind."

"I admit I'm not a very dreadful mistress. He'll have nothing to do all day but call for your pheasants, sit in the house doing nothing and eat his share of them."

"There are plenty of people who would be glad to be in his place," said M. de Grouchy, for envy makes men blind.

"Oriane," began the Princesse de Parme, "I had a visit the other day from your cousin d'Heudicourt; of course she's a highly intelligent woman; she's a Guermentes—need I say more?—but they tell me she has a spiteful tongue."

The Duke fastened on his wife a slow gaze of feigned stupefaction. Mme de Guermentes began to laugh. Gradually the Princess became aware of their pantomime.

"But ... do you mean to say ... you don't agree with me?" she stammered with growing uneasiness.

"Really, Ma'am, it's too good of you to pay any attention to Basin's faces. Now, Basin, you're not to hint nasty things about our cousins."

"Does he think she's too malicious?" inquired the Princess briskly.

"Oh, dear me, no!" replied the Duchess. "I don't know who told Your Highness that she was malicious. On the contrary, she's an excellent creature who never spoke ill of anyone, or did any harm to anyone."

"Ah!" sighed Mme de Parme, greatly relieved. "I must say I'd never noticed it either. But I know it's often difficult not to be a bit malicious when one has a great deal of wit ..."

"Ah! now that is a quality of which she has even less."

"Less wit?" asked the stupefied Princess.

"Come now, Oriane," broke in the Duke in a plaintive tone, casting to right and left of him a glance of amusement, "you heard the Princess tell you that she was a superior woman."

"But isn't she?"

"Superior in chest measurement, at any rate."

"Don't listen to him, Ma'am, he's having you on; she's as stupid as a (h'm) goose," came in a loud and husky voice from Mme de Guermentes, who, a great deal more "old world" even than the Duke when she wasn't trying, often deliberately sought to be, but in a manner entirely different from the deliquescent, lace jabot style of her husband and in reality far more subtle, with a sort of almost peasant pronunciation which had a harsh and delicious flavour of the soil. "But she's the best woman in the world. Besides, I don't really know that one can call it stupidity when it's carried to such a point as that. I don't believe I ever met anyone quite like her; she's a case for a specialist, there's something pathological about her, she's a sort of 'natural' or cretin or 'mooncalf,' like the people you see in melodramas, or in *L'Arlésienne*. I always ask myself, when she

comes here, whether the moment may not have arrived at which her intelligence is going to dawn, which makes me a little nervous always."

The Princess marvelled at these expressions, but remained astonished by the verdict. "She repeated to me—and so did Mme d'Epinay—your remark about 'Teaser Augustus.' It's delicious," she put in.

M. de Guermantes explained the joke to me. I wanted to tell him that his brother, who pretended not to know me, was expecting me that very evening at eleven o'clock. But I had not asked Robert whether I might mention this assignation, and as the fact that M. de Charlus had practically fixed it with me himself directly contradicted what he had told the Duchess, I judged it more tactful to say nothing.

"'Teaser Augustus' isn't bad," said M. de Guermantes, "but Mme d'Heudicourt probably didn't tell you a far wittier remark Oriane made to her the other day in reply to an invitation to luncheon."

"Oh, no! Do tell me!"

"Now, Basin, you keep quiet. In the first place, it was a stupid remark, and it will make the Princess think me inferior even to my nitwit of a cousin. Though I don't know why I should call her my cousin. She's one of Basin's cousins. Still, I believe she is related to me in some sort of way."

"Oh!" cried the Princesse de Parme at the idea that she could possibly think Mme de Guermantes stupid, and protesting desperately that nothing could ever make the Duchess fall from the place she held in her estimation.

"Besides, we've already deprived her of the qualities of the mind, and since the remark in question tends to deny certain qualities of the heart, it seems to me inopportune to repeat it."

"Deny her!" 'Inopportune!' How well she expresses herself!" said the Duke with a pretence of irony, to win admiration for the Duchess.

"Now, then, Basin, you're not to make fun of your wife."

"I should explain to your Royal Highness," went on the Duke, "that Oriane's cousin may be superior, good, stout, anything you like to mention, but she is not exactly—what shall I say—lavish."

"Yes, I know, she's terribly close-fisted," broke in the Princess.

"I should not have ventured to use the expression, but you have hit on exactly the right word. It's reflected in her house-keeping, and especially in the cooking, which is excellent, but strictly rationed."

"Which gives rise to some quite amusing scenes," M. de Bréauté interrupted him. "For instance, my dear Basin, I was down at Heudicourt one day when you were expected, Oriane and yourself. They had made the most sumptuous preparations when a footman brought in a telegram during the afternoon to say that you weren't coming."

"That doesn't surprise me!" said the Duchess, who not only was difficult to get, but liked people to know as much.

"Your cousin read the telegram, was duly distressed, then immediately, without missing a trick, telling herself that there was no point in going to unnecessary expense for so unimportant a gentleman as myself, called the footman back: 'Tell the cook not to put on the chicken!' she shouted after him. And that evening I heard her asking the butler: 'Well? What about the beef that was left over yesterday? Aren't you going to let us have that?' "

"All the same, one must admit that the fare you get there is of the very best," said the Duke, who fancied that in using this expression he was showing himself to be very old school. "I don't know any house where one eats better."

"Or less," put in the Duchess.

"It's quite wholesome and quite adequate for what you would call a vulgar yokel like myself," went on the Duke. "One doesn't outrun one's appetite."

"Oh, if it's to be taken as a cure, that's another matter. It's certainly more healthy than sumptuous. Not that it's as good as all that," added Mme de Guermantes, who was not at all pleased that the title of "best table in Paris" should be awarded to any but her own. "With my cousin it's just the same as with those costive authors who turn out a one-act play or a sonnet every fifteen years. The sort of thing people call little masterpieces, trifles that are perfect gems, in fact what I loathe most in the world. The cooking at Zénaïde's is not bad, but you would think it more ordinary if she was less parsimonious. There are some things her cook does quite well, and others he doesn't bring off. I've had some thoroughly bad dinners there, as in most houses, only they've done me less harm there because the stomach is, after all, more sensitive to quantity than to quality."

"Well, to get on with the story," the Duke concluded, "Zénaïde insisted that Oriane should go to luncheon there, and as my wife is not very fond of going out anywhere she resisted, wanted to be sure that under the pretence of a quiet meal she was not being trapped into some great junket, and tried in vain to find out who else would be of the party. 'You must come,' Zénaïde insisted, boasting of all the good things there would be to eat. 'You're going to have a purée of chestnuts, I need say no more than that, and there will be seven little *bouchées à la reine*.' 'Seven little *bouchées*!' cried Oriane, 'that means that we shall be at least eight!' "

There was silence for a few seconds, and then the Princess, having seen the point, let her laughter explode like a peal of thunder. "Ah! 'Then we shall be eight'—it's exquisite. How very well phrased!" she said, having by a supreme effort recalled the expression she had heard used by Mme d'Epinay, which this time was more appropriate.

"Oriane, that was very charming of the Princess, she said your remark was well phrased."

"But, my dear, you're telling me nothing new. I know how clever the Princess is," replied Mme de Guermantes, who readily appreciated a remark when it was uttered at once by a royal personage and in praise of her own wit. "I'm very proud that Ma'am should appreciate my humble phrasings. I don't remember,

though, that I ever did say such a thing, and if I did, it must have been to flatter my cousin, for if she had ordered seven 'mouthfuls,' the mouths, if I may so express myself, would have been a round dozen if not more."

During this time the Comtesse d'Arpajon, who, before dinner, had told me that her aunt would have been so happy to show me round her house in Normandy, was saying to me over the Prince d'Agrigente's head that where she would most like to entertain me was in the Côte d'Or, because there, at Pont-le-Duc, she would be at home.

"The archives of the château would interest you. There are some absolutely fascinating correspondences between all the most prominent people of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I've spent many wonderful hours there, living in the past," she declared, and I remembered that M. de Guermantes had told me that she was extremely well up in literature.

"She owns all M. de Bornier's manuscripts," went on the Princess, speaking of Mme d'Heudicourt, and anxious to make the most of the good reasons she might have for befriending that lady.

"She must have dreamed it, I don't believe she ever even knew him," said the Duchess.

"What is especially interesting is that these correspondences are with people of different countries," went on the Comtesse d'Arpajon who, allied to the principal ducal and even reigning families of Europe, was always glad to remind people of the fact.

"Surely, Oriane," said M. de Guermantes, meaningly, "you can't have forgotten that dinner-party where you had M. de Bornier sitting next to you!" "But, Basin," the Duchess interrupted him, "if you mean to inform me that I knew M. de Bornier, why of course I did, he even called upon me several times, but I could never bring myself to invite him to the house because I should always have been obliged to have it disinfected afterwards with formol. As for the dinner you mean, I remember it only too well, but it was certainly not at Zénaïde's, who never set eyes on Bornier in her life and would probably think if you spoke to her of *La Fille de Roland* that you meant a Bonaparte princess who is said to be engaged to the son of the King of Greece;<sup>25</sup> no, it was at the Austrian Embassy. Dear Hoyos imagined he was giving me a great treat by planting that pestiferous academician on the chair next to mine. I quite thought I had a squadron of mounted police sitting beside me. I was obliged to stop my nose as best I could all through dinner; I didn't dare breathe until the gruyère came round."

M. de Guermantes, having achieved his secret objective, made a furtive examination of his guests' faces to judge the effect of the Duchess's pleasantry.

"As a matter of fact I find that old correspondences have a peculiar charm," the lady who was well up in literature and had such fascinating letters in her château went on, in spite of the intervening head of the Prince d'Agrigente. "Have you noticed how often a writer's letters are superior to the rest of his work? What's the name of that author who wrote *Salammbô*?"

I should have liked not to have to reply in order not to prolong this conversation, but I felt it would be disobliging to the Prince d'Agrigente, who had pretended to know perfectly well who *Salammbô* was by and out of pure politeness to be leaving it to me to say, but who was now in a painful quandary.

"Flaubert," I ended up by saying, but the vigorous signs of assent that came from the Prince's head smothered the sound of my reply, so that my interlocutress was not exactly sure whether I had said Paul Bert or Fulbert, names which she did not find entirely satisfactory.

"In any case," she went on, "how intriguing his correspondence is, and how superior to his books! It explains him, in fact, because one sees from everything he says about the difficulty he has in writing a book that he wasn't a real writer, a gifted man."

"Talking of correspondence, I must say I find Gambetta's admirable," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, to show that she was not afraid to be found taking an interest in a proletarian and a radical. M. de Bréauté, who fully appreciated the brilliance of this feat of daring, gazed round him with an eye at once tipsy and affectionate, after which he wiped his monocle.

"Gad, it's infernally dull, that *Fille de Roland*," said M. de Guermantes (who was still on the subject of M. de Bornier), with the satisfaction which he derived from the sense of his own superiority over a work which had bored him so much, and perhaps also from the *suave mari magno* feeling one has in the middle of a good dinner, when one recalls such terrible evenings in the past. "Still, there were some quite good lines in it, and a patriotic feeling."

I made a remark that implied that I had no admiration for M. de Bornier.

"Ah! have you got something against him?" the Duke asked with genuine curiosity, for he always imagined when anyone spoke ill of a man that it must be on account of a personal resentment, just as to speak well of a woman marked the beginning of a love affair. "You've obviously got a grudge against him. What did he do to you? You must tell us. Why yes, there must be some skeleton in the cupboard or you wouldn't run him down. It's long-winded, *La Fille de Roland*, but it's quite strong in parts."

"Strong is just the word for such an odorous author," Mme de Guermantes broke in sarcastically. "If this poor boy ever found himself in his company I can quite understand that he got up his nostrils!"

"I must confess, though, Ma'am," the Duke went on, addressing the Princesse de Parme, "that quite apart from *La Fille de Roland*, in literature and even in music I'm terribly old-fashioned; no old junk can be too stale for my taste. You won't believe me, perhaps, but in the evenings, if my wife sits down to the piano, I find myself calling for some old tune by Auber or Boieldieu, or even Beethoven! That's the sort of thing I like. As for Wagner, he sends me to sleep at once."

"You're wrong there," said Mme de Guermantes. "In spite of his insufferable long-windedness, Wagner was a genius. *Lohengrin* is a masterpiece. Even in *Tristan* there are some intriguing passages here and there. And the Spinning Chorus in the *Flying Dutchman* is a perfect marvel."

"Aren't I right, Babal," said M. de Guermantes, turning to M. de Bréauté, "what we like is:

The gatherings of noble companions  
Are all of them held in this charming haunt.<sup>26</sup>

It's delightful. And *Fra Diavolo* and the *Magic Flute*, and *Le Chalet*, and the *Marriage of Figaro*, and *Les Diamants de la Couronne*—there's music for you! It's the same thing in literature. For instance, I adore Balzac, *Le Bal de Sceaux*, *Les Mohicans de Paris*."

"Ah! my dear man, if you're off on the subject of Balzac we'll be here all night. Keep it for some evening when Mémé's here. He's even better, he knows it all by heart."

Irritated by his wife's interruption, the Duke held her for some seconds under the fare of a menacing silence. Meanwhile Mme d'Arpajon had been exchanging with the Princesse de Parme some remarks about poetry, tragic and otherwise, which did not reach me distinctly until I caught the following from Mme d'Arpajon: "Oh, I quite agree with all that, I admit he makes the world seem ugly because he's unable to distinguish between ugliness and beauty, or rather because his insufferable vanity makes him believe that everything he says is beautiful. I agree with your Highness that in the piece in question there are some ridiculous things, unintelligible, and errors of taste, and that it's difficult to understand, that it's as much trouble to read as if it was written in Russian or Chinese, because obviously it's anything in the world but French; but still, when one has taken the trouble, how richly one is rewarded, it's so full of imagination!"

I had missed the opening sentences of this little lecture. I gathered in the end not only that the poet incapable of distinguishing between beauty and ugliness was Victor Hugo, but furthermore that the poem which was as difficult to understand as Chinese or Russian was a piece dating from the poet's earliest period, and perhaps even nearer to Mme Deshoulières<sup>27</sup> than to the Victor Hugo of the *Légende des Siècles*. Far from thinking Mme d'Arpajon ridiculous, I saw her (the first person at this table, so real and so ordinary, at which I had sat down with such keen disappointment), I saw her in my mind's eye crowned with that lace cap, with the long spiral ringlets falling from it on either side, which was worn by Mme de Rémusat, Mme de Broglie, Mme de Saint-Aulaire, all those distinguished ladies who in their delightful letters quote with such learning and such aptness Sophocles, Schiller and the *Imitation*, but in whom the earliest poetry of the Romantics induced the alarm and exhaustion inseparable for my grandmother from the later verses of Stéphane Mallarmé.

When the child appears, the family circle  
Applauds with loud cries . .

"Mme d'Arpajon is very fond of poetry," said the Princesse de Parme to her hostess, impressed by the ardent tone in which the speech had been delivered.

"No, she doesn't understand the first thing about it," replied Mme de Guermantes in an undertone, taking advantage of the fact that Mme d'Arpajon, who was dealing with an objection raised by General de Beautreillis, was too intent upon what she herself was saying to hear what was being murmured by the Duchess. "She has become literary since she's been forsaken. I may tell your Highness that it's I who have to bear the brunt of it because it's to me that she comes to complain whenever Basin hasn't been to see her, which is practically every day. But it isn't my fault, after all, if she bores him, and I can't force him to go to her, although I'd rather he were a little more faithful, because then I shouldn't see quite so much of her myself. But she drives him mad and I'm not surprised. She isn't a bad sort, but she's boring to a degree you can't imagine. She gives me such a headache every day that I'm obliged to take a pyramidon tablet whenever she comes. And all this because Basin took it into his head for a year or so to go to bed with her. And on top of that to have a footman who's in love with a little tart and goes about with a long face if I don't ask the young person to leave her profitable pavement for half an hour and come to tea with me! Oh! life is really too tedious!" the Duchess languorously concluded.

Mme d'Arpajon bored M. de Guermantes principally because he had recently become the lover of another woman, whom I discovered to be the Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc. As it happened, the footman who had been deprived of his day off was at that moment waiting at table. And it struck me that, still disconsolate, he was doing it with some lack of composure, for I noticed that in handing the dish to M. de Châtellerault he performed his task so awkwardly that the young Duke's elbow came in contact several times with his. The young Duke showed no sign of annoyance with the blushing footman, but on the contrary looked up at him with a smile in his clear blue eyes. This good humour seemed to me to betoken kindness on the guest's part. But the insistency of his smile led me to think that, aware of the servant's discomfiture, what he felt was perhaps a malicious amusement.

"But, my dear, you know you're not revealing any new discovery when you tell us about Victor Hugo," went on the Duchess, this time addressing Mme d'Arpajon whom she had just seen turn round with a worried look. "You mustn't expect to launch that young genius. Everybody knows that he has talent. What is utterly detestable is the Victor Hugo of the last stage, the *Légende des Siècles*, I forget all their names. But in the *Feuilles d'Automne*, the *Chants du Crépuscule*, there's much of a poet, a true poet. Even in the *Contemplations*," went on the

Duchess, whom none of her listeners dared to contradict, and with good reason, “there are still some quite pretty things. But I confess that I prefer not to venture further than the *Crépuscule*! And then in the finer poems of Victor Hugo, and there really are some, one frequently comes across an idea, even a profound idea.”

And with just the right shade of feeling, bringing out the sorrowful thought with the full force of her intonation, projecting it somewhere beyond her voice, and fixing straight in front of her a charming, dreamy gaze, the Duchess slowly recited:

“Sorrow is a fruit, God does not cause it to grow  
On a branch that is still too feeble to bear it.

Or again:

The dead last so short a time ...  
Alas, in the coffin they crumble into dust,  
Less quickly than in our hearts!”

And, while a smile of disillusionment puckered her sorrowful lips with a graceful sinuosity, the Duchess fastened on Mme d’Arpajon the dreamy gaze of her lovely clear blue eyes. I was beginning to know them, as well as her voice, with its heavy drawl, its harsh savour. In those eyes and in that voice, I recognised much of the life of nature round Combray. Certainly, in the affectation with which that voice betrayed at times a rudeness of the soil, there was more than one element: the wholly provincial origin of one branch of the Guermantes family, which had for long remained more localised, more hardy, wilder, more combative than the rest; and then the ingrained habit of really distinguished people and people of intelligence who know that distinction does not lie in mincing speech, and the habit of nobles who fraternise more readily with their peasants than with the middle classes; peculiarities all of which the regal position of Mme de Guermantes enabled her to display more freely, to bring out in full fig. It appears that the same voice existed also in some of her sisters, whom she detested, and who, less intelligent than herself and almost humbly married, if one may use this adverb to speak of unions with obscure noblemen, holed up on their provincial estates, or, in Paris, in one of the dimmer reaches of Faubourg society, possessed this voice also but had curbed it, corrected it, softened it so far as lay in their power, just as it is very rarely that any of us has the courage of his own originality and does not apply himself diligently to resembling the most approved models. But Oriane was so much more intelligent, so much richer, above all, so much more in vogue than her sisters, she had, when Princesse des Laumes, cut so successful a figure in the company of the Prince of Wales, that she had realised that this discordant voice was an attraction, and had made it, in the social sphere, with the courage of originality rewarded by success, what in the theatrical sphere a Réjane or a Jeanne Granier (which implies no comparison, naturally, between the respective merits and talents of those two actresses) had made of theirs, something admirable and distinctive which possibly certain Réjane and Granier sisters, whom no one has ever known, strove to conceal as a defect.

To all these reasons for displaying her local originality, Mme de Guermantes’s favourite writers—Mérimée, Meilhac and Halévy—had brought in addition, together with a respect for “naturalness,” a feeling for the prosaic by which she attained to poetry and a purely society spirit which called up distant landscapes before my eyes. Besides, the Duchess was fully capable, adding to these influences an artful refinement of her own, of having chosen for the majority of her words the pronunciation that seemed to her most “Ile-de-France,” most “Champenoise,” since, if not quite to the same extent as her sister-in-law Marsantes, she rarely strayed beyond the pure vocabulary that might have been used by an old French writer. And when one was tired of the composite patchwork of modern speech, it was very restful to listen to Mme de Guermantes’s talk, even though one knew it could express far fewer things—almost as restful, if one was alone with her and she restrained and clarified the flow of her speech still further, as listening to an old song. Then, as I looked at and listened to Mme de Guermantes, I could see, imprisoned in the perpetual afternoon of her eyes, a sky of the Ile-de-France or of Champagne spread itself, grey-blue, oblique, with the same angle of inclination as in the eyes of Saint-Loup.

Thus, through these diverse influences, Mme de Guermantes expressed at once the most ancient aristocratic France, then, much later, the manner in which the Duchesse de Broglie might have enjoyed and found fault with Victor Hugo under the July Monarchy, and, finally, a keen taste for the literature that sprang from Mérimée and Meilhac. The first of these influences attracted me more than the second, did more to console me for the disappointments of my pilgrimage to and arrival in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, so different from what I had imagined it to be; but even the second I preferred to the last. For, while Mme de Guermantes was almost involuntarily Guermantes, her Pailleronism,<sup>28</sup> her taste for the younger Dumas were self-conscious and deliberate. As this taste was the opposite of my own, she furnished my mind with literature when she talked to me of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and never seemed to me so stupidly Faubourg Saint-Germain as when she talked literature.

Moved by this last quotation, Mme d’Arpajon exclaimed: “These relics of the heart, they also have their dust!”—Monsieur, you must write that down for me on my fan,” she said to M. de Guermantes.

“Poor woman, I feel sorry for her!” said the Princesse de Parme to Mme de Guermantes.

“No, really, Ma’am, you mustn’t be soft-hearted, she has only got what she deserves.”



"But—you'll forgive my saying this to you—she does really love him all the same!"

"Oh, not at all; she isn't capable of it; she thinks she loves him just as she thought just now she was quoting Victor Hugo when she was reciting a line from Musset. Look," the Duchess went on in a melancholy tone, "nobody would be more touched than myself by a true feeling. But let me give you an example. Only yesterday she made a terrible scene with Basin. Your Highness thinks perhaps that it was because he's in love with other women, because he no longer loves her; not in the least, it was because he won't put her sons up for the Jockey. Is that the behaviour of a woman in love? No! I will go further," Mme de Guermantes added with precision, "she is a person of rare insensitivity."

Meanwhile it was with an eye sparkling with satisfaction that M. de Guermantes had listened to his wife talking about Victor Hugo "point-blank" and quoting those few lines. The Duchess might frequently irritate him, but at moments such as this he was proud of her. "Oriane is really extraordinary. She can talk about anything, she has read everything. She couldn't possibly have guessed that the conversation this evening would turn on Victor Hugo. Whatever subject you take her on at, she's ready for you, she can hold her own with the most learned scholars. This young man must be quite captivated."

"But do let's change the subject," Mme de Guermantes added, "because she's dreadfully susceptible ... You must think me very old-fashioned," she went on, turning to me, "I know that nowadays it's considered a weakness to care for ideas in poetry, poetry with some thought in it."

"Old-fashioned?" asked the Princesse de Parme, quivering with the slight shock produced by this new wave which she had not expected, although she knew that the Duchess's conversation always held in store for her those continuous and delightful thrills, that breath-catching panic, that wholesome exhaustion after which her thoughts instinctively turned to the necessity of taking a footbath in a dressing cabin and a brisk walk to "restore her circulation."

"For my part, no, Oriane," said Mme de Brissac, "I don't in the least object to Victor Hugo's having ideas, quite the contrary, but I do object to his seeking them in everything that's monstrous. It was he who accustomed us to ugliness in literature. There's quite enough ugliness in life already. Why can't we be allowed at least to forget it while we're reading? A distressing spectacle from which we should turn away in real life, that's what attracts Victor Hugo."

"Victor Hugo is not so realistic as Zola though, surely?" asked the Princesse de Parme.

The name of Zola did not stir a muscle on the face of M. de Beautreillis. The General's anti-Dreyfusism was too deep-rooted for him to seek to give expression to it. And his benign silence when anyone broached these topics touched the layman's heart as a proof of the same delicacy that a priest shows in avoiding any reference to your religious duties, a financier in taking pains not to recommend the companies which he himself controls, a strong man in behaving with lamblike gentleness and not hitting you in the jaw.

"I know you're related to Admiral Jurien de La Gravière," Mme de Varambon, the lady-in-waiting to the Princesse de Parme, said to me with a knowing look. An excellent but limited woman, she had been procured for the Princess long ago by the Duke's mother. She had not previously addressed me, and I could never afterwards, despite the admonitions of the Princess and my own protestations, get out of her mind the idea that I was in some way connected with the admiral-academician, who was a complete stranger to me. The obstinate persistence of the Princesse de Parme's lady-in-waiting in seeing in me a nephew of Admiral Jurien de La Gravière was in itself quite an ordinary form of silliness. But the mistake she made was only an extreme and desiccated sample of the numberless mistakes, more frivolous, more pointed, unwitting or deliberate, which accompany one's name on the label which the world attaches to one. I remember a friend of the Guermantes who expressed a keen desire to meet me, and gave me as his reason that I was a great friend of his cousin, Mme de Chaussegros. "She's a charming person, and so fond of you." I scrupulously, though quite vainly, insisted on the fact that there must be some mistake, as I did not know Mme de Chaussegros. "Then it's her sister you know; it comes to the same thing. She met you in Scotland." I had never been to Scotland, and took the fruitless trouble, in my honesty, to apprise my interlocutor of the fact. It was Mme de Chaussegros herself who had said that she knew me, and no doubt sincerely believed it, as a result of some initial confusion, for from that time onwards she never failed to greet me whenever she saw me. And since, after all, the world in which I moved was precisely that in which Mme de Chaussegros moved, my humility had neither rhyme nor reason. To say that I was an intimate friend of the Chaussegros family was, literally, a mistake, but from the social point of view it roughly corresponded to my position, if one can speak of the social position of so young a man as I then was. It therefore mattered not in the least that this friend of the Guermantes should tell me things that were untrue about myself, he neither lowered nor raised me (from the social point of view) in the idea which he continued to hold of me. And when all is said, for those of us who are not professional actors, the tedium of living always in the same character is dispelled for a moment, as if we were to go on the boards, when another person forms a false idea of us, imagines that we are friends with a lady whom we do not know and are reported to have met in the course of a delightful journey which we have never made. Errors that multiply themselves and are harmless when they do not have the inflexible rigidity of the one which had been committed, and continued for the rest of her life to be committed, in spite of my denials, by the imbecile lady-in-waiting to Mme de Parme, rooted for all time in the belief that I was related to the tiresome Admiral Jurien de La Gravière. "She's not very strong in the head," the Duke confided to me, "and besides, she ought not to indulge in too many libations. I fancy she's slightly under the influence of Bacchus." As a matter of fact Mme de Varambon had drunk nothing but water, but the Duke liked to seize opportunities for his favourite phrases.

"But Zola is not a realist, Ma'am, he's a poet!" said Mme de Guermantes, drawing inspiration from the critical essays she had read in recent years and adapting them to her own personal genius. Agreeably buffeted hitherto, in the course of the bath of wit, a bath stirred up specially for her, which she was taking this evening and which, she considered, must be particularly good for her health, letting herself be borne up by the waves of paradox which curled and broke one after another, at this, even more enormous than the rest, the Princesse de Parme jumped for fear of being knocked over. And it was with a catch in her voice, as though she had lost her breath, that she now gasped: "Zola a poet!"

"Why, yes," answered the Duchess with a laugh, entranced by this display of suffocation. "Your Highness must have remarked how he magnifies everything he touches. You will tell me that he only touches ... what brings luck! But he makes it into something colossal. His is the epic dungheap! He is the Homer of the sewers! He hasn't enough capital letters to write the *mot de Cambronne*."<sup>29</sup>

Despite the extreme exhaustion which she was beginning to feel, the Princess was enchanted; never had she felt better. She would not have exchanged for an invitation to Schönbrunn, although that was the one thing that really flattered her, these divine dinner-parties at Mme de Guermantes's, made invigorating by so liberal a dose of Attic salt.

"He writes it with a big 'C'," exclaimed Mme d'Arpajon.

"Surely with a big 'M', I think, my dear," replied Mme de Guermantes, exchanging first with her husband a merry glance which implied: "Did you ever hear such an idiot?"

"Wait a minute, now," Mme de Guermantes turned to me, fixing on me a tender, smiling gaze, because, as an accomplished hostess, she was anxious to display her own knowledge of the artist who interested me particularly and to give me, if need be, an opportunity to exhibit mine, "wait now," she said, gently waving her feather fan, so conscious was she at this moment that she was exercising to the full the duties of hospitality, and, that she might be found wanting in none of them, making a sign also to the servants to help me to more of the asparagus with *mousseline* sauce, "wait now, I do believe that Zola has actually written an essay on Elstir, the painter whose paintings you were looking at just now—the only ones of his I care for, incidentally."

As a matter of fact she hated Elstir's work, but found a unique quality in anything that was in her own house. I asked M. de Guermantes if he knew the name of the gentleman in the tall hat who figured in the picture of the crowd and whom I recognised as the same person whose formal portrait the Guermantes also had and had hung beside the other, both dating more or less from the same early period in which Elstir's personality had not yet completely emerged and he modelled himself a little on Manet.

"Oh, heavens!" he replied, "I know it's a fellow who is quite well-known and no fool either in his own line, but I have no head for names. I have it on the tip of my tongue, Monsieur ... Monsieur ... oh, well, it doesn't matter, I've forgotten. Swann would be able to tell you. It was he who made Mme de Guermantes buy all that stuff. She's always too good-natured, afraid of hurting people's feelings if she refuses to do things; between ourselves, I believe he's landed us with a lot of daubs. What I *can* tell you is that the gentleman you mean has been a sort of Maecenas to M. Elstir—he launched him and has often helped him out of difficulties by commissioning pictures from him. As a compliment to this man—if you call it a compliment, it's a matter of taste—he painted him standing about among that crowd, where with his Sunday-go-to-meeting look he creates a distinctly odd effect. He may be no end of a pundit but he's evidently not aware of the proper time and place for a top hat. With that thing on his head, among all those bare-headed girls, he looks like a little country lawyer on the spree. But tell me, you seem quite gone on his pictures. If I'd only known, I should have had it all at my fingertips. Not that there's much need to rack one's brains to get to the bottom of M. Elstir's work, as there would be for Ingres's *Source* or the *Princes in the Tower* by Paul Delaroche. What one appreciates in his work is that it's shrewdly observed, amusing, Parisian, and then one passes on to the next thing. One doesn't need to be an expert to look at that sort of thing. I know of course that they're merely sketches, but still, I don't feel myself that he puts enough work into them. Swann had the nerve to try and make us buy a *Bundle of Asparagus*. In fact it was in the house for several days. There was nothing else in the picture, just a bundle of asparagus exactly like the ones you're eating now. But I must say I refused to swallow M. Elstir's asparagus. He wanted three hundred francs for them. Three hundred francs for a bundle of asparagus! A louis, that's as much as they're worth, even early in the season. I thought it a bit stiff. When he puts people into his pictures as well, there's something squalid and depressing about them that I dislike. I'm surprised to see a man of refinement, a superior mind like you, admiring that sort of thing."

"I don't know why you should say that, Basin," interrupted the Duchess, who did not like to hear people run down anything that her rooms contained. "I'm by no means prepared to admit that there's no distinction in Elstir's painting. You have to take it or leave it. But it's not always lacking in talent. And you must admit that the ones I bought are remarkably beautiful."

"Well, Oriane, in that style of thing I'd infinitely prefer to have the little study by M. Vibert we saw at the water-colour exhibition. There's nothing much in it, if you like, you could hold it in the palm of your hand, but you can see the man's got wit to the tips of his fingers: that shabby scarecrow of a missionary standing in front of the sleek prelate who is making his little dog do tricks, it's a perfect little poem of subtlety, and even profundity."

"I believe you know M. Elstir," the Duchess said to me. "As a man, he's quite pleasant."

"He's intelligent," said the Duke. "You're surprised, when you talk to him, that his paintings should be so vulgar."

"He's more than intelligent, he's really quite witty," said the Duchess in the judicious, appraising tone of a person who knew what she was talking about.

"Didn't he once start a portrait of you, Oriane?" asked the Princesse de Parme.

"Yes, in shrimp pink," replied Mme de Guermantes, "but that's not going to make his name live for posterity. It's a ghastly thing; Basin wanted to have it destroyed."

This last statement was one which Mme de Guermantes often made. But at other times her appreciation of the picture was different: "I don't care for his painting, but he did once do a good portrait of me." The first of these judgments was addressed as a rule to people who spoke to the Duchess of her portrait, the other to those who did not refer to it and whom therefore she was anxious to inform of its existence. The first was inspired in her by coquetry, the second by vanity.

"Make a portrait of you look ghastly! Why, then it can't be a portrait, it's a lie. I don't know one end of a brush from the other, but I'm sure if I were to paint you, merely putting you down as I see you, I should produce a masterpiece," said the Princesse de Parme ingenuously.

"He probably sees me as I see myself, bereft of allurements," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, with the look, at once melancholy, modest and winning, which seemed to her best calculated to make her appear different from what Elstir had portrayed.

"That portrait ought to appeal to Mme de Gallardon," said the Duke.

"Because she knows nothing about pictures?" asked the Princesse de Parme, who knew that Mme de Guermantes had an infinite contempt for her cousin. "But she's a very kind woman, isn't she?"

The Duke assumed an air of profound astonishment.

"Why, Basin, don't you see the Princess is making fun of you?" (The Princess had never dreamed of doing such a thing.) "She knows as well as you do that Gallardonette is a poisonous crone," went on Mme de Guermantes, whose vocabulary, habitually limited to all these old expressions, was as richly flavoured as those dishes which it is possible to come across in the delicious books of Pampille, but which have in real life become so rare, dishes in which the jellies, the butter, the gravy, the quenelles are all genuine and unalloyed, in which even the salt is brought specially from the salt-marshes of Brittany: from her accent, her choice of words, one felt that the basis of the Duchess's conversation came directly from Guermantes. In this way, the Duchess differed profoundly from her nephew Saint-Loup, impregnated by so many new ideas and expressions; it is difficult, when one's mind is troubled by the ideas of Kant and the yearnings of Baudelaire, to write the exquisite French of Henri IV, so that the very purity of the Duchess's language was a sign of limitation and that, in her, both intelligence and sensibility had remained closed against innovation. Here again, Mme de Guermantes's mind attracted me just because of what it excluded (which was precisely the substance of my own thoughts) and everything which, by virtue of that exclusion, it had been able to preserve, that seductive vigour of supple bodies which no exhausting reflexion, no moral anxiety or nervous disorder has deformed. Her mind, of a formation so anterior to my own, was for me the equivalent of what had been offered me by the gait and the bearing of the girls of the little band along the sea-shore. Mme de Guermantes offered me, domesticated and subdued by civility, by respect for intellectual values, all the energy and charm of a cruel little girl of one of the noble families round Combray who from her childhood had been brought up in the saddle, had tortured cats, gouged out the eyes of rabbits, and, instead of having remained a pillar of virtue, might equally well have been, a good few years ago now, so much did she have the same dashing style, the most brilliant mistress of the Prince de Sagan. But she was incapable of understanding what I had looked for in her—the charm of her historic name—and the tiny quantity of it that I had found in her, a rustic survival from Guermantes. Our relations were based on a misunderstanding which could not fail to become manifest as soon as my homage, instead of being addressed to the relatively superior woman she believed herself to be, was diverted to some other woman of equal mediocrity and exuding the same unconscious charm. A misunderstanding that is entirely natural, and one that will always exist between a young dreamer and a society woman, but nevertheless profoundly disturbs him, so long as he has not yet discovered the nature of his imaginative faculties and has not yet resigned himself to the inevitable disappointments he is destined to find in people, as in the theatre, in travel and indeed in love.

M. de Guermantes having declared (following upon Elstir's asparagus and those that had just been served after the chicken *financière*) that green asparagus grown in the open air, which, as has been so quaintly said by the charming writer who signs herself E. de Clermont-Tonnerre, "have not the impressive rigidity of their sisters," ought to be eaten with eggs. "One man's meat is another man's poison, as they say," replied M. de Bréauté. "In the province of Canton, in China, the greatest delicacy that can be set before one is a dish of completely rotten ortolan's eggs." M. de Bréauté, the author of an essay on the Mormons which had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, moved in none but the most aristocratic circles, but among these only such as had a certain reputation for intellect, with the result that from his presence, if it was at all regular, in a woman's house, one could tell that she had a "salon." He claimed to loathe society, and assured each of his duchesses in turn that it was for the sake of her wit and beauty that he came to see her. They all believed him. Whenever he resigned himself, with a heavy heart, to attending a big reception at the Princesse de Parme's, he collected them all around him to keep up his courage, and thus appeared only to be moving in the midst of an intimate circle. So that his reputation as an intellectual might survive his social activity, applying certain maxims of the Guermantes spirit, he would set out with the ladies of fashion on long scientific expeditions at the height of the dancing season, and when a snobbish person, in other words a person not yet socially secure, began to be seen everywhere, he would be ferociously obstinate in his refusal to know that person, to allow himself to be introduced to him or her. His hatred of snobs derived from his snobbishness, but made the simple-minded (in other words, everyone) believe that he was immune from snobbishness.

"Babal always knows everything," exclaimed the Duchesse de Guermantes. "I think it must be charming, a country where you can be quite sure that your dairyman will supply you with really rotten eggs, eggs of the year of the comet. I can just see myself dipping my bread and butter in them. I may say that it sometimes happens at aunt Madeleine's" (Mme de Villeparisis's) "that things are served in a state of putrefaction, eggs included." Then, as Mme d'Arpajon protested, "But my dear Phili, you know it as well as I do. You can see the chicken in the egg. In fact I can't think how they can be so well behaved as to stay in. It's not an omelette you get there, it's a regular hen-house, but at least it isn't marked on the menu. You were so wise not to come to dinner there the day before yesterday, there was a brill cooked in carbolic! I assure you, it wasn't hospitality so much as a hospital for contagious diseases. Really, Norpois carries loyalty to the pitch of heroism: he had a second helping!"

"I believe I saw you there the time she lashed out at M. Bloch" (M. de Guermantes, perhaps to give a Jewish name a more foreign sound, pronounced the "ch" in Bloch not like a "k" but as in the German "*hoch*") "when he said about some poet" (poet) "or other that he was sublime. Châtellerauld did his best to break M. Bloch's shins, but the fellow didn't understand and thought my nephew's kicks were aimed at a young woman sitting next to him." (At this point M. de Guermantes coloured slightly.) "He didn't realise that he was irritating our aunt with his 'sublimes' chucked about all over the place like that. Anyhow, aunt Madeleine, who's never at a loss for words, turned on him with: 'Indeed, sir, and what epithet are you going to keep for M. de Bossuet?' " (M. de Guermantes thought that, when one mentioned a famous name, the use of "Monsieur" and a particle was eminently "old school.") "It was absolutely killing."

"And what answer did this M. Bloch make?" came in a careless tone from Mme de Guermantes, who, running short for the moment of original ideas, felt that she must copy her husband's Teutonic pronunciation.

"Ah! I can assure you M. Bloch didn't wait for any more, he fled."

"Yes, I remember very well seeing you there that evening," said Mme de Guermantes with emphasis, as though there must be something highly flattering to myself in this remembrance on her part. "It's always so interesting at my aunt's. At that last party, where I met you, I meant to ask you whether that old gentleman who went past us wasn't François Coppée. You must know who everyone is," she went on, sincerely envious of my relations with poets and poetry, and also out of amiability towards me, the wish to enhance the status, in the eyes of her other guests, of a young man so well versed in literature. I assured the Duchess that I had not observed any celebrities at Mme de Villeparisis's party. "What!" she exclaimed unguardedly, betraying the fact that her respect for men of letters and her contempt for society were more superficial than she said, perhaps even than she thought, "what, no famous authors there! You astonish me! Why, I saw all sorts of quite impossible-looking people!"

I remembered the evening very well on account of an entirely trivial incident. Mme de Villeparisis had introduced Bloch to Mme Alphonse de Rothschild, but my friend had not caught the name and, thinking he was talking to an old English lady who was a trifle mad, had replied only in monosyllables to the garrulous conversation of the historic beauty, when Mme de Villeparisis, introducing her to someone else, had pronounced, quite distinctly this time: "The Baronne Alphonse de Rothschild." Thereupon so many ideas of millions and of glamour, which it would have been more prudent to subdivide and separate, had suddenly and simultaneously coursed through Bloch's arteries that he had had a sort of heart attack and brainstorm combined, and had cried aloud in the dear old lady's presence: "If I'd only known!"—an exclamation the silliness of which kept him awake at nights for a whole week. This remark of Bloch's was of no great interest, but I remembered it as a proof that sometimes in this life, under the stress of an exceptional emotion, people do say what they think.

"I fancy Mme de Villeparisis is not absolutely ... moral," said the Princesse de Parme, who knew that the best people did not visit the Duchess's aunt, and, from what the Duchess herself had just been saying, that one might speak freely about her. But, Mme de Guermantes not seeming to approve of this criticism, she hastened to add: "Though, of course, intelligence carried to that degree excuses everything."

"You take the same view of my aunt as everyone else," replied the Duchess, "which is, on the whole, quite mistaken. It's just what Mémé was saying to me only yesterday." (She blushed, her eyes clouding with a memory unknown to me. I conjectured that M. de Charlus had asked her to cancel my invitation, as he had sent Robert to ask me not to go to her house. I had the impression that the blush—equally incomprehensible to me—which had tinged the Duke's cheeks when he made some reference to his brother could not be attributed to the same cause.) "My poor aunt—she will always have the reputation of being a lady of the old school, of sparkling wit and uncontrolled passions. And really there's no more middle-class, solemn, drab, commonplace mind in Paris. She will go down as a patron of the arts, which means to say that she was once the mistress of a great painter, though he was never able to make her understand what a picture was; and as for her private life, so far from being a depraved woman, she was so much made for marriage, so conjugal from her cradle that, not having succeeded in keeping a husband, who incidentally was a scoundrel, she has never had a love affair which she hasn't taken just as seriously as if it were holy matrimony, with the same irritations, the same quarrels, the same fidelity. Mind you, those relationships are often the most sincere; on the whole there are more inconsolable lovers than husbands."

"And yet, Oriane, if you take the case of your brother-in-law Palamède whom you were speaking about just now, no mistress in the world could ever dream of being mourned as that poor Mme de Charlus has been."

"Ah!" replied the Duchess, "Your Highness must permit me to be not altogether of her opinion. People don't all like to be mourned in the same way, each of us has his preferences."

"Still, he has made a regular cult of her since her death. It's true that people sometimes do for the dead what they would not have done for the living."

"For one thing," retorted Mme de Guermantes in a dreamy tone which belied her facetious intent, "we go to their funerals, which we never do for the living!" (M. de Guermantes gave M. de Bréauté a sly glance as though to provoke him into laughter at the Duchess's wit.) "At the same time I frankly admit," went on Mme de Guermantes, "that the manner in which I should like to be mourned by a man I loved would not be that adopted by my brother-in-law."

The Duke's face darkened. He did not like to hear his wife utter random judgments, especially about M. de Charlus. "You're very particular. His grief set an edifying example to everyone," he reproved her stiffly. But the Duchess had in dealing with her husband that sort of boldness which animal tamers show, or people who live with a madman and are not afraid of provoking him.

"Well, yes, if you like, I suppose it's edifying—he goes every day to the cemetery to tell her how many people he has had to luncheon, he misses her enormously, but as he'd mourn a cousin, a grandmother, a sister. It isn't the grief of a husband. It's true that they were a pair of saints, which makes it all rather exceptional." (M. de Guermantes, infuriated by his wife's chatter, fixed on her with a terrible immobility a pair of eyes already loaded.) "I don't wish to say anything against poor Mémé, who, by the way, couldn't come this evening," went on the Duchess. "I quite admit there's no one like him, he's kind and sweet, he has a delicacy, a warmth of heart that you don't as a rule find in men. He has a woman's heart, Mémé has!"

"What you say is absurd," M. de Guermantes broke in sharply. "There's nothing effeminate about Mémé. Nobody could be more manly than he is."

"But I'm not suggesting for a moment that he's the least bit effeminate. Do at least take the trouble to understand what I say," retorted the Duchess. "He's always like that the moment he thinks one's getting at his brother," she added, turning to the Princesse de Parme.

"It's very charming, it's a pleasure to hear him. There's nothing so nice as two brothers who are fond of each other," replied the Princess, as many a humbler person might have replied, for it is possible to belong to a princely family by blood and a very plebeian family by intellect.

"While we're on the subject of your family, Oriane," said the Princess, "I saw your nephew Saint-Loup yesterday. I believe he wants to ask you a favour."

The Duc de Guermantes knitted his Olympian brow. When he did not care to do someone a favour, he preferred that his wife should not undertake to do so, knowing that it would come to the same thing in the end and that the people to whom she would be obliged to apply would put it down to the common account of the household, just as much as if it had been requested by the husband alone.

"Why didn't he ask me himself?" said the Duchess, "he was here yesterday and stayed a couple of hours, and I can't tell you how boring he was. He would be no stupider than anyone else if he had only had the sense, like many people we know, to remain a fool. It's his veneer of knowledge that's so terrible. He wants to have an open mind—open to all the things he doesn't understand. The way he goes on about Morocco, it's frightful."

"He doesn't want to go back there, because of Rachel," said the Prince de Foix.

"But I thought they'd broken it off," interrupted M. de Bréauté.

"So far from breaking it off, I found her a couple of days ago in Robert's rooms, and they didn't look at all like people who'd quarrelled, I can assure you," replied the Prince de Foix, who liked to spread every rumour that could damage Robert's chances of marrying, and who might, moreover, have been misled by one of the intermittent resurrections of a liaison that was practically at an end.

"That Rachel was speaking to me about you. I run into her occasionally in the morning in the Champs-Élysées. She's somewhat *flighty* as you say, what you call *unbuttoned*, a kind of 'Dame aux Camélias,' figuratively speaking, of course." (This speech was addressed to me by Prince Von, who liked always to appear conversant with French literature and Parisian refinements.)

"Why, that's just what it was—Morocco!" exclaimed the Princess, flinging herself into this opening.

"What on earth can he want in Morocco?" asked M. de Guermantes sternly. "Oriane can do absolutely nothing for him there, as he knows perfectly well."

"He thinks he invented strategy," Mme de Guermantes pursued the theme, "and then he uses impossible words for the simplest thing, which doesn't prevent him from making blots all over his letters. The other day he announced that he'd been given some *sublime* potatoes, and that he'd taken a *sublime* stage box."

"He speaks Latin," the Duke went one better.

"What! Latin?" the Princess gasped.

"On my word of honour! Your Highness can ask Oriane if I'm not telling the truth."

"Why, yes, Ma'am; the other day he said to us straight out, without stopping to think: 'I know of no more touching example of *sic transit gloria mundi*.' I can repeat the phrase now to your Highness because, after endless inquiries and by appealing to *linguists*, we succeeded in reconstructing it, but Robert flung it out without pausing for breath, one could hardly make out that there was Latin in it, he was just like a character in the *Malade Imaginaire*. And it was simply to do with the death of the Empress of Austria!"

"Poor woman!" cried the Princess, "what a delicious creature she was!"

"Yes," replied the Duchess, "a trifle mad, a trifle headstrong, but she was a thoroughly good woman, a nice, kind-hearted lunatic; the only thing I could never understand was why she never managed to get a set of false teeth that fitted her; they always came loose halfway through a sentence and she was obliged to stop short or she'd have swallowed them."

"That Rachel was telling me that young Saint-Loup worshipped you, that he was fonder of you than he was of her," said Prince Von to me, devouring his food like an ogre as he spoke, his face scarlet, his teeth bared by his perpetual grin.

"But in that case she must be jealous of me and hate me," said I.

"Not at all, she said all sorts of nice things about you. The Prince de Foix's mistress would perhaps be jealous if he preferred you to her. You don't understand? Come home with me, and I'll explain it all to you."

"I'm afraid I can't, I'm going on to M. de Charlus at eleven."

"Why, he sent round to me yesterday to ask me to dine with him this evening, but told me not to come after a quarter to eleven. But if you insist on going to him, at least come with me as far as the Théâtre-Français, you will be in the periphery," said the Prince, who thought doubtless that this last word meant "proximity" or possibly "centre."

But the bulging eyes in his coarse though handsome red face frightened me and I declined, saying that a friend was coming to call for me. This reply seemed to me in no way offensive. The Prince, however, apparently formed a different impression of it, for he did not say another word to me.

"I really must go and see the Queen of Naples—it must be a great grief to her," said, or at least appeared to me to have said, the Princesse de Parme. For her words had come to me only indistinctly through the intervening screen of those addressed to me, albeit in an undertone, by Prince Von, who had doubtless been afraid of being overheard by the Prince de Foix if he spoke louder.

"Oh, dear, no!" replied the Duchess, "I don't believe she feels any grief at all."

"None at all! You do always fly to extremes, Oriane," said M. de Guermantes, resuming his role as the cliff which, by standing up against the wave, forces it to fling even higher its crest of foam.

"Basin knows even better than I that I'm telling the truth," replied the Duchess, "but he thinks he's obliged to look severe because you are present, Ma'am, and he's afraid of my shocking you."

"Oh, please no, I beg of you," cried the Princesse de Parme, dreading the slightest alteration on her account of these delicious evenings at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, this forbidden fruit which the Queen of Sweden herself had not yet acquired the right to taste.

"Why, it was to Basin himself, when he said to her with a duly sorrowful expression: 'But I see the Queen is in mourning. For whom, pray? Is it a great grief to your Majesty?' that she replied: 'No, it's not a deep mourning, it's a light mourning, a very light mourning, it's my sister.' The truth is, she's delighted about it, as Basin knows perfectly well. She invited us to a party that very evening, and gave me two pearls. I wish she could lose a sister every day! So far from weeping for her sister's death, she was in fits of laughter over it. She probably says to herself, like Robert, '*sic transit*——' I forget how it goes on," she added modestly, knowing how it went on perfectly well.

In saying all this Mme de Guermantes was only indulging her wit, and in the most disingenuous way, for the Queen of Naples, like the Duchesse d'Alençon, who also died in tragic circumstances, had the warmest heart in the world and sincerely mourned her kinsfolk. Mme de Guermantes knew these noble Bavarian sisters, her cousins, too well not to be aware of this. "He is anxious not to go back to Morocco," said the Princesse de Parme, grasping once more at the name Robert which Mme de Guermantes had held out to her, quite unintentionally, like a lifeline. "I believe you know General de Monserfeuil."

"Very slightly," replied the Duchess, who was an intimate friend of the officer in question. The Princess explained what it was that Saint-Loup wanted.

"Oh dear, well, yes, if I see him ... It's possible that I may run into him," the Duchess replied, so as not to appear to be refusing, her relations with General de Monserfeuil seeming to have grown rapidly more intermittent since it had become a question of her asking him for something. This uncertainty did not, however, satisfy the Duke, who interrupted his wife.

"You know perfectly well you won't be seeing him, Oriane, and besides you've already asked him for two things which he hasn't done. My wife has a passion for doing people good turns," he went on, getting more and more furious in order to force the Princess to withdraw her request without making her doubt his wife's good nature and so that Mme de Parme should throw the blame on his own essentially crotchety character. "Robert could get anything he wanted out of Monserfeuil. Only, as he happens not to know what he wants, he gets us to ask for it because he knows there's no better way of making the whole thing fall through. Oriane has asked too many favours of Monserfeuil. A request from her now would be a reason for him to refuse."

"Oh, in that case, it would be better if the Duchess did nothing," said Mme de Parme.

"Obviously," the Duke concluded.

"That poor General, he's been defeated again at the elections," said the Princess, to change the subject.

"Oh, it's nothing serious, it's only the seventh time," said the Duke, who, having been obliged himself to retire from politics, quite enjoyed hearing of other people's failures at the polls. "He has consoled himself by giving his wife another baby."

"What! Is that poor Mme de Monserfeuil pregnant again?" cried the Princess.

"Why, of course," replied the Duchess, "it's the one *ward* where the poor General has never failed."

In the period that followed I was continually to be invited, however small the party, to these repasts at which I had at one time imagined the guests as seated like the Apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle. They did assemble there indeed, like the early Christians, not to partake merely of a material nourishment, which was incidentally exquisite, but in a sort of social Eucharist; so that in the course of a few dinner-parties I

assimilated the acquaintance of all the friends of my hosts, friends to whom they presented me with a tinge of benevolent patronage so marked (as a person for whom they had always had a sort of parental affection) that there was not one among them who would not have felt himself to be somehow failing the Duke and Duchess if he had given a ball without including my name on his list, and at the same time, while I sipped one of those Yquem which lay concealed in the Guermantes cellars, I tasted ortolans dressed according to a variety of recipes judiciously elaborated and modified by the Duke himself. However, for one who had already sat down more than once at the mystic board, the consumption of these latter was not indispensable. Old friends of M. and Mme de Guermantes came in to see them after dinner, "with the tooth-picks" as Mme Swann would have said, without being expected, and took in winter a cup of limeblossom tea in the lighted warmth of the great drawing-room, in summer a glass of orangeade in the darkness of the little rectangular strip of garden outside. No one could remember having ever received from the Guermantes, on these evenings in the garden, anything else but orangeade. It had a sort of ritual meaning. To have added other refreshments would have seemed to be falsifying the tradition, just as a big at-home in the Faubourg Saint-Germain ceases to be an at-home if there is a play also, or music. You must be assumed to have come simply—even if there were five hundred of you—to pay a call on, let us say, the Princesse de Guermantes. People marvelled at my influence because I managed to procure the addition to this orangeade of a jug containing the juice of stewed cherries or stewed pears. I took a dislike on this account to the Prince d'Agrigente, who was like all those people who, lacking in imagination but not in covetousness, take a keen interest in what one is drinking and ask if they may taste a little of it themselves. Which meant that, every time, M. d'Agrigente, by diminishing my ration, spoiled my pleasure. For this fruit juice can never be provided in sufficient quantities to quench one's thirst. Nothing is less cloying than that transmutation into flavour of the colour of a fruit, which, when cooked, seems to have travelled backwards to the season of its blossoming. Blushing like an orchard in spring, or else colourless and cool like the zephyr beneath the fruit-trees, the juice can be sniffed and gloated over drop by drop, and M. d'Agrigente prevented me, regularly, from taking my fill of it. Despite these distillations, the traditional orangeade persisted like the lime-blossom tea. In these humble kinds, the social communion was none the less celebrated. In this respect, doubtless, the friends of M. and Mme de Guermantes had after all, as I had originally imagined them, remained more different from the rest of humanity than their disappointing exterior might have misled me into supposing. Numbers of elderly men came to receive from the Duchess, together with the invariable drink, a welcome that was often far from warm. Now this could not have been due to snobbishness, they themselves being of a rank to which there was none superior; nor to love of luxury: they did love it perhaps, but, in less exalted social conditions, might have been enjoying a glittering example of it, for on those same evenings the charming wife of a colossally rich financier would have given anything in the world to have them among the brilliant shooting-party she was giving for a couple of days for the King of Spain. They had nevertheless declined her invitation, and had come round without fail to see whether Mme de Guermantes was at home. They were not even certain of finding there opinions that conformed entirely with their own, or sentiments of any great cordiality; Mme de Guermantes would throw out from time to time—on the Dreyfus case, on the Republic, on the anti-religious laws, or even, in an undertone, on themselves, their weaknesses, the dullness of their conversation—comments which they had to appear not to notice. No doubt, if they kept up their habit of coming there, it was owing to their consummate training as epicures in things worldly, to their clear consciousness of the prime and perfect quality of the social pabulum, with its familiar, reassuring, sapid flavour, free of admixture or adulteration, with the origin and history of which they were as well acquainted as she who served them with it, remaining more "noble" in this respect than they themselves imagined. Now, on this occasion, among the visitors to whom I was introduced after dinner, it so happened that there was that General de Monseigneur of whom the Princesse de Parme had spoken and whom Mme de Guermantes, of whose drawing-room he was one of the regular frequenters, had not expected that evening. He bowed before me, on hearing my name, as though I had been the President of the Supreme War Council. I had supposed it to be simply from some deep-rooted unwillingness to oblige, in which the Duke, as in wit if not in love, was his wife's accomplice, that the Duchess had practically refused to recommend her nephew to M. de Monseigneur. And I saw in this an indifference all the more blameworthy in that I seemed to have gathered from a few words which the Princess had let fall that Robert was in a post of danger from which it would be prudent to have him removed. But it was by the genuine malice of Mme de Guermantes that I was revolted when, the Princesse de Parme having timidly suggested that she might say something herself and on her own initiative to the General, the Duchess did everything in her power to dissuade her.

"But Ma'am," she cried, "Monseigneur has no sort of standing or influence whatever with the new Government. You would be wasting your breath."

"I think he can hear us," murmured the Princess, as a hint to the Duchess not to speak so loud.

"Your Highness needn't be afraid, he's as deaf as a post," said the Duchess, without lowering her voice, though the General could hear her perfectly.

"The thing is, I believe M. de Saint-Loup is in a place that is not very safe," said the Princess.

"It can't be helped," replied the Duchess, "he's in the same boat as everybody else, the only difference being that it was he who asked to be sent there. Besides, no, it's not really dangerous; if it was, you can imagine how anxious I should be to help. I'd have spoken to Saint-Joseph about it during dinner. He has far more influence, and he's a real worker. But, as you see, he's gone now. Besides, it would be less awkward than going to this one, who has three of his sons in Morocco just now and has refused to apply for them to be transferred; he might raise that as an objection. Since your Highness insists, I shall speak to Saint-Joseph—if I see him again,

or to Beautreillis. But if I don't see either of them, you mustn't waste your pity on Robert. It was explained to us the other day where he is. I don't think he could be anywhere better."

"What a pretty flower, I've never seen one like it; there's no one like you, Oriane, for having such marvellous things in your house," said the Princesse de Parme, who, fearing that General de Monserfeuil might have overheard the Duchess, sought now to change the subject. I looked and recognised a plant of the sort that I had watched Elstir painting.

"I'm so glad you like them; they are charming, do look at their little purple velvet collars; the only thing against them is—as may happen with people who are very pretty and very nicely dressed—they have a hideous name and a horrid smell. In spite of which I'm very fond of them. But what is rather sad is that they're going to die."

"But they're growing in a pot, they aren't cut flowers," said the Princess.

"No," answered the Duchess with a smile, "but it comes to the same thing, as they're all ladies. It's a kind of plant where the ladies and the gentlemen don't both grow on the same stalk. I'm like the people who keep a lady dog. I have to find a husband for my flowers. Otherwise I shan't have any young ones!"

"How very strange. Do you mean to say that in nature ... ?"

"Yes, there are certain insects whose duty it is to bring about the marriage, as with sovereigns, by proxy, without the bride and bridegroom ever having set eyes on one another. And so, I assure you, I always tell my man to put my plant at the open window as often as possible, on the courtyard side and the garden side turn about, in the hope that the necessary insect will arrive. But the odds are so enormous! Just think, he would need to have just visited a person of the same species and the opposite sex, and he must then have taken it into his head to come and leave cards at the house. He hasn't appeared so far—I believe my plant still deserves the name of virgin, but I must say a little more shamelessness would please me better. It's just the same with that fine tree we have in the courtyard—it will die childless because it belongs to a species that's very rare in these latitudes. In its case, it's the wind that's responsible for bringing about the union, but the wall is a trifle high."

"Yes, indeed," said M. de Bréauté, "you ought to have taken just a couple of inches off the top, that would have been quite enough. You have to know all the tricks of the trade. The flavour of vanilla we tasted in the excellent ice you gave us this evening, Duchess, comes from the plant of that name. It produces flowers which are both male and female, but a sort of partition between them prevents any communication. And so one could never get any fruit from them until a young negro, a native of Réunion, by the name of Albins, which by the way is rather a comic name for a black since it means 'white,' had the happy thought of using the point of a needle to bring the separate organs into contact."

"Babal, you're divine, you know everything," cried the Duchess.

"But you yourself, Oriane, have taught me things I had no idea of," the Princesse de Parme assured her.

"I must explain to your Highness that it's Swann who has always talked to me a great deal about botany. Sometimes when we thought it would be too boring to go to an afternoon party we would set off for the country, and he would show me extraordinary marriages between flowers, which was far more amusing than going to human marriages—no wedding-breakfast and no crowd in the sacristy. We never had time to go very far. Now that motor-cars have come in, it would be delightful. Unfortunately, in the meantime he himself has made an even more astonishing marriage, which makes everything very difficult. Ah, Ma'am, life is a dreadful business, we spend our whole time doing things that bore us, and when by chance we come across somebody with whom we could go and look at something really interesting, he has to make a marriage like Swann's. Faced with the alternatives of giving up my botanical expeditions and being obliged to call upon a degrading person, I chose the first of these two calamities. Actually, though, there's no need to go quite so far. It seems that even here, in my own little bit of garden, more improper things happen in broad daylight than at midnight ... in the Bois de Boulogne! Only they attract no attention, because between flowers it's all done quite simply—you see a little orange shower, or else a very dusty fly coming to wipe its feet or take a bath before crawling into a flower. And that does the trick!"

"The cabinet the plant is standing on is splendid, too; it's Empire, I believe," said the Princess, who, not being familiar with the works of Darwin and his followers, was unable to grasp the point of the Duchess's pleasantries.

"It's lovely, isn't it? I'm so glad your Highness likes it," replied the Duchess, "it's a magnificent piece. I must tell you that I've always adored the Empire style, even when it wasn't in fashion. I remember at Guermites I got into terrible disgrace with my mother-in-law because I told them to bring down from the attics all the splendid Empire furniture Basin had inherited from the Montesquiou, and used it to furnish the wing we lived in."

M. de Guermites smiled. He must nevertheless have remembered that the course of events had been very different. But, the witticisms of the Princesse des Laumes on the subject of her mother-in-law's bad taste having been a tradition during the short time in which the Prince had been in love with his wife, his love for the latter had been outlasted by a certain contempt for the intellectual inferiority of the former, a contempt which, however, went hand in hand with considerable attachment and respect.

"The Iénas have the same armchair with Wedgwood medallions. It's a fine piece, but I prefer mine," said the Duchess, with the same air of impartiality as if she had not been the owner of either of these two pieces of furniture. "I admit, of course, that they've got some marvellous things which I haven't."

The Princesse de Parme remained silent.



“But it’s quite true; your Highness hasn’t seen their collection. Oh, you ought really to come there one day with me, it’s one of the most magnificent things in Paris. You’d say it was a museum come to life.”

And since this suggestion was one of the most “Guermantes” of the Duchess’s audacities, inasmuch as the Iénas were for the Princesse de Parme rank usurpers, their son bearing like her own the title of Duc de Guastalla, Mme de Guermantes in thus launching it could not refrain (so much did the love that she bore her own originality prevail over the deference due to the Princesse de Parme) from glancing round at her other guests with an amused smile. They too made an effort to smile, at once alarmed, amazed and above all delighted to think that they were being witnesses of Oriane’s very “latest” and could serve it up “piping hot.” They were only half shocked, knowing that the Duchess had the knack of throwing all the Courvoisier prejudices to the wind for the sake of a more striking and enjoyable triumph. Had she not, within the last few years, brought together Princesse Mathilde and the Duc d’Aumale, who had written to the Princess’s own brother the famous letter: “In my family all the men are brave and the women chaste”? And inasmuch as princes remain princely even at those moments when they appear anxious to forget that they are, the Duc d’Aumale and the Princesse Mathilde had enjoyed themselves so greatly at Mme de Guermantes’s that they had afterwards exchanged visits, with that faculty for forgetting the past which Louis XVIII showed when he appointed as a minister Fouché, who had voted the death of his brother. Mme de Guermantes was now nursing a similar project of arranging a reconciliation between the Princesse Murat and the Queen of Naples. In the meantime, the Princesse de Parme appeared as embarrassed as might have been the heirs apparent to the thrones of the Netherlands and Belgium, styled respectively Prince of Orange and Duke of Brabant, had one offered to present to them M. de Mailly-Nesle, Prince d’Orange, and M. de Charlus, Duc de Brabant. But, before anything further could happen, the Duchess, in whom Swann and M. de Charlus between them (albeit the latter was resolute in ignoring the Iénas’ existence) had with great difficulty succeeded in inculcating a taste for the Empire style, exclaimed:

“Honestly, Ma’am, I can’t tell you how beautiful you’ll find it! I must confess that the Empire style has always had a fascination for me. But at the Iénas’ it really is hallucinating. That sort of—what shall I say—reflux from the Egyptian expedition, and then, too, the sort of upsurge into our own times from Antiquity, all those things invading our houses, the Sphinxes crouching at the feet of the armchairs, the snakes coiled round candelabra, a huge Muse who holds out a little torch for you to play cards under, or has quietly climbed on to the mantelpiece and is leaning against your clock; and then all the Pompeian lamps, the little boat-shaped beds which look as if they had been found floating on the Nile so that you expect to see Moses climb out of them, the classical chariots galloping along the bedside tables ...”

“They’re not very comfortable to sit in, those Empire chairs,” the Princess ventured.

“No,” the Duchess agreed, “but I love,” she at once added, stressing the point with a smile, “I love being uncomfortable on those mahogany seats covered with ruby velvet or green silk. I love that discomfort of warriors who understand nothing but the curule chair and weave their fasces and stack their laurels in the middle of their main living-room. I can assure you that at the Iénas’ one doesn’t stop to think for a moment of how comfortable one is, when one sees in front of one a great strapping wench of a Victory painted in fresco on the wall. My husband is going to say that I’m a very bad royalist, but I’m terribly wrong-thinking, you know, I can assure you that in those people’s house one comes to love all the big N’s and all the Napoleonic bees. Good heavens, after all, since we hadn’t been exactly surfeited with glory for a good many years under our kings, those warriors who brought home so many crowns that they stuck them even on the arms of the chairs, I must say I think it’s all rather fetching! Your Highness really must.”

“Why, my dear, if you think so,” said the Princess, “but it seems to me that it won’t be easy.”

“But Your Highness will find that it will all go quite smoothly. They are very kind people, and no fools. We took Mme de Chevreuse there,” added the Duchess, knowing the force of this example, “and she was enchanted. The son is really very pleasant ... I’m going to tell you something that’s not quite proper,” she went on, “but he has a bedroom, and more especially a bed, in which I should love to sleep—without him! What is even less proper is that I went to see him once when he was ill and lying in it. By his side, on the frame of the bed, there was a sculpted Siren, stretched out at full length, absolutely ravishing, with a mother-of-pearl tail and some sort of lotus flowers in her hand. I assure you,” went on Mme de Guermantes, reducing the speed of her delivery to bring into even bolder relief the words which she seemed to be modelling with the pout of her fine lips, drawing them out with her long expressive hands, directing on the Princess as she spoke a soft, intent, profound gaze, “that with the palm-leaves and the golden crown on one side, it was most moving, it was precisely the same composition as Gustave Moreau’s *Death and the Young Man* (Your Highness must know that masterpiece, of course).”

The Princesse de Parme, who did not know so much as the painter’s name, nodded her head vehemently and smiled ardently, in order to manifest her admiration for this picture. But the intensity of her mimicry could not fill the place of that light which is absent from our eyes so long as we do not understand what people are talking to us about.

“A good-looking boy, I believe?” she asked.

“No, he’s just like a tapir. The eyes are a little those of a Queen Hortense on a lamp-shade. But he probably came to the conclusion that it would be rather absurd for a man to develop such a resemblance, and so it’s lost in the encaustic surface of his cheeks which give him really rather a Mameluke appearance. You feel that the polisher must call round every morning. Swann,” she went on, reverting to the young duke’s bed, “was struck by the resemblance between that Siren and Gustave Moreau’s *Death*. But in fact,” she added, in a more rapid but still serious tone of voice, in order to provoke more laughter, “there was nothing really to get worked up about, for it was only a cold in the head, and the young man is now as fit as a fiddle.”

"They say he's a snob?" put in M. de Bréauté, with a malicious twinkle, expecting to be answered with the same precision as though he had said: "They tell me that he has only four fingers on his right hand; is that so?"

"G—ood g—racious, n—o," replied Mme de Guermantes with a smile of benign tolerance. "Perhaps just the least little bit of a snob in appearance, because he's extremely young, but I should be surprised to hear that he was in reality, for he's intelligent," she added, as though there were to her mind some absolute incompatibility between snobbishness and intelligence. "He has wit, too, I've known him to be quite amusing," she said again, laughing with the air of an epicure and expert, as though the act of declaring that a person could be amusing demanded a certain expression of merriment from the speaker, or as though the Duc de Guastalla's sallies were recurring to her mind as she spoke. "Anyway, as he is never invited anywhere, he can't have much scope for his snobbishness," she wound up, oblivious of the fact that this was hardly an encouragement to the Princesse de Parme.

"I cannot help wondering what the Prince de Guermantes, who calls her Mme Iéna, will say if he hears that I've been to see her."

"What!" cried the Duchess with extraordinary vivacity. "Don't you know that it was we who gave up to Gilbert" (she bitterly regretted that surrender now) "a complete card-room done in the Empire style which came to us from Quiou-Quiou and is an absolute marvel! There was no room for it here, though I think it would look better here than it does in his house. It's a thing of sheer beauty, half Etruscan, half Egyptian ..."

"Egyptian?" queried the Princess, to whom the word Etruscan conveyed little.

"Well, you know, a little of both. Swann told us that, he explained it all to me, only you know I'm such a dunce. But then, Ma'am, what one has to bear in mind is that the Egypt of the Empire cabinet-makers has nothing to do with the historical Egypt, nor their Romans with the Romans nor their Etruria ..."

"Indeed," said the Princess.

"No, it's like what they used to call a Louis XV costume under the Second Empire, when Anna de Mouchy and dear Brigode's mother were girls. Basin was talking to you just now about Beethoven. We heard a thing of his played the other day which was really rather fine, though a little stiff, with a Russian theme in it. It's pathetic to think that he believed it to be Russian. In the same way as the Chinese painters believed they were copying Bellini. Besides, even in the same country, whenever anybody begins to look at things in a slightly new way, nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand are totally incapable of seeing what he puts before them. It takes at least forty years before they can manage to make it out."

"Forty years!" the Princess cried in alarm.

"Why, yes," went on the Duchess, adding more and more to her words (which were practically my own, for I had just been expressing a similar idea to her), thanks to her way of pronouncing them, the equivalent of what on the printed page are called italics, "it's like a sort of first isolated individual of a species which does not yet exist but is going to multiply in the future, an individual endowed with a kind of *sense* which the human race of his generation does not possess. I can hardly give myself as an instance because I, on the contrary, have always loved any interesting artistic offering from the very start, however novel it might be. But anyway the other day I was with the Grand Duchess in the Louvre and we happened to pass Manet's *Olympia*. Nowadays nobody is in the least surprised by it. It looks just like an Ingres! And yet, heaven knows how I had to take up the cudgels on behalf of that picture, which I don't altogether like but which is unquestionably the work of *somebody*. Perhaps the Louvre isn't quite the place for it."

"And is the Grand Duchess well?" inquired the Princesse de Parme, to whom the Tsar's aunt was infinitely more familiar than Manet's model.

"Yes; we talked about you. After all," she resumed, clinging to her idea, "the fact of the matter is, as my brother-in-law Palamède always says, that one has between oneself and the rest of the world the barrier of a strange language. Though I admit that there's no one it's quite so true of as Gilbert. If it amuses you to go to the Iénas', you have far too much sense to let your actions be governed by what that poor fellow may think—he's a dear, innocent creature, but he really lives in another world. I feel nearer, more akin to my coachman, my horses even, than to a man who keeps on harking back to what people would have thought under Philip the Bold or Louis the Fat. Just fancy, when he goes for a walk in the country, he waves the peasants out of his way with his stick, quite affably, saying 'Get along there, churls!' In fact I'm as amazed when he speaks to me as if I heard myself addressed by a recumbent figure on an old Gothic tomb. It's all very well that animated gravestone's being my cousin; he frightens me, and the only idea that comes into my head is to let him stay in his Middle Ages. Apart from that, I quite admit that he's never murdered anyone."

"I've just been seeing him at dinner at Mme de Villeparisis's," said the General, but without either smiling at or endorsing the Duchess's pleasantries.

"Was M. de Norpois there?" asked Prince Von, whose mind still ran on the Academy of Moral Sciences.

"Yes," said the General. "In fact he was talking about your Emperor."

"It seems the Emperor William is highly intelligent, but he doesn't care for Elstir's painting. Not that that's anything against him," said the Duchess, "I quite share his point of view. Although Elstir has done a fine portrait of me. You don't know it? It's not in the least like me, but it's an intriguing piece of work. He's most interesting while one's sitting to him. He has made me like a little old woman. It's modelled on *The Women Regents of the Hospice*, by Hals. I expect you know those sublimities, to borrow one of my nephew's favourite expressions," the Duchess turned to me, gently flapping her black feather fan. More than erect on her chair, she flung her head nobly backwards, for, while always a great lady, she was a trifle inclined to act the part of

the great lady too. I said that I had been once to Amsterdam and The Hague, but that to avoid getting everything muddled up, since my time was limited, I had left out Haarlem.

"Ah! The Hague! What a gallery!" cried M. de Guermantes. I said to him that he had doubtless admired Vermeer's *View of Delft*. But the Duke was less erudite than arrogant. Accordingly he contented himself with replying in a self-complacent tone, as was his habit whenever anyone spoke to him of a picture in a gallery, or in the Salon, which he did not remember having seen: "If it's to be seen, I saw it!"

"What? You've been to Holland, and you never visited Haarlem!" cried the Duchess. "Why, even if you had only a quarter of an hour to spend in the place, they're an extraordinary thing to have seen, those Halses. I don't mind saying that a person who only caught a passing glimpse of them from the top of a tram without stopping, supposing they were hung out to view in the street, would open his eyes pretty wide."

This remark shocked me as indicating a misconception of the way in which artistic impressions are formed in our minds, and because it seemed to imply that our eye is in that case simply a recording machine which takes snapshots.

M. de Guermantes, rejoicing that she should be speaking to me with so competent a knowledge of the subjects that interested me, appraised his wife's illustrious presence, listened to what she was saying about Franz Hals, and thought: "She's thoroughly at home in everything. Our young friend can go home and say that he's had before his eyes a great lady of the old school, in the full sense of the word, the like of whom couldn't be found anywhere else today." Thus I beheld the pair of them, divorced from that name Guermantes in which long ago I had imagined them leading an unimaginable life, now just like other men and other women, merely lagging a little behind their contemporaries, and that not evenly, as in so many households of the Faubourg Saint-Germain where the wife has had the good taste to stop at the golden, the husband the misfortune to come down to the pinchbeck age of the past, she remaining still Louis XV while her partner is pompously Louis-Philippe. That Mme de Guermantes should be like other women had been for me at first a disappointment; it was now, by a natural reaction, and with the help of so many good wines, almost a miracle. A Don John of Austria, an Isabella d'Este, situated for us in the world of names, have as little communication with the great pages of history as the Méséglise way had with the Guermantes. Isabella d'Este was no doubt in reality a very minor princess, similar to those who under Louis XIV obtained no special place at Court. But because she seems to us to be of a unique and therefore incomparable essence, we cannot conceive of her as being any less great than he, so that a supper-party with Louis XIV would appear to us only to be rather interesting, whereas with Isabella d'Este we should find ourselves miraculously transported into the presence of a heroine of romance. Then, after having studied Isabella d'Este, after having transplanted her patiently from that magic world into the world of history, and discovered that her life, her thought, contained nothing of that mysterious strangeness which had been suggested to us by her name, once we have recovered from our disappointment we feel a boundless gratitude to that princess for having had a knowledge of Mantegna's paintings almost equal to that, hitherto despised by us and put, as Françoise would have said, "lower than the dirt," of M. Lafenestre. After having scaled the inaccessible heights of the name Guermantes, on descending the inner slope of the life of the Duchess, I felt on finding there the names, familiar elsewhere, of Victor Hugo, Franz Hals and, I regret to say, Vibert, the same astonishment that an explorer, after having taken into account, in order to visualise the singularity of the native customs in some wild valley of Central America or Northern Africa, its geographical remoteness, the strangeness of its place-names and its flora, feels on discovering, once he has made his way through a screen of giant aloes or manchineels, inhabitants who (sometimes indeed among the ruins of a Roman theatre and beneath a column dedicated to Venus) are engaged in reading Voltaire's *Mérope* or *Alzire*. And, so remote, so distinct from, so superior to the educated women of the middle classes whom I had known, the similar culture by which Mme de Guermantes had made herself, with no ulterior motive, to gratify no ambition, descend to the level of people whom she would never know, had the praiseworthy character, almost touching in its uselessness, of a knowledge of Phoenician antiquities in a politician or a doctor.

"I might have been able to show you a very fine one," Mme de Guermantes said to me amiably, still speaking of Hals, "the finest in existence, some people say, which was left to me by a German cousin. Unfortunately, it turned out to be 'enfeoffed' in the castle—you don't know the expression? nor do I," she added, with her fondness for jokes (which made her, she thought, seem modern) at the expense of the old customs to which nevertheless she was unconsciously but fiercely attached. "I'm glad you have seen my Elstirs, but I must admit I should have been a great deal more glad if I could have done you the honours of my Hals, of that 'enfeoffed' picture."

"I know the one," said Prince Von, "it's the Grand Duke of Hesse's Hals."

"Quite so; his brother married my sister," said M. de Guermantes, "and his mother and Oriane's were first cousins as well."

"But so far as M. Elstir is concerned," the Prince went on, "I shall take the liberty of saying, without having any opinion of his work, which I do not know, that the hatred with which the Kaiser pursues him ought not, it seems to me, to be counted against him. The Kaiser is a man of marvellous intelligence."

"Yes, I've met him at dinner twice, once at my aunt Sagan's and once at my aunt Radziwill's, and I must say I found him quite unusual. I didn't find him at all simple! But there's something amusing about him, something 'forced' " (she detached the word) "like a green carnation, that is to say a thing that surprises me and doesn't please me enormously, a thing it's surprising that anyone should have been able to create but which I feel would have been just as well left uncreated. I trust I'm not shocking you?"

"The Kaiser is a man of astounding intelligence," resumed the Prince, "he is passionately fond of the arts, he has for works of art a taste that is practically infallible, he never makes a mistake: if a thing is good he spots it at once and takes a dislike to it. If he detests anything, there can be no more doubt about it, the thing is excellent."

Everyone smiled.

"You set my mind at rest," said the Duchess.

"I should be inclined to compare the Kaiser," went on the Prince, who, not knowing how to pronounce the word archaeologist (that is to say, as though it were spelt with a "k"), never missed an opportunity of using it, "to an old archaeologist" (but the Prince said "arsheologist") "we have in Berlin. If you put him in front of a genuine Assyrian antique, he weeps. But if it is a modern fake, if it is not really old, he does not weep. And so, when they want to know whether an arsheological piece is really old, they take it to the old arsheologist. If he weeps, they buy the piece for the Museum. If his eyes remain dry, they send it back to the dealer, and prosecute him for fraud. Well, every time I dine at Potsdam, if the Kaiser says to me of a play: 'Prince, you must see it, it's a work of genius,' I make a note not to go to it; and when I hear him fulminating against an exhibition, I rush to see it at the first possible opportunity."

"Norpois is in favour of an Anglo-French understanding, isn't he?" said M. de Guermantes.

"What good would that do you?" asked Prince Von, who could not endure the English, with an air at once irritated and crafty. "The English are so *schtubid*. I know, of course, that it would not be as soldiers that they would help you. But one can judge them, all the same, by the *schtubidity* of their generals. A friend of mine was talking the other day to Botha, you know, the Boer leader. He said to my friend: 'It's terrible, an army like that. I rather like the English, as a matter of fact, but just imagine that I, a mere *peasant*, have beaten them in every battle. And in the last, when I was overpowered by a force twenty times the strength of my own, even while surrendering because I had to, I managed to take two thousand prisoners! That was all right because I was only a leader of an army of *peasants*, but if those poor fools ever have to stand up against a European army, one trembles to think what may happen to them!' Besides, you have only to see how their King, whom you know as well as I do, passes for a great man in England."

I scarcely listened to these stories, of the kind that M. de Norpois used to tell my father; they supplied no food for my favourite trains of thought; and besides, even had they possessed the elements which they lacked, they would have had to be of a very exciting quality for my inner life to awaken during those hours in which I lived on the surface, my hair well brushed, my shirt-front starched, in which, that is to say, I could feel nothing of what constituted for me the pleasure of life.

"Oh, I don't agree with you at all," said Mme de Guermantes, who felt that the German prince was wanting in tact, "I find King Edward charming, so simple, and much cleverer than people think. And the Queen is, even now, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in the world."

"But, *Madame la Duchesse*," said the Prince, who was losing his temper and unable to see that he was giving offence, "you must admit that if the Prince of Wales had been an ordinary person there isn't a club that wouldn't have blackballed him, and nobody would have been willing to shake hands with him. The Queen is charming, excessively gentle and dim-witted. But still, there's something shocking about a royal couple who are literally kept by their subjects, who get the big Jewish financiers to foot all the bills they ought to pay themselves, and create them Baronets in return. It's like the Prince of Bulgaria ..."

"He's our cousin," put in the Duchess, "he's a witty fellow."

"He's mine, too, but we don't think him a good man on that account. No, it is us you ought to make friends with, it's the Kaiser's dearest wish, but he insists on its coming from the heart. He says: 'What I want to see is a hand clasped in mine, not waving a hat in the air.' With that, you would be invincible. It would be more practical than the Anglo-French rapprochement M. de Norpois preaches."

"You know him, of course," said the Duchess, turning to me, so as not to leave me out of the conversation. Remembering that M. de Norpois had said that I had once looked as though I wanted to kiss his hand, and thinking that he had no doubt repeated this story to Mme de Guermantes, and in any event could have spoken of me to her only with malice, since in spite of his friendship with my father he had not hesitated to make me appear so ridiculous, I did not do what a man of the world would have done. He would have said that he detested M. de Norpois, and had let him see it; he would have said this so as to give himself the appearance of being the deliberate cause of the Ambassador's slanders, which would then have been no more than lying and calculated reprisals. I said, on the contrary, that, to my great regret, I was afraid that M. de Norpois did not like me.

"You're quite mistaken," replied the Duchess, "he likes you very much indeed. You can ask Basin, for if people give me the reputation of only saying nice things, he certainly doesn't. He will tell you that we've never heard Norpois speak about anyone so kindly as he spoke about you. And only the other day he was wanting to give you a fine post at the Ministry. As he knew that you were not very strong and couldn't accept it, he had the delicacy not to speak of his kind thought to your father, for whom he has an unbounded admiration."

M. de Norpois was quite the last person whom I should have expected to do me any practical service. The truth was that, his being a mocking and indeed somewhat malicious nature, those who, like me, had let themselves be taken in by his outward appearance of a Saint Louis delivering justice beneath an oak-tree, by the affecting sounds that emerged from his somewhat too tuneful lips, suspected real treachery when they learned of a slander uttered at their expense by a man whose words had always seemed so heartfelt. These

slanders were frequent enough with him. But that did not prevent him from taking a liking to people, from praising those he liked and taking pleasure in showing willingness to help them.

"Not that I'm in the least surprised at his appreciating you," said Mme de Guermantes, "he's an intelligent man. And I can quite understand," she added, for the benefit of the rest of the party, alluding to a plan of marriage of which I knew nothing, "that my aunt, who has long ceased to amuse him as an old mistress, may not seem of very much use to him as a new wife. Especially as I understand that even as a mistress she hasn't functioned for years now. Her only relations, if I may say so, are with God. She is more churchy than you would believe, and Boaz-Norpois can say, in the words of Victor Hugo:

How long a time since she with whom I slept,  
O Lord, forsook my bed for yours!

Really, my poor aunt is like those avant-garde artists who have railed against the Academy all their lives, and in the end start a little academy of their own, or those unfrocked priests who fabricate a religion of their own. Might as well stick to the cloth, or not live together. But who knows," went on the Duchess with a meditative air, "it may be in anticipation of widowhood—there's nothing sadder than weeds one's not entitled to wear."

"Ah! if Mme de Villeparisis were to become Mme de Norpois, I really believe our cousin Gilbert would have a fit," said General de Monserfeuil. "The Prince de Guermantes is a charming man, but he really is rather taken up with questions of birth and etiquette," said the Princesse de Parme. "I went to spend a few days with them in the country, when the Princess, unfortunately, was ill in bed. I was accompanied by Petite." (This was a nickname that was given to Mme d'Hunolstein because she was enormously stout.) "The Prince came to meet me at the foot of the steps, and pretended not to see Petite. We went up to the first floor, and then at the entrance to the reception rooms, stepping back to make way for me, he said: 'Oh, how d'ye do, Mme d'Hunolstein' (he always calls her that now, since her separation) pretending to have caught sight of Petite for the first time, so as to show that he didn't have to come down to receive her at the foot of the steps."

"That doesn't surprise me in the least. I don't need to tell you," said the Duke, who regarded himself as extremely modern, more contemptuous than anyone in the world of mere birth, and in fact a Republican, "that I haven't many ideas in common with my cousin. Your Highness can imagine that we are about as much agreed on most subjects as day and night. But I must say that if my aunt were to marry Norpois, for once I should be of Gilbert's opinion. To be the daughter of Florimond de Guise and then to make a marriage like that would be enough, as the saying is, to make a cat laugh, when all's said and done." (These last words, which the Duke uttered as a rule in the middle of a sentence, were here quite superfluous. But he felt a perpetual need to say them which made him shift them to the end of a period if he had found no place for them elsewhere. They were for him, among other things, almost a question of prosody.) "Mind you," he added, "the Norpois are excellent people with a good place, of good stock."

"Listen to me, Basin, it's really not worth your while to poke fun at Gilbert if you're going to speak the same language as he does," said Mme de Guermantes, for whom the "goodness" of a family, no less than that of a wine, consisted in its age. But, less frank than her cousin and more subtle than her husband, she made a point of never in her conversation playing false to the Guermantes spirit, and despised rank in her speech while ready to honour it by her actions.

"But aren't you even some sort of cousins?" asked General de Monserfeuil. "I seem to remember that Norpois married a La Rochefoucauld."

"Not in that way at all, she belonged to the branch of the Ducs de La Rochefoucauld, and my grandmother comes from the Ducs de Doudeauville. She was own grandmother to Edouard Coco, the wisest man in the family," replied the Duke, whose views of wisdom were somewhat superficial, "and the two branches haven't intermarried since Louis XIV's time; the connexion would be rather distant."

"Really, how interesting; I never knew that," said the General.

"However," went on M. de Guermantes, "his mother, I believe, was the sister of the Duc de Montmorency, and had originally been married to a La Tour d'Auvergne. But as those Montmorencys are barely Montmorencys, while those La Tour d'Auvergnes are not La Tour d'Auvergnes at all, I cannot see that it gives him any very great position. He says—and this should be more to the point—that he's descended from Saintrailles, and as we ourselves are in a direct line of descent ..."

There was at Combray a Rue de Saintrailles to which I had never given another thought. It led from the Rue de la Bretonnerie to the Rue de l'Oiseau. And as Saintrailles, the companion of Joan of Arc, had, by marrying a Guermantes, brought into the family that county of Combray, his arms were quartered with those of Guermantes at the base of one of the windows in Saint-Hilaire. I saw again a vision of dark sandstone steps, while a modulation of sound brought to my ears that name, Guermantes, in the forgotten tone in which I used to hear it long ago, so different from that in which it simply meant the genial hosts with whom I was dining this evening. If the name, Duchesse de Guermantes, was for me a collective name, it was not so merely in history, by the accumulation of all the women who had successively borne it, but also in the course of my own short life, which had already seen, in this single Duchesse de Guermantes, so many different women superimpose themselves, each one vanishing as soon as the next had acquired sufficient consistency. Words do not change their meaning as much in centuries as names do for us in the space of a few years. Our memories and our hearts are not large enough to be able to remain faithful. We have not room enough, in our present mental field, to keep the dead there as well as the living. We are obliged to build on top of what has gone

before and is brought to light only by a chance excavation, such as the name Saintrilles had just opened up. I felt that it would be useless to explain all this, and indeed a little while earlier I had lied by implication in not answering when M. de Guermantes said to me: "You don't know our little corner?" Perhaps he was quite well aware that I did know it, and it was only from good breeding that he did not press the question. Mme de Guermantes drew me out of my meditation.

"Really, I find all that sort of thing too deadly. I say, it's not always as boring as this at my house. I hope you'll soon come and dine again as a compensation, with no pedigrees next time," she said to me in a low voice, incapable both of appreciating the kind of charm which I might find in her house and of having sufficient humility to be content to appeal to me simply as a herbarium filled with plants of another day.

What Mme de Guermantes believed to be disappointing my expectations was on the contrary what in the end—for the Duke and the General went on to discuss pedigrees now without stopping—saved my evening from being a complete disappointment. How could I have felt otherwise until now? Each of my fellow-guests at dinner, decking out the mysterious name under which I had merely known and dreamed of them at a distance in a body and a mind similar or inferior to those of all the people I knew, had given me the impression of a commonplace dullness which the view on entering the Danish port of Elsinore would give to any passionate admirer of *Hamlet*. No doubt these geographical regions and that ancient past which put forest glades and Gothic belfries into their names had in a certain measure formed their faces, their minds and their prejudices, but survived in them only as does the cause in the effect, that is to say as a thing possible for the intelligence to perceive but in no way perceptible to the imagination.

And these old-time prejudices restored in a flash to the friends of M. and Mme de Guermantes their lost poetry. Assuredly, the notions in the possession of the nobility which make them the scholars, the etymologists of the language not of words but of names (and even then only in comparison with the ignorant mass of the middle classes, for if at the same level of mediocrity a devout Catholic would be better able to stand questioning on the details of the liturgy than a free-thinker, on the other hand an anti-clerical archaeologist can often give points to his parish priest on everything connected even with the latter's own church), those notions, if we are to keep to the truth, that is to say to the spirit, did not even have for these noblemen the charm that they would have had for a bourgeois. They knew perhaps better than I that the Duchesse de Guise was Princess of Cleves, of Orléans, of Porcien, and all the rest, but they had known, long before they knew all these names, the face of the Duchesse de Guise which thenceforth that name reflected back to them. I had begun with the fairy, even if she was fated soon to perish; they with the woman.

In middle-class families one sometimes sees jealousies spring up if the younger sister marries before the elder. So the aristocratic world, Courvoisiers especially but Guermantes also, reduced its ennobled greatness to simple domestic superiorities, by virtue of a childishness which I had met originally (and this for me was its sole charm) in books. Is it not just as though Tallemant des Réaux were speaking of the Guermantes, and not of the Rohans, when he relates with evident satisfaction how M. de Guéménée cried to his brother: "You can come in here; this is not the Louvre!" and said of the Chevalier de Rohan (because he was a natural son of the Duc de Clermont): "At any rate he's a prince." The only thing that distressed me in all this talk was to find that the absurd stories which were being circulated about the charming adopted Grand Duke of Luxembourg found as much credence in this salon as they had among Saint-Loup's friends. Plainly it was an epidemic that would not last longer than perhaps a year or two but had meanwhile infected everyone. People repeated the same old stories, or enriched them with others equally untrue. I gathered that the Princesse de Luxembourg herself, while apparently defending her nephew, supplied weapons for the assault. "You are wrong to stand up for him," M. de Guermantes told me, as Saint-Loup had told me before. "Look, even leaving aside the opinion of our family, which is unanimous, you have only to talk to his servants, and they, after all, are the people who know us best. Mme de Luxembourg gave her little negro page to her nephew. The negro came back in tears: 'Grand Duke beat me, me no bad boy, Grand Duke naughty man, just fancy!' And I can speak with some knowledge, he's Oriane's cousin."

I cannot, by the way, say how many times in the course of this evening I heard the word "cousin" used. On the one hand, M. de Guermantes, almost at every name that was mentioned, exclaimed: "But he's Oriane's cousin!" with the sudden delight of a man who, lost in a forest, reads at the ends of a pair of arrows pointing in opposite directions on a signpost, and followed by quite a low number of kilometres, the words: "Belvédère Casimir-Périer" and "Croix du Grand-Veneur," and gathers from them that he is on the right road. On the other hand the word cousin was employed in a wholly different connexion (which was here the exception to the prevailing rule) by the Turkish Ambassadors, who had come in after dinner. Devoured by social ambition and endowed with a real power of assimilating knowledge, she would pick up with equal facility Xenophon's story of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand or the details of sexual perversion among birds. It would have been impossible to catch her out on any of the most recent German publications, whether they dealt with political economy, mental aberrations, the various forms of onanism, or the philosophy of Epicurus. She was, incidentally, a dangerous person to listen to, for, perpetually in error, she would point out to you as being of the loosest morals women of irreproachable virtue, would put you on your guard against a man with the most honourable intentions, and would tell you anecdotes of the sort that seem always to have come out of a book, not so much because they are serious as because they are so wildly improbable.

She was at this period little received in society. For some weeks now she had been frequenting the houses of women of real social brilliance, such as the Duchesse de Guermantes, but in general had confined herself, of necessity, as regards the noblest families, to obscure scions whom the Guermantes no longer called on. She hoped to prove her social credentials by quoting the most historic names of the little-known people who were

her friends. At once M. de Guermantes, thinking that she was referring to people who frequently dined at his table, quivered with joy at finding himself once more in sight of a landmark and uttered the rallying-cry: "But he's Oriane's cousin! I know him as well as I know my own name. He lives in the Rue Vaneau. His mother was Mlle d'Uzès." The Ambassadors was obliged to admit that her specimen had been drawn from smaller game. She tried to connect her friends with those of M. de Guermantes by means of a detour. "I know quite well who you mean. No, it's not those ones, they're cousins." But this reflux launched by the unfortunate Ambassadors ran but a little way. For M. de Guermantes, losing interest, answered: "Oh, then I don't know who you're talking about." The Ambassadors offered no reply, for if she never knew anyone nearer than the "cousins" of those whom she ought to have known in person, very often these cousins were not even related at all. Then, from the lips of M. de Guermantes, would flow a fresh wave of "But she's Oriane's cousin!"—words which seemed to have for the Duke the same practical value in each of his sentences as certain epithets which the Roman poets found convenient because they provided them with dactyls or spondees for their hexameters.

At least the explosion of "But she's Oriane's cousin!" appeared to me quite natural when applied to the Princesse de Guermantes, who was indeed very closely related to the Duchess. The Ambassadors did not seem to care for this Princess. She said to me in an undertone: "She is stupid. No, she's not so beautiful as all that. That reputation is usurped. Anyhow," she went on, with an air at once considered, dismissive and decisive, "I find her extremely antipathetic." But often the cousinship extended a great deal further, Mme de Guermantes making it a point of honour to address as "Aunt" ladies with whom it would have been impossible to find her an ancestress in common without going back at least to Louis XV; just as, whenever the "hardness" of the times brought it about that a multimillionairess married a prince whose great-great-grandfather had married, as had Oriane's also, a daughter of Louvois, one of the chief joys of the fair American was to be able, after a first visit to the Hôtel de Guermantes, where she was, incidentally, somewhat coolly received and critically dissected, to say "Aunt" to Mme de Guermantes, who allowed her to do so with a maternal smile. But little did it matter to me what "birth" meant for M. de Guermantes and M. de Monseigneur; in the conversations which they held on the subject I sought only a poetic pleasure. Without being conscious of it themselves, they procured me this pleasure as might a couple of farmers or sailors speaking of the soil or the tides, realities too little detached from their own lives for them to be capable of enjoying the beauty which personally I undertook to extract from them.

Sometimes, rather than of a race, it was of a particular fact, of a date, that a name reminded me. Hearing M. de Guermantes recall that M. de Bréauté's mother had been a Choiseul and his grandmother a Lucinge, I fancied I could see beneath the commonplace shirt-front with its plain pearl studs, bleeding still in two globes of crystal, those august relics, the hearts of Mme de Praslin and of the Duc de Berry. Others were more voluptuous: the fine and flowing hair of Mme Tallien or Mme de Sabran.

Sometimes it was more than a simple relic that I saw. Better informed than his wife as to what their ancestors had been, M. de Guermantes had at his command memories which gave to his conversation a fine air of an ancient mansion, lacking in real masterpieces but still full of pictures, authentic, indifferent and majestic, which taken as a whole has an air of grandeur. The Prince d'Agrigente having asked why the Prince Von had said, in speaking of the Duc d'Aumale, "my uncle," M. de Guermantes replied: "Because his mother's brother, the Duke of Württemberg, married a daughter of Louis-Philippe." At once I was lost in contemplation of a reliquary such as Carpaccio or Memling used to paint, from its first panel in which the princess, at the wedding festivities of her brother the Duc d'Orléans, appeared wearing a plain garden dress to indicate her ill-humour at having seen her ambassadors, who had been sent to sue on her behalf for the hand of the Prince of Syracuse, return empty-handed, down to the last, in which she has just given birth to a son, the Duke of Württemberg (the uncle of the prince with whom I had just dined), in that castle called Fantaisie, one of those places which are as aristocratic as certain families, for they too, outlasting a single generation, see attached to themselves more than one historical personage: in this one, notably, survive side by side memories of the Margravine of Bayreuth, of that other somewhat fantastic princess (the Duc d'Orléans's sister), to whom, it was said, the name of her husband's castle made a distinct appeal, of the King of Bavaria, and finally of the Prince Von whose address it now in fact was, at which he had just asked the Duc de Guermantes to write to him, for he had succeeded to it and let it only during the Wagner festivals, to the Prince de Polignac, another delightful "fantasist." When M. de Guermantes, to explain how he was related to Mme d'Arpajon, was obliged to go back, so far and so simply, along the chain formed by the joined hands of three or five ancestresses, to Marie-Louise or Colbert, it was the same thing again: in each of these cases, a great historical event appeared only in passing, masked, distorted, reduced, in the name of a property, in the Christian names of a woman, chosen for her because she was the granddaughter of Louis-Philippe and Marie-Amélie, considered no longer as King and Queen of France but only insofar as, in their capacity as grandparents, they bequeathed a heritage. (We see for other reasons in a glossary to the works of Balzac, where the most illustrious personages figure only according to their connexion with the *Comédie Humaine*, Napoleon occupying a space considerably less than that allotted to Rastignac, and occupying that space solely because he once spoke to Mlle de Cinq-Cygne.) Thus does the aristocracy, in its heavy structure, pierced with rare windows, admitting a scanty daylight, showing the same incapacity to soar but also the same massive and blind force as Romanesque architecture, embody all our history, immuring it, beetling over it.

Thus the empty spaces of my memory were covered by degrees with names which in arranging, composing themselves in relation to one another, in linking themselves to one another by increasingly numerous connexions, resembled those finished works of art in which there is not one touch that is isolated, in which every part in turn receives from the rest a justification which it confers on them in turn.



M. de Luxembourg's name having been brought up again, the Turkish Ambadress told us how, the young bride's grandfather (he who had made that immense fortune out of flour and pasta) having invited M. de Luxembourg to lunch, the latter had written to decline, putting on the envelope: "M. So-and-so, miller," to which the grandfather had replied: "I am all the more disappointed that you were unable to come, my dear friend, in that I should have been able to enjoy your society in privacy, for we were an intimate party and there would have been only the miller, his son, and you."<sup>30</sup> This story was not merely utterly distasteful to me, who knew how inconceivable it was that my dear M. de Nassau could write to his wife's grandfather (whose fortune, moreover, he was expecting to inherit) and address him as "miller"; but furthermore its stupidity was glaring from the start, the word "miller" having obviously been dragged in only to lead up to the title of La Fontaine's fable. But there is in the Faubourg Saint-Germain a silliness so great, when it is aggravated by malice, that everyone agreed that it was "well said" and that the grandfather, whom at once everyone confidently declared to have been a remarkable man, had shown a prettier wit than his grandson-in-law. The Duc de Châtellerault wanted to take advantage of this story to tell the one I had heard in the café: "Everyone had to lie down!"—but scarcely had he begun, or reported M. de Luxembourg's pretension that in his wife's presence M. de Guermantes ought to stand up, when the Duchess stopped him with the protest: "No, he's very absurd, but not as bad as that." I was privately convinced that all these stories at the expense of M. de Luxembourg were equally untrue, and that whenever I found myself face to face with any of the reputed actors or spectators I should hear the same denial. I wondered, however, whether the denial just uttered by Mme de Guermantes had been inspired by regard for truth or by pride. In any event the latter quality succumbed to malice, for she added with a laugh: "Not that I haven't had my little snub too, for he invited me to luncheon, wishing to introduce me to the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, which is how he has the good taste to describe his wife when he's writing to his aunt. I sent a reply expressing my regret, and adding: As for the 'Grand Duchess of Luxembourg' (in inverted commas), tell her that if she wants to come to see me I am at home every Thursday after five. I even had another snub. Happening to be in Luxembourg, I telephoned and asked to speak to him. His Highness was going into luncheon, had just risen from luncheon, two hours went by and nothing happened; so then I employed another method: 'Will you tell the Comte de Nassau to come and speak to me?' Cut to the quick, he was at the instrument that very minute." Everyone laughed at the Duchess's story, and at other analogous, that is to say (I am convinced of it) equally untrue stories, for a man more intelligent, kinder, more refined, in a word more exquisite than this Luxembourg-Nassau I have never met. The sequel will show that it was I who was right. I must admit that, in the midst of her scurrilous onslaught, Mme de Guermantes nevertheless did have a kind word for him.

"He wasn't always like that," she informed us. "Before he went off his head, like the man in the story-book who thinks he's become king, he was no fool, and indeed in the early days of his engagement he used to speak of it in really quite a nice way, as an undreamed-of happiness: 'It's just like a fairy-tale; I shall have to make my entry into Luxembourg in a fairy coach,' he said to his uncle d'Ornessan, who answered—for you know it's not a very big place, Luxembourg: 'A fairy coach! I'm afraid, my dear fellow, you'd never get it in. I should suggest that you take a goat-cart.' Not only did this not annoy Nassau, but he was the first to tell us the story, and to laugh at it."

"Ornessan is a witty fellow, and he has every reason to be; his mother was a Montjeu. He's in a very bad way now, poor Ornessan."

This name had the magic virtue of interrupting the flow of stale witticisms which otherwise would have gone on for ever. For M. de Guermantes went on to explain that M. d'Ornessan's great-grandmother had been the sister of Marie de Castille Montjeu, the wife of Timoléon de Lorraine, and consequently Oriane's aunt, with the result that the conversation drifted back to genealogies, while the imbecile Turkish Ambadress breathed in my ear: "You appear to be very much in the Duke's good books; have a care!" and, on my demanding an explanation: "I mean to say—*verb. sap.*—he's a man to whom one could safely entrust one's daughter, but not one's son." Now if ever, on the contrary, there was a man who was passionately and exclusively a lover of women, it was certainly the Duc de Guermantes. But error, untruth fatuously believed, were for the Ambadress like a vital element out of which she could not move. "His brother Mémé, who is, as it happens, for other reasons altogether" (he ignored her) "profoundly uncongenial to me, is genuinely distressed by the Duke's morals. So is their aunt Villeparisis. Ah, now, her I adore! There is a saint of a woman for you, the true type of the great ladies of the past. She's not only virtue itself but reserve itself. She still says 'Monsieur' to the Ambassador Norpois whom she sees every day, and who, by the way, made an excellent impression in Turkey."

I did not even reply to the Ambadress, in order to listen to the genealogies. They were not all of them important. It happened indeed that one of the alliances about which I learned from M. de Guermantes in the course of the conversation was a misalliance, but one not without charm, for, uniting under the July Monarchy the Duc de Guermantes and the Duc de Fezensac with the two irresistible daughters of an eminent navigator, it gave to the two duchesses the unexpected piquancy of an exotically bourgeois, "Louisphilippically" Indian grace. Or else, under Louis XIV, a Norpois had married the daughter of the Duc de Mortemart, whose illustrious title, in that far-off epoch, struck the name Norpois, which I had found lacklustre and might have supposed to be recent, and engraved it deeply with the beauty of an old medal. And in these cases, moreover, it was not only the less well-known name that benefited by the association; the other, hackneyed by its very glitter, struck me more forcibly in this novel and more obscure aspect, just as among the portraits painted by a brilliant colourist the most striking is sometimes one that is all in black. The sudden mobility with which all these names seemed to me to have been endowed, as they sprang to take their places

by the side of others from which I should have supposed them to be remote, was due not to my ignorance alone; the to-ings and fro-ings which they were performing in my mind had been performed no less readily at those epochs in which a title, being always attached to a piece of land, used to follow it from one family to another, so much so that, for example, in the fine feudal structure that is the title of Duc de Nemours or Duc de Chevreuse, I might discover successively, crouching as in the hospitable abode of a hermit-crab, a Guise, a Prince of Savoy, an Orléans, a Luynes. Sometimes several remained in competition for a single shell: for the Principality of Orange the royal house of the Netherlands and MM. de Mailly-Nesle, for the Duchy of Brabant the Baron de Charlus and the royal house of Belgium, various others for the titles of Prince of Naples, Duke of Parma, Duke of Reggio. Sometimes it was the other way; the shell had been so long uninhabited by proprietors long since dead that it had never occurred to me that this or that name of a castle could have been, at an epoch which after all was comparatively recent, the name of a family. Thus, when M. de Guermantes replied to a question put to him by M. de Monseigneur: "No, my cousin was a fanatical royalist; she was the daughter of the Marquis de Féterne, who played some part in the Chouan rising," on seeing this name Féterne, which to me, since my stay at Balbec, had been the name of a castle, become, what I had never dreamed that it could possibly be, a family name, I felt the same astonishment as in reading a fairy-tale where turrets and a terrace come to life and turn into men and women. In this sense of the words, we may say that history, even mere family history, restores old stones to life. There have been in Parisian society men who played as considerable a part in it, who were more sought after for their distinction or for their wit, who were equally well born as the Duc de Guermantes or the Duc de La Trémoille. They have now fallen into oblivion because, as they left no descendants, their name, which we no longer hear, has an unfamiliar ring; at most, like the name of a thing beneath which we never think to discover the name of any person, it survives in some remote castle or village. The day is not distant when the traveller who, in the heart of Burgundy, stops in the little village of Charlus to look at its church, if he is not studious enough or is in too great a hurry to examine its tombstones, will go away ignorant of the fact that this name, Charlus, was that of a man who ranked with the highest in the land. This thought reminded me that it was time to go, and that while I listened to M. de Guermantes talking pedigrees, the hour was approaching at which I had promised to call on his brother. "Who knows," I continued to muse, "whether one day Guermantes itself may appear nothing more than a place-name, save to the archaeologists who, stopping by chance at Combray and standing beneath the window of Gilbert the Bad, have the patience to listen to the account given them by Théodore's successor or to read the Curé's guide?" But so long as a great name is not extinct it keeps the men and women who bear it in the limelight; and doubtless to some extent the interest which the illustriousness of these families gave them in my eyes lay in the fact that one can, starting from today, follow their ascending course, step by step, to a point far beyond the fourteenth century, and find the diaries and correspondence of all the forebears of M. de Charlus, of the Prince d'Agrigente, of the Princesse de Parme, in a past in which an impenetrable darkness would cloak the origins of a middle-class family, and in which we make out, in the luminous backward projection of a name, the origin and persistence of certain nervous characteristics, vices and disorders of one or another Guermantes. Almost pathologically identical with their namesakes of the present day, they excite from century to century the startled interest of their correspondents, whether these be anterior to the Princess Palatine and Mme de Motteville, or subsequent to the Prince de Ligne.

However, my historical curiosity was faint in comparison with my aesthetic pleasure. The names cited had the effect of disembodiment the Duchess's guests—for all that they were called the Prince d'Agrigente or of Cystria—whose masks of flesh and unintelligence or vulgar intelligence had transformed them into ordinary mortals, so much so that I had made my landing on the ducal doormat not as upon the threshold (as I had supposed) but as at the terminus of the enchanted world of names. The Prince d'Agrigente himself, as soon as I heard that his mother had been a Damas, a granddaughter of the Duke of Modena, was delivered, as from an unstable chemical alloy, from the face and speech that prevented one from recognising him, and went to form with Damas and Modena, which themselves were only titles, an infinitely more seductive combination. Each name displaced by the attraction of another with which I had never suspected it of having any affinity left the unalterable position which it had occupied in my brain, where familiarity had dulled it, and, speeding to join the Mortemarts, the Stuarts or the Bourbons, traced with them branches of the most graceful design and ever-changing colour. The name Guermantes itself received from all the beautiful names—extinct, and so all the more glowingly rekindled—with which I learned only now that it was connected, a new and purely poetic sense and purpose. At the most, at the extremity of each spray that burgeoned from the exalted stem, I could see it flower in some face of a wise king or illustrious princess, like the sire of Henri IV or the Duchesse de Longueville. But as these faces, different in this respect from those of the party around me, were not overlaid for me by any residue of physical experience or social mediocrity, they remained, in their handsome outlines and rainbow iridescence, homogeneous with those names which at regular intervals, each of a different hue, detached themselves from the genealogical tree of Guermantes, and disturbed with no foreign or opaque matter the translucent, alternating, multicoloured buds which like the ancestors of Jesus in the old Jesse windows, blossomed on either side of the tree of glass.

Already I had made several attempts to slip away, on account, more than for any other reason, of the insignificance which my presence in it imparted to the gathering, although it was one of those which I had long imagined as being so beautiful—as it would doubtless have been had there been no inconvenient witness present. At least my departure would allow the guests, once the interloper had gone, to form themselves into a closed group. They would be free to celebrate the mysteries for which they had assembled there, since it could obviously not have been to talk of Franz Hals or of avarice, and to talk of them in the same way as

people talk in bourgeois society. They spoke nothing but trivialities, doubtless because I was in the room, and I felt with some compunction, on seeing all these pretty women kept apart, that I was preventing them by my presence from carrying on, in the most precious of its drawing-rooms, the mysterious life of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But M. and Mme de Guermantes carried the spirit of self-sacrifice so far as to keep postponing, by detaining me, this departure which I was constantly trying to effect. A more curious thing still, several of the ladies who had come hurrying, ecstatic, decked out in their finery, bespangled with jewels, only to attend a party which, through my fault, differed in essence from those that are given elsewhere than in the Faubourg Saint-Germain no more than one feels oneself at Balbec to be in a town that differs from what one's eyes are accustomed to see—several of these ladies left, not at all disappointed, as they had every reason to be, but thanking Mme de Guermantes most effusively for the delightful evening which they had spent, as though on other days, those on which I was not present, nothing more occurred.

Was it really for the sake of dinners such as this that all these people dressed themselves up and refused to allow middle-class women to penetrate into their so exclusive drawing-rooms—for dinners such as this, identical, had I been absent? The suspicion flashed across my mind for a moment, but it was too absurd. Plain commonsense enabled me to brush it aside. And then, if I had adopted it, what would have been left of the name Guermantes, already so debased since Combray?

It struck me that these flower-maidens were, to a strange extent, easily pleased with another person, or anxious to please that person, for more than one of them, to whom I had not uttered during the whole course of the evening more than two or three casual remarks the stupidity of which had left me blushing, made a point, before leaving the drawing-room, of coming to tell me, fastening on me her fine caressing eyes, straightening as she spoke the garland of orchids that followed the curve of her bosom, what an intense pleasure it had been to her to make my acquaintance, and to speak to me—a veiled allusion to an invitation to dinner—of her desire to “arrange something” after she had “fixed a day” with Mme de Guermantes.

None of these flower ladies left the room before the Princesse de Parme. The presence of the latter—one must never depart before royalty—was one of the two reasons, neither of which I had guessed, for which the Duchess had insisted so strongly on my remaining. As soon as Mme de Parme had risen, it was like a deliverance. Each of the ladies, having made a genuflection before the Princess, who then raised her up from the ground, received from her in a kiss, and as it were a benediction which they had craved on their knees, the permission to ask for their cloaks and carriages. With the result that there followed, at the front door, a sort of stentorian recital of great names from the History of France. The Princesse de Parme had forbidden Mme de Guermantes to accompany her downstairs to the hall for fear of her catching cold, and the Duke had added: “There, Oriane, since Ma’am gives you leave, remember what the doctor told you.”

“I think the Princesse de Parme was *very pleased* to dine with you.” I knew the formula. The Duke had come the whole way across the drawing-room in order to utter it for my benefit with an obliging, earnest air, as though he were handing me a diploma or offering me a plateful of biscuits. And I guessed from the pleasure which he appeared to be feeling as he spoke, and which brought so gentle an expression momentarily into his face, that the duties and concerns which it represented for him were of the kind which he would continue to discharge to the very end of his life, like one of those honorific and easy posts which one is still allowed to retain even when senile.

Just as I was about to leave, the Princess's lady-in-waiting reappeared in the drawing-room, having forgotten to take away some wonderful carnations, sent up from Guermantes, which the Duchess had presented to Mme de Parme. The lady-in-waiting was somewhat flushed, and one felt that she had just been receiving a scolding, for the Princess, so kind to everyone else, could not contain her impatience at the stupidity of her attendant. And so the latter picked up the flowers quickly and ran, but to preserve an air of nonchalance and independence, flung at me as she passed: “The Princess says I'm keeping her waiting; she wants to be gone, and to have the carnations as well. After all, I'm not a little bird, I can't be in several places at once.”

Alas! the rule of not leaving before royalty was not the only one. I could not depart at once, for there was another: this was that the famous prodigality, unknown to the Courvoisiers, with which the Guermantes, whether opulent or practically ruined, excelled in entertaining their friends, was not only a material prodigality, of the kind that I had often experienced with Robert de Saint-Loup, but also a prodigality of charming words, of courteous gestures, a whole system of verbal elegance fed by a positive cornucopia within. But as this last, in the idleness of fashionable existence, remains unemployed, it overflowed at times, sought an outlet in a sort of fleeting effusion which was all the more intense, and which might, on the part of Mme de Guermantes, have led one to suppose a genuine affection. She did in fact feel it at the moment when she let it overflow, for she found then, in the society of the friend, man or woman, with whom she happened to be, a sort of intoxication, in no way sensual, similar to that which music produces in certain people; she would suddenly pluck a flower from her bodice, or a medallion, and present it to someone with whom she would have liked to prolong the evening, with a melancholy feeling the while that such a prolongation could have led to nothing but idle talk, into which nothing could have passed of the nervous pleasure, the fleeting emotion, reminiscent of the first warm days of spring in the impression they leave behind them of lassitude and regret. As for the friend, it did not do for him to put too implicit a faith in the promises, more exhilarating than anything he had ever heard, tendered by these women who, because they feel with so much more force the sweetness of a moment, make of it, with a delicacy, a nobility of which normally constituted creatures are incapable, a compelling masterpiece of grace and kindness, and no longer have anything of themselves left to give when the next moment has arrived. Their affection does not outlive the exaltation that has dictated it; and the subtlety of mind which had then led them to divine all the things that you wished to

hear, and to say them to you, will enable them just as easily, a few days later, to seize hold of your absurdities and use them to entertain another of their visitors with whom they will then be in the act of enjoying one of those "musical moments" which are so brief.

In the hall where I asked the footmen for my snow-boots, which I had brought, not realising how unfashionable they were, as a precaution against the snow, a few flakes of which had already fallen, to be converted rapidly into slush, I felt, at the contemptuous smiles on all sides, a shame which rose to its highest pitch when I saw that Mme de Parme had not yet gone and was watching me put on my American "rubbers." The Princess came towards me. "Oh! what a good idea," she exclaimed, "it's so practical! There's a sensible man for you. Madame, we shall have to get a pair of those," she said to her lady-in-waiting, while the mockery of the footmen turned to respect and the other guests crowded round me to inquire where I had managed to find these marvels. "With those on, you will have nothing to fear even if it starts snowing again and you have a long way to go. You're independent of the weather," the Princess said to me.

"Oh! if it comes to that, your Royal Highness can rest assured," broke in the lady-in-waiting with a knowing air, "it won't snow again."

"What do you know about it, Madame?" came witheringly from the excellent Princesse de Parme, whose temper only the stupidity of her lady-in-waiting could succeed in ruffling.

"I can assure your Royal Highness that it can't snow again. It's a physical impossibility."

"But why?"

"It can't snow any more, because they've taken the necessary steps to prevent it: they've sprinkled salt in the streets!"

The simple-minded lady did not notice either the anger of the Princess or the mirth of the rest of her audience, for instead of remaining silent she said to me with a genial smile, paying no heed to my repeated denials of any connexion with Admiral Jurien de La Gravière: "Not that it matters, after all. Monsieur must have stout sealegs. What's bred in the bone!"

Having escorted the Princesse de Parme to her carriage, M. de Guermantes said to me, taking hold of my greatcoat: "Let me help you into your skin." He had ceased even to smile when he employed this expression, for those that were most vulgar had for that very reason, because of the Guermantes affectation of simplicity, become aristocratic.

An exhilaration relapsing only into melancholy, because it was artificial, was what I also, although quite differently from Mme de Guermantes, felt once I had finally left her house, in the carriage that was to take me to that of M. de Charlus. We can as we choose abandon ourselves to one or other of two forces, of which one rises in ourselves, emanates from our deepest impressions, while the other comes to us from without. The first brings with it naturally a joy, the joy that springs from the life of those who create. The other current, that which endeavours to introduce into us the impulses by which persons external to ourselves are stirred, is not accompanied by pleasure; but we can add a pleasure to it, by a sort of recoil, in an intoxication so artificial that it turns swiftly into boredom, into melancholy—whence the gloomy faces of so many men of the world, and all those nervous conditions which may even lead to suicide. Now, in the carriage which was taking me to M. de Charlus, I was a prey to this second sort of exaltation, very different from that which is given us by a personal impression, such as I had received in other carriages, once at Combray, in Dr Percepied's gig, from which I had seen the spires of Martinville against the setting sun, another day at Balbec, in Mme de Villeparisis's barouche, when I strove to identify the reminiscence that was suggested to me by an avenue of trees. But in this third carriage, what I had before my mind's eye were those conversations that had seemed to me so tedious at Mme de Guermantes's dinner-table, for example Prince Von's stories about the German Emperor, General Botha and the British Army. I had just slid them into the internal stereoscope through the lenses of which, as soon as we are no longer ourselves, as soon as, endowed with a worldly spirit, we wish to receive our life only from other people, we give depth and relief to what they have said and done. Like a tipsy man filled with tender feeling for the waiter who has been serving him, I marvelled at my good fortune, a good fortune not recognised by me, it is true, at the actual moment, in having dined with a person who knew Wilhelm II so well and had told stories about him that were—upon my word—extremely witty. And, as I repeated to myself, with the Prince's German accent, the story of General Botha, I laughed out loud, as though this laugh, like certain kinds of applause which increase one's inward admiration, were necessary to the story as a corroboration of its hilarity. Through the magnifying lenses, even those of Mme de Guermantes's pronouncements which had struck me as being stupid (as for example the one about the Hals pictures which one ought to see from the top of a tram-car) took on an extraordinary life and depth. And I must say that, even if this exaltation was quick to subside, it was not altogether unreasonable. Just as there may always come a day when we are glad to know the person whom we despise more than anyone in the world because he happens to be connected with a girl with whom we are in love, to whom he can introduce us, and thus offers us both utility and agreeableness, attributes in which we should have supposed him to be permanently lacking, so there is no conversation, any more than there are personal relations, from which we can be certain that we shall not one day derive some benefit. What Mme de Guermantes had said to me about the pictures which it would be interesting to see, even from a tram-car, was untrue, but it contained a germ of truth which was of value to me later on.

Similarly the lines of Victor Hugo which I had heard her quote were, it must be admitted, of a period earlier than that in which he became something more than a new man, in which he brought to light, in the order of evolution, a literary species hitherto unknown, endowed with more complex organs. In these early poems, Victor Hugo is still a thinker, instead of contenting himself, like Nature, with providing food for thought. His

“thoughts” he at that time expressed in the most direct form, almost in the sense in which the Duke understood the word when, feeling it to be “old hat” and otiose for the guests at his big parties at Guermites to append to their signatures in the visitors’ book a philosophico-poetical reflexion, he used to warn newcomers in a beseeching tone: “Your name, my dear fellow, but no ‘thoughts,’ please!” Now, it was these “thoughts” of Victor Hugo’s (almost as absent from the *Légende des Siècles* as “tunes,” as “melodies” are from Wagner’s later manner) that Mme de Guermites admired in the early Hugo. Nor was she altogether wrong. They were touching, and already round about them, before their form had yet achieved the depth which it was to acquire only in later years, the rolling tide of words and of richly articulated rhymes rendered them unassimilable to the lines that one can discover in a Corneille, for example, lines in which a romanticism that is intermittent, restrained, and thus all the more moving, has nevertheless in no way penetrated to the physical sources of life, modified the unconscious and generalisable organism in which the idea is latent. And so I had been wrong in confining myself, hitherto, to the later volumes of Hugo. Of the earlier ones, of course, it was only with a fractional part that Mme de Guermites embellished her conversation. But it is precisely by thus quoting an isolated line that one multiplies its power of attraction tenfold. The lines that had entered or returned to my mind during this dinner magnetised in turn, summoned to themselves with such force, the poems within which they were normally embedded, that my electrified hands could not hold out for longer than forty-eight hours against the force that drew them towards the volume in which were bound up the *Orientales* and the *Chants du Crépuscule*. I cursed Françoise’s footman for having made a present to his native village of my copy of the *Feuilles d’Automne*, and sent him off without a moment’s delay to buy me another. I read these volumes from cover to cover and found peace of mind only when I suddenly came across, awaiting me in the light in which she had bathed them, the lines which Mme de Guermites had quoted to me. For all these reasons, conversations with the Duchess resembled the discoveries that we make in the library of a country house, out of date, incomplete, incapable of forming a mind, lacking in almost everything that we value, but offering us now and then some curious scrap of information, or even a quotation from a fine passage which we did not know and as to which we are glad to remember in after years that we owe our knowledge of it to a stately baronial mansion. We are then, as a result of having found Balzac’s preface to the *Chartreuse*, or some unpublished letters of Joubert, tempted to exaggerate the value of the life we led there, the barren frivolity of which we forget for this windfall of a single evening.

From this point of view, if this world had been unable at the outset to respond to what my imagination expected, and was consequently to strike me first of all by what it had in common with every other world rather than by the ways in which it differed from them, it yet revealed itself to me by degrees as something quite distinct. Noblemen are almost the only people from whom one learns as much as one does from peasants; their conversation is adorned with everything that concerns the land, dwellings as people used to live in them long ago, old customs, everything of which the world of money is profoundly ignorant. Even supposing that the aristocrat most moderate in his aspirations has finally caught up with the period in which he lives, his mother, his uncles, his great-aunts keep him in touch, when he recalls his childhood, with the conditions of a life almost unknown today. In the death-chamber of a contemporary corpse Mme de Guermites would not have pointed out, but would immediately have noticed, all the lapses from traditional customs. She was shocked to see women mingling with the men at a funeral, when there was a particular ceremony which ought to be celebrated for the women. As for the pall, the use of which Bloch would doubtless have believed to be confined to coffins, on account of the pall bearers of whom one reads in the reports of funerals, M. de Guermites could remember the time when, as a child, he had seen it borne at the wedding of M. de Mailly-Nesle. While Saint-Loup had sold his priceless “genealogical tree,” old portraits of the Bouillons, letters of Louis XIII, in order to buy Carrières and Art Nouveau furniture, M. and Mme de Guermites, actuated by a sentiment in which a fervent love of art may have played very little part and which left them themselves more commonplace, had kept their marvellous Boulle furniture, which presented an ensemble altogether more seductive to an artist. A literary man would similarly have been enchanted by their conversation, which would have been for him—for a hungry man has no need of another to keep him company—a living dictionary of all those expressions which every day are becoming more and more forgotten: St Joseph ties, children pledged to wear blue for Our Lady, and so forth, which one finds today only among those who have constituted themselves the amiable and benevolent custodians of the past. The pleasure that a writer experiences among them, far more than among other writers, is not without danger, for there is a risk of his coming to believe that the things of the past have a charm in themselves, of his transferring them bodily into his work, still-born in that case, exhaling a tedium for which he consoles himself with the reflexion: “It’s attractive because it’s true; that’s how people do talk.” These aristocratic conversations had moreover the charm, in Mme de Guermites’s case, of being couched in excellent French. For this reason they made permissible on the Duchess’s part her hilarity at the words “vatic,” “cosmic,” “pythian,” “supereminent,” which Saint-Loup used to employ—as well as his Bing furniture.

When all was said, the stories I had heard at Mme de Guermites’s, very different in this respect from what I had felt in the case of the hawthorns, or when I tasted a *madeleine*, remained alien to me. Entering me for a moment and possessing me only physically, it was as though, being of a social, not an individual nature, they were impatient to escape. I writhed in my seat in the carriage like the priestess of an oracle. I looked forward to another dinner-party at which I might myself become a sort of Prince of X ... , of Mme de Guermites, and repeat them. In the meantime they made my lips quiver as I stammered them to myself, and I tried in vain to bring back and concentrate a mind that was carried away by a centrifugal force. And so it was with a feverish impatience not to have to bear the whole weight of them any longer by myself in a carriage where indeed I

made up for the lack of conversation by soliloquising aloud, that I rang the bell at M. de Charlus's door, and it was in long monologues with myself, in which I rehearsed everything that I was going to tell him and gave scarcely a thought to what he might have to say to me, that I spent the whole of the time during which I was kept waiting in a drawing-room into which a footman showed me and which I was incidentally too excited to inspect. I felt so urgent a need for M. de Charlus to listen to the stories I was burning to tell him that I was bitterly disappointed to think that the master of the house was perhaps in bed, and that I might have to go home to work off by myself my verbal intoxication. I had just noticed, in fact, that I had been twenty-five minutes—that they had perhaps forgotten about me—in this room of which, despite this long wait, I could at the most have said that it was immense, greenish in colour, and contained a large number of portraits. The need to speak prevents one not merely from listening but from seeing, and in this case the absence of any description of external surroundings is tantamount to a description of an internal state. I was about to leave the room to try to get hold of someone, and, if I found no one, to make my way back to the hall and have myself let out, when, just as I had risen from my chair and taken a few steps across the mosaic parquet of the floor, a manservant came in with a troubled expression and said to me: "Monsieur le Baron has been engaged all evening, sir. There are still several people waiting to see him. I shall do everything I possibly can to get him to receive you; I have already telephoned up twice to the secretary."

"No; please don't bother. I had an appointment with M. le Baron, but it's now very late, and if he's busy this evening I can come back another day."

"Oh no, sir, you mustn't go away," cried the servant. "M. le Baron might be vexed. I will try again."

I was reminded of the things I had heard about M. de Charlus's servants and their devotion to their master. One could not quite say of him as of the Prince de Conti that he sought to give pleasure as much to the valet as to the minister, but he had shown such skill in making of the least thing that he asked of them a sort of personal favour that at night, when his body-servants were assembled round him at a respectful distance, and after running his eye over them he said: "Coignet, the candlestick!" or "Ducret, the nightshirt!" it was with an envious murmur that the rest used to withdraw, jealous of him who had been singled out by his master's favour. Two of them, indeed, who could not abide one another, used each to try to snatch the favour from his rival by going on the most flimsy pretext with a message to the Baron, if he had gone upstairs earlier than usual, in the hope of being invested for the evening with the charge of candlestick or nightshirt. If he addressed a few words directly to one of them on some subject outside the scope of his duty, still more if in winter, in the garden, knowing that one of his coachmen had caught cold, he said to him after ten minutes: "Put your cap on!" the others would not speak to the fellow again for a fortnight, in their jealousy of the great distinction that had been conferred on him.

I waited ten minutes more, and then, after requesting me not to stay too long as M. le Baron was tired and had had to send away several most important people who had made appointments with him many days before, they admitted me to his presence. These histrionic trappings with which M. de Charlus surrounded himself seemed to me a great deal less impressive than the simplicity of his brother Guermantes, but already the door stood open, and I could see the Baron, in a Chinese dressing-gown, with his throat bare, lying on a settee. My eye was caught at the same moment by a tall hat, its nap flashing like a mirror, which had been left on a chair with a cape, as though the Baron had but recently come in. The valet withdrew. I supposed that M. de Charlus would rise to greet me. Without moving a muscle he fastened on me a pair of implacable eyes. I went towards him and said good evening; he did not hold out his hand, made no reply, did not ask me to take a chair. After a moment's silence I asked him, as one would ask an ill-mannered doctor, whether it was necessary for me to remain standing. I said this with no ill intent, but my words seemed only to intensify the cold fury on M. de Charlus's face. I was not aware, moreover, that at home, in the country, at the Château de Charlus, he was in the habit after dinner (so much did he love to play the king) of sprawling in an armchair in the smoking-room, letting his guests remain standing round him. He would ask for a light from one, offer a cigar to another and then, after a few minutes' interval, would say: "But Argencourt, why don't you sit down? Take a chair, my dear fellow," and so forth, having made a point of keeping them standing simply to remind them that it was from him that they must receive permission to be seated. "Put yourself in the Louis XIV seat," he answered me with an imperious air, as though rather to force me to move further away from him than to invite me to be seated. I took an armchair which was comparatively near. "Ah! so that is what you call a Louis XIV seat! I can see you are a well-educated young man," he exclaimed in derision. I was so taken aback that I did not move, either to leave the house, as I ought to have done, or to change my seat, as he wished. "Sir," he next said to me, weighing each of his words, to the more insulting of which he prefixed a double yoke of consonants, "the interview which I have condescended to grant you, at the request of a person who desires to remain nameless, will mark the final point in our relations. I make no secret of the fact that I had hoped for better things! I should perhaps be straining the meaning of the words a little—which one ought not to do, even with people who are ignorant of their value, simply out of the respect due to oneself—were I to tell you that I had felt a certain *liking* for you. I think, however, that *benevolence*, in its most effectively patronising sense, would exceed neither what I felt nor what I was proposing to display. I had, immediately on my return to Paris, given you to understand, while you were still at Balbec, that you could count upon me." I who remembered with what a torrent of abuse M. de Charlus had parted from me at Balbec made an instinctive gesture of denial. "What!" he shouted angrily, and indeed his face, convulsed and white, differed as much from his ordinary face as does the sea when, on a stormy morning, one sees instead of its customary smiling surface a myriad writhing snakes of spray and foam, "do you mean to pretend that you did not receive my message—

almost a declaration—that you were to remember me? What was there in the way of decoration round the cover of the book that I sent you?”

“Some very pretty plaited garlands with ornaments,” I told him.

“Ah!” he replied scornfully, “the young in France know little of the treasures of our land. What would be said of a young Berliner who had never heard of the *Walküre*? Besides, you must have eyes to see and see not, since you yourself told me that you had spent two hours contemplating that particular treasure. I can see that you know no more about flowers than you do about styles. Don’t protest that you know about styles,” he cried in a shrill scream of rage, “you don’t even know what you are sitting on. You offer your hindquarters a Directory fireside chair as a Louis XIV *bergère*. One of these days you’ll be mistaking Mme de Villeparisis’s lap for the lavatory, and goodness knows what you’ll do in it. Similarly, you did not even recognise on the binding of Bergotte’s book the lintel of myosotis over the door of Balbec church. Could there have been a clearer way of saying to you: ‘Forget me not!’?”

I looked at M. de Charlus. Undoubtedly his magnificent head, though repellent, yet far surpassed that of any of his relatives; he was like an ageing Apollo; but an olive-hued, bilious juice seemed ready to start from the corners of his malevolent mouth; as for intellect, one could not deny that his, over a vast compass, had a grasp of many things which would always remain unknown to his brother Guermantes. But whatever the fine words with which he embellished all his hatreds, one felt that, whether he was moved by offended pride or disappointed love, whether his motivating force was rancour, sadism, teasing or obsession, this man was capable of committing murder, and of proving by dint of logic that he had been right in doing it and was still head and shoulders above his brother, his sister-in-law, or any of the rest.

“As, in Velazquez’s *Surrender of Breda*,” he went on, “the victor advances towards him who is the humbler in rank, and as is the duty of every noble nature, since I was everything and you were nothing, it was I who took the first steps towards you. You have made an imbecilic reply to what it is not for me to describe as an act of grandeur. But I did not allow myself to be discouraged. Our religion enjoins patience. The patience I have shown towards you will be counted, I hope, to my credit, and also my having only smiled at what might be denounced as impertinence, were it within your power to be impertinent to one who is so infinitely your superior. However, all this is now neither here nor there. I have subjected you to the test which the one eminent man of our world has ingeniously named the test of untoward kindness, and which he rightly declares to be the most terrible of all, the only one that can separate the wheat from the chaff. I can scarcely reproach you for having undergone it without success, for those who emerge from it triumphant are very few. But at least, and this is the conclusion which I am entitled to draw from the last words that we shall exchange on this earth, at least I intend to protect myself against your calumnious fabrications.”

So far, I had never dreamed that M. de Charlus’s rage could have been caused by an unflattering remark which had been repeated to him; I searched my memory; I had not spoken about him to anyone. Some ill-wisher had invented the whole thing. I protested to M. de Charlus that I had said absolutely nothing about him. “I don’t think I can have annoyed you by saying to Mme de Guermantes that I was a friend of yours.” He gave a disdainful smile, raised his voice to the supreme pitch of its highest register, and there, softly attacking the shrillest and most contumelious note, “Oh! Sir,” he said, returning by the most gradual stages to a natural intonation, and seeming to revel as he went in the oddities of this descending scale, “I think you do yourself an injustice when you accuse yourself of having said that we were *friends*. I do not look for any great verbal accuracy in one who could all too easily mistake a piece of Chippendale for a rococo chair, but really I do not believe,” he went on, with vocal caresses that grew more and more sardonically winning until a charming smile actually began to play about his lips, “I do not believe that you can ever have said, or thought, that we were *friends*! As for your having boasted that you had been *presented* to me, had *talked* to me, *knew* me slightly, had obtained, almost without solicitation, the prospect of becoming my *protégé*, I find it on the contrary very natural and intelligent of you to have done so. The extreme difference in age that there is between us enables me to recognise without absurdity that that *presentation*, those *talks*, that vague prospect of future *relations* were for you, it is not for me to say an honour, but still, when all is said and done, an advantage as to which I consider that your folly lay not in divulging it but in not having had the sense to keep it. I will even go so far as to say,” he went on, switching suddenly and momentarily from haughty anger to a gentleness so tinged with melancholy that I thought he was going to burst into tears, “that when you left unanswered the proposal I made to you here in Paris, it seemed to me so unbelievable on your part, you who had struck me as well brought up and of a good *bourgeois* family” (on this adjective alone his voice gave a little hiss of impertinence), “that I was ingenuous enough to imagine all the tall stories that never happen, letters miscarrying, addresses misread. I recognise that it was extremely naïve of me, but St Bonaventure preferred to believe that an ox could fly rather than that his brother was capable of lying. However, all that is over: the idea did not appeal to you, there is no more to be said. It seems to me only that you might have brought yourself” (and there were genuine tears in his voice), “were it only out of consideration for my age, to write to me. I had conceived and planned for you infinitely seductive things, which I had taken good care not to divulge to you. You preferred to refuse without knowing what they were; that is your affair. But, as I say, one can always *write*. In your position, and indeed in my own, I should have done so. For that reason I prefer mine to yours—I say ‘for that reason,’ because I believe that all our positions are equal, and I have more fellow-feeling for an intelligent labourer than for many a duke. But I can say that I prefer my position, because in the whole course of my life, which is beginning now to be a pretty long one, I am conscious that I have never done what you did.” (His head was turned away from the light, and I could not see if tears were falling from his eyes, as his voice led one to suppose.) “I said that I had advanced a long way towards you; the effect that

had was to make you withdraw twice as far. Now it is for me to withdraw, and we shall know one another no longer. I shall retain not your name but your case, so that at moments when I might be tempted to believe that men have good manners, or simply the intelligence not to let slip an unparalleled opportunity, I may remember that that is ranking them too highly. No, that you should have said that you knew me when it was true—for henceforward it will cease to be true—I regard that as only natural, and I take it as an act of homage, that is to say something agreeable. Unfortunately, elsewhere and in other circumstances, you have uttered remarks of a very different nature.”

“Monsieur, I swear to you that I have said nothing that could offend you.”

“And who says that I am offended?” he screamed in fury, raising himself into an erect posture on the sofa on which hitherto he had been reclining motionless, while, as the pallid, frothing snakes twisted and stiffened in his face, his voice became alternately shrill and solemn like the deafening onrush of a storm. (The force with which he habitually spoke, which made strangers turn round in the street, was multiplied a hundredfold, as is a musical forte if, instead of being played on the piano, it is played by an orchestra, and changed into a fortissimo as well. M. de Charlus roared.) “Do you suppose that it is within your power to offend me? You are evidently not aware to whom you are speaking? Do you imagine that the envenomed spittle of five hundred little gentlemen of your type, heaped one upon another, would succeed in slobbering so much as the tips of my august toes?”

While he was speaking, my desire to persuade M. de Charlus that I had never spoken or heard anyone else speak ill of him had given place to a wild rage, provoked by the words which, to my mind, were dictated to him solely by his colossal pride. Perhaps they were indeed the effect, in part at any rate, of this pride. Almost all the rest sprang from a feeling of which I was then still ignorant, and for which I could not therefore be blamed for not making due allowance. Failing this unknown element, I might, had I remembered the words of Mme de Guermantes, have been tempted to assume a trace of madness in his pride. But at that moment the idea of madness never even entered my head. There was in him, in my view, only pride, while in me there was only fury. This fury (at the moment when M. de Charlus ceased to shout, in order to refer to his august toes, with a majesty that was accompanied by a grimace, a vomit of disgust at his obscure blasphemers), this fury could contain itself no longer. I felt a compulsive desire to strike something, and, a lingering trace of discernment making me respect the person of a man so much older than myself, and even, in view of their dignity as works of art, the pieces of German porcelain that were grouped around him, I seized the Baron's new silk hat, flung it to the ground, trampled it, picked it up again, began blindly pulling it to pieces, wrenched off the brim, tore the crown in two, heedless of the continuing vociferations of M. de Charlus, and, crossing the room in order to leave, opened the door. To my intense astonishment, two footmen were standing one on either side of it, who moved slowly away, so as to appear only to have been casually passing in the course of their duty. (I afterwards learned their names; one was called Burnier, the other Charmel.) I was not taken in for a moment by the explanation which their leisurely gait seemed to offer me. It was highly improbable; three others appeared to me to be less so: one was that the Baron sometimes entertained guests against whom, in case he happened to need assistance (but why?), he deemed it necessary to keep reinforcements posted close at hand; the second was that, drawn by curiosity, they had stopped to listen at the keyhole, not thinking that I should come out so quickly; the third, that, the whole of the scene which M. de Charlus had made having been a piece of play-acting rehearsed in advance, he had himself told them to listen, from a love of spectacle combined, perhaps, with a *nunc erudimini*, “Be wise now,” by which everyone would profit.

My anger had not calmed that of M. de Charlus, and my departure from the room seemed to cause him acute distress; he called me back, shouted to his servants to stop me, and finally, forgetting that a moment earlier, when he spoke of his “august toes,” he had thought to make me a witness of his own deification, came running after me at full speed, overtook me in the hall, and stood barring the door. “Come, now,” he said, “don't be childish; come back for a minute; he that loveth well chasteneth well, and if I have chastened you well it is because I love you well.” My anger had subsided; I let the word “chasten” pass and followed the Baron who, summoning a footman, ordered him without a trace of self-consciousness to clear away the remains of the shattered hat, which was replaced by another.

“If you will tell me, Monsieur, who it is that has treacherously maligned me,” I said to M. de Charlus, “I will stay here to learn his name and to confute the impostor.”

“Who? Do you not know? Do you retain no memory of the things you say? Do you think that the people who are so good as to inform me of such things do not begin by demanding secrecy? And do you imagine that I'm going to betray a person to whom I have given my promise?”

“So it's impossible for you to tell me?” I asked, racking my brains in a last fruitless effort to discover to whom I could have spoken about M. de Charlus.

“Did you not hear me say that I had given a promise of secrecy to my informant?” he said in a snarling voice. “I see that with your fondness for abject utterances you combine one for futile persistence. You ought at least to have the intelligence to profit from a final interview with me, and not go on talking for the sake of talking drivell.”

“Monsieur,” I replied, moving away from him, “you insult me. I am disarmed, because you are several times my age, we are not equally matched. Moreover, I cannot convince you. I have already sworn to you that I have said nothing.”

“So I'm lying!” he screamed in a terrifying tone, and with a bound forward that brought him within a yard of me.



"Someone has misinformed you."

Then in a gentle, affectionate, melancholy voice, as in those symphonies which are played without a break between the different movements, in which a graceful scherzo, amiable and idyllic, follows the thunder-peals of the opening part, "It is quite possible," he said. "Generally speaking, a remark repeated at second hand is rarely true. It is your fault if, not having profited by the opportunities of seeing me which I had held out to you, you have not furnished me, by those frank and open words of daily intercourse which create confidence, with the unique and sovereign remedy against a remark which made you out a traitor. Either way, true or false, the allegation has done its work. I can never rid myself of the impression it made on me. I cannot even say that he who chasteneth well loveth well, for I have chastened you well enough but I no longer love you."

While saying this he had forced me to sit down and had rung the bell. A different footman appeared. "Bring something to drink and order the brougham." I said that I was not thirsty, that it was very late, and that in any case I had a carriage waiting. "They have probably paid him and sent him away," he told me, "you needn't worry about that. I'm ordering a carriage to take you home ... If you're anxious about the time ... I could have given you a room here ..." I said that my mother would be worried. "Ah! of course, yes. Well, true or false, the remark has done its work. My affection, a trifle premature, had flowered too soon, and, like those apple-trees of which you spoke so poetically at Balbec, it has been unable to withstand the first frost."

If M. de Charlus's affection for me had not been destroyed, he could hardly have acted differently, since, while assuring me that we had fallen out, he made me sit down and drink, asked me to stay the night, and was now going to send me home. He had indeed an air of dreading the moment at which he must part from me and find himself alone, that sort of slightly anxious fear which his sister-in-law and cousin Guermantes had appeared to me to be feeling when she had tried to force me to stay a little longer, with something of the same momentary fondness for me, of the same effort to prolong the passing minute.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "I have not the gift to cause what has once been destroyed to blossom again. My affection for you is quite dead. Nothing can revive it. I believe that it is not unworthy of me to confess that I regret it. I always feel myself to be a little like Victor Hugo's Boaz: 'I am widowed and alone, and darkness gathers over me.'"

I walked back through the big green drawing-room with him. I told him, speaking quite at random, how beautiful I thought it. "Isn't it?" he replied. "It's a good thing to be fond of something. The panelling is by Bagard. What is rather charming, d'you see, is that it was made to match the Beauvais chairs and the consoles. You observe, it repeats the same decorative design. There used to be only two places where you could see this, the Louvre and M. d'Hinnisdal's house. But naturally, as soon as I had decided to come and live in this street, there cropped up an old family house of the Chimays which nobody had ever seen before because it came here expressly for me. On the whole it's quite good. It might perhaps be better, but after all it's not bad. Some pretty things, are there not? These are portraits of my uncles, the King of Poland and the King of England, by Mignard. But why am I telling you all this? You must know it as well as I do, since you were waiting in this room. No? Ah, then they must have put you in the blue drawing-room," he said with an air that might have been either rudeness, on the score of my lack of curiosity, or personal superiority, in not having taken the trouble to ask where I had been kept waiting. "Look, in this cabinet I have all the hats worn by Madame Elisabeth, by the Princesse de Lamballe, and by Marie-Antoinette. They don't interest you; it's as though you couldn't see. Perhaps you are suffering from an affection of the optic nerve. If you like this kind of beauty better, here is a rainbow by Turner beginning to shine out between these two Rembrandts, as a sign of our reconciliation. You hear: Beethoven has come to join him." And indeed one could hear the first chords of the last movement of the Pastoral Symphony, "Joy after the Storm," performed somewhere not far away, on the first floor no doubt, by a band of musicians. I innocently inquired how they happened to be playing that, and who the musicians were. "Ah, well, one doesn't know. One never does know. It's invisible music. Pretty, isn't it?" he said to me in a slightly insolent tone, which nevertheless suggested somehow the influence and accent of Swann. "But you don't care two hoots about it. You want to go home, even if it means showing disrespect for Beethoven and for me. You are pronouncing judgment on yourself," he added, with an affectionate and mournful air, when the moment had come for me to go. "You will excuse my not accompanying you home, as good manners ordain that I should. Since I have decided not to see you again, spending five minutes more in your company would make very little difference to me. But I am tired, and I have a great deal to do." However, seeing that it was a fine night: "Ah, well, perhaps I will come in the carriage after all," he said. "There's a superb moon which I shall go on to admire from the Bois after I have taken you home. What, you don't know how to shave!—even on a night when you've been dining out, you have still a few hairs here," he said, taking my chin between two fingers which seemed as it were magnetised, and after a moment's resistance ran up to my ears like the fingers of a barber. "Ah! how pleasant it would be to look at the 'blue light of the moon' in the Bois with someone like yourself," he said to me with a sudden and almost involuntary gentleness, and then, sadly: "For you're nice, really; you could be nicer than anyone," he went on, laying his hand in a fatherly way on my shoulder. "Originally, I must confess that I found you quite insignificant." I ought to have reflected that he must find me so still. I had only to recall the rage with which he had spoken to me, barely half an hour before. In spite of this I had the impression that he was, for the moment, sincere, that his kindness of heart was prevailing over what I regarded as an almost frenzied condition of susceptibility and pride. The carriage was waiting beside us, and still he prolonged the conversation. "Come along," he said abruptly, "jump in, in five minutes we shall be at your door. And I shall bid you a good-night which will cut short our relations, for all time. It is better, since we must part for ever, that we should do so, as in music, on a common chord." Despite these solemn affirmations that we should never see one another again, I could have

sworn that M. de Charlus, annoyed at having forgotten himself earlier in the evening and afraid of having hurt my feelings, would not have been displeased to see me once again. Nor was I mistaken, for, a moment later: "There, now," he said, "if I hadn't forgotten the most important thing of all. In memory of your grandmother, I have had a rare edition of Mme de Sévigné bound for you. I fear that that will prevent this from being our last meeting. One must console oneself with the reflexion that complicated affairs are rarely settled in a day. Just look how long they took over the Congress of Vienna."

"But I could send round for it without disturbing you," I said obligingly.

"Will you hold your tongue, you little fool," he replied angrily, "and not assume the grotesque air of regarding as a small matter the honour of being probably (I do not say certainly, for it will perhaps be one of my servants who hands you the volumes) received by me."

Then, regaining possession of himself: "I do not wish to part from you on these words. No dissonance; before the eternal silence, the dominant chord!" It was for his own nerves that he seemed to dread an immediate return home after harsh words of dissension. "You would not care to come to the Bois," he said to me in a tone that was not so much interrogative as affirmative, not, it seemed to me, because he did not wish to make me the offer, but because he was afraid that his self-esteem might meet with a refusal. "Ah, well," he went on, still postponing our separation, "it is the moment when, as Whistler says, the *bourgeois* go to bed" (perhaps he wished now to appeal to my self-esteem) "and it is meet to begin to look at things. But you don't even know who Whistler is!" I changed the subject and asked him whether the Princesse d'Éléna was an intelligent person. M. de Charlus stopped me, and, adopting the most contemptuous tone that I had yet heard him use, "Ah! there, sir," he said, "you are alluding to an order of nomenclature with which I do not hold. There is perhaps an aristocracy among the Tahitians, but I must confess that I know nothing about it. The name which you have just pronounced did sound in my ears, strangely enough, only a few days ago. Someone asked me whether I would condescend to allow the young Duc de Guastalla to be presented to me. The request astonished me, for the Duc de Guastalla has no need of an introduction to me, for the simple reason that he is my cousin, and has known me all his life; he is the son of the Princesse de Parme, and, as a well brought-up young kinsman, he never fails to come and pay his respects to me on New Year's Day. But, on making inquiries, I discovered that the young man in question was not my kinsman but the son of the person in whom you are interested. As there exists no princess of that title, I supposed that my friend was referring to some poor wanton sleeping under the Pont d'Éléna, who had picturesquely assumed the title of Princesse d'Éléna, as one talks about the Panther of the Batignolles, or the Steel King. But no, the reference was to a rich person who possesses some remarkable furniture which I had seen and admired at an exhibition, and which enjoys the superiority over the name of its owner of being genuine. As for this self-styled Duc de Guastalla, I supposed him to be my secretary's stockbroker; one can procure so many things with money. But no; it was the Emperor, it appears, who amused himself by conferring on these people a title which simply was not his to bestow. It was perhaps a sign of power, or of ignorance, or of malice, but in any case, I consider that it was an exceedingly scurvy trick to play on these unwitting usurpers. However, I cannot enlighten you on the subject; my knowledge begins and ends with the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where, among all the Courvoisiers and Gallardons, you will find, if you can manage to secure an introduction, plenty of old harridans taken straight out of Balzac who will amuse you. Naturally, all that has nothing to do with the prestige of the Princesse de Guermantes, but without me and my 'Open Sesame' her portals are inaccessible."

"The Princesse de Guermantes's house is really very beautiful."

"Oh, it's not very beautiful. It's the most beautiful thing in the world. Next to the Princess herself, of course."

"Is the Princesse de Guermantes superior to the Duchesse de Guermantes?"

"Oh! there's no comparison." (It is to be observed that, whenever people in society have the least touch of imagination, they will crown or dethrone, at the whim of their affections or their quarrels, those whose position appeared most solid and unalterably fixed.) "The Duchesse de Guermantes" (perhaps in not calling her "Oriane" he wished to set a greater distance between her and myself) "is delightful, far superior to anything you can have guessed. But really she is incommensurable with her cousin. The Princess is exactly what the people in the market-place might imagine Princess Metternich to have been, but *la Metternich* believed she had launched Wagner, because she knew Victor Maurel.<sup>31</sup> The Princesse de Guermantes, or rather her mother, knew the man himself. Which is a distinction, not to mention the incredible beauty of the lady. And the Esther gardens alone!"

"Can one not visit them?"

"No, you would have to be invited, but they never invite *anyone* unless I intercede."

But at once withdrawing the bait of this offer after having dangled it in front of me, he held out his hand, for we had reached my door.

"My role is at an end, sir. I will simply add these few words. Another person will perhaps offer you his affection some day as I have done. Let the present example serve for your instruction. Do not neglect it. Affection is always precious. What one cannot do alone in this life, because there are things which one cannot ask, or do, or wish, or learn by oneself, one can do in company, and without needing to be thirteen, as in Balzac's *Story of the Thirteen*, or four, as in *The Three Musketeers*. Good-bye."

He must have been feeling tired and have abandoned the idea of going to look at the moonlight, for he asked me to tell his coachman to drive home. At once he made a sharp movement as though he had changed his mind. But I had already given the order, and, so as not to lose any more time, I went and rang my door-bell. It had not recurred to me for a moment that I had been meaning to tell M. de Charlus, on the subject of

the German Emperor and General Botha, stories which had been such an obsession an hour ago but which his unexpected and crushing reception had sent flying far from my mind.

On entering my room I saw on my desk a letter which Françoise's young footman had written to one of his friends and had left lying there. Now that my mother was away, there was no liberty that he hesitated to take. I was even more at fault for taking the liberty of reading the letter which lay spread out before me with no envelope and (this was my sole excuse) seemed to be offering itself to my eyes.

Dear Friend and Cousin,

I hope this finds you in good health, and the same with all the young folk, particularly my young godson Joseph who I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting but who I prefer to you all as being my godson, these relics of the heart they also have their dust, upon their blest remains let us not lay our hands. Besides dear friend and cousin who can say that tomorrow you and your dear wife my cousin Marie, will not both be cast headlong down into the bottom of the sea, like the sailor clinging to the mast on high, for this life is but a dark valley. Dear friend I must tell you that my principal occupation, which will astonish you I'm sure, is now poetry which I love passionately, for we must wile away the time. And so dear friend do not be too surprised if I have not answered your last letter before now, in place of pardon let oblivion come. As you know, Madame's mother has past away amid unspeakable sufferings which fairly exhausted her as she saw as many as three doctors. The day of her internment was a great day for all Monsieur's relations came in crowds as well as several Ministers. It took them more than two hours to get to the cemetery, which will make you all open your eyes pretty wide in your village for they certainly won't do as much for mother Michu. So all my life to come can be but one long sob. I am enjoying myself immensely with the motorcycle which I've recently learned. What would you say my dear friends if I arrived suddenly like that at full speed at Les Ecorres. But on that head I shall no more keep silence for I feel that the frenzy of grief sweeps its reason away. I am associating with the Duchesse de Guermantes, people whose names you have never even heard in our ignorant villages. Therefore it is with pleasure that I'm going to send the works of Racine, of Victor Hugo, of Pages Choiesies de Chênédollé, of Alfred de Musset, for I would cure the land which give me birth of ignorance which leads inevitably to crime. I can't think of anything more to say to you and send you like the pelican wearied by a long flight my best regards as well as to your wife my godson and your sister Rose. May it never be said of her: And Rose she lived only as live the roses, as has been said by Victor Hugo, the sonnet of Arvers, Alfred de Musset all those great geniuses who because of that were sent to die at the stake like Joan of Arc. Hoping for your next missive soon, your loving cousin Périot Joseph.

We are attracted by any life which represents for us something unknown and strange, by a last illusion still unshattered. Many of the things that M. de Charlus had told me had given a vigorous spur to my imagination and, making it forget how much the reality had disappointed it at Mme de Guermantes's (people's names are in this respect like the names of places), had swung it towards Oriane's cousin. Moreover, M. de Charlus misled me for some time as to the imaginary worth and variety of society people only because he was himself misled. And this, perhaps, because he did nothing, did not write, did not paint, did not even read anything in a serious and thorough manner. But, superior as he was by several degrees to society people, if it was from them and the spectacle they afforded that he drew the material for his conversation, he was still not understood by them. Speaking as an artist, he could at the most bring out the deceptive charm of society people—but for artists only, in relation to whom he might be said to play the part played by the reindeer among the Eskimos: this precious animal plucks for them from the barren rocks lichens and mosses which they themselves could neither discover nor utilise, but which, once they have been digested by the reindeer, become for the inhabitants of the far North an assimilable form of food.

To which I may add that the pictures which M. de Charlus drew of society were animated with plenty of life by the blend of his ferocious hatreds and his passionate affections—hatreds directed mainly against young men, adoration aroused principally by certain women.

If among these the Princesse de Guermantes was placed by M. de Charlus upon the most exalted throne, his mysterious words about the "inaccessible Aladdin's palace" in which his cousin dwelt were not sufficient to account for my stupefaction, speedily followed by the fear that I might be the victim of some bad joke concocted by someone who wanted to get me thrown out of a house to which I had gone without being invited, when, about two months after my dinner with the Duchess and while she was at Cannes, having opened an envelope the appearance of which had not led me to suppose that it contained anything out of the ordinary, I read the following words engraved on a card: "The Princesse de Guermantes, *née* Duchesse en Bavière, At Home, the——th." No doubt to be invited to the Princesse de Guermantes's was perhaps not, from the social point of view, any more difficult than to dine with the Duchess, and my slight knowledge of heraldry had taught me that the title of Prince is not superior to that of Duke. Besides, I told myself that the intelligence of a society woman could not be essentially so dissimilar from that of the rest of her kind as M. de Charlus made out. But my imagination, like Elstir engaged upon rendering some effect of perspective without reference to the notions of physics which he might quite well possess, depicted for me not what I knew but what it saw; what it saw, that is to say what the name showed it. Now, even before I had met the Duchess, the name Guermantes preceded by the title of Princess, like a note or a colour or a quantity profoundly modified by surrounding values, by the mathematical or aesthetic "sign" that governs it, had always evoked for me something entirely different. With that title, it is to be found chiefly in the memoirs of the days of Louis XIII and Louis XIV; and I imagined the town house of the Princesse de Guermantes as being regularly frequented by the Duchesse de Longueville and the great Condé, whose presence there rendered it highly improbable that I should ever enter it.

In spite of whatever may stem from various subjective points of view, of which I shall have something to say later, in these artificial magnifications, the fact remains that there is a certain objective reality in all these people, and consequently a difference between them.

How, in any case, could it be otherwise? The humanity with which we consort and which bears so little resemblance to our dreams is none the less the same that, in the memoirs and in the letters of eminent persons, we have seen described and have felt a desire to know. The utterly insignificant old man we meet at dinner is the same who wrote that proud letter to Prince Friedrich-Karl which we read with such emotion in a book about the war of 1870. We are bored at the dinner-table because our imagination is absent, and, because it is keeping us company, we are interested in a book. But the people in question are the same. We should like to have known Mme de Pompadour, who was so valuable a patron of the arts, and we should have been as bored in her company as among the modern Egerias at whose houses we cannot bring ourselves to pay a second call, so mediocre do we find them. The fact remains that these differences do exist. People are never completely alike; their behaviour with regard to ourselves, at, one might say, the same level of friendship, reveals differences which, in the end, counter-balance one another. When I knew Mme de Montmorency, she enjoyed saying disagreeable things to me, but if I asked her a favour she would use all her influence as unstintingly and as effectively as possible in order to obtain what I needed. Whereas another woman, Mme de Guermites for example, would never have wished to hurt my feelings, never said anything about me except what might give me pleasure, showered on me all those tokens of friendship which formed the rich texture of the Guermites's moral life, but, if I asked her for the smallest thing above and beyond that, would not have moved an inch to procure it for me, as in those country houses where one has at one's disposal a motor-car and a valet but where it is impossible to obtain a glass of cider for which no provision has been made in the arrangements for a party. Which was for me the true friend, Mme de Montmorency, so happy to ruffle my feelings and always so ready to oblige, or Mme de Guermites, distressed by the slightest offence that might have been given me and incapable of the slightest effort to be of use to me? Similarly, it was said that the Duchesse de Guermites spoke only about frivolities, and her cousin, intellectually so mediocre, invariably about interesting things. Types of mind are so varied, so conflicting, not only in literature but in society, that Baudelaire and Mérimée are not the only people who have the right to despise one another mutually. These distinctive characteristics form in each person a system of looks, words and actions so coherent, so despotic, that when we are in his or her presence it seems to us superior to the rest. With Mme de Guermites, her words, deduced like a theorem from her type of mind, seemed to me the only ones that could possibly be said. And at heart I was of her opinion when she told me that Mme de Montmorency was stupid and kept an open mind towards all the things she did not understand, or when, having heard of some malicious remark made by that lady, she said: "So that's what you call a kind woman. I call her a monster." But this tyranny of the reality which confronts us, this self-evidence of the lamplight which turns the already distant dawn as pale as the faintest memory, disappeared when I was away from Mme de Guermites and a different lady said to me, putting herself on my level and considering the Duchess as being far below either of us: "Oriane takes no interest, really, in anything or anybody," or even (something that in the presence of Mme de Guermites it would have seemed impossible to believe, so loudly did she herself proclaim the opposite): "Oriane is a snob." Since no mathematical process would have enabled one to convert Mme d'Arpajon and Mme de Montpensier into commensurable quantities, it would have been impossible for me to answer had anyone asked me which of the two seemed to me superior to the other.

Now, among the characteristics peculiar to the Princesse de Guermites's salon, the one most generally cited was an exclusiveness due in part to the Princess's royal birth but more especially to the almost fossilised rigidity of the Prince's aristocratic prejudices—which, incidentally, the Duke and Duchess had had no hesitation in deriding in front of me. This exclusiveness made me regard it as even more improbable that I should have been invited by this man who reckoned only in royal personages and dukes and at every dinner-party made a scene because he had not been put in the place to which he would have been entitled under Louis XIV, a place which, thanks to his immense erudition in matters of history and genealogy, he was the only person who knew. For this reason, many society people came down on the side of the Duke and Duchess when discussing the differences that distinguished them from their cousins. "The Duke and Duchess are far more modern, far more intelligent, they aren't simply interested, like the other couple, in how many quarterings one has, their salon is three hundred years in advance of their cousins'," were customary remarks, the memory of which made me tremble as I looked at the invitation card, since they made it all the more probable that it had been sent to me by some practical joker.

If the Duke and Duchess had not been still at Cannes, I might have tried to find out from them whether the invitation I had received was genuine. This state of doubt in which I was plunged is not in fact, as I deluded myself for a time by supposing, a sentiment which a man of fashion would not have felt and which consequently a writer, even if he otherwise belonged to the world of society, ought to reproduce in order to be thoroughly "objective" and to depict each class differently. I happened indeed, only the other day, in a charming volume of memoirs, to come upon the record of uncertainties analogous to those which the Princesse de Guermites's card engendered in me. "Georges and I" (or "Hély and I"—I haven't the book at hand to verify the reference) "were so longing to be asked to Mme Delessert's that, having received an invitation from her, we thought it prudent, each of us independently, to make certain that we were not the victims of an April fool hoax." And the writer is none other than the Comte d'Haussonville (he who married the Duc de Broglie's daughter), while the other young man who "independently" tries to ascertain whether he

is the victim of a hoax is, according to whether he is called Georges or Hély, one or other of the two inseparable friends of M. d'Haussonville, either M. d'Harcourt or the Prince de Chalais.

The day on which the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's was to be held, I learned that the Duke and Duchess had returned to Paris the night before, and I made up my mind to go and see them that morning. But, having gone out early, they had not yet returned; I watched first of all from a little room, which had seemed to me to be a good look-out post, for the arrival of their carriage. As a matter of fact I had made a singularly bad choice of observatory, for I could scarcely see into our courtyard, but I caught a glimpse of several others, and this, though of no practical use to me, diverted me for a time. It is not only in Venice that one has these views on to several houses at once which have proved so tempting to painters; it is just the same in Paris. Nor do I cite Venice at random. It is of its poorer quarters that certain poor quarters of Paris remind one, in the morning, with their tall, splayed chimneys to which the sun imparts the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds—like a garden flowering above the houses, and flowering in such a variety of tints as to suggest the garden of a tulip-fancier of Delft or Haarlem planted above the town. And then the extreme proximity of the houses, with their windows looking across at one another over a common courtyard, makes of each casement the frame in which a cook sits dreamily gazing down at the ground below, or, further off, a girl is having her hair combed by an old woman with a witchlike face, barely distinguishable in the shadow: thus each courtyard provides the neighbours in the adjoining house, suppressing sound by its width and framing silent gestures in a series of rectangles placed under glass by the closing of the windows, with an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings hung in rows. True, from the Hôtel de Guermantes one did not have the same kind of views, but one had curious ones none the less, especially from the strange trigonometrical point at which I had placed myself and from which there was nothing to arrest one's gaze, across the relatively featureless and steeply sloping intervening area, until the distant heights formed by the mansion of the Marquise de Plassac and Mme de Tresmes, extremely noble cousins of M. de Guermantes whom I did not know. Between me and this house (which was that of their father, M. de Bréquigny) nothing but blocks of buildings of low elevation, facing in every conceivable direction, which, without obstructing the view, prolonged the distance with their oblique planes. The red-tiled turret of the coach-house in which the Marquis de Frécourt kept his carriages did indeed end in a spire that rose rather higher, but was so slender that it concealed nothing, and reminded one of those picturesque old buildings in Switzerland which spring up in isolation at the foot of a mountain. All these vague and divergent points on which my eyes came to rest made Mme de Plassac's house, actually quite near but misleadingly distant as in an Alpine landscape, appear as though it were separated from us by several streets or by a series of foothills. When its large rectangular windows, glittering in the sunlight like flakes of rock crystal, were thrown open to air the rooms, one felt, in following from one floor to the next the footmen whom it was impossible to see clearly but who were visibly shaking carpets, the same pleasure as when one sees in a landscape by Turner or Elstir a traveller in a stage-coach, or a guide, at different degrees of altitude on the Saint-Gothard. But from the vantage-point where I had placed myself I should have been in danger of not seeing M. or Mme de Guermantes come in, so that when in the afternoon I was free to resume my watch I simply stood on the staircase, from which the opening of the carriage-gate could not escape my notice, and it was on this staircase that I posted myself, although the Alpine beauties of the Hôtel de Bréquigny, so entrancing with their footmen rendered minute by distance and busily cleaning, were not visible from there. Now this wait on the staircase was to have for me consequences so considerable, and to reveal to me so important a landscape, no longer Turneresque but moral, that it is preferable to postpone the account of it for a little while by interposing first that of my visit to the Guermantes when I knew that they had come home.

It was the Duke alone who received me in his library. As I was approaching the door there emerged a little man with snow-white hair, a rather shabby appearance, a little black tie such as was worn by the Combray notary and by several of my grandfather's friends, but of a more timid aspect than they, who, making me a series of deep bows, refused absolutely to go downstairs until I had passed him. The Duke shouted after him from the library something which I did not understand, and the other responded with further bows, addressed to the wall, for the Duke could not see him, but endlessly repeated nevertheless, like the purposeless smiles on the faces of people who are talking to one on the telephone; he had a falsetto voice, and saluted me afresh with the humility of a steward. And he might indeed have been a steward from Combray, so much was he in the style, provincial, antiquated and mild, of the small folk, the modest elders of those parts.

"You'll see Oriane presently," the Duke said to me when I entered the room. "As Swann is coming round soon with the proofs of his essay on the coinage of the Order of Malta, and, what is worse, an immense photograph he has had taken showing both sides of each of the coins, Oriane decided to get dressed first in order to be able to stay with him until it's time to go out to dinner. We're already so cluttered with things that we don't know where to put them all, and I wonder where on earth we're going to stick this photograph. But my wife's too good-natured—she can't resist obliging people. She thought it would be nice to ask Swann to let her see side by side on one sheet the heads of all those Grand Masters of the Order whose medals he found at Rhodes. I said Malta, didn't I—it's Rhodes, but it's the same Order of St John of Jerusalem. The truth is that she's interested in all that only because Swann makes a hobby of it. Our family is very much mixed up in the whole story; even today, my brother, whom you know, is one of the highest dignitaries in the Order of Malta. But if I'd talked to Oriane about it all she simply wouldn't have listened to me. On the other hand, Swann's researches into the Templars (it's astonishing the passion people of one religion have for studying others) only had to lead him on to the history of the Knights of Rhodes, who succeeded the Templars, for Oriane at once to insist on seeing the heads of these knights. They were very small fry indeed compared with the

Lusignans, Kings of Cyprus, from whom we descend in a direct line. But so far Swann hasn't taken them up, so Oriane doesn't care to hear anything about the Lusignans."

I could not at once explain to the Duke why I had come. The fact was that several relatives or friends, including Mme de Silistrie and the Duchesse de Montrose, came to call on the Duchess, who was often at home before dinner, and not finding her, stayed for a short while with the Duke. The first of these ladies (the Princesse de Silistrie), simply attired, with a curt but friendly manner, was carrying a stick. I was afraid at first that she had injured herself, or was a cripple. She was on the contrary most alert. She spoke sadly to the Duke, of a first cousin of his—not on the Guermantes side, but more illustrious still, were that possible—whose health, which had been in a grave condition for some time past, had grown suddenly worse. But it was evident that the Duke, while sympathising with his cousin and repeating "Poor Mama!" (the cousin's nickname in the family) "He's such a good fellow," had formed a favourable prognosis. The fact was that the Duke was looking forward to the dinner-party he was to attend, and far from bored at the prospect of the big reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's, but above all he was to go on at one o'clock in the morning with his wife to a great supper and fancy dress ball, with a view to which a costume as Louis XI for himself, and one as Isabella of Bavaria for the Duchess, were waiting in readiness. And the Duke was determined not to be disturbed amid all these gaieties by the sufferings of the worthy Amanien d'Osmond. Two other ladies carrying sticks, Mme de Plassac and Mme de Tresmes, both daughters of the Comte de Bréquigny, came in next to pay Basin a visit, and declared that cousin Mama's state was now beyond hope. The Duke shrugged his shoulders, and to change the subject asked whether they were going that evening to Marie-Gilbert's. They replied that they were not, in view of the state of Amanien who was *in extremis*, and indeed they had excused themselves from the dinner to which the Duke was going, the other guests at which they proceeded to enumerate to him: the brother of King Theodosius, the Infanta Maria-Concepción, and so forth. As the Marquis d'Osmond was less closely related to them than he was to Basin, their "defection" appeared to the Duke to be a sort of indirect reproach for his own conduct, and he was rather curt with them. And so, although they had come down from the heights of the Hôtel de Bréquigny to see the Duchess (or rather to announce to her the alarming character, incompatible for his relatives with attendance at social gatherings, of their cousin's illness), they did not stay long: each armed with her alpenstock, Walpurge and Dorothee (such were the names of the two sisters) retraced the craggy path to their citadel. I never thought to ask the Guermantes what was the meaning of these sticks, so common in a certain part of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Possibly, looking upon the whole parish as their domain, and not caring to hire cabs, they were in the habit of taking long walks, for which some old fracture, due to immoderate indulgence in the chase and to the falls from horseback which are often the fruit of that indulgence, or simply rheumatism caused by the dampness of the left bank and of old country houses, made a stick necessary. Perhaps they had not set out upon any such long expedition through the neighbourhood, but, having merely come down into their garden (which lay at no great distance from that of the Duchess) to pick the fruit required for their compotes, had looked in on their way home to bid good evening to Mme de Guermantes, though without going so far as to bring a pair of secateurs or a watering-can into her house.

The Duke appeared touched that I should have come to see them on the very day of their return to Paris. But his face clouded over when I told him I had come to ask his wife to find out whether her cousin really had invited me. I had touched upon one of those services which M. and Mme de Guermantes were not fond of rendering. The Duke explained to me that it was too late, that if the Princess had not sent me an invitation it would make him appear to be asking her for one, that his cousins had refused him one once before, and he had no wish to appear either directly or indirectly to be interfering with their visiting list, to be "meddling," that anyhow he could not even be sure that he and his wife, who were dining out that evening, would not come straight home afterwards, that in that case their best excuse for not having gone to the Princess's party would be to conceal from her the fact of their return to Paris, instead of hastening to inform her of it, as they must do if they sent her a note or spoke to her over the telephone about me, and certainly too late to be of any use, since, in all probability, the Princess's list of guests would be closed by now. "You've not fallen foul of her in any way?" he asked in a suspicious tone, the Guermantes living in constant fear of not being informed of the latest society quarrels, and of people's trying to climb back into favour on their shoulders. Finally, as the Duke was in the habit of taking upon himself all decisions that might seem ungracious, "Listen, my boy," he said to me suddenly, as though the idea had just come into his head, "I'd really rather not mention at all to Oriane that you've spoken to me about this. You know how kindhearted she is, and besides, she's enormously fond of you—she'd insist on sending to ask her cousin, in spite of anything I might say to the contrary, and if she's tired after dinner, there'll be no getting out of it, she'll be forced to go to the party. No, decidedly, I shall say nothing to her about it. Anyhow, you'll see her yourself in a minute. But not a word about this matter, I beg of you. If you decide to go to the party, I've no need to tell you what a pleasure it will be for us to spend the evening there with you."

Humane motives are too sacred for the person before whom they are invoked not to bow to them, whether he believes them to be sincere or not; I did not wish to appear to be weighing in the balance for a moment the relative importance of my invitation and the possible tiredness of Mme de Guermantes, and I promised not to speak to her of the object of my visit, exactly as though I had been taken in by the little farce which M. de Guermantes had performed for my benefit. I asked him if he thought there was any chance of my seeing Mme de Stermaria at the Princess's.

"Why, no," he replied with the air of a connoisseur. "I know the name you mention, from having seen it in club directories—it isn't at all the type of person who goes to Gilbert's. You'll see nobody there who is not excessively well-bred and intensely boring, duchesses bearing titles which one thought were extinct years ago

and which have been trotted out for the occasion, all the ambassadors, heaps of Coburgs, foreign royalties, but you mustn't expect even the ghost of a Stermaria. Gilbert would be taken ill at the mere thought of such a thing. Wait now, you're fond of painting, I must show you a superb picture I bought from my cousin, partly in exchange for the Elstirs, which frankly didn't appeal to us. It was sold to me as a Philippe de Champaigne, but I believe myself that it's by someone even greater. Would you like to know what I think? I think it's a Velázquez, and of the best period," said the Duke, looking me boldly in the eyes, either to ascertain my impression or in the hope of enhancing it. A footman came in.

"Mme la Duchesse wishes to know if M. le Duc will be so good as to see M. Swann, as Mme la Duchesse is not quite ready."

"Show M. Swann in," said the Duke, after looking at his watch and seeing that he himself still had a few minutes before he need go to dress. "Naturally my wife, who told him to come, isn't ready. No point in saying anything in front of Swann about Marie-Gilbert's party," said the Duke. "I don't know whether he's been invited. Gilbert likes him immensely, because he believes him to be the natural grandson of the Duc de Berry, but that's a long story. (Otherwise you can imagine!—my cousin, who has a fit if he sees a Jew a mile off.) But now of course the Dreyfus case has made things more serious. Swann ought to have realised that he more than anyone must drop all connexion with those fellows, instead of which he says the most regrettable things."

The Duke called back the footman to know whether the man who had been sent to inquire at cousin Osmond's had returned. His plan was as follows: since he rightly believed that his cousin was dying, he was anxious to obtain news of him before his death, that is to say before he was obliged to go into mourning. Once covered by the official certainty that Amanien was still alive, he would sneak off to his dinner, to the Prince's reception, to the midnight revel where he was to appear as Louis XI and where he had a most tantalising assignation with a new mistress, and would make no more inquiries until the following day, when his pleasures would be over. Then he would put on mourning if the cousin had passed away in the night. "No, M. le Duc, he is not back yet." "Hell and damnation! Nothing is ever done in this house till the last minute," cried the Duke, at the thought that Amanien might still be in time to "croak" for an evening paper, and to make him miss his revel. He sent for *Le Temps*, in which there was nothing.

I had not seen Swann for a long time, and found myself wondering momentarily whether in the old days he used to clip his moustache, or whether his hair had not been *en brosse*, for I found him somehow changed. It was simply that he was indeed greatly "changed" because he was very ill, and illness produces in the face modifications as profound as are created by growing a beard or by changing one's parting. (Swann's illness was the same that had killed his mother, who had been struck down by it at precisely the age which he had now reached. Our lives are in truth, owing to heredity, as full of cabalistic ciphers, of horoscopic castings as if sorcerers really existed. And just as there is a certain duration of life for humanity in general, so there is one for families in particular, that is to say, in any one family, for the members of it who resemble one another.) Swann was dressed with an elegance which, like that of his wife, associated with what he now was what he once had been. Buttoned up in a pearl-grey frock-coat which emphasised his tall, slim figure, his white gloves stitched in black, he had a grey topper of a flared shape which Delion no longer made except for him, the Prince de Sagan, M. de Charlus, the Marquis de Modène, M. Charles Haas and Comte Louis de Turenne. I was surprised at the charming smile and affectionate handclasp with which he replied to my greeting for I had imagined that after so long an interval he would not recognise me at once; I told him of my astonishment; he received it with a shout of laughter, a trace of indignation and a further squeeze of my hand, as if it were to throw doubt on the soundness of his brain or the sincerity of his affection to suppose that he did not recognise me. And yet that was in fact the case; he did not identify me, as I learned long afterwards, until several minutes later when he heard my name mentioned. But no change in his face, in his speech, in the things he said to me betrayed the discovery which a chance word from M. de Guermantes had enabled him to make, with such mastery, with such absolute sureness did he play the social game. He brought to it, moreover, that spontaneity in manners and that personal enterprise, even in matters of dress, which characterised the Guermantes style. Thus it was that the greeting which the old clubman had given me without recognising me was not the cold, stiff greeting of the purely formalist man of the world, but a greeting full of real friendliness, genuine charm, such as the Duchesse de Guermantes, for instance, possessed (carrying it so far as to smile at you first, before you had bowed to her, if she met you in the street), in contrast to the more mechanical greeting customary among the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. In the same way, the hat which, in conformity with a custom that was beginning to disappear, he laid on the floor by his feet, was lined with green leather, a thing not usually done, because (he said) it showed the dirt far less, in reality because (but this he did not say) it was highly becoming.

"Now, Charles, you're a great expert, come and see what I've got to show you, after which, my boys, I'm going to ask your permission to leave you together for a moment while I go and change my clothes. Besides, I expect Oriane won't be long now." And he showed his "Velázquez" to Swann. "But it seems to me that I know this," said Swann with the grimace of a sick man for whom the mere act of speaking requires an effort.

"Yes," said the Duke, perturbed by the time which the expert was taking to express his admiration. "You've probably seen it at Gilbert's."

"Oh, yes, of course, I remember."

"What do you suppose it is?"

"Oh, well, if it comes from Gilbert's house it's probably one of your *ancestors*," said Swann with a blend of irony and deference towards a grandeur which he would have felt it impolite and absurd to belittle, but to which for reasons of good taste he preferred to make only a playful reference.

"Of course it is," said the Duke bluntly. "It's Bosen, the I forget how manyeth de Guermantes. Not that I care a damn about that. You know I'm not as feudal as my cousin. I've heard the names of Rigaud, Mignard, even Velázquez mentioned," he went on, fastening on Swann the look of both an inquisitor and a torturer in an attempt at once to read into his mind and to influence his response. "Well," he concluded (for when he was led to provoke artificially an opinion which he desired to hear, he had the faculty, after a few moments, of believing that it had been spontaneously uttered), "come, now, none of your flattery. Do you think it's by one of those big guns I've mentioned?"

"Nnnnno," said Swann.

"Well anyway, I know nothing about these things, it's not for me to decide who daubed the canvas. But you're a dilettante, a master of the subject, what would you say it was?"

Swann hesitated for a moment in front of the picture, which obviously he thought atrocious.

"A bad joke!" he replied with a smile at the Duke who could not restrain an impulse of rage. When this had subsided: "Be good fellows, both of you, wait a moment for Oriane, I must go and put on my swallow-tails and then I'll be back. I shall send word to the missus that you're both waiting for her."

I chatted for a minute or two with Swann about the Dreyfus case and asked him how it was that all the Guermantes were anti-Dreyfusards. "In the first place because at heart all these people are anti-semites," replied Swann, who nevertheless knew very well from experience that certain of them were not, but, like everyone who holds a strong opinion, preferred to explain the fact that other people did not share it by imputing to them preconceptions and prejudices against which there was nothing to be done, rather than reasons which might permit of discussion. Besides, having come to the premature term of his life, like a weary animal that is being tormented, he cried out against these persecutions and was returning to the spiritual fold of his fathers.

"Yes, it's true I've been told that the Prince de Guermantes is anti-semitic."

"Oh, that fellow! I don't even bother to consider him. He carries it to such a point that when he was in the army and had a frightful toothache he preferred to grin and bear it rather than go to the only dentist in the district, who happened to be a Jew, and later on he allowed a wing of his castle to be burned to the ground because he would have had to send for extinguishers to the place next door, which belongs to the Rothschilds."

"Are you going to be there this evening, by any chance?"

"Yes," Swann replied, "although I don't really feel up to it. But he sent me a wire to tell me that he has something to say to me. I feel that I shall soon be too unwell to go there or to receive him at my house, it will be too agitating, so I prefer to get it over at once."

"But the Duc de Guermantes is not anti-semitic?"

"You can see quite well that he is, since he's an anti-Dreyfusard," replied Swann, without noticing that he was begging the question. "All the same I'm sorry to have disappointed the fellow—His Grace I should say!—by not admiring his Mignard or whatever he calls it."

"But at any rate," I went on, reverting to the Dreyfus case, "the Duchess, now, is intelligent."

"Yes, she is charming. To my mind, however, she was even more charming when she was still known as the Princesse des Laumes. Her mind has become somehow more angular—it was all much softer in the juvenile great lady. But after all, young or old, men or women, when all's said and done these people belong to a different race, one can't have a thousand years of feudalism in one's blood with impunity. Naturally they imagine that it counts for nothing in their opinions."

"All the same, Robert de Saint-Loup is a Dreyfusard."

"Ah! So much the better, especially as his mother is extremely anti. I had heard that he was, but I wasn't certain of it. That gives me a great deal of pleasure. It doesn't surprise me, he's highly intelligent. It's a great thing, that is."

Swann's Dreyfusism had brought out in him an extraordinary naïvety and imparted to his way of looking at things an impulsiveness, an inconsistency more noticeable even than had been the similar effects of his marriage to Odette; this new "declassing" would have been better described as a "reclassing" and was entirely to his credit, since it made him return to the paths which his forebears had trodden and from which he had been deflected by his aristocratic associations. But precisely at the moment when, with all his clear-sightedness, and thanks to the principles he had inherited from his ancestors, he was in a position to perceive a truth that was still hidden from people of fashion, Swann showed himself nevertheless quite comically blind. He subjected all his admirations and all his contempts to the test of a new criterion, Dreyfusism. That the anti-Dreyfusism of Mme Bontemps should make him think her a fool was no more astonishing than that, when he had got married, he should have thought her intelligent. It was not very serious, either, that the new wave should also affect his political judgments and make him lose all memory of having denounced Clemenceau—whom, he now declared, he had always regarded as a voice of conscience, a man of steel, like Cornély—as a man with a price, a British spy (this latter was an absurdity of the Guermantes set). "No, no, I never told you anything of the sort. You're thinking of someone else." But, sweeping past his political judgments, the wave overturned Swann's literary judgments too, down to his way of expressing them. Barrès was now devoid of talent, and even his early books were feeble, could scarcely bear re-reading. "You try, you'll find you can't struggle to the end. What a difference from Clemenceau! Personally I'm not anti-clerical, but when you compare them together you must see that Barrès is invertebrate. He's a very great man, is old Clemenceau. How he knows the language!" However, the anti-Dreyfusards were in no position to criticise these follies. They explained that one was only a Dreyfusard because one was of Jewish origin. If a practising Catholic like



Saniette was also in favour of reconsideration, that was because he was cornered by Mme Verdurin, who behaved like a wild radical. She was first and foremost against the "frocks." Saniette was more fool than knave, and had no idea of the harm that the Mistress was doing him. If you pointed out that Brichot was equally a friend of Mme Verdurin and was a member of the "Patrie Française," that was because he was more intelligent.

"You see him occasionally?" I asked Swann, referring to Saint-Loup.

"No, never. He wrote to me the other day asking me to persuade the Duc de Mouchy and various other people to vote for him at the Jockey, where for that matter he got through like a letter through the post."

"In spite of the Affair!"

"The question was never raised. However I must tell you that since all this business began I never set foot in the place."

M. de Guermantes returned and was presently joined by his wife, all ready now for the evening, tall and proud in a gown of red satin the skirt of which was bordered with sequins. She had in her hair a long ostrich feather dyed purple, and over her shoulders a tulle scarf of the same red as her dress. "How nice it is to have one's hat lined in green," said the Duchess, who missed nothing. "However, with you, Charles, everything is always charming, whether it's what you wear or what you say, what you read or what you do." Swann meanwhile, without apparently listening, was considering the Duchess as he would have studied the canvas of a master, and then sought her eyes, making a face which implied the exclamation "Gosh!" Mme de Guermantes rippled with laughter. "So my clothes please you? I'm delighted. But I must say they don't please me much," she went on with a sulky air. "God, what a bore it is to have to dress up and go out when one would ever so much rather stay at home!"

"What magnificent rubies!"

"Ah! my dear Charles, at least one can see that you know what you're talking about, you're not like that brute Monseigneur who asked me if they were real. I must say I've never seen anything quite like them. They were a present from the Grand Duchess. They're a little too big for my liking, a little too like claret glasses filled to the brim, but I've put them on because we shall be seeing the Grand Duchess this evening at Marie-Gilbert's," added Mme de Guermantes, never suspecting that this assertion destroyed the force of those previously made by the Duke.

"What's on at the Princess's?" inquired Swann.

"Practically nothing," the Duke hastened to reply, the question having made him think that Swann was not invited.

"What do you mean, Basin? The whole world has been invited. It will be a deathly crush. What will be pretty, though," she went on, looking soulfully at Swann, "if the storm I can feel in the air now doesn't break, will be those marvellous gardens. You know them, of course. I was there a month ago, when the lilacs were in flower. You can't imagine how lovely they were. And then the fountain—really, it's Versailles in Paris."

"What sort of person is the Princess?" I asked.

"Why, you know quite well, since you've seen her here, that she's as beautiful as the day, and also a bit of a fool, but very nice, in spite of all her Germanic high-and-mightiness, full of good nature and gaffes."

Swann was too shrewd not to perceive that the Duchess was trying to show off the "Guermantes wit," and at no great cost to herself, for she was only serving up in a less perfect form a few of her old quips. Nevertheless, to prove to the Duchess that he appreciated her intention to be funny, and as though she had really succeeded in being funny, he gave a somewhat forced smile, causing me by this particular form of insincerity the same embarrassment as I used to feel long ago when I heard my parents discussing with M. Vinteuil the corruption of certain sections of society (when they knew very well that a corruption far greater reigned at Montjouvain), or simply on hearing Legrandin embellishing his utterances for the benefit of fools, choosing delicate epithets which he knew perfectly well would not be understood by a rich or smart but illiterate audience.

"Come now, Oriane, what on earth are you saying?" broke in M. de Guermantes. "Marie a fool? Why, she's read everything, and she's as musical as a fiddle."

"But, my poor little Basin, you're as innocent as a new-born babe. As if one couldn't be all that, and rather an idiot as well. Idiot is too strong a word; no, she's in the clouds, she's Hesse-Darmstadt, Holy Roman Empire, and wa-wa-wa. Even her pronunciation gets on my nerves. But I quite admit that she's a charming loony. In the first place, the very idea of stepping down from her German throne to go and marry, in the most bourgeois way, a private individual. It's true that she chose him! Ah, but of course," she went on, turning to me, "you don't know Gilbert. Let me give you an idea of him: he took to his bed once because I had left a card on Mme Carnot ... But, my dear Charles" (the Duchess changed the subject when she saw that the story of the card left on the Carnots appeared to irritate M. de Guermantes), "you know, you've never sent me that photograph of our Knights of Rhodes, whom I've learned to love through you and with whom I'm so anxious to become acquainted." The Duke meanwhile had not taken his eyes from his wife's face: "Oriane, you might at least tell the story properly and not cut out half. I ought to explain," he corrected, addressing Swann, "that the British Ambassador at that time, who was a very worthy woman but lived rather in the moon and was in the habit of making up these odd combinations, conceived the distinctly quaint idea of inviting us with the President and his wife. Even Oriane was rather surprised, especially as the Ambassador knew quite enough of the same sort of people as us not to invite us to such an ill-assorted gathering. There was a minister there who's a swindler ... however I'll draw a veil over all that—the fact was that we hadn't been warned, we were trapped, and to be honest I'm bound to admit that all these people behaved most civilly. Still, that was quite

enough of a good thing. But Mme de Guermantes, who does not often do me the honour of consulting me, felt it incumbent upon her to leave a card in the course of the following week at the Elysée. Gilbert may perhaps have gone rather far in regarding it as a stain upon our name. But it must not be forgotten that, politics apart, M. Carnot, who incidentally filled his post quite respectably, was the grandson of a member of the revolutionary tribunal which slaughtered eleven of our people in a single day."

"In that case, Basin, why used you to go every week to dine at Chantilly? The Duc d'Aumale was just as much the grandson of a member of the revolutionary tribunal, with this difference, that Carnot was a decent man and Philippe-Egalité a frightful scoundrel."

"Excuse my interrupting you to explain that I did send the photograph," said Swann. "I can't understand how it hasn't reached you."

"It doesn't altogether surprise me," said the Duchess, "my servants tell me only what they think fit. They probably don't approve of the Order of St John." And she rang the bell.

"You know, Oriane, that when I used to go to Chantilly it was without much enthusiasm."

"Without much enthusiasm, but with a nightshirt in case the Prince asked you to stay the night, which in fact he very rarely did, being a perfect boor like all the Orléans lot ... Do you know who else we're dining with at Mme de Saint-Euverte's?" Mme de Guermantes asked her husband.

"Besides the people you know already, she's asked King Theodosius's brother at the last moment."

At these tidings the Duchess's features exuded contentment and her speech boredom: "Oh, God, more princes!"

"But that one is amiable and intelligent," Swann remarked.

"Not altogether, though," replied the Duchess, apparently seeking for words that would give more novelty to her thought. "Have you ever noticed with princes that the nicest of them are never entirely nice? They must always have an opinion about everything. And as they have no opinions of their own, they spend the first half of their lives asking us ours and the second half serving them up to us again. They positively must be able to say that this has been well played and that not so well. When there's no difference. Do you know, this little Theodosius junior (I forget his name) asked me once what an orchestral motif was called. I answered" (the Duchess's eyes sparkled and a laugh exploded from her beautiful red lips) "'It's called an orchestral motif.' I don't think he was any too well pleased, really. Oh, my dear Charles," she went on with a languishing air, "what a bore it can be, dining out. There are evenings when one would sooner die! It's true that dying may be perhaps just as great a bore, because we don't know what it's like."

A servant appeared. It was the young lover who had had a quarrel with the concierge, until the Duchess, out of the kindness of her heart, had brought about an apparent peace between them.

"Am I to go round this evening to inquire after M. le Marquis d'Osmond?" he asked.

"Most certainly not, nothing before tomorrow morning. In fact I don't want you to remain in the house tonight. His footman, whom you know, might very well come and bring you the latest report and send you out after us. Be off with you, go anywhere you like, have a spree, sleep out, but I don't want to see you here before tomorrow morning."

The footman's face glowed with happiness. At last he would be able to spend long hours with his betrothed, whom he had practically ceased to see ever since, after a final scene with the concierge, the Duchess had considerably explained to him that it would be better, to avoid further conflicts, if he did not go out at all. He floated, at the thought of having an evening free at last, on a tide of happiness which the Duchess saw and the reason for which she guessed. She felt a sort of pang and as it were an itching in all her limbs at the thought of this happiness being snatched behind her back, unbeknown to her, and it made her irritated and jealous.

"No, Basin, he must stay here; he's not to stir out of the house."

"But Oriane, that's absurd, the house is crammed with servants, and you have the costumier's people coming as well at twelve to dress us for our ball. There's absolutely nothing for him to do, and he's the only one who's a friend of Mama's footman; I'd much sooner get him right away from the house."

"Listen, Basin, let me do what I want. I shall have a message for him during the evening, as it happens—I'm not yet sure at what time. In any case you're not to budge from here for a single instant, do you hear?" she said to the despairing footman.

If there were continual quarrels, and if servants did not stay long with the Duchess, the person to whose charge this guerrilla warfare was to be laid was indeed irremovable, but it was not the concierge. No doubt for the heavy work, for the martyrdoms it was particularly tiring to inflict, for the quarrels which ended in blows, the Duchess entrusted the blunter instruments to him; but even then he played his role without the least suspicion that he had been cast for it. Like the household servants, he was impressed by the Duchess's kindness, and the imperceptive footmen who came back, after leaving her service, to visit Françoise used to say that the Duke's house would have been the finest "place" in Paris if it had not been for the porter's lodge. The Duchess made use of the lodge in the same way as at different times clericalism, freemasonry, the Jewish peril and so on have been made use of. Another footman came into the room.

"Why haven't they brought up the package M. Swann sent here? And, by the way (you've heard, Charles, that Mama is seriously ill?), Jules went round to inquire for news of M. le Marquis d'Osmond: has he come back yet?"

"He's just arrived this instant, M. le Duc. They're expecting M. le Marquis to pass away at any moment."

"Ah, he's alive!" exclaimed the Duke with a sigh of relief. "They're expecting, are they? Well, they can go on expecting. While there's life there's hope," he added cheerfully for our benefit. "They've been talking to me

about him as though he were dead and buried. In a week from now he'll be fitter than I am."

"It's the doctors who said that he wouldn't last out the evening. One of them wanted to call again during the night. The head one said it was no use. M. le Marquis would be dead by then; they've only kept him alive by injecting him with camphorated oil."

"Hold your tongue, you damned fool," cried the Duke in a paroxysm of rage. "Who the devil asked you for your opinion? You haven't understood a word of what they told you."

"It wasn't me they told, it was Jules."

"Will you hold your tongue!" roared the Duke, and, turning to Swann: "What a blessing he's still alive! He'll regain his strength gradually, don't you know. Still alive, after being in such a critical state—that in itself is an excellent sign. One mustn't expect everything at once. It can't be at all unpleasant, a little injection of camphorated oil." He rubbed his hands. "He's alive; what more could anyone want? After all that he's gone through, it's a great step forward. Upon my word, I envy him having such a constitution. Ah! these invalids, you know, people do all sorts of little things for them that they don't do for us. For instance, today some beggar of a chef sent me up a leg of mutton with *béarnaise* sauce—it was done to a turn, I must admit, but just for that very reason I took so much of it that it's still lying on my stomach. However, that doesn't make people come to inquire after me as they do after dear Amanien. We do too much inquiring. It only tires him. We must leave him room to breathe. They're killing the poor fellow by sending round to him all the time."

"Well," said the Duchess to the footman as he was leaving the room, "I gave orders for the envelope containing a photograph which M. Swann sent me to be brought up here."

"Madame la Duchesse, it's so large that I didn't know if I could get it through the door. We've left it in the hall. Does Madame la Duchesse wish me to bring it up?"

"Oh, in that case, no; they ought to have told me, but if it's so big I shall see it in a moment when I come downstairs."

"I forgot to tell Mme la Duchesse that Mme la Comtesse Molé left a card this morning for Mme la Duchesse."

"What, this morning?" said the Duchess with an air of disapproval, feeling that so young a woman ought not to take the liberty of leaving cards in the morning.

"About ten o'clock, Madame la Duchesse."

"Show me the cards."

"In any case, Oriane, when you say that it was a funny idea on Marie's part to marry Gilbert," went on the Duke, reverting to the original topic of conversation, "it's you who have an odd way of writing history. If either of them was a fool, it was Gilbert, for having married of all people a woman so closely related to the King of the Belgians, who has usurped the name of Brabant which belongs to us. To put it briefly, we are of the same blood as the Hesses, and of the elder branch. It's always stupid to talk about oneself," he apologised to me, "but after all, whenever we've been not only to Darmstadt, but even to Cassel and all over electoral Hesse, all the landgraves have always been most courteous in giving us precedence as being of the elder branch."

"But really, Basin, you don't mean to tell me that a person who was honorary commandant of every regiment in her country, who people thought would become engaged to the King of Sweden ..."

"Oh, Oriane, that's too much; anyone would think you didn't know that the King of Sweden's grandfather was tilling the soil at Pau when we had been ruling the roost for nine hundred years throughout the whole of Europe."

"That doesn't alter the fact that if somebody were to say in the street: 'Hallo, there's the King of Sweden,' everyone would at once rush to see him as far as the Place de la Concorde, and if he said: 'There's M. de Guermantes,' nobody would know who it was."

"What an argument!"

"Besides, I can't understand how, once the title of Duke of Brabant has passed to the Belgian royal family, you can continue to claim it."

The footman returned with the Comtesse Molé's card, or rather what she had left in place of a card. On the pretext that she did not have one with her, she had taken from her pocket a letter addressed to herself, and keeping the contents had handed in the envelope which bore the inscription: "La Comtesse Molé." As the envelope was rather large, following the fashion in note-paper which prevailed that year, this "card" was almost twice the size of an ordinary visiting card.

"That's what people call Mme Molé's 'simplicity,'" said the Duchess sarcastically. "She wants to make us think that she had no cards on her to show her originality. But we know all about that, don't we, my little Charles, we're quite old enough and quite original enough ourselves to see through the tricks of a little lady who has only been going about for four years. She is charming, but she doesn't seem to me, all the same, to have the weight to imagine that she can stun the world with so little effort as merely by leaving an envelope instead of a card and leaving it at ten o'clock in the morning. Her old mother mouse will show her that she knows a thing or two about that."

Swann could not help smiling at the thought that the Duchess, who was, as it happened, a trifle jealous of Mme Molé's success, would find it quite in accordance with the "Guermantes wit" to make some insolent retort to her visitor.

"So far as the title of Duc de Brabant is concerned, I've told you a hundred times, Oriane ..." the Duke continued, but the Duchess, without listening, cut him short.

"But, my dear Charles, I'm longing to see your photograph."

"Ah! *Extincto draconis latrator Anubis*," said Swann.

"Yes, it was so charming what you said about that apropos of San Giorgio at Venice. But I don't understand why Anubis?"

"What's the one like who was an ancestor of Babal?" asked M. de Guermantes.

"You want to see his bauble," said his wife drily, to show that she herself despised the pun. "I want to see them all," she added.

"I'll tell you what, Charles, let's go downstairs till the carriage comes," said the Duke. "You can pay your call on us in the hall, because my wife won't let us have any peace until she's seen your photograph. I'm less impatient, I must say," he added complacently. "I'm not easily stirred myself, but she would see us all dead rather than miss it."

"I entirely agree with you, Basin," said the Duchess, "let's go into the hall; we shall at least know why we have come down from your study, whereas we shall never know how we have come down from the Counts of Brabant."

"I've told you a hundred times how the title came into the House of Hesse," said the Duke (while we were going downstairs to look at the photograph, and I thought of those that Swann used to bring me at Combray), "through the marriage of a Brabant in 1241 with the daughter of the last Landgrave of Thuringia and Hesse, so that really it's the title of Prince of Hesse that came to the House of Brabant rather than that of Duke of Brabant to the House of Hesse. You will remember that our battle-cry was that of the Dukes of Brabant: 'Limbourg to her conqueror!' until we exchanged the arms of Brabant for those of Guermantes, in which I think myself that we were wrong, and the example of the Gramonts will not make me change my opinion."

"But," replied Mme de Guermantes, "as it's the King of the Belgians who is the conqueror ... Besides, the Belgian Crown Prince calls himself Duc de Brabant."

"But, my dear child, your argument will not hold water for a moment. You know as well as I do that there are titles of pretension which can perfectly well survive even if the territory is occupied by usurpers. For instance, the King of Spain describes himself equally as Duke of Brabant, claiming in virtue of a possession less ancient than ours, but more ancient than that of the King of the Belgians. He also calls himself Duke of Burgundy, King of the West and East Indies, and Duke of Milan. Well, he's no more in possession of Burgundy, the Indies or Brabant than I possess Brabant myself, or the Prince of Hesse either, for that matter. The King of Spain likewise proclaims himself King of Jerusalem, as does the Austrian Emperor, and Jerusalem belongs to neither one nor the other."

He stopped for a moment, perturbed by the thought that the mention of Jerusalem might have embarrassed Swann, in view of "current events," but only went on more rapidly: "What you said just now might be said of anyone. We were at one time Dukes of Aumale, a duchy that has passed as regularly to the House of France as Joinville and Chevreuse have to the House of Albert. We make no more claim to those titles than to that of Marquis de Noirmoutiers, which was at one time ours, and became perfectly regularly the appanage of the House of La Trémoille, but because certain cessions are valid, it does not follow that they all are. For instance," he went on, turning to me, "my sister-in-law's son bears the title of Prince d'Agrigente, which comes to us from Joan the Mad, as that of Prince de Tarente comes to the La Trémoilles. Well, Napoleon went and gave this title of Tarente to a soldier, who may have been an excellent campaigner, but in doing so the Emperor was disposing of what belonged to him even less than Napoleon III when he created a Duc de Montmorency, since Périgord had at least a mother who was a Montmorency, while the Tarente of Napoleon I had no more Tarente about him than Napoleon's wish that he should become so. That didn't prevent Chaix d'Est-Ange, alluding to our uncle Condé, from asking the Imperial Attorney if he had picked up the title of Duc de Montmorency in the moat at Vincennes."

"Look, Basin, I ask for nothing better than to follow you to the moat of Vincennes, or even to Taranto. And that reminds me, Charles, of what I was going to say to you when you were telling me about your San Giorgio of Venice. We have a plan, Basin and I, to spend next spring in Italy and Sicily. If you were to come with us, just think what a difference it would make! I'm not thinking only of the pleasure of seeing you, but imagine, after all you've told me about the remains of the Norman Conquest and of antiquity, imagine what a trip like that would become if you were with us! I mean to say that even Basin—what am I saying, Gilbert!—would benefit by it, because I feel that even his claims to the throne of Naples and all that sort of thing would interest me if they were explained by you in old Romanesque churches in little villages perched on hills as in primitive paintings. But now we're going to look at your photograph. Open the envelope," she said to a footman.

"Please, Oriane, not this evening; you can look at it tomorrow," implored the Duke, who had already been making signs of alarm to me on seeing the enormous size of the photograph.

"But I want to look at it with Charles," said the Duchess, with a smile at once spuriously concupiscent and subtly psychological, for in her desire to be amiable to Swann she spoke of the pleasure which she would derive from looking at the photograph as of the kind an invalid feels he would derive from eating an orange, or as though she had simultaneously contrived an escapade with some friends and informed a biographer of tastes flattering to herself.

"Well, he'll come and see you specially," declared the Duke, to whom his wife was obliged to yield. "You can spend three hours in front of it, if that amuses you," he added sarcastically. "But where are you going to stick a toy that size?"

"In my room, of course. I want to have it before my eyes."

"Oh, just as you please; if it's in your room, there's a chance I shall never see it," said the Duke, oblivious of the revelation he was thus blindly making of the negative character of his conjugal relations.

"Make sure you undo it with the greatest care," Mme de Guermantes told the servant, underlining her instructions out of deference to Swann. "And don't crumple the envelope, either."

"Even the envelope has to be respected!" the Duke murmured to me, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "But, Swann," he added, "what amazes me, a poor prosaic husband, is how you managed to find an envelope that size. Where on earth did you dig it up?"

"Oh, at the photographer's; they're always sending out things like that. But the man is an oaf, for I see he's written on it 'La Duchesse de Guermantes,' without putting 'Madame.'"

"I forgive him," said the Duchess carelessly; then, seeming to be struck by a sudden idea which amused her, repressed a faint smile; but at once returning to Swann: "Well, you don't say whether you're coming to Italy with us?"

"Madame, I'm very much afraid that it won't be possible."

"Indeed! Mme de Montmorency is more fortunate. You went with her to Venice and Vicenza. She told me that with you one saw things one would never see otherwise, things no one had ever thought of mentioning before, that you showed her things she'd never dreamed of, and that even in the well-known things she was able to appreciate details which without you she might have passed by a dozen times without ever noticing. She's certainly been more highly favoured than we are to be ... You will take the big envelope which contained M. Swann's photograph," she said to the servant, "and you will hand it in, from me, the corner turned down, this evening at half past ten at Mme la Comtesse Molé's."

Swann burst out laughing.

"I should like to know, all the same," Mme de Guermantes asked him, "how you can tell ten months in advance that a thing will be impossible."

"My dear Duchess, I'll tell you if you insist, but, first of all, you can see that I'm very ill."

"Yes, my little Charles, I don't think you look at all well. I'm not pleased with your colour. But I'm not asking you to come with us next week, I'm asking you to come in ten months' time. In ten months one has time to get oneself cured, you know."

At this point a footman came in to say that the carriage was at the door. "Come, Oriane, to horse," said the Duke, already pawing the ground with impatience as though he were himself one of the horses that stood waiting outside.

"Very well, give me in one word the reason why you can't come to Italy," the Duchess put it to Swann as she rose to say good-bye to us.

"But, my dear lady, it's because I shall then have been dead for several months. According to the doctors I've consulted, by the end of the year the thing I've got—which may, for that matter, carry me off at any moment—won't in any case leave me more than three or four months to live, and even that is a generous estimate," replied Swann with a smile, while the footman opened the glazed door of the hall to let the Duchess out.

"What's that you say?" cried the Duchess, stopping for a moment on her way to the carriage and raising her beautiful, melancholy blue eyes, now clouded by uncertainty. Placed for the first time in her life between two duties as incompatible as getting into her carriage to go out to dinner and showing compassion for a man who was about to die, she could find nothing in the code of conventions that indicated the right line to follow; not knowing which to choose, she felt obliged to pretend not to believe that the latter alternative need be seriously considered, in order to comply with the first, which at the moment demanded less effort, and thought that the best way of settling the conflict would be to deny that any existed. "You're joking," she said to Swann.

"It would be a joke in charming taste," he replied ironically. "I don't know why I'm telling you this. I've never said a word to you about my illness before. But since you asked me, and since now I may die at any moment ... But whatever I do I mustn't make you late; you're dining out, remember," he added, because he knew that for other people their own social obligations took precedence over the death of a friend, and he put himself in their place thanks to his instinctive politeness. But that of the Duchess enabled her also to perceive in a vague way that the dinner-party to which she was going must count for less to Swann than his own death. And so, while continuing on her way towards the carriage, she let her shoulders droop, saying: "Don't worry about our dinner. It's not of any importance!" But this put the Duke in a bad humour and he exclaimed: "Come, Oriane, don't stop there chattering like that and exchanging your jeremiads with Swann; you know very well that Mme de Saint-Euverte insists on sitting down to table at eight o'clock sharp. We must know what you propose to do; the horses have been waiting for a good five minutes. Forgive me, Charles," he went on, turning to Swann, "but it's ten minutes to eight already. Oriane is always late, and it will take us more than five minutes to get to old Saint-Euverte's."

Mme de Guermantes advanced resolutely towards the carriage and uttered a last farewell to Swann. "You know, we'll talk about that another time; I don't believe a word you've been saying, but we must discuss it quietly. I expect they've frightened you quite unnecessarily. Come to luncheon, any day you like" (with Mme de Guermantes things always resolved themselves into luncheons), "just let me know the day and the time," and, lifting her red skirt, she set her foot on the step. She was just getting into the carriage when, seeing this foot exposed, the Duke cried out in a terrifying voice: "Oriane, what have you been thinking of, you wretch? You've kept on your black shoes! With a red dress! Go upstairs quick and put on red shoes, or rather," he said to the footman, "tell Mme la Duchesse's lady's-maid at once to bring down a pair of red shoes."

"But, my dear," replied the Duchess gently, embarrassed to see that Swann, who was leaving the house with me but had stood back to allow the carriage to pass out in front of us, had heard, "seeing that we're late ..."

"No, no, we have plenty of time. It's only ten to; it won't take us ten minutes to get to the Parc Monceau. And after all, what does it matter? Even if we turn up at half past eight they'll wait for us, but you can't possibly go there in a red dress and black shoes. Besides, we shan't be the last, I can tell you; the Sassenages are coming, and you know they never arrive before twenty to nine."

The Duchess went up to her room.

"Well," said M. de Guermantes to Swann and myself, "people laugh at us poor downtrodden husbands, but we have our uses. But for me, Oriane would have gone out to dinner in black shoes."

"It's not unbecoming," said Swann, "I noticed the black shoes and they didn't offend me in the least."

"I don't say you're wrong," replied the Duke, "but it looks better to have them to match the dress. Besides, you needn't worry, no sooner had she got there than she'd have noticed them, and I should have been obliged to come home and fetch the others. I should have had my dinner at nine o'clock. Good-bye, my boys," he said, thrusting us gently from the door, "off you go before Oriane comes down again. It's not that she doesn't like seeing you both. On the contrary, she's too fond of your company. If she finds you still here she'll start talking again. She's already very tired, and she'll reach the dinner-table quite dead. Besides, I tell you frankly, I'm dying of hunger. I had a wretched luncheon this morning when I came from the train. There was the devil of a *béarnaise* sauce, I admit, but in spite of that I shan't be sorry, not at all sorry to sit down to dinner. Five minutes to eight! Ah, women! She'll give us both indigestion before tomorrow. She's not nearly as strong as people think."

The Duke felt no compunction in speaking thus of his wife's ailments and his own to a dying man, for the former interested him more and therefore appeared to him more important. And so, after gently showing us out, it was simply from breeding and jollity that in a stentorian voice, as if addressing someone off-stage, he shouted from the gate to Swann, who was already in the courtyard: "You, now, don't let yourself be alarmed by the nonsense of those damned doctors. They're fools. You're as sound as a bell. You'll bury us all!"

## Addenda

*This passage continues as follows in Proust's manuscript:*

And the legendary scenes depicted in this landscape gave it the curious grandeur of having become contemporaneous with them. The myth dated the landscape; it swept the sky, the sun, the mountains which were its witnesses back with it to a past in the depths of which they already appeared to me to be identical to what they are today. It pushed back through endless time the unfurling of the waves which I had seen at Balbec. I said to myself: that sunset, that ocean which I can contemplate once again, whenever I wish, from the hotel or from the cliff, those identical waves, constitute a setting analogous, especially in the summer when the light orientalises it, to that in which Hercules killed the Hydra of Lerna, in which Orpheus was torn to pieces by the Bacchantes. Already, in those immemorial days of kings whose palaces are unearthed by archaeologists and of whom mythology has made its demi-gods, the sea at evening washed against the shore with that plaint which so often aroused in me a similar vague disquiet. And when I walked along the esplanade at the close of day, the sea which formed such a large part of the picture before my eyes, made up of so many contemporary images such as the band-stand and the casino, was the sea that the Argonauts saw, the sea of pre-history, and it was only by the alien elements I introduced into it that it was of today, it was only because I adjusted it to the hour of my quotidian vision that I found a familiar echo in the melancholy murmur which Theseus heard.

*The following development appears in the original manuscript:*

"That is why life is so horrible, since nobody can understand anybody else," Mme de Guermantes concluded with a self-consciously pessimistic air, but also with the animation induced by the pleasure of shining before the Princesse de Parme. And when I saw this woman who was so difficult to please, who had claimed to be bored to death by M. and Mme Ribot [*changed to*: with an extremely impressive minister-academician], going to so much trouble for this uninspiring princess, I understood how a man of such refinement as Swann could have enjoyed the company of M. Bontemps [*changed to*: Mme Bontemps]. Indeed if she had had reasons for adopting the latter, the Duchess might have preferred him to the celebrated statesman, for, outside the ranks of the princely families, only charm and distinction, either proved or imaginary but in the latter case its existence having been decreed in the same way as a monarch ennobles people, counted in the Guermantes circle. Political or professional hierarchies meant nothing. And if Cottard, a professor and an academician, who was not received there, had been called in as a consultant, he might have found there a complete unknown, Dr Percepied, whom for purely self-interested motives it was convenient for the Duchess to have to lunch now and then and whom she declared to be rather distinguished because she received him.

"Really?" replied the Princess, astonished by the assertion that life is horrible. "At least," she added, "one can do a great deal of good."

"Not even that, when you come down to it," said the Duchess, fearful lest the conversation should turn to philanthropy, which she found boring. "How can one do good to people one doesn't understand? And besides, one doesn't know which people to do good to—one tries to do good to the wrong people. That's what is so frightful. But to get back to Gilbert and his being shocked at your visiting the Iénas, Your Highness has far too much sense to let her actions be governed ..."

*Additional passage of dialogue in the manuscript:*

"I think he's mainly preoccupied by a Villeparisis-Norpois rapprochement," said the Duchess, in order to change the subject.

"But is there any room for a closer rapprochement in that direction?" asked the Prince. "I thought they were already very close."

"Good heavens!" said the Duchess with a gesture of alarm at the image of coupling which the Prince conjured up for her, "I believe at any rate that they have been. But I'm told, ridiculous though it may seem, that my aunt would like to marry him. No, seriously, it seems incredible, but I gather she's the one who wants it, and he doesn't because she already bores him enough as it is. Really, she can't have any sense of the ridiculous. Why, I wonder, when one has so seldom 'resisted' in the course of one's life, should one suddenly feel the need to sanction a liaison with matrimony, after dispensing with it on so many other occasions? There really isn't much point in having caused every door to be closed to one if one cannot bear the idea of a union remaining illicit, especially when it's as respectable as this one, and, we all hope, as platonic."

BOOK IV  
THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN

SODOM AND  
GOMORRAH

PART EIGHT

*The women shall have Gomorrah and  
the men shall have Sodom*

ALFRED DE VIGNY

The reader will remember that, well before going that day (the day on which the Princesse de Guermantes's reception was to be held) to pay the Duke and Duchess the visit I have just described, I had kept watch for their return and in the course of my vigil had made a discovery which concerned M. de Charlus in particular but was in itself so important that I have until now, until the moment when I could give it the prominence and treat it with the fullness that it demanded, postponed giving an account of it. I had, as I have said, left the marvellous point of vantage, so snugly contrived at the top of the house, commanding the hilly slopes which led up to the Hôtel de Bréquigny, and which were gaily decorated in the Italian manner by the rose-pink campanile of the Marquis de Frécourt's coach-house. I had thought it more practical, when I suspected that the Duke and Duchess were on the point of returning, to post myself on the staircase. I rather missed my Alpine eyrie. But at that time of day, namely the hour immediately after lunch, I had less cause for regret, for I should not then have seen, as in the morning, the footmen of the Bréquigny household, converted by distance into minute figures in a picture, make their leisurely ascent of the steep hillside, feather-brush in hand, behind the large, transparent flakes of mica which stood out so pleasingly upon its ruddy bastions. Failing the geologist's field of contemplation, I had at least that of the botanist, and was peering through the shutters of the staircase window at the Duchess's little shrub and at the precious plant, exposed in the courtyard with that assertiveness with which mothers "bring out" their marriageable offspring, and asking myself whether the unlikely insect would come, by a providential hazard, to visit the offered and neglected pistil. My curiosity emboldening me by degrees, I went down to the ground-floor window, which also stood open with its shutters ajar. I could distinctly hear Jupien getting ready to go out, but he could not detect me behind my blind, where I stood perfectly still until the moment when I drew quickly aside in order not to be seen by M. de Charlus, who, on his way to call upon Mme de Villeparisis, was slowly crossing the courtyard, corpulent, greying, aged by the strong light. Nothing short of an indisposition from which Mme de Villeparisis might be suffering (consequent on the illness of the Marquis de Fierbois, with whom he personally was at daggers drawn) could have made M. de Charlus pay a call, perhaps for the first time in his life, at that hour of the day. For with that eccentricity of the Guermantes, who, instead of conforming to the ways of society, tended to modify them to suit their own personal habits (habits not, they thought, social, and deserving in consequence the abasement before them of that worthless thing, society life—thus it was that Mme de Marsantes had no regular "day," but was at home to her friends every morning between ten o'clock and noon), the Baron, reserving those hours for reading, hunting for old curios and so forth, paid calls only between four and six in the evening. At six o'clock he went to the Jockey Club, or took a stroll in the Bois. A moment later, I again recoiled, in order not to be seen by Jupien. It was nearly time for him to set out for the office, from which he would return only for dinner, and not always even then during the last week since his niece and her apprentices had gone to the country to finish a dress for a customer. Then, realising that no one could see me, I decided not to let myself be disturbed again for fear of missing, should the miracle be fated to occur, the arrival, almost beyond the possibility of hope (across so many obstacles of distance, of adverse risks, of dangers), of the insect sent from so far away as ambassador to the virgin who had been waiting for so long. I knew that this expectancy was no more passive than in the male flower, whose stamens had spontaneously curved so that the insect might more easily receive their offering; similarly the female flower that stood here would coquettishly arch her "styles" if the insect came, and, to be more effectively penetrated by him, would imperceptibly advance, like a hypocritical but ardent damsel, to meet him half-way. The laws of the vegetable kingdom are themselves governed by increasingly higher laws. If the visit of an insect, that is to say the transportation of the seed from another flower, is generally necessary for the fertilisation of a flower, that is because self-fertilisation, the insemination of a flower by itself, would lead, like a succession of intermarriages in the same family, to degeneracy and sterility, whereas the crossing effected by insects gives to the subsequent generations of the same species a vigour unknown to their forebears. This invigoration may, however, prove excessive, and the species develop out of all proportion; then, as an antitoxin protects us against disease, as the thyroid gland regulates our adiposity, as defeat comes to punish pride, as fatigue follows indulgence, and as sleep in turn brings rest from fatigue, so an exceptional act of self-fertilisation comes at the crucial moment to apply its turn of the screw, its pull on the curb, brings back within the norm the flower that has exaggeratedly overstepped it. My reflexions had followed a trend which I shall describe in due course, and I had already drawn from the visible stratagems of flowers a conclusion that bore upon a whole unconscious element of literary production, when I saw M. de Charlus coming away from the Marquise's door. Only a few minutes had passed since his entry. Perhaps he had learned from his elderly



relative herself, or merely from a servant, of a great improvement in her condition, or rather her complete recovery from what had been nothing more than a slight indisposition. At this moment, when he did not suspect that anyone was watching him, his eyelids lowered as a screen against the sun, M. de Charlus had relaxed that artificial tension, softened that artificial vigour in his face which were ordinarily sustained by the animation of his talk and the force of his will. Pale as a marble statue, his fine features with the prominent nose no longer received from an expression deliberately assumed a different meaning which altered the beauty of their contours; no more now than a Guermantes, he seemed already carved in stone, he, Palamède XV, in the chapel at Combray. These general features of a whole family took on, however, in the face of M. de Charlus a more spiritualised, above all a softer refinement. I regretted for his sake that he should habitually adulterate with so many violent outbursts, offensive eccentricities, calumnies, with such harshness, touchiness and arrogance, that he should conceal beneath a spurious brutality the amenity, the kindness which, as he emerged from Mme de Villeparisis's, I saw so innocently displayed upon his face. Blinking his eyes in the sunlight, he seemed almost to be smiling, and I found in his face seen thus in repose and as it were in its natural state something so affectionate, so defenceless, that I could not help thinking how angry M. de Charlus would have been could he have known that he was being watched; for what was suggested to me by the sight of this man who was so enamoured of, who so prided himself upon, his virility, to whom all other men seemed odiously effeminate, what he suddenly suggested to me, to such an extent had he momentarily assumed the features, the expression, the smile thereof, was a woman.

I was about to change my position again, so that he should not catch sight of me; I had neither the time nor the need to do so. For what did I see! Face to face, in that courtyard where they had certainly never met before (M. de Charlus coming to the Hôtel de Guermantes only in the afternoon, during the time when Jupien was at his office), the Baron, having suddenly opened wide his half-shut eyes, was gazing with extraordinary attentiveness at the ex-tailor poised on the threshold of his shop, while the latter, rooted suddenly to the spot in front of M. de Charlus, implanted there like a tree, contemplated with a look of wonderment the plump form of the ageing Baron. But, more astounding still, M. de Charlus's pose having altered, Jupien's, as though in obedience to the laws of an occult art, at once brought itself into harmony with it. The Baron, who now sought to disguise the impression that had been made on him, and yet, in spite of his affectation of indifference, seemed unable to move away without regret, came and went, looked vaguely into the distance in the way which he felt would most enhance the beauty of his eyes, assumed a smug, nonchalant, fatuous air. Meanwhile Jupien, shedding at once the humble, kindly expression which I had always associated with him, had—in perfect symmetry with the Baron—thrown back his head, given a becoming tilt to his body, placed his hand with grotesque effrontery on his hip, stuck out his behind, struck poses with the coquetry that the orchid might have adopted on the providential arrival of the bee. I had not supposed that he could look so unappealing. But I was equally unaware that he was capable of improvising his part in this sort of dumb show which (although he found himself for the first time in the presence of M. de Charlus) seemed to have been long and carefully rehearsed; one does not arrive spontaneously at that pitch of perfection except when one meets abroad a compatriot with whom an understanding then develops of itself, the means of communication being the same, even without having seen each other before.

This scene was not, however, positively comic; it was stamped with a strangeness, or if you like a naturalness, the beauty of which steadily increased. Try as M. de Charlus might to assume a detached air, to let his eyelids nonchalantly droop, every now and then he raised them, and at such moments turned on Jupien an attentive gaze. But (doubtless because he felt that such a scene could not be prolonged indefinitely in this place, whether for reasons which we shall understand later on, or possibly from that feeling of the brevity of all things which makes us determine that every blow must strike home, and renders so moving the spectacle of every kind of love), each time that M. de Charlus looked at Jupien, he took care that his glance should be accompanied by a word, which made it infinitely unlike the glances we usually direct at a person whom we scarcely know or do not know at all; he stared at Jupien with the peculiar fixity of the person who is about to say to you: "Excuse my taking the liberty, but you have a long white thread hanging down your back," or else: "Surely I can't be mistaken, you come from Zurich too; I'm certain I must have seen you there often at the antique dealer's." Thus, every other minute, the same question seemed to be put to Jupien intently in M. de Charlus's ogling, like those questioning phrases of Beethoven's, indefinitely repeated at regular intervals and intended—with an exaggerated lavishness of preparation—to introduce a new theme, a change of key, a "re-entry." On the other hand, the beauty of the reciprocal glances of M. de Charlus and Jupien arose precisely from the fact that they did not, for the moment at least, seem to be intended to lead to anything further. It was the first time I had seen the manifestation of this beauty in the Baron and Jupien. In the eyes of both of them, it was the sky not of Zurich but of some oriental city, the name of which I had not yet divined, that I saw reflected. Whatever the point might be that held M. de Charlus and the ex-tailor thus arrested, their pact seemed concluded and these superfluous glances to be but ritual preliminaries, like the parties people give before a marriage which has been definitely arranged. Nearer still to nature—and the multiplicity of these analogies is itself all the more natural in that the same man, if we examine him for a few minutes, appears in turn a man, a man-bird, a man-insect, and so forth—one might have thought of them as a pair of birds, the male and the female, the male seeking to advance, the female—Jupien—no longer giving any sign of response to this stratagem, but regarding her new friend without surprise, with an inattentive fixity of gaze, doubtless considered more disturbing and the sole practicality now that the male had taken the first steps, and contenting herself with preening her feathers. At length Jupien's indifference seemed to suffice him no longer;

from the certainty of having conquered to getting himself pursued and desired was but a step, and Jupien, deciding to go off to his work, went out through the carriage gate. It was only, however, after turning his head two or three times that he disappeared into the street, towards which the Baron, trembling lest he should lose the trail (boldly humming a tune, and not forgetting to fling a "Good-day" to the porter, who, half-tipsy and engaged in treating a few friends in his back kitchen, did not even hear him), hurried briskly to catch up with him. At the same instant as M. de Charlus disappeared through the gate humming like a great bumble-bee, another, a real one this time, flew into the courtyard. For all I knew this might be the one so long awaited by the orchid, coming to bring it that rare pollen without which it must remain a virgin. But I was distracted from following the gyrations of the insect, for, a few minutes later, engaging my attention afresh, Jupien (perhaps to pick up a parcel which he did take away with him ultimately and which, in the emotion aroused in him by the appearance of M. de Charlus, he had forgotten, perhaps simply for a more natural reason) returned, followed by the Baron. The latter, deciding to precipitate matters, asked the tailor for a light, but at once observed: "I ask you for a light, but I see I've left my cigars at home." The laws of hospitality prevailed over the rules of coquetry. "Come inside, you shall have everything you wish," said the tailor, on whose features disdain now gave place to joy. The door of the shop closed behind them and I could hear no more. I had lost sight of the bumblebee. I did not know whether he was the insect that the orchid required, but I had no longer any doubt, in the case of a very rare insect and a captive flower, of the miraculous possibility of their conjunction when I considered that M. de Charlus (this is simply a comparison of providential chances, whatever they may be, without the slightest scientific claim to establish a relation between certain botanical laws and what is sometimes, most ineptly, termed homosexuality), who for years past had never come to the house except at hours when Jupien was not there, had, by the mere accident of Mme de Villeparisis's indisposition, encountered the tailor and with him the good fortune reserved for men of the Baron's kind by one of those fellow-creatures who may even be, as we shall see, infinitely younger than Jupien and better-looking, the man predestined to exist in order that they may have their share of sensual pleasure on this earth: the man who cares only for elderly gentlemen.

All that I have just said, however, I was not to understand until several minutes had elapsed, to such an extent is reality encumbered by those properties of invisibility until a chance occurrence has divested it of them. At all events, for the moment I was greatly annoyed at not being able to hear any more of the conversation between the ex-tailor and the Baron. Then I noticed the vacant shop, which was separated from Jupien's only by an extremely thin partition. In order to get to it, I had merely to go up to our flat, pass through the kitchen, go down by the service stairs to the cellars, make my way through them across the breadth of the courtyard above, and on arriving at the place in the basement where a few months ago the joiner had still been storing his timber and where Jupien intended to keep his coal, climb the flight of steps which led to the interior of the shop. Thus the whole of my journey would be made under cover, and I should not be seen by anyone. This was the most prudent method. It was not the one that I adopted; instead, keeping close to the walls, I edged my way round the courtyard in the open, trying not to let myself be seen. If I was not, I owe it more, I am sure, to chance than to my own sagacity. And for the fact that I took so imprudent a course, when the way through the cellar was so safe, I can see three possible reasons, assuming that I had any reason at all. First of all, my impatience. Secondly, perhaps, a dim memory of the scene at Montjouvain, when I crouched concealed outside Mlle Vinteuil's window. Certainly, the affairs of this sort of which I have been a spectator have always been, as far as their setting is concerned, of the most imprudent and least probable character, as if such revelations were to be the reward of an action full of risk, though in part clandestine. I hardly dare confess to the third and final reason, so childish does it seem, but I suspect that it was unconsciously decisive. Ever since, in order to follow—and see controverted—the military principles enunciated by Saint-Loup, I had been following in close detail the course of the Boer War, I had been led on from that to re-read old accounts of travel and exploration. These narratives had thrilled me, and I applied them to the events of my daily life to give myself courage. When attacks of illness had compelled me to remain for several days and nights on end not only without sleep but without lying down, without tasting food or drink, at the moment when my pain and exhaustion became so intense that I felt that I should never escape from them, I would think of some traveller cast up on a shore, poisoned by noxious herbs, shivering with fever in clothes drenched by the salt water, who nevertheless in a day or two felt stronger, rose and went blindly on his way, in search of possible inhabitants who might turn out to be cannibals. His example acted on me as a tonic, restored my hope, and I felt ashamed of my momentary discouragement. Thinking of the Boers who, with British armies facing them, were not afraid to expose themselves at the moment when they had to cross a tract of open country in order to reach cover, "It would be a fine thing," I thought to myself, "if I were to show less courage when the theatre of operations is simply our own courtyard, and when the only steel that I have to fear, I who have just fought several duels unafraid on account of the Dreyfus case, is that of the eyes of the neighbours who have other things to do besides looking into the courtyard."

But when I was inside the shop, taking care not to let the wooden floor make the slightest creak, as I realised that the least sound in Jupien's shop could be heard from mine, I thought to myself how rash Jupien and M. de Charlus had been, and how luck had favoured them.

I did not dare move. The Guermantes groom, taking advantage no doubt of his master's absence, had, as it happened, transferred to the shop in which I now stood a ladder which hitherto had been kept in the coach-house, and if I had climbed this I could have opened the fanlight above and heard as well as if I had been in Jupien's shop itself. But I was afraid of making a noise. Besides, it was unnecessary. I had not even cause to regret my not having arrived in the shop until several minutes had elapsed. For from what I heard at first in

Jupien's quarters, which was only a series of inarticulate sounds, I imagine that few words had been exchanged. It is true that these sounds were so violent that, if they had not always been taken up an octave higher by a parallel plaint, I might have thought that one person was slitting another's throat within a few feet of me, and that subsequently the murderer and his resuscitated victim were taking a bath to wash away the traces of the crime. I concluded from this later on that there is another thing as noisy as pain, namely pleasure, especially when there is added to it—in the absence of the fear of pregnancy which could not be the case here, despite the hardly convincing example in the *Golden Legend*—an immediate concern about cleanliness. Finally, after about half an hour (during which time I had stealthily hoisted myself up my ladder so as to peep through the fanlight which I did not open), the Baron emerged and a conversation began. Jupien refused with insistence the money that M. de Charlus was trying to press upon him.

Then M. de Charlus took one step outside the shop. "Why do you have your chin shaved like that," asked the other in a caressing tone. "It's so becoming, a nice beard." "Ugh! It's disgusting," the Baron replied.

Meanwhile he still lingered on the threshold and plied Jupien with questions about the neighbourhood. "You don't know anything about the man who sells chestnuts round the corner, not the one on the left, he's a horror, but on the other side, a big dark fellow? And the chemist opposite, he has a very nice cyclist who delivers his medicines." These questions must have ruffled Jupien, for, drawing himself up with the indignation of a courtesan who has been betrayed, he replied: "I can see you're a regular flirt." Uttered in a pained, frigid, affected tone, this reproach must have had its effect on M. de Charlus, who, to counteract the bad impression his curiosity had produced, addressed to Jupien, in too low a tone for me to be able to make out his words, a request the granting of which would doubtless necessitate their prolonging their sojourn in the shop, and which moved the tailor sufficiently to make him forget his annoyance, for he studied the Baron's face, plump and flushed beneath his grey hair, with the supremely blissful air of a person whose self-esteem has just been profoundly flattered, and, deciding to grant M. de Charlus the favour that he had just asked of him, after various remarks lacking in refinement such as "What a big bum you have!", said to the Baron with an air at once smiling, moved, superior and grateful: "All right, you big baby, come along!"

"If I hark back to the question of the tram conductor," M. de Charlus tenaciously pursued, "it is because, apart from anything else, it might provide some interest for my homeward journey. For it happens to me at times, like the Caliph who used to roam the streets of Baghdad in the guise of a common merchant, to condescend to follow some curious little person whose profile may have taken my fancy." At this point I was struck by the same observation as had occurred to me in the case of Bergotte. If he should ever have to answer for himself before a court, he would employ not the sentences calculated to convince the judges, but such Bergottesque sentences as his peculiar literary temperament suggested to him and made him find pleasure in using. Similarly M. de Charlus, in conversing with the tailor, made use of the same language as he would have used in speaking to fashionable people of his own set, even exaggerating its eccentricities, whether because the shyness which he was striving to overcome drove him to an excess of pride or, by preventing him from mastering himself (for we are always less at our ease in the company of someone who is not of our milieu), forced him to unveil, to lay bare his true nature, which was indeed arrogant and a trifle mad, as Mme de Guermantes had remarked. "In order not to lose the trail," he went on, "I spring like a little usher, like a young and good-looking doctor, into the same tram-car as the little person herself, of whom we speak in the feminine gender only so as to conform with the rules of grammar (as one says in speaking of a prince, 'Is *Her* Highness enjoying *her* usual health').<sup>1</sup> If she changes trams, I take, with possibly the germs of the plague, that incredible thing called a 'transfer'—a number, and one which, although it is presented to *me*, is not always number one! I change 'carriages' in this way as many as three or four times, I end up sometimes at eleven o'clock at night at the Gare d'Orléans, and then have to come home. Still, if only it was just the Gare d'Orléans! Once, I must tell you, not having managed to engage in conversation sooner, I went all the way to Orléans itself, in one of those frightful compartments where all one has to rest one's eyes upon, between those triangular objects made of netting, are photographs of the principal architectural features of the line. There was only one vacant seat; I had in front of me, by way of historic monument, a 'view' of the Cathedral of Orléans, quite the ugliest in France, and as tiring a thing to have to stare at in that way against my will as if somebody had forced me to focus its towers in the lens of one of those optical penholders which give one ophthalmia. I got out of the train at Les Aubrais together with my young person, for whom alas his family (when I had imagined him to possess every defect except that of having a family) were waiting on the platform! My sole consolation, as I waited for a train to take me back to Paris, was the house of Diane de Poitiers. For all that she charmed one of my royal ancestors, I should have preferred a more living beauty. That is why, as an antidote to the boredom of returning home alone, I should rather like to make friends with a sleeping-car attendant or a bus conductor. Now, don't be shocked," the Baron wound up, "it is all a question of type. With what you might call 'young gentlemen,' for instance, I feel no desire for physical possession, but I am never satisfied until I have touched them, I don't mean physically, but touched a responsive chord. As soon as, instead of leaving my letters unanswered, a young man starts writing to me incessantly, when he is morally, as it were, at my disposal, I am assuaged, or at least I would be were I not immediately seized with an obsession for another. Rather curious, is it not?—Speaking of 'young gentlemen,' those that come to the house here, do you know any of them?" "No, my pet. Oh, yes, I do, a dark one, very tall, with an eyeglass, who keeps smiling and turning round." "I don't know who you mean." Jupien filled in the portrait, but M. de Charlus was unable to identify its subject, not knowing that the ex-tailor was one of those persons, more common than is generally supposed, who never remember the colour of the hair of people they do not know well. But to me, who was aware of this infirmity in Jupien and substituted "fair" for "dark," the portrait appeared to be an

exact description of the Duc de Châtellerault. "To return to young men not of the lower orders," the Baron went on, "at the present moment my head has been turned by a strange little fellow, an intelligent little cit who shows with regard to myself a prodigious want of civility. He has absolutely no idea of the prodigious personage that I am, and of the microscopic animalcule that he is in comparison. But what does it matter, the little donkey may bray his head off before my august bishop's mantle." "Bishop!" cried Jupien, who had understood nothing of M. de Charlus's last remarks, but was completely taken aback by the word bishop. "But that sort of thing doesn't go with religion," he said. "I have three Popes in my family," replied M. de Charlus, "and enjoy the right to mantle in gules by virtue of a cardinalate title, the niece of the Cardinal, my great-uncle, having brought to my grandfather the title of Duke which was substituted for it. I see, though, that you are deaf to metaphor and indifferent to French history. Besides," he added, less perhaps by way of conclusion than as a warning, "this attraction that I feel towards young people who avoid me, from fear of course, for only their natural respect stops their mouths from crying out to me that they love me, requires in them a superior social position. Even then their feigned indifference may produce nevertheless a directly opposite effect. Fatuously prolonged, it sickens me. To take an example from a class with which you are more familiar, when they were doing up my house, so as not to create jealousies among all the duchesses who were vying with one another for the honour of being able to say that they had given me lodging, I went for a few days to a 'hotel,' as they say nowadays. One of the room waiters was known to me, and I pointed out to him an interesting little page who opened carriage doors and who remained recalcitrant to my proposals. Finally, in my exasperation, in order to prove to him that my intentions were pure, I made him an offer of a ridiculously high sum simply to come upstairs and talk to me for five minutes in my room. I waited for him in vain. I then took such a dislike to him that I used to go out by the service door so as not to see his villainous little mug at the other. I learned afterwards that he had never had any of my notes, which had been intercepted, the first by the room waiter who was jealous, the next by the day porter who was virtuous, the third by the night porter who was in love with the little page, and used to couch with him at the hour when Dian rose. But my disgust persisted none the less, and were they to bring me the page like a dish of venison on a silver platter, I should thrust him away with a retching stomach. There now, what a pity—we have spoken of serious matters and now it's all over between us as regards what I was hoping for. But you could be of great service to me, act as my agent ... Why no, the mere thought of such a thing makes me quite frisky again, and I feel it isn't all over."

From the beginning of this scene my eyes had been opened by a transformation in M. de Charlus as complete and as immediate as if he had been touched by a magician's wand. Until then, because I had not understood, I had not seen. Each man's vice (we use the term for the sake of linguistic convenience) accompanies him after the manner of the tutelary spirit who was invisible to men so long as they were unaware of his presence. Kindness, treachery, name, social relations, they do not let themselves be laid bare, we carry them hidden. Ulysses himself did not recognise Athena at first. But the gods are immediately perceptible to one another, like as quickly to like, and so too had M. de Charlus been to Jupien. Until that moment, in the presence of M. de Charlus I had been in the position of an unobservant man who, standing before a pregnant woman whose distended waistline he has failed to remark, persists, while she smilingly reiterates "Yes, I'm a little tired just now," in asking her tactlessly: "Why, what's the matter with you?" But let someone say to him: "She is expecting a child," and suddenly he catches sight of her stomach and ceases to see anything else. It is the explanation that opens our eyes; the dispelling of an error gives us an additional sense.

People who do not care to refer, for examples of this law, to the Messieurs de Charlus of their acquaintance whom for long years they had never suspected until the day when, upon the smooth surface of an individual indistinguishable from everyone else, there suddenly appears, traced in an ink hitherto invisible, the characters that compose the word dear to the ancient Greeks, have only to remind themselves, in order to be persuaded that the world which surrounds them appears to them naked at first, stripped of a thousand ornaments which it offers to the eyes of others better informed, of the number of times in the course of their lives they have found themselves on the point of committing a gaffe. Nothing upon the blank, undocumented face of this man or that could have led them to suppose that he was precisely the brother, or the fiancé, or the lover of a woman of whom they were about to remark: "What a cow!" But then, fortunately, a word whispered to them by someone standing near arrests the fatal expression on their lips. At once there appear, like a *Mene*, *Tekel*, *Upharsin*, the words: "he is engaged to," or "he is the brother of," or "he is the lover of" the woman whom it is inadvisable to describe in his hearing as a cow. And this single new notion will bring about an entire regrouping, thrusting some back, others forward, of the fractional notions, henceforward a complete whole, which we possessed of the rest of the family. Although in the person of M. de Charlus another creature was coupled, as the horse in the centaur, which made him different from other men, although this creature was one with the Baron, I had never perceived it. Now the abstract had become material, the creature at last discerned had lost its power of remaining invisible, and the transformation of M. de Charlus into a new person was so complete that not only the contrasts of his face and of his voice, but, in retrospect, the very ups and downs of his relations with myself, everything that hitherto had seemed to my mind incoherent, became intelligible, appeared self-evident, just as a sentence which presents no meaning so long as it remains broken up in letters arranged at random expresses, once these letters are rearranged in the proper order, a thought which one can never afterwards forget.

I now understood, moreover, why earlier, when I had seen him coming away from Mme de Villeparisis's, I had managed to arrive at the conclusion that M. de Charlus looked like a woman: he was one! He belonged to

that race of beings, less paradoxical than they appear, whose ideal is manly precisely because their temperament is feminine, and who in ordinary life resemble other men in appearance only; there where each of us carries, inscribed in those eyes through which he beholds everything in the universe, a human form engraved on the surface of the pupil, for them it is not that of a nymph but that of an ephebe. A race upon which a curse is laid and which must live in falsehood and perjury because it knows that its desire, that which constitutes life's dearest pleasure, is held to be punishable, shameful, an inadmissible thing; which must deny its God, since its members, even when Christians, when at the bar of justice they appear and are arraigned, must before Christ and in his name refute as a calumny what is their very life; sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie even in the hour when they close her dying eyes; friends without friendships, despite all those which their frequently acknowledged charm inspires and their often generous hearts would gladly feel—but can we describe as friendships those relationships which flourish only by virtue of a lie and from which the first impulse of trust and sincerity to which they might be tempted to yield would cause them to be rejected with disgust, unless they are dealing with an impartial or perhaps even sympathetic spirit, who however in that case, misled with regard to them by a conventional psychology, will attribute to the vice confessed the very affection that is most alien to it, just as certain judges assume and are more inclined to pardon murder in inverts and treason in Jews for reasons derived from original sin and racial predestination? And lastly—according at least to the first theory which I sketched in outline at the time, which we shall see subjected to some modification in the sequel, and in which, had the paradox not been hidden from their eyes by the very illusion that made them see and live, this would have angered them above all else—lovers who are almost precluded from the possibility of that love the hope of which gives them the strength to endure so many risks and so much loneliness, since they are enamoured of precisely the type of man who has nothing feminine about him, who is not an invert and consequently cannot love them in return; with the result that their desire would be for ever unappeased did not their money procure for them real men, and their imagination end by making them take for real men the inverts to whom they have prostituted themselves. Their honour precarious, their liberty provisional, lasting only until the discovery of their crime; their position unstable, like that of the poet one day fêted in every drawing-room and applauded in every theatre in London, and the next driven from every lodging, unable to find a pillow upon which to lay his head, turning the mill like Samson and saying like him: “The two sexes shall die, each in a place apart!”<sup>2</sup> excluded even, except on the days of general misfortune when the majority rally round the victim as the Jews round Dreyfus, from the sympathy—at times from the society—of their fellows, in whom they inspire only disgust at seeing themselves as they are, portrayed in a mirror which, ceasing to flatter them, accentuates every blemish that they have refused to observe in themselves, and makes them understand that what they have been calling their love (and to which, playing upon the word, they have by association annexed all that poetry, painting, music, chivalry, asceticism have contrived to add to love) springs not from an ideal of beauty which they have chosen but from an incurable disease; like the Jews again (save some who will associate only with those of their race and have always on their lips the ritual words and the accepted pleasantries), shunning one another, seeking out those who are most directly their opposite, who do not want their company, forgiving their rebuffs, enraptured by their condescensions; but also brought into the company of their own kind by the ostracism to which they are subjected, the opprobrium into which they have fallen, having finally been invested, by a persecution similar to that of Israel, with the physical and moral characteristics of a race, sometimes beautiful, often hideous, finding (in spite of all the mockery with which one who, more closely integrated with, better assimilated to the opposing race, is in appearance relatively less inverted, heaps upon one who has remained more so) a relief in frequenting the society of their kind, and even some support in their existence, so much so that, while steadfastly denying that they are a race (the name of which is the vilest of insults), they readily unmask those who succeed in concealing the fact that they belong to it, with a view less to injuring them, though they have no scruple about that, than to excusing themselves, and seeking out (as a doctor seeks out cases of appendicitis) cases of inversion in history, taking pleasure in recalling that Socrates was one of themselves, as the Jews claim that Jesus was one of them, without reflecting that there were no abnormal people when homosexuality was the norm, no anti-Christians before Christ, that the opprobrium alone makes the crime because it has allowed to survive only those who remained obdurate to every warning, to every example, to every punishment, by virtue of an innate disposition so peculiar that it is more repugnant to other men (even though it may be accompanied by high moral qualities) than certain other vices which exclude those qualities, such as theft, cruelty, breach of faith, vices better understood and so more readily excused by the generality of men; forming a freemasonry far more extensive, more effective and less suspected than that of the Lodges, for it rests upon an identity of tastes, needs, habits, dangers, apprenticeship, knowledge, traffic, vocabulary, and one in which even members who do not wish to know one another recognise one another immediately by natural or conventional, involuntary or deliberate signs which indicate one of his kind to the beggar in the person of the nobleman whose carriage door he is shutting, to the father in the person of his daughter's suitor, to the man who has sought healing, absolution or legal defence in the doctor, the priest or the barrister to whom he has had recourse; all of them obliged to protect their own secret but sharing with the others a secret which the rest of humanity does not suspect and which means that to them the most wildly improbable tales of adventure seem true, for in this life of anachronistic fiction the ambassador is a bosom friend of the felon, the prince, with a certain insolent aplomb born of his aristocratic breeding which the timorous bourgeois lacks, on leaving the duchess's party goes off to confer in private with the ruffian; a reprobate section of the human collectivity, but an important one, suspected where it does not exist, flaunting itself, insolent and immune, where its existence is never guessed; numbering its

adherents everywhere, among the people, in the army, in the church, in prison, on the throne; living, in short, at least to a great extent, in an affectionate and perilous intimacy with the men of the other race, provoking them, playing with them by speaking of its vice as of something alien to it—a game that is rendered easy by the blindness or duplicity of the others, a game that may be kept up for years until the day of the scandal when these lion-tamers are devoured; obliged until then to make a secret of their lives, to avert their eyes from the direction in which they would wish to stray, to fasten them on what they would naturally turn away from, to change the gender of many of the adjectives in their vocabulary, a social constraint that is slight in comparison with the inward constraint imposed upon them by their vice, or what is improperly so called, not so much in relation to others as to themselves, and in such a way that to themselves it does not appear a vice. But certain among them, more practical, busier men who have not the time to go and drive their bargains, or to dispense with the simplification of life and the saving of time which may result from co-operation, have formed two societies of which the second is composed exclusively of persons similar to themselves.

This is noticeable in those who are poor and have come up from the country, without friends, with nothing but their ambition to be some day a celebrated doctor or barrister, with a mind still barren of opinions, a person devoid of social graces which they intend as soon as possible to adorn, just as they might buy furniture for their little attic in the Latin Quarter, modelling themselves on what they observe among those who have already “arrived” in the useful and serious profession in which they also intend to establish themselves and to become famous; in these their special predisposition, unconsciously inherited like a proclivity for drawing, for music, a tendency towards blindness, is perhaps the only inveterate and overriding peculiarity—which on certain evenings compels them to miss some meeting, advantageous to their career, with people whose ways of speaking, thinking, dressing, parting their hair, they otherwise adopt. In their neighbourhood, where for the rest they mix only with brother students, teachers or some fellow-provincial who has graduated and can help them on, they have speedily discovered other young men who are drawn to them by the same special inclination, as in a small town the assistant schoolmaster and the solicitor are brought together by a common interest in chamber music or mediaeval ivories; applying to the object of their distraction the same utilitarian instinct, the same professional spirit which guides them in their career, they meet these young men at gatherings to which no outsider is admitted any more than to those that bring together collectors of old snuff-boxes, Japanese prints or rare flowers, and at which, what with the pleasure of gaining information, the practical value of making exchanges and the fear of competition, there prevail simultaneously, as in a stamp market, the close co-operation of specialists and the fierce rivalries of collectors. Moreover no one in the café where they have their table knows what the gathering is, whether it is that of an angling club, of an editorial staff, or of the “Sons of the Indre,” so correct is their attire, so cold and reserved their manner, so modestly do they refrain from any but the most covert glance at the young men of fashion, the young “lions” who, a few feet away, are boasting about their mistresses, and among whom those who now admire them without venturing to raise their eyes will learn only twenty years later, when some are on the eve of admission to the Academy, and others middle-aged clubmen, that the most attractive among them, now a stout and grizzled Charlus, was in reality one of themselves, but elsewhere, in another circle of society, beneath other external symbols, with different signs whose unfamiliarity misled them. But these groups are at varying stages of evolution; and, just as the “Union of the Left” differs from the “Socialist Federation” or some Mendelssohnian musical club from the Schola Cantorum, on certain evenings, at another table, there are extremists who allow a bracelet to slip down from beneath a cuff, or sometimes a necklace to gleam in the gap of a collar, who by their persistent stares, their cooings, their laughter, their mutual caresses, oblige a band of students to depart in hot haste, and are served with a civility beneath which indignation smoulders by a waiter who, as on the evenings when he has to serve Dreyfusards, would have the greatest pleasure in summoning the police did he not find profit in pocketing their gratuities.

It is with these professional organisations that the mind contrasts the taste of the solitaires, and in one sense without too much contrivance, since it is doing no more than imitate the solitaires themselves who imagine that nothing differs more widely from organised vice than what appears to them to be a misunderstood love, but with some contrivance nevertheless, for these different classes correspond, no less than to diverse physiological types, to successive stages in a pathological or merely social evolution. And it is, in fact, very rarely that the solitaires do not eventually merge themselves in some such organisation, sometimes from simple lassitude, or for convenience (just as the people who have been most strongly opposed to such innovations end by having the telephone installed, inviting the Iénas to their parties, or shopping at Potin’s). They meet with none too friendly a reception as a rule, for, in their relatively pure lives, their want of experience, the saturation in day-dreams to which they have been reduced, have branded more strongly upon them those special marks of effeminacy which the professionals have sought to efface. And it must be admitted that, among certain of these newcomers, the woman is not only inwardly united to the man but hideously visible, convulsed as they are by a hysterical spasm, by a shrill laugh which sets their knees and hands trembling, looking no more like the common run of men than those apes with melancholy ringed eyes and prehensile feet who dress up in dinner-jackets and black ties; so that these new recruits are judged by others, themselves less chaste, to be compromising associates, and their admission is hedged with difficulties; they are accepted nevertheless, and they benefit then from those facilities by which commerce and big business have transformed the lives of individuals by bringing within their reach commodities hitherto too costly to acquire and indeed hard to find, which now submerge them beneath a plethora of what by themselves they had never succeeded in discovering amid the densest crowds.

But, even with these innumerable outlets, the burden of social constraint is still too heavy for some, recruited principally among those who have not practised mental constraint and who still take to be rarer than it actually is their way of love. Let us ignore for the moment those who, the exceptional character of their inclinations making them regard themselves as superior to the other sex, look down on women, regard homosexuality as the appurtenance of genius and the great periods of history, and, when they wish to share their taste with others, seek out not so much those who seem to them to be predisposed towards it, like drug-addicts with their morphine, as those who seem to them to be worthy of it, from apostolic zeal, just as others preach Zionism, conscientious objection, Saint-Simonianism, vegetarianism or anarchy. There are some who, should we intrude upon them in the morning, still in bed, will present to our gaze an admirable female head, so generalised and typical of the entire sex is the expression of the face; the hair itself affirms it, so feminine is its ripple; unbrushed, it falls so naturally in long curls over the cheek that one marvels how the young woman, the girl, the Galatea barely awakened to life in the unconscious mass of this male body in which she is imprisoned has contrived so ingeniously, by herself, without instruction from anyone else, to take advantage of the narrowest apertures in her prison wall to find what was necessary to her existence. No doubt the young man who sports this delicious head does not say: "I am a woman." Even if—for any of the countless possible reasons—he lives with a woman, he can deny to her that he is himself one, can swear to her that he has never had intercourse with men. But let her look at him as we have just revealed him, lying back in bed, in pyjamas, his arms bare, his throat and neck bare too beneath the dark tresses: the pyjama jacket becomes a woman's shift, the head that of a pretty Spanish girl. The mistress is appalled by these confidences offered to her gaze, truer than any spoken confidence could be, or indeed any action, which his actions indeed, if they have not already done so, cannot fail later on to confirm, for every individual follows the line of his own pleasure, and if he is not too depraved, seeks it in a sex complementary to his own. And for the invert vice begins, not when he enters into relations (for there are all sorts of reasons that may enjoin these), but when he takes his pleasure with women. The young man whom we have been attempting to portray was so evidently a woman that the women who looked upon him with desire were doomed (failing a special taste on their part) to the same disappointment as those who in Shakespeare's comedies are taken in by a girl disguised as a youth. The deception is mutual, the invert is himself aware of it, he guesses the disillusionment which the woman will experience once the mask is removed, and feels to what an extent this mistake as to sex is a source of poetical imaginings. Moreover it is in vain that he keeps back the admission "I am a woman" even from his demanding mistress (if she is not a denizen of Gomorrah) when all the time, with the cunning, the agility, the obstinacy of a climbing plant, the unconscious but visible woman in him seeks the masculine organ. We have only to look at that curly hair on the white pillow to understand that if, in the evening, this young man slips through his guardians' fingers in spite of them, in spite of himself, it will not be to go in pursuit of women. His mistress may castigate him, may lock him up, but next day the man-woman will have found some way of attaching himself to a man, as the convolvulus throws out its tendrils wherever it finds a pick or a rake up which to climb. Why, when we admire in the face of this man a delicacy that touches our hearts, a grace, a natural gentleness such as men do not possess, should we be dismayed to learn that this young man runs after boxers? They are different aspects of the same reality. And indeed, what repels us is the most touching thing of all, more touching than any refinement of delicacy, for it represents an admirable though unconscious effort on the part of nature: the recognition of sex by itself, in spite of the deceptions of sex, appears as an unavowed attempt to escape from itself towards what an initial error on the part of society has segregated it from. Some—those no doubt who have been most timid in childhood—are not greatly concerned with the kind of physical pleasure they receive, provided that they can associate it with a masculine face. Whereas others, whose sensuality is doubtless more violent, feel an imperious need to localise their physical pleasure. These latter, perhaps, would shock the average person with their avowals. They live perhaps less exclusively under the planet of Saturn, since for them women are not entirely excluded as they are for the former sort, in relation to whom women have no existence apart from conversation, flirtation, intellectual loves. But the second sort seek out those women who love other women, who can procure for them a young man, enhance the pleasure they experience in his company; better still, they can, in the same fashion, take with such women the same pleasure as with a man. Whence it arises that jealousy is kindled in those who love the first sort only by the pleasure which they may enjoy with a man, which alone seems to their lovers a betrayal, since they do not participate in the love of women, have practised it only out of habit and to preserve for themselves the possibility of eventual marriage, visualising so little the pleasure that it is capable of giving that they cannot be distressed by the thought that he whom they love is enjoying that pleasure; whereas the other sort often inspire jealousy by their love-affairs with women. For, in their relations with women, they play, for the woman who loves her own sex, the part of another woman, and she offers them at the same time more or less what they find in other men, so that the jealous friend suffers from the feeling that the man he loves is riveted to the woman who is to him almost a man, and at the same time feels his beloved almost escape him because, to these women, he is something which the lover himself cannot conceive, a sort of woman. Nor need we pause here to consider those young fools who out of childishness, to tease their friends or to shock their families, obdurately choose clothes that resemble women's dresses, redden their lips and blacken their eyelashes; let us leave them aside, for it is they whom we shall find later on, when they have suffered the all too cruel penalty of their affectation, spending what remains of their lifetime in vain attempts to repair by a sternly protestant demeanour the wrong that they did to themselves when they were carried away by the same demon that urges young women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain to live scandalous lives, to defy all the conventions, to scoff at the entreaties of their families, until the day when they set themselves with

perseverance but without success to reascend the slope down which they had found it so amusing to slide or rather had not been able to stop themselves from sliding. Let us, finally, leave until later the men who have sealed a pact with Gomorrah. We shall speak of them when M. de Charlus comes to know them. Let us leave all those, of one sort or another, who will appear each in his turn, and, to conclude this first sketch of the subject, let us simply say a word about those whom we began to speak of just now, the solitaires. Supposing their vice to be more exceptional than it is, they have retired into solitude from the day on which they discovered it, after having carried it within themselves for a long time without knowing it, longer, that is, than certain others. For no one can tell at first that he is an invert, or a poet, or a snob, or a scoundrel. The boy who has been reading erotic poetry or looking at obscene pictures, if he then presses his body against a schoolfellow's, imagines himself only to be communing with him in an identical desire for a woman. How should he suppose that he is not like everybody else when he recognises the substance of what he feels in reading Mme de La Fayette, Racine, Baudelaire, Walter Scott, at a time when he is still too little capable of observing himself to take into account what he has added from his own store to the picture, and to realise that if the sentiment be the same the object differs, that what he desires is Rob Roy and not Diana Vernon? With many, by a defensive prudence on the part of the instinct that precedes the clearer vision of the intellect, the mirror and walls of their bedroom vanish beneath coloured prints of actresses, and they compose verses such as:

I love but Chloe in the world,  
For Chloe is divine;  
Her golden hair is sweetly curled,  
For her my heart doth pine.

Must we on that account attribute to the opening phase of such lives a taste which we shall not find in them later on, like those flaxen ringlets on the heads of children which are destined to change to the darkest brown? Who can tell whether the photographs of women are not a first sign of hypocrisy, a first sign also of horror at other inverts? But the solitaires are precisely those to whom hypocrisy is painful. Possibly even the example of the Jews, of a different type of colony, is not strong enough to account for the frail hold that their upbringing has upon them, and for the skill and cunning with which they find their way back, not, perhaps, to anything so sheerly terrible as suicide (to which madmen return, whatever precautions one may take with them, and, having been pulled out of the river into which they have flung themselves, take poison, procure revolvers, and so forth), but to a life whose compulsive pleasures the men of the other race not only cannot understand, cannot imagine, abominate, but whose frequent danger and constant shame would horrify them. Perhaps, to form a picture of these, we ought to think, if not of the wild animals that never become domesticated, of the lion-cubs, allegedly tamed, which are still lions at heart, then at least of the negroes whom the comfortable existence of the white man drives to despair and who prefer the risks of life in the wild and its incomprehensible joys. When the day has dawned on which they have discovered themselves to be incapable at once of lying to others and of lying to themselves, they go away to live in the country, shunning the society of their own kind (whom they believe to be few in number) from horror of the monstrosity or fear of the temptation, and that of the rest of humanity from shame. Never having arrived at tree maturity, plunged in a constant melancholy, from time to time, on a moonless Sunday evening, they go for a solitary walk as far as a crossroads where, although not a word has been said, there has come to meet them one of their boyhood friends who is living in a house in the neighbourhood. And they begin again the pastimes of long ago, on the grass, in the night, without exchanging a word. During the week, they meet in their respective houses, talk of this and that, without any allusion to what has occurred between them—exactly as though they had done nothing and would not do anything again—save, in their relations, a trace of coldness, of irony, of irritability and rancour, sometimes of hatred. Then the neighbour sets out on a strenuous expedition on horseback, scales mountain peaks, sleeps in the snow; his friend, who identifies his own vice with a weakness of constitution, a timid, stay-at-home life, assumes that vice can no longer exist in his emancipated friend, so many thousands of feet above sea-level. And, sure enough, the other takes a wife. Yet the forsaken one is not cured (although there are cases where, as we shall see, inversion is curable). He insists upon going down himself every morning to the kitchen to receive the milk from the hands of the dairyman's boy, and on the evening when desire is too strong for him will go out of his way to set a drunkard on the right road or to "adjust the dress" of a blind man. No doubt the life of certain inverts appears at times to change, their vice (as it is called) is no longer apparent in their habits; but nothing is ever lost: a missing jewel turns up again; when the quantity of a sick man's urine decreases, it is because he is perspiring more freely, but the excretion must invariably occur. One day this homosexual hears of the death of a young cousin, and from his inconsolable grief we learn that it was to this love, chaste possibly and aimed rather at retaining esteem than at obtaining possession, that his desires have turned by a sort of transfer as, in a budget, without any alteration in the total, certain expenditure is carried under another head. As is the case with invalids in whom a sudden attack of urticaria makes their chronic ailments temporarily disappear, this pure love for a young relative seems, in the invert, to have momentarily replaced, by metastasis, habits that will one day or another return to fill the place of the vicarious cured malady.

Meanwhile the married neighbour of our recluse has returned; and on the day when he is obliged to invite them to dinner, seeing the beauty of the young bride and the demonstrative affection of the husband, he feels ashamed of the past. Already in an interesting condition, she must return home early, leaving her husband



behind; the latter, when the time has come for him to go home also, asks his host to accompany him for part of the way; at first, no suspicion enters his mind, but at the cross-roads he finds himself thrown down on to the grass without a word by the mountaineer who is shortly to become a father. And their meetings begin again, and continue until the day when there comes to live not far off a male cousin of the young wife's, with whom her husband is now constantly to be seen. And the latter, if the twice-abandoned friend calls round and endeavours to approach him, indignantly repulses him, furious that he has not had the tact to sense the disgust which he must henceforward inspire. Once, however, there appears a stranger, sent to him by his faithless friend; but being busy at the time, the abandoned one cannot see him, and only afterwards learns with what object his visitor had come.

Then the solitary languishes alone. He has no other diversion than to go to the neighbouring watering-place to ask for some information or other from a certain railwayman there. But the latter has obtained promotion, has been transferred to the other end of the country; the solitary will no longer be able to go and ask him the times of the trains or the price of a first-class ticket, and, before retiring to dream, Griselda-like, in his tower, loiters upon the beach, a strange Andromeda whom no Argonaut will come to free, a sterile jellyfish that must perish upon the sand, or else he stands idly on the platform until his train leaves, casting over the crowd of passengers a look that will seem indifferent, disdainful or abstracted to those of another race, but, like the luminous glow with which certain insects bedeck themselves in order to attract others of their species, or like the nectar which certain flowers offer to attract the insects that will fertilise them, would not deceive the connoisseur (barely possible to find) of a pleasure too singular, too hard to place, which is offered him, the confrère with whom our specialist could converse in the strange tongue—in which at best some ragamuffin on the platform will put up a show of interest, but for material gain alone, like those people who, at the Collège de France, in the room in which the Professor of Sanskrit lectures without an audience, attend his course only for the sake of keeping warm. Jellyfish! Orchid! When I followed my instinct only, the jellyfish used to revolt me at Balbec; but if I had the eyes to regard them, like Michelet, from the standpoint of natural history and aesthetics, I saw an exquisite blue girandole. Are they not, with the transparent velvet of their petals, as it were the mauve orchids of the sea? Like so many creatures of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, like the plant which would produce vanilla but, because in its structure the male organ is separated by a partition from the female, remains sterile unless humming-birds or certain tiny bees convey the pollen from one to the other, or man fertilises them by artificial means, M. de Charlus (and here the word fertilise must be understood in a moral sense, since in the physical sense the union of male with male is and must be sterile, but it is no small matter for a person to be able to encounter the sole pleasure which he is capable of enjoying, and that “every soul here below” can impart to some other “its music or its fragrance or its flame”), M. de Charlus was one of those men who may be called exceptional because, however many they may be, the satisfaction, so easy for others, of their sexual needs depends upon the coincidence of too many conditions, and of conditions too difficult to meet. For men like M. de Charlus (subject to the compromises which will appear little by little and which the reader may already have sensed, enforced by the need of pleasure which resigns itself to partial acceptations), mutual love, apart from the difficulties, so great as to be almost insurmountable, which it encounters in the ordinary run of mortals, entails others so exceptional that what is always extremely rare for everyone becomes in their case well-nigh impossible, and, if they should chance to have an encounter which is really fortunate, or which nature makes appear so to them, their happiness is somehow far more extraordinary, selective, profoundly necessary than that of the normal lover. The feud of the Capulets and Montagues was as nothing compared with the obstacles of every sort which have been surmounted, the special eliminations to which nature has had to subject the chances, already far from common, which bring about love, before a retired tailor, who was intending to set off soberly for his office, can stand quivering in ecstasy before a stoutish man of fifty; this Romeo and this Juliet may believe with good reason that their love is not a momentary whim but a true predestination, determined by the harmonies of their temperaments, and not only by their own personal temperaments but by those of their ancestors, by their most distant strains of heredity, so much so that the fellow-creature who is conjoined with them has belonged to them from before their birth, has attracted them by a force comparable to that which governs the worlds on which we spent our former lives. M. de Charlus had distracted me from looking to see whether the bumble-bee was bringing to the orchid the pollen it had so long been waiting to receive, and had no chance of receiving save by an accident so unlikely that one might call it a sort of miracle. But it was a miracle also that I had just witnessed, almost of the same order and no less marvellous. As soon as I considered the encounter from this point of view, everything about it seemed to me instinct with beauty. The most extraordinary stratagems that nature has devised to compel insects to ensure the fertilisation of flowers which without their intervention could not be fertilised because the male flower is too far away from the female—or the one which, if it is the wind that must provide for the transportation of the pollen, makes it so much more easily detachable from the male, so much more easily snatched from the air by the female flower, by eliminating the secretion of the nectar, which is no longer of any use since there are no insects to be attracted, and even the brilliance of the corollas which attract them—and the device which, in order that the flower may be kept free for the right pollen, which can fructify only in that particular flower, makes it secrete a liquid which renders it immune to all other pollens—seemed to me no more marvellous than the existence of the subvariety of insects destined to guarantee the pleasures of love to the invert who is growing old: men who are attracted not by all other men, but—by a phenomenon of correspondence and harmony similar to those that govern the fertilisation of heterostyle trimorphous flowers like the *lythrum salicaria*—only by men considerably older than themselves. Of this subvariety Jupien had just furnished me with an example, one less striking however than

certain others which every human herbalist, every moral botanist, will be able to observe in spite of their rarity, and which will show them a frail young man awaiting the advances of a robust and paunchy quinquagenarian, and remaining as indifferent to those of other young men as the hermaphrodite flowers of the short-styled *primula veris* remain sterile so long as they are fertilised only by other *primulae veris* of short style also, whereas they welcome with joy the pollen of the *primula veris* with the long style. As for M. de Charlus's part in the transaction, I noticed later on that there were for him various kinds of conjunction, some of which, by their multiplicity, their scarcely visible instantaneousness, and above all the absence of contact between the two actors, recalled still more forcibly those flowers that in a garden are fertilised by the pollen of a neighbouring flower which they may never touch. There were in fact certain persons whom it was sufficient for him to invite to his house, and to hold for an hour or two under the domination of his talk, for his desire, inflamed by some earlier encounter, to be assuaged. By a simple use of words the conjunction was effected, as simply as it can be among the infusoria. Sometimes, as had doubtless been the case with me on the evening on which I had been summoned by him after the Guermites dinner-party, the relief was effected by a violent diatribe which the Baron flung in his visitor's face, just as certain flowers, by means of a hidden spring, spray from a distance the disconcerted but unconsciously collaborating insect. M. de Charlus, the dominated turned dominator, feeling purged of his agitation and calmed, would send away the visitor who had at once ceased to appear to him desirable. Finally, inasmuch as inversion itself springs from the fact that the invert is too closely akin to woman to be capable of having any effective relations with her, it relates to a higher law which ordains that so many hermaphrodite flowers shall remain infertile, that is to say to the sterility of self-fertilisation. It is true that inverts, in their search for a male, often content themselves with other inverts as effeminate as themselves. But it is enough that they do not belong to the female sex, of which they have in them an embryo which they can put to no useful purpose, as happens with so many hermaphrodite flowers, and even with certain hermaphrodite animals, such as the snail, which cannot be fertilised by themselves, but can by other hermaphrodites. In this respect the race of inverts, who readily link themselves with the ancient East or the golden age of Greece, might be traced back further still, to those experimental epochs in which there existed neither dioecious plants nor monosexual animals, to that initial hermaphroditism of which certain rudiments of male organs in the anatomy of women and of female organs in that of men seem still to preserve the trace. I found the pantomime, incomprehensible to me at first, of Jupien and M. de Charlus as curious as those seductive gestures addressed, Darwin tells us, to insects by the flowers called composite which erect the florets of their capitula so as to be seen from a greater distance, like certain heterostyled flowers which turn back their stamens and bend them to open the way for the insect, or which offer him an ablution, and indeed quite simply comparable to the nectar-fragrance and vivid hue of the corollas that were at that moment attracting insects into the courtyard. From this day onwards M. de Charlus was to alter the time of his visits to Mme de Villeparisis, not that he could not see Jupien elsewhere and with greater convenience, but because to him just as much as to me the afternoon sunshine and the blossoming plant were no doubt linked with his memories. Moreover he did not content himself with recommending the Jupiens to Mme de Villeparisis, to the Duchesse de Guermites, to a whole brilliant clientele who were all the more assiduous in their patronage of the young seamstress when they saw that the few ladies who had resisted, or had merely delayed their submission, were subjected to the direst reprisals by the Baron, whether in order that they might serve as examples or because they had aroused his wrath and had stood out against his attempted domination. He made Jupien's position more and more lucrative, until he finally engaged him as his secretary and established him in the state in which we shall see him later on. "Ah, now! There's a happy man, that Jupien," said Françoise, who had a tendency to minimise or exaggerate people's generosity according as it was bestowed on herself or on others. Not that, in this instance, she had any need to exaggerate, nor for that matter did she feel any jealousy, being genuinely fond of Jupien. "Oh, he's such a good man, the Baron," she went on, "so gentlemanly, so devout, so proper! If I had a daughter to marry and was one of the rich myself, I'd give her to the Baron with my eyes shut." "But, Françoise," my mother observed gently, "she'd be well supplied with husbands, that daughter of yours. Don't forget you've already promised her to Jupien." "Ah, yes!" replied Françoise, "there's another of them that would make a woman very happy. It doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor, it makes no difference to your nature. The Baron and Jupien, they're just the same sort of person."

However, I greatly exaggerated at the time, on the strength of this first revelation, the elective character of so carefully selected a combination. Admittedly, every man of M. de Charlus's kind is an extraordinary creature since, if he does not make concessions to the possibilities of life, he seeks out essentially the love of a man of the other race, that is to say a man who is a lover of women (and incapable consequently of loving him); contrary to what I had imagined in the courtyard, where I had seen Jupien hovering round M. de Charlus like the orchid making overtures to the bumble-bee, these exceptional creatures with whom we commiserate are a vast crowd, as we shall see in the course of this book, for a reason which will be disclosed only at the end of it, and commiserate with themselves for being too many rather than too few. For the two angels who were posted at the gates of Sodom to learn whether its inhabitants (according to Genesis) had indeed done all the things the report of which had ascended to the Eternal Throne must have been, and of this one can only be glad, exceedingly ill chosen by the Lord, who ought to have entrusted the task only to a Sodomite. Such a one would never have been persuaded by such excuses as "A father of six, I've got two mistresses," to lower his flaming sword benevolently and mitigate the punishment. He would have answered: "Yes, and your wife lives in a torment of jealousy. But even when you haven't chosen these women from Gomorrah, you spend your nights with a watcher of flocks from Hebron." And he would at once have made

him retrace his steps to the city which the rain of fire and brimstone was to destroy. On the contrary, all the shameless Sodomites were allowed to escape, even if, on catching sight of a boy, they turned their heads like Lot's wife, though without being on that account changed like her into pillars of salt. With the result that they engendered a numerous progeny with whom this gesture has remained habitual, like that of the dissolute women who, while apparently studying a row of shoes displayed in a shop window, turn their heads to keep track of a passing student. These descendants of the Sodomites, so numerous that we may apply to them that other verse of Genesis: "If a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered," have established themselves throughout the entire world; they have had access to every profession and are so readily admitted into the most exclusive clubs that, whenever a Sodomite fails to secure election, the black balls are for the most part cast by other Sodomites, who make a point of condemning sodomy, having inherited the mendacity that enabled their ancestors to escape from the accursed city. It is possible that they may return there one day. Certainly they form in every land an oriental colony, cultured, musical, malicious, which has charming qualities and intolerable defects. We shall study them with greater thoroughness in the course of the following pages; but I have thought it as well to utter here a provisional warning against the lamentable error of proposing (just as people have encouraged a Zionist movement) to create a Sodomist movement and to rebuild Sodom. For, no sooner had they arrived there than the Sodomites would leave the town so as not to have the appearance of belonging to it, would take wives, keep mistresses in other cities where they would find, incidentally, every diversion that appealed to them. They would repair to Sodom only on days of supreme necessity, when their own town was empty, at those seasons when hunger drives the wolf from the woods. In other words, everything would go on very much as it does today in London, Berlin, Rome, Petrograd or Paris.

At all events, on the day in question, before paying my call on the Duchess, I did not look so far ahead, and I was distressed to find that, by my engrossment in the Jupien-Charlus conjunction, I had missed perhaps an opportunity of witnessing the fertilisation of the blossom by the bumble-bee.

## PART NINE

### *Chapter Eleven*

As I was in no hurry to arrive at the Guermantes reception to which I wasn't certain I had been invited, I hung about outside; but the summer day seemed to be in no greater haste to stir. Although it was after nine o'clock, it was still the daylight that was giving the Luxor obelisk on the Place de la Concorde the appearance of pink nougat. Then it diluted the tint and changed the surface to a metallic substance, so that the obelisk not only became more precious but seemed more slender and almost flexible. One felt that one might have been able to twist this jewel, that one had perhaps already slightly bent it. The moon was now in the sky like a segment of an orange delicately peeled although nibbled at. But a few hours later it was to be fashioned of the most enduring gold. Nestling alone behind it, a poor little star was to serve as sole companion to the lonely moon, while the latter, keeping its friend protected but striding ahead more boldly, would brandish like an irresistible weapon, like an oriental symbol, its broad, magnificent golden crescent.

Outside the mansion of the Princesse de Guermantes I ran into the Duc de Châtellerauld. I no longer remembered that half an hour earlier I had still been tormented by the fear—which in fact was soon to grip me again—that I might be entering the house uninvited. We get anxious, and it is sometimes long after the hour of danger, which a subsequent distraction has made us forget, that we remember our anxiety. I greeted the young Duke and made my way into the house. But here I must first of all record a trifling incident, which will enable us to understand something that was presently to occur.

There was one person who, on that evening as on the previous evenings, had been thinking a great deal about the Duc de Châtellerauld, without however suspecting who he was: this was the Princesse de Guermantes's usher (styled at that time the "barker"). M. de Châtellerauld, so far from being one of the Princess's intimate friends, although he was one of her cousins, had been invited to her house for the first time. His parents, who had not been on speaking terms with her for ten years, had made it up with her within the last fortnight, and, obliged to be out of Paris that evening, had requested their son to represent them. Now, a few days earlier, the Princess's usher had met in the Champs-Élysées a young man whom he had found charming but whose identity he had been unable to establish. Not that the young man had not shown himself as obliging as he had been generous. All the favours that the usher had supposed that he would have to bestow upon so young a gentleman, he had on the contrary received. But M. de Châtellerauld was as cowardly as he was rash; he was all the more determined not to unveil his incognito since he did not know with whom he was dealing; his fear would have been far greater, although illfounded, if he had known. He had confined himself to posing as an Englishman, and to all the passionate questions with which he was plied by the usher, desirous to meet again a person to whom he was indebted for so much pleasure and largesse, the Duke had merely replied, from one end of the Avenue Gabriel to the other: "I do not speak French."

Although, in spite of everything—remembering his cousin Gilbert's maternal ancestry—the Duc de Guermantes affected to find a touch of Courvoisier in the drawing-room of the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, the general estimate of that lady's social initiative and intellectual superiority was based upon an innovation that was to be found nowhere else in these circles. After dinner, however important the party that was to follow, the chairs at the Princesse de Guermantes's were arranged in such a way as to form little groups whose backs were necessarily sometimes turned on one another. The Princess then displayed her social sense by going to sit down, as though by preference, in one of these. She did not however hesitate to pick out and draw into it a member of another group. If, for instance, she had remarked to M. Detaille, who had naturally agreed with her, on the beauty of Mme de Villemur's neck, of which that lady's position in another group made her present a back view, the Princess had no hesitation in raising her voice: "Madame de Villemur, M. Detaille, wonderful painter that he is, has just been admiring your neck." Mme de Villemur interpreted this as a direct invitation to join in the conversation; with the agility of a practised horsewoman, she would swivel round slowly in her chair through three quadrants of a circle, and, without in any way disturbing her neighbours, come to rest almost facing the Princess. "You don't know M. Detaille?" exclaimed their hostess, for whom her guest's skilful and discreet about-face was not enough. "I don't know him, but I know his work," Mme de Villemur would reply with a respectful and winning air and an aptness which many of the onlookers envied her, addressing the while an imperceptible bow to the celebrated painter whom this invocation had not been sufficient to introduce to her in a formal manner. "Come, Monsieur Detaille," said the Princess, "let me introduce you to Mme de Villemur." That lady thereupon showed as much ingenuity in making room for the creator of the *Dream* as she had shown a moment earlier in wheeling round to face him. And the Princess would draw forward a chair for herself, having in fact addressed Mme de Villemur only in order to have an excuse for leaving the first group, in which she had spent the statutory ten minutes, and bestow a similar allowance of her time upon the second. In three quarters of an hour, all the groups would have received a visit from her, which seemed to have been determined in each instance by impulse and predilection, but had the paramount object of making it apparent how naturally "a great lady knows how to entertain." But now the guests for the reception were beginning to arrive and the lady of the house was seated not far from the door—erect and proud in her quasi-regal majesty, her eyes ablaze with their own incandescence—between two unattractive highnesses and the Spanish Ambassadress.

I stood waiting behind a number of guests who had arrived before me. Facing me was the Princess, whose beauty is probably not the only thing, among so many other beauties, that reminds me of this party. But the face of my hostess was so perfect, stamped like so beautiful a medal, that it has retained a commemorative virtue in my mind. The Princess was in the habit of saying to her guests when she met them a day or two before one of her parties: "You will come, won't you?" as though she felt a great desire to talk to them. But since, on the contrary, she had nothing to talk to them about, when they entered her presence she contented herself, without rising, with breaking off for an instant her vapid conversation with the two highnesses and the Ambassadors and thanking them with: "How good of you to have come," not because she thought that the guest had shown goodness by coming, but to enhance her own; then, at once dropping him back into the stream, she would add: "You will find M. de Guermantes by the garden door," so that the guest proceeded on his way and ceased to bother her. To some indeed she said nothing, contenting herself with showing them her admirable onyx eyes, as though they had come solely to visit an exhibition of precious stones.

The person immediately in front of me was the Duc de Châtellerauld.

Having to respond to all the smiles, all the greetings waved to him from inside the drawing-room, he had not noticed the usher. But from the first moment the usher had recognised him. In another instant he would know the identity of this stranger, which he had so ardently desired to learn. When he asked his "Englishman" of the other evening what name he was to announce, the usher was not merely stirred, he considered that he was being indiscreet, indelicate. He felt that he was about to reveal to the whole world (which would, however, suspect nothing) a secret which it was criminal of him to ferret out like this and to proclaim in public. Upon hearing the guest's reply: "Le Duc de Châtellerauld," he was overcome with such pride that he remained for a moment speechless. The Duke looked at him, recognised him, saw himself ruined, while the servant, who had recovered his composure and was sufficiently versed in heraldry to complete for himself an appellation that was too modest, roared with a professional vehemence softened with intimate tenderness: "Son Altesse Monseigneur le Duc de Châtellerauld!" But now it was my turn to be announced. Absorbed in contemplation of my hostess, who had not yet seen me, I had not thought of the function—terrible to me, although not in the same sense as to M. de Châtellerauld—of this usher garbed in black like an executioner, surrounded by a group of lackeys in the most cheerful livery, strapping fellows ready to seize hold of an intruder and fling him out. The usher asked me my name, and I gave it to him as mechanically as the condemned man allows himself to be strapped to the block. At once he lifted his head majestically and, before I could beg him to announce me in a lowered tone so as to spare my own feelings if I were not invited and those of the Princesse de Guermantes if I were, roared the disquieting syllables with a force capable of bringing down the roof.

The famous Huxley (whose grandson occupies a leading position in the English literary world of today) relates that one of his patients no longer dared go out socially because often, on the very chair that was offered to her with a courteous gesture, she saw an old gentleman already seated. She was quite certain that either the gesture of invitation or the old gentleman's presence was a hallucination, for no one would have offered her a chair that was already occupied. And when Huxley, to cure her, forced her to reappear in society, she had a moment of painful hesitation wondering whether the friendly sign that was being made to her was the real thing, or whether, in obedience to a non-existent vision, she was about to sit down in public upon the knees of a gentleman of flesh and blood. Her brief uncertainty was agonising. Less so perhaps than mine. From the moment I had taken in the sound of my name, like the rumble that warns us of a possible cataclysm, I was obliged, in order at least to plead my good faith, and as though I were not tormented by any doubts, to advance towards the Princess with a resolute air.

She caught sight of me when I was still a few feet away and (leaving me in no further doubt that I had been the victim of a plot), instead of remaining seated, as she had done for her other guests, rose and came towards me. A moment later, I was able to heave the sigh of relief of Huxley's patient when, having made up her mind to sit down in the chair, she found it vacant and realised that it was the old gentleman who was the hallucination. The Princess had just held out her hand to me with a smile. She remained standing for some moments with the kind of charm enshrined in the verse of Malherbe which ends:

To do them honour all the angels rise.

She apologised because the Duchess had not yet arrived, as though I must be bored there without her. In offering me this greeting, she executed around me, holding me by the hand, a graceful pirouette, by the whirl of which I felt myself swept away. I almost expected her to offer me next, like the leader of a cotillon, an ivory-headed cane or a wrist-watch. She did not, however, give me anything of the sort, and as though, instead of dancing the boston, she had been listening to a sacrosanct Beethoven quartet the sublime strains of which she was afraid of interrupting, she cut short the conversation there and then, or rather did not begin it, and, still radiant at having seen me come in, merely informed me where the Prince was to be found.

I moved away from her and did not venture to approach her again, feeling that she had absolutely nothing to say to me and that, in her immense good will, this marvellously handsome and stately woman, noble as were so many great ladies who stepped so proudly on to the scaffold, could only, short of offering me a draught of honeydew, repeat what she had already said to me twice: "You will find the Prince in the garden." Now, to go in search of the Prince was to feel my doubts revive in a different form.

In any case I should have to find somebody to introduce me. Above all the din of conversation was to be heard the inexhaustible chattering of M. de Charlus, talking to H.E. the Duke of Sidonia, whose acquaintance

he had just made. Members of the same profession recognise each other instinctively; so do those with the same vice. M. de Charlus and M. de Sidonia had each of them immediately detected the other's, which was in both cases that of being monologuists in society, to the extent of not being able to stand any interruption. Having decided at once that, in the words of a famous sonnet, there was "no help," they had made up their minds, not to remain silent, but each to go on talking without any regard to what the other might say. This had resulted in the sort of confused babble produced in Molière's comedies by a number of people saying different things simultaneously. The Baron, with his deafening voice, was moreover certain of keeping the upper hand, of drowning the feeble voice of M. de Sidonia—without however discouraging him, for, whenever M. de Charlus paused for a moment to draw breath, the gap was filled by the murmuring of the Spanish grandee who had imperturbably continued his discourse. I might well have asked M. de Charlus to introduce me to the Prince de Guermantes, but I feared (and with good reason) that he might be displeased with me. I had treated him in the most ungrateful fashion by letting his offers pass unheeded for the second time and by giving him no sign of life since the evening when he had so affectionately escorted me home. And yet I could not plead the excuse of having anticipated the scene which I had witnessed that very afternoon enacted by himself and Jupien. I suspected nothing of the sort. It is true that shortly before this, when my parents reproached me for my laziness and for not having taken the trouble to write a line to M. de Charlus, I had accused them of wanting me to accept a degrading proposal. But anger alone, and the desire to hit upon the expression that would be most offensive to them, had dictated this mendacious retort. In reality, I had imagined nothing sensual, nothing sentimental even, underlying the Baron's offers. I had said this to my parents out of pure fantasy. But sometimes the future is latent in us without our knowing it, and our supposedly lying words foreshadow an imminent reality.

M. de Charlus would doubtless have forgiven me my want of gratitude. But what made him furious was that my presence this evening at the Princesse de Guermantes's, as for some time past at her cousin's, seemed to flout his solemn declaration: "There is no admission to those houses save through me." I had not followed the hierarchical path—a grave fault, a perhaps inexpiable crime. M. de Charlus knew all too well that the thunderbolts which he hurled at those who did not comply with his orders, or to whom he had taken a dislike, were beginning to be regarded by many people, however furiously he might brandish them, as mere pasteboard, and had no longer the force to banish anybody from anywhere. But he believed perhaps that his diminished power, still considerable, remained intact in the eyes of novices like myself. And so I did not consider it very advisable to ask a favour of him at a party where the mere fact of my presence seemed an ironical refutation of his pretensions.

I was buttonholed at that moment by a rather vulgar man, Professor E——. He had been surprised to see me at the Guermantes'. I was no less surprised to see him there, for nobody of his sort had ever been seen before or was ever to be seen again in the Princess's drawing-room. He had just cured the Prince, after the last sacraments had been administered, of infectious pneumonia, and the special gratitude that Mme de Guermantes felt towards him was the reason for her thus departing from custom and inviting him to her house. As he knew absolutely nobody there, and could not wander about indefinitely by himself like a minister of death, having recognised me he had discovered for the first time in his life that he had an infinite number of things to say to me, which enabled him to keep some sort of countenance. This was one of the reasons for his approaching me. There was also another. He attached great importance to never being mistaken in his diagnoses. Now his correspondence was so voluminous that he could not always remember, when he had seen a patient once only, whether the disease had really followed the course that he had traced for it. The reader may perhaps remember that, immediately after my grandmother's stroke, I had taken her to see him, on the afternoon when he was having all his decorations stitched to his coat. After so long an interval, he had forgotten the formal announcement which had been sent to him at the time. "Your grandmother is dead, isn't she?" he said to me in a voice in which a semi-certainty calmed a slight apprehension. "Ah! indeed! Well, from the moment I saw her my prognosis was extremely grave, I remember it quite well."

It was thus that Professor E—— learned or recalled the death of my grandmother, and (I must say this to his credit, and to the credit of the medical profession as a whole) without displaying, without perhaps feeling any satisfaction. The mistakes made by doctors are innumerable. They err habitually on the side of optimism as to treatment, of pessimism as to the outcome. "Wine? In moderation, it can do you no harm, it's always a tonic ... Sexual enjoyment? After all it's a natural function. But you mustn't overdo it, you understand. Excess in anything is wrong." At once, what a temptation to the patient to renounce those two life-givers, water and chastity! If, on the other hand, he has trouble with his heart, an excess of albumin, or something of the sort, he has very little hope. Disorders that are grave but purely functional are at once ascribed to an imaginary cancer. Useless to continue visits which are powerless to check an ineluctable disease. Let the patient, left to his own devices, thereupon subject himself to an implacable regimen and in time recover, or at any rate survive, and the doctor, to whom he touches his hat in the Avenue de l'Opéra when he was supposed to have long been lying in Père-Lachaise, will interpret the gesture as an act of sardonic insolence. An innocent stroll taken beneath his nose and venerable beard would arouse no greater wrath in the Assize Judge who two years earlier had sentenced the stroller, now passing him with apparent impunity, to death. Doctors (we do not here include them all, of course, and make a mental reservation of certain admirable exceptions) are in general more displeased, more irritated by the invalidation of their verdicts than pleased by their execution. This explains why Professor E——, despite the intellectual satisfaction that he doubtless felt at finding that he had not been mistaken, was able to speak to me with due regret of the blow that had fallen upon us. He was in no

hurry to cut short the conversation, which kept him in countenance and gave him a reason for remaining. He spoke to me of the heatwave through which we were passing, but although he was a well-read man and capable of expressing himself in good French, he asked me: "You are none the worse for this hyperthermia?" The fact is that medicine has made some slight advance in knowledge since Molière's days, but none in its vocabulary. My interlocutor went on: "The great thing is to avoid the sudations that are caused by weather like this, especially in overheated rooms. You can remedy them, when you go home and feel thirsty, by the application of heat" (by which he apparently meant hot drinks).

Owing to the circumstances of my grandmother's death, the subject interested me, and I had recently read in a book by a great specialist that perspiration was injurious to the kidneys by discharging through the skin something whose proper outlet was elsewhere. I thought with regret of those dog-days at the time of my grandmother's death, and was inclined to blame them for it. I did not mention this to Dr E——, but of his own accord he said to me: "The advantage of this very hot weather in which perspiration is abundant is that the kidney is correspondingly relieved." Medicine is not an exact science.

Clinging on to me, Professor E—— asked only not to be forced to leave me. But I had just seen the Marquis de Vaugoubert, bowing and scraping this way and that to the Princesse de Guermantes after first taking a step backwards. M. de Norpois had recently introduced me to him and I hoped that I might find in him a person capable of presenting me to our host. The proportions of this work do not permit me to explain here in consequence of what incidents in his youth M. de Vaugoubert was one of the few men (possibly the only man) in society who happened to be in what is called in Sodom the "confidence" of M. de Charlus. But, if our minister to the court of King Theodosius had some of the same defects as the Baron, they were only very pale reflexions of them. It was only in an infinitely diluted, sentimental and inane form that he displayed those alternations of affection and hatred through which the desire to charm, and then the fear—equally imaginary—of being, if not scorned, at any rate unmasked, made the Baron pass. These alternations—made ridiculous by a chastity, a "platonism," to which as a man of keen ambition he had, from the moment of passing his examination, sacrificed all pleasure, above all by his intellectual nullity—M. de Vaugoubert did nevertheless display. But whereas M. de Charlus's immoderate eulogies were proclaimed with a positively dazzling eloquence, and seasoned with the subtlest, the most mordant banter which marked a man for ever, M. de Vaugoubert's predilections were by contrast expressed with the banality of a man of the lowest intelligence, a man of fashionable society, and a functionary, and his grievances (made up on the spur of the moment like the Baron's) with a malevolence that was as witless as it was remorseless, and was all the more startling in that it was invariably a direct contradiction of what the minister had said six months earlier and might soon perhaps be saying again: a regularity of change which gave an almost astronomic poetry to the various phases of M. de Vaugoubert's life, albeit apart from this nobody was ever less suggestive of a star.

His response to my greeting had nothing in common with that which I should have received from M. de Charlus. He imparted to it, in addition to countless mannerisms which he supposed to be typical of the social and diplomatic worlds, a brisk, cavalier, smiling air calculated to make him seem on the one hand delighted with his existence—at a time when he was inwardly brooding over the mortifications of a career with no prospect of advancement and threatened with enforced retirement—and on the other hand young, virile and charming, when he could see and no longer dared to go and examine in the glass the wrinkles gathering on a face which he would have wished to remain infinitely seductive. Not that he hoped for real conquests, the mere thought of which filled him with terror on account of gossip, scandal, blackmail. Having gone from an almost infantile corruption to an absolute continence dating from the day on which his thoughts had turned to the Quai d'Orsay and he had begun to plan a great career for himself, he had the air of a caged animal, casting in every direction glances expressive of fear, craving and stupidity. This last was so dense that it did not occur to him that the street-arabs of his adolescence were boys no longer, and when a newsvendor bawled in his face: "*La Presse!*" he shuddered with terror even more than with longing, imagining himself recognised and denounced.

But in default of the pleasures sacrificed to the ingratitude of the Quai d'Orsay, M. de Vaugoubert—and it was for this that he was still anxious to please—was liable to sudden stirrings of the heart. He would pester the Ministry with endless letters, would employ every personal ruse, would draw shamelessly on the considerable credit of Mme de Vaugoubert (who, on account of her corpulence, her high birth, her masculine air, and above all the mediocrity of her husband, was reputed to be endowed with eminent capacities and to be herself for all practical purposes the minister), to introduce for no valid reason a young man destitute of all merit on to the staff of the legation. It is true that a few months or a few years later, the insignificant attaché had only to appear, without the least trace of any hostile intention, to have shown signs of coldness towards his chief for the latter, supposing himself scorned or betrayed, to devote the same hysterical ardour to punishing as formerly to gratifying him. He would move heaven and earth to have him recalled and the head of the political section would receive a letter daily, saying: "Why don't you hurry up and rid me of the brute? Give him a dressing-down in his own interest. What he needs is a slice of humble pie." The post of attaché at the court of King Theodosius was for that reason far from enjoyable. But in all other respects, thanks to his perfect common sense as a man of the world, M. de Vaugoubert was one of the best representatives of the French Government abroad. When a man who was reckoned a superior person, a Jacobin with an expert knowledge of all subjects, replaced him later on, it was not long before war broke out between France and the country over which that monarch reigned.

M. de Vaugoubert, like M. de Charlus, did not care to be the first to greet one. Both of them preferred to "respond," being constantly afraid of the gossip which the person to whom otherwise they would have offered

their hand might have heard about them since their last meeting. In my case, M. de Vaugoubert had no need to ask himself this question, for I had gone up of my own accord to greet him, if only because of the difference in our ages. He replied with an air of wonder and delight, his eyes continuing to stray as though there had been a patch of forbidden clover to be grazed on either side of me. I felt that it would be more seemly to ask him to introduce me to Mme de Vaugoubert before effecting the introduction to the Prince, which I decided not to mention to him until afterwards. The idea of making me acquainted with his wife seemed to fill him with joy, for his own sake as well as for hers, and he led me with a resolute step towards the Marquise. Arriving in front of her, and indicating me with his hand and eyes, with every conceivable mark of consideration, he nevertheless remained silent and withdrew after a few moments, with a wriggling, sidelong motion, leaving me alone with his wife. She had at once given me her hand, but without knowing to whom this gesture of affability was addressed, for I realised that M. de Vaugoubert had forgotten my name, perhaps even had failed to recognise me, and being reluctant, out of politeness, to confess his ignorance, had made the introduction consist in a mere dumb-show. And so I was no further advanced; how was I to get myself introduced to my host by a woman who did not know my name? Worse still, I found myself obliged to remain for some moments chatting to Mme de Vaugoubert. And this irked me for two reasons. I had no wish to remain all night at this party, having arranged with Albertine (I had given her a box for *Phèdre*) that she was to pay me a visit shortly before midnight. I was not in the least in love with her; in asking her to come this evening, I was yielding to a purely sensual desire, although we were at that torrid period of the year when sensuality, released, is more readily inclined to visit the organs of taste, and seeks coolness above all. More than for the kiss of a girl, it thirsts for orangeade, for a bath, or even to gaze at that peeled and juicy moon that was quenching the thirst of heaven. I counted however upon ridding myself, in Albertine's company—which moreover reminded me of the coolness of the sea—of the regrets I was bound to feel for many a charming face (for it was a party quite as much for young girls as for married women that the Princess was giving). On the other hand, the face of the imposing Mme de Vaugoubert, Bourbonesque and morose, was in no way attractive.

It was said at the Ministry, without any suggestion of malice, that in their household it was the husband who wore the petticoats and the wife the trousers. Now there was more truth in this than was supposed. Mme de Vaugoubert really was a man. Whether she had always been one, or had grown to be as I now saw her, matters little, for in either case we are faced with one of the most touching miracles of nature which, in the latter alternative especially, makes the human kingdom resemble the kingdom of flowers. On the former hypothesis—if the future Mme de Vaugoubert had always been so heavily mannish—nature, by a fiendish and beneficent ruse, bestows on the girl the deceptive aspect of a man. And the youth who has no love for women and is seeking to be cured greets with joy this subterfuge of discovering a bride who reminds him of a market porter. In the alternative case, if the woman has not at first these masculine characteristics, she adopts them by degrees, to please her husband, and even unconsciously, by that sort of mimicry which makes certain flowers assume the appearance of the insects which they seek to attract. Her regret at not being loved, at not being a man, makes her mannish. Indeed, quite apart from the case that we are now considering, who has not remarked how often the most normal couples end by resembling each other, at times even by exchanging qualities? A former German Chancellor, Prince von Bülow, married an Italian. In the course of time it was remarked on the Pincio how much Italian delicacy the Teutonic husband had absorbed, and how much German coarseness the Italian princess. To go outside the confines of the laws which we are now tracing, everyone knows an eminent French diplomat whose origins were suggested only by his name, one of the most illustrious in the East. As he matured, as he aged, the oriental whom no one had even suspected in him emerged, and now when we see him we regret the absence of the fez that would complete the picture.<sup>3</sup>

To revert to habits completely unknown to the ambassador whose ancestrally thickened profile we have just recalled, Mme de Vaugoubert personified the acquired or predestined type, the immortal example of which is the Princess Palatine, never out of a riding habit, who, having borrowed from her husband more than his virility, embracing the defects of the men who do not care for women, reports in her gossip letters the mutual relations of all the great noblemen of the court of Louis XIV. One of the reasons which enhance still further the masculine air of women like Mme de Vaugoubert is that the neglect which they receive from their husbands, and the shame that they feel at such neglect, gradually dry up everything that is womanly in them. They end by acquiring both the good and the bad qualities which their husbands lack. The more frivolous, effeminate, indiscreet their husbands are, the more they grow into the charmless effigies of the virtues which their husbands ought to practise.

Traces of opprobrium, boredom, indignation, tarnished the regular features of Mme de Vaugoubert. Alas, I felt that she was considering me with interest and curiosity as one of those young men who appealed to M. de Vaugoubert and whom she herself would so much have liked to be now that her ageing husband showed a preference for youth. She was gazing at me with the close attention shown by provincial ladies who from an illustrated catalogue copy the tailor-made dress so becoming to the charming person in the picture (actually the same person on every page, but deceptively multiplied into different creatures, thanks to the differences of pose and the variety of attire). The instinctive attraction which urged Mme de Vaugoubert towards me was so strong that she went as far as to seize me by the arm so that I might take her to get a glass of orangeade. But I extricated myself on the pretext that I must presently be going, and had not yet been introduced to our host.

The distance between me and the garden door where he stood talking to a group of people was not very great. But it alarmed me more than if, in order to cross it, I had had to expose myself to a continuous hail of fire.



A number of women from whom I felt that I might be able to secure an introduction were in the garden, where, while feigning an ecstatic admiration, they were at a loss for something to do. Parties of this sort are as a rule premature. They have little reality until the following day, when they occupy the attention of the people who were not invited. A real writer, devoid of the foolish self-esteem of so many literary people, when he reads an article by a critic who has always expressed the greatest admiration for his works and sees the names of various inferior writers mentioned but not his own, has no time to stop and consider what might be to him a matter for astonishment; his books are calling him. But a society woman has nothing to do and, on seeing in the *Figaro*: "Last night the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes gave a large party," etc., exclaims: "What! Only three days ago I talked to Marie-Gilbert for an hour, and she never said a word about it!" and racks her brain to discover how she can have offended the Guermantes. It must be said that, so far as the Princess's parties were concerned, the astonishment was sometimes as great among those who were invited as among those who were not. For they would burst forth at the moment when one least expected them, and mobilised people whose existence Mme de Guermantes had forgotten for years. And almost all society people are so insignificant that others of their sort adopt, in judging them, only the measure of their social success, cherish them if they are invited, detest them if they are omitted. As to the latter, if it was the fact that the Princess did not invite them even though they were her friends, that was often due to her fear of annoying "Palamède," who had excommunicated them. And so I might be certain that she had not spoken of me to M. de Charlus, for otherwise I should not have found myself there. He meanwhile was posted between the house and the garden, beside the German Ambassador, leaning upon the balustrade of the great staircase which led from the garden to the house, so that the other guests, in spite of the three or four female admirers who were grouped round the Baron and almost concealed him, were obliged to greet him as they passed. He responded by naming each of them in turn. And one heard successively: "Good evening, Monsieur du Hazay, good evening, Madame de La Tour du Pin-Verclause, good evening, Madame de La Tour du Pin-Gouvernet, good evening, Philibert, good evening, my dear Ambassadress," and so on. This created a continuous yapping interspersed with benevolent suggestions or inquiries (the answers to which he ignored), which M. de Charlus addressed to them in an artificially soft and benign tone of voice that betrayed his indifference: "Take care the child doesn't catch cold, it's always rather damp in the gardens. Good evening, Madame de Brantes. Good evening, Madame de Mecklembourg. Have you brought your daughter? Is she wearing that delicious pink frock? Good evening, Saint-Géran." True, there was an element of pride in this attitude. M. de Charlus was aware that he was a Guermantes, and that he occupied a predominant place at this festivity. But there was more in it than pride, and the very word festivity suggested, to the man with aesthetic gifts, the luxurious, rarefied sense that it might bear if it were being given not by people in contemporary society but in a painting by Carpaccio or Veronese. It is even more probable that the German prince M. de Charlus was must rather have been picturing to himself the reception that occurs in *Tannhäuser*, and himself as the Margrave, standing at the entrance to the Warburg with a kind word of condescension for each of the guests, while their procession into the castle or the park is greeted by the long phrase, a hundred times repeated, of the famous March.

Meanwhile I had to make up my mind. I recognised beneath the trees various women with whom I was on more or less friendly terms, but they seemed transformed because they were at the Princess's and not at her cousin's, and because I saw them seated not in front of Dresden china plates but beneath the boughs of a chestnut-tree. The elegance of the setting mattered nothing. Had it been infinitely less elegant than at "Oriane's," I should have felt the same uneasiness. If the electric light in our drawing-room fails, and we are obliged to replace it with oil lamps, everything seems altered. I was rescued from my uncertainty by Mme de Souvré. "Good evening," she said, coming towards me. "Have you seen the Duchesse de Guermantes lately?" She excelled in giving to remarks of this sort an intonation which proved that she was not uttering them from sheer silliness, like people who, not knowing what to talk about, come up to you again and again to mention some mutual acquaintance, often extremely vague. She had on the contrary a subtle way of intimating with her eyes: "Don't imagine for a moment that I haven't recognised you. You are the young man I met at the Duchesse de Guermantes's. I remember very well." Unfortunately, the patronage extended to me by this remark, stupid in appearance but delicate in intention, was extremely fragile, and vanished as soon as I tried to make use of it. Mme de Souvré had the art, if called upon to convey a request to some influential person, of appearing at once in the petitioner's eyes to be recommending him, and in those of the influential person not to be recommending the petitioner, so that this ambiguous gesture gave her a credit balance of gratitude with the latter without putting her in debit with the former. Encouraged by this lady's civilities to ask her to introduce me to M. de Guermantes, I found that she took advantage of a moment when our host was not looking in our direction, laid a motherly hand on my shoulder, and, smiling at the averted face of the Prince who could not see her, thrust me towards him with a would-be protective but deliberately ineffectual gesture which left me stranded almost where I had started. Such is the cowardice of society people.

That of a lady who came to greet me, addressing me by my name, was greater still. I tried to recall hers as I talked to her; I remembered quite well having met her at dinner, and could remember things that she had said. But my attention, concentrated upon the inward region in which these memories of her lingered, was unable to discover her name there. It was there none the less. My thoughts began playing a sort of game with it to grasp its outlines, its initial letter, and finally to bring the whole name to light. It was labour in vain; I could more or less sense its mass, its weight, but as for its forms, confronting them with the shadowy captive lurking in the interior darkness, I said to myself: "That's not it." Certainly my mind would have been capable of creating the most difficult names. Unfortunately, it was not called upon to create but to reproduce. Any mental activity is easy if it need not be subjected to reality. Here I was forced to subject myself to it. Finally,

in a flash, the name came back to me in its entirety: "Madame d'Arpajon." I am wrong in saying that it came, for it did not, I think, appear to me by a spontaneous propulsion. Nor do I think that the many faint memories associated with the lady, to which I did not cease to appeal for help (by such exhortations as: "Come now, it's the lady who is a friend of Mme de Souvré, who feels for Victor Hugo so artless an admiration mingled with so much alarm and horror")—nor do I think that all these memories, hovering between me and her name, served in any way to bring it to light. That great game of hide and seek which is played in our memory when we seek to recapture a name does not entail a series of gradual approximations. We see nothing, then suddenly the correct name appears and is very different from what we thought we were guessing. It is not the name that has come to us. No, I believe rather that, as we go on living, we spend our time moving further away from the zone in which a name is distinct, and it was by an exercise of my will and attention, which heightened the acuteness of my inward vision, that all of a sudden I had pierced the semi-darkness and seen daylight. In any case, if there are transitions between oblivion and memory, then these transitions are unconscious. For the intermediate names through which we pass before finding the real name are themselves false, and bring us nowhere nearer to it. They are not even, strictly speaking, names at all, but often mere consonants which are not to be found in the recaptured name. And yet this labour of the mind struggling from blankness to reality is so mysterious that it is possible after all that these false consonants are preliminary poles clumsily stretched out to help us hook ourselves to the correct name. "All this," the reader will remark, "tells us nothing as to the lady's failure to oblige; but since you have made so long a digression, allow me, dear author, to waste another moment of your time by telling you that it is a pity that, young as you were (or as your hero was, if he isn't you), you had already so feeble a memory that you could not remember the name of a lady whom you knew quite well." It is indeed a pity, dear reader. And sadder than you think when one feels that it heralds the time when names and words will vanish from the bright zone of consciousness and one must for ever cease to name to oneself the people whom one has known most intimately. It is indeed regrettable that one should require this effort, when still young, to remember names which one knows well. But if this infirmity occurred only in the case of names barely known and quite naturally forgotten, names one wouldn't want to take the trouble of remembering, the infirmity would not be without its advantages. "And what are they, may I ask?" Well, sir, infirmity alone makes us take notice and learn, and enables us to analyse mechanisms of which otherwise we should know nothing. A man who falls straight into bed night after night, and ceases to live until the moment when he wakes and rises, will surely never dream of making, I don't say great discoveries, but even minor observations about sleep. He scarcely knows that he is asleep. A little insomnia is not without its value in making us appreciate sleep, in throwing a ray of light upon that darkness. An unfailing memory is not a very powerful incentive to the study of the phenomena of memory. "Well, did Mme d'Arpajon introduce you to the Prince?" No, but be quiet and let me go on with my story.

Mme d'Arpajon was even more cowardly than Mme de Souvré, but there was more excuse for her cowardice. She knew that she had always had very little influence in society. This influence, such as it was, had been reduced still further by her liaison with the Duc de Guermantes; his desertion of her dealt it the final blow. The ill-humour aroused in her by my request that she should introduce me to the Prince produced a silence which she was ingenuous enough to imagine a convincing pretence of not having heard what I said. She was not even aware that her anger made her frown. Perhaps, on the other hand, she was aware of it, did not bother about the inconsistency, and made use of it for the lesson in tact which she was thus able to teach me without undue rudeness; I mean a silent lesson, but none the less eloquent for that.

Apart from this, Mme d'Arpajon was extremely nettled, for many eyes were raised in the direction of a Renaissance balcony at the corner of which, instead of one of those monumental statues which were so often used as ornaments at that period, there leaned, no less sculptural than they, the magnificent Duchesse de Surgis-le-Duc, who had recently succeeded Mme d'Arpajon in the affections of Basin de Guermantes. Beneath the flimsy white tulle which protected her from the cool night air, one saw the supple form of a winged victory.

I had no one else to turn to but M. de Charlus, who had withdrawn to a room downstairs which opened on to the garden. I had plenty of time (as he was pretending to be absorbed in a fictitious game of whist which enabled him to appear not to notice people) to admire the deliberate, artful simplicity of his evening coat which, by the merest trifles which only a tailor's eye could have picked out, had the air of a "Harmony in Black and White" by Whistler; black, white and red, rather, for M. de Charlus was wearing, suspended from a broad ribbon over his shirt-front, the cross, in white, black and red enamel, of a Knight of the religious Order of Malta. At that moment the Baron's game was interrupted by Mme de Gallardon, escorting her nephew, the Vicomte de Courvoisier, a young man with a pretty face and an impertinent air. "Cousin," said Mme de Gallardon, "allow me to introduce my nephew Adalbert. Adalbert, you remember the famous Uncle Palamède of whom you have heard so much." "Good evening, Madame de Gallardon," M. de Charlus replied. And he added, without so much as a glance at the young man: "Good evening, sir," with a truculent air and in a tone so violently discourteous that everyone was stunned. Perhaps M. de Charlus, knowing that Mme de Gallardon had her doubts as to his morals and had once been unable to resist the temptation to hint at them, was determined to nip in the bud any scandal that she might embroider upon a friendly reception of her nephew, and at the same time make a resounding profession of indifference with regard to young men in general; perhaps he did not consider that the said Adalbert had responded to his aunt's words with a sufficiently respectful air; perhaps, desirous of making his mark later with so attractive a cousin, he wished to give himself the advantage of a pre-emptive attack, like those sovereigns who, before engaging upon diplomatic action, reinforce it with an act of war.

It was not so difficult as I supposed to secure M. de Charlus's consent to my request that he should introduce me to the Prince de Guermantes. For one thing, in the course of the last twenty years this Don Quixote had tilted against so many windmills (often relatives who he claimed had behaved badly to him), he had so frequently banned people as being "impossible to have in the house" from being invited by various male or female Guermantes, that the latter were beginning to be afraid of quarrelling with all the people they liked, of depriving themselves throughout their lives of the society of certain newcomers they were curious about, by espousing the thunderous but unexplained grudges of a brother-in-law or cousin who expected them to abandon wife, brother, children for his sake. More intelligent than the other Guermantes, M. de Charlus realised that people were ceasing to pay attention to more than one in every two of his vetoes, and, with an eye to the future, fearing it might be he himself of whose society they deprived themselves, had begun to cut his losses, to lower, as the saying is, his sights. Furthermore, if he had the faculty of keeping up a feud with a detested person for months, for years on end—to such a one he would not have tolerated their sending an invitation, and would have fought like a street porter even against a queen, the status of the person who stood in his way ceasing to count for anything in his eyes—on the other hand, his explosions of rage were too frequent not to be somewhat fragmentary. "The imbecile, the scoundrel! We'll put him in his place, sweep him into the gutter, where unfortunately he won't be innocuous to the health of the town," he would scream, even when he was alone in his own room, on reading a letter that he considered irreverent, or on recalling some remark that had been repeated to him. But a fresh outburst against a second imbecile cancelled the first, and the former victim had only to show due deference for the fit of rage that he had occasioned to be forgotten, it not having lasted long enough to establish a foundation of hatred on which to build. And so, perhaps—despite his bad temper towards me—I might have been successful when I asked him to introduce me to the Prince, had I not been so ill-inspired as to add, from a scruple of conscience, and so that he might not suppose me guilty of the indelicacy of entering the house on the off chance, counting upon him to enable me to remain there: "You are aware that I know them quite well, the Princess was very nice to me." "Very well, if you know them, why do you need me to introduce you?" he replied in a waspish tone, and, turning his back, resumed his make-believe game with the Nuncio, the German Ambassador and another personage whom I didn't know by sight.

Then, from the depths of those gardens where in days past the Duc d'Aiguillon used to breed rare animals, there came to my ears, through the great open doors, the sound of a nose that was sniffing up all those refinements, determined to miss none of them. The sound approached, I moved at a venture in its direction, with the result that the words "Good evening" were murmured in my ear by M. de Bréauté, not like the rusty metallic sound of a knife being sharpened on a grindstone, even less like the cry of the wild boar, devastator of tilled fields, but like the voice of a possible saviour.

Less influential than Mme de Souvré, but less deeply ingrained than she with unwillingness to oblige, far more at his ease with the Prince than was Mme d'Arpajon, entertaining some illusions, perhaps, as to my position in the Guermantes set, or perhaps knowing more about it than myself, he was, however, for the first few moments difficult to pin down, for he was turning in every direction, with quivering and distended nostrils, staring inquisitively through his monocle as though confronted with five hundred masterpieces. But, having heard my request, he received it with satisfaction, led me towards the Prince and presented me to him with a lip-smacking, ceremonious, vulgar air, as though he had been handing him a plate of cakes with a word of commendation. Whereas the Duc de Guermantes's greeting was, when he chose, friendly, instinct with good fellowship, cordial and familiar, I found that of the Prince stiff, solemn and haughty. He barely smiled at me, addressed me gravely as "Sir." I had often heard the Duke make fun of his cousin's hauteur. But from the first words that he addressed to me, which by their cold and serious tone formed the most complete contrast with Basin's comradely language, I realised at once that the fundamentally disdainful man was the Duke, who spoke to you at your first meeting with him as "man to man," and that, of the two cousins, the one who was genuinely simple and natural was the Prince. I found in his reserve a stronger feeling if not of equality, for that would have been inconceivable to him, at least of the consideration which one may show for an inferior, such as may be found in all strongly hierarchical societies, in the Law Courts, for instance, or in a Faculty, where a public prosecutor or a dean, conscious of their high charge, conceal perhaps more genuine simplicity, and, when you come to know them better, more kindness and cordiality, beneath their traditional aloofness than the more modern brethren beneath their jocular affectation of camaraderie. "Do you intend to follow the career of your distinguished father?" he inquired with a distant but interested air. I answered the question briefly, realising that he had asked it only out of politeness, and moved away to allow him to welcome new arrivals.

I caught sight of Swann, and wanted to speak to him, but at that moment I saw that the Prince de Guermantes, instead of waiting where he was to receive the greeting of Odette's husband, had immediately carried him off, with the force of a suction pump, to the further end of the garden, in order, some people said, "to show him the door."

So bewildered in the midst of the glittering company that I did not learn until two days later, from the newspapers, that a Czech orchestra had been playing throughout the evening, and that fireworks had been going off in constant succession, I recovered some power of attention with the thought of going to look at the famous Hubert Robert fountain.

It could be seen from a distance, slender, motionless, rigid, set apart in a clearing surrounded by fine trees, several of which were as old as itself, only the lighter fall of its pale and quivering plume stirring in the breeze. The eighteenth century had refined the elegance of its lines, but, by fixing the style of the jet, seemed

to have arrested its life; at this distance one had the impression of art rather than the sensation of water. Even the moist cloud that was perpetually gathering at its summit preserved the character of the period like those that assemble in the sky round the palaces of Versailles. But from a closer view one realised that, while it respected, like the stones of an ancient palace, the design traced for it beforehand, it was a constantly changing stream of water that, springing upwards and seeking to obey the architect's original orders, performed them to the letter only by seeming to infringe them, its thousand separate bursts succeeding only from afar in giving the impression of a single thrust. This was in reality as often interrupted as the scattering of the fall, whereas from a distance it had appeared to me dense, inflexible, unbroken in its continuity. From a little nearer, one saw that this continuity, apparently complete, was assured, at every point in the ascent of the jet where it must otherwise have been broken, by the entering into line, by the lateral incorporation, of a parallel jet which mounted higher than the first and was itself, at a greater altitude which was however already a strain upon its endurance, relieved by a third. From close to, exhausted drops could be seen falling back from the column of water, passing their sisters on the way up, and at times, torn and scattered, caught in an eddy of the night air, disturbed by this unrelenting surge, floating awhile before being drowned in the basin. They teased with their hesitations, with their journey in the opposite direction, and blurred with their soft vapour the vertical tension of the shaft that bore aloft an oblong cloud composed of countless tiny drops but seemingly painted in an unchanging golden brown which rose, unbreakable, fixed, slender and swift, to mingle with the clouds in the sky. Unfortunately, a gust of wind was enough to scatter it obliquely on the ground; at times indeed a single disobedient jet swerved and, had they not kept a respectful distance, would have drenched to their skins the incautious crowd of gazers.

One of these little accidents, which occurred only when the breeze freshened for a moment, was somewhat unpleasant. Mme d'Arpajon had been led to believe that the Duc de Guermantes, who in fact had not yet arrived, was with Mme de Surgis in one of the galleries of pink marble to which one ascended by the double colonnade, hollowed out of the wall, which rose from the brink of the fountain. Now, just as Mme d'Arpajon was making for one of these colonnades, a strong gust of warm air deflected the jet of water and inundated the fair lady so completely that, the water streaming down from her low neckline inside her dress, she was as thoroughly soaked as if she had been plunged into a bath. Whereupon, a few feet away, a rhythmical roar resounded, loud enough to be heard by a whole army, and at the same time periodically prolonged as though it were being addressed not to the army as a whole but to each unit in turn; it was the Grand Duke Vladimir, laughing whole-heartedly on seeing the immersion of Mme d'Arpajon, one of the funniest sights, as he was never tired of repeating afterwards, that he had ever seen in his life. Some charitable persons having suggested to the Muscovite that a word of sympathy from himself was perhaps called for and would give pleasure to the lady who, notwithstanding her forty years and more, mopping herself up with her scarf without appealing to anyone for help, was bravely extricating herself in spite of the water that was mischievously spilling over the edge of the basin, the Grand Duke, who had a kind heart, felt that he ought to comply, and before the last military tattoo of his laughter had altogether subsided, one heard a fresh roar, even more vociferous than the last. "Bravo, old girl!" he cried, clapping his hands as though at the theatre. Mme d'Arpajon was not at all pleased that her dexterity should be commended at the expense of her youth. And when someone remarked to her, in a voice drowned by the roar of the water, over which the princely thunder could nevertheless be heard: "I think His Imperial Highness said something to you," "No! It was to Mme de Souvré," was her reply.

I passed through the gardens and returned by the stair, upon which the absence of the Prince, who had vanished with Swann, swelled the crowd of guests round M. de Charlus, just as, when Louis XIV was not at Versailles, there was a more numerous attendance upon Monsieur, his brother. I was stopped on my way by the Baron, while behind me two ladies and a young man came up to greet him.

"It's nice to see you here," he said to me, holding out his hand. "Good evening, Madame de La Trémoille, good evening, my dear Herminie." But doubtless the memory of what he had said to me as to his own supreme position in the Hôtel Guermantes made him wish to appear to be drawing, from a circumstance which displeased him but which he had been unable to prevent, a satisfaction which his lordly insolence and hysterical glee immediately invested in a cloak of exaggerated sarcasm: "It's nice," he went on, "but above all it's extremely funny." And he broke into peals of laughter which appeared to be indicative at once of his amusement and of the inadequacy of human speech to express it. Certain of the guests, meanwhile, who knew both how difficult he was of access and how prone to offensive outbursts, had been drawn towards us by curiosity and now, with an almost indecent haste, took to their heels. "Come, now, don't be cross," he said to me, patting me gently on the shoulder, "you know I'm fond of you. Good evening, Antioche, good evening, Louis-René. Have you been to look at the fountain?" he asked me in a tone that was more affirmative than questioning. "Very pretty, is it not? Marvellous though it is, it could be better still, naturally, if certain things were removed, and then there would be nothing like it in France. But even as it stands, it's quite one of the best things. Bréauté will tell you that it was a mistake to put lamps round it, to try and make people forget that it was he who was responsible for that absurd idea. But on the whole he didn't manage to spoil it too much. It's far more difficult to disfigure a great work of art than to create one. Not that we hadn't a vague suspicion all along that Bréauté wasn't quite a match for Hubert Robert."

I drifted back into the stream of guests who were going into the house. "Have you seen my delicious cousin Oriane lately?" asked the Princess who had now deserted her post by the door and with whom I was making my way back to the rooms. "She's coming tonight. I saw her this afternoon," my hostess added, "and she promised she would. Incidentally, I gather you'll be dining with us both to meet the Queen of Italy at the embassy on Thursday. There'll be every imaginable royalty—it will be most alarming." They could not in any

way alarm the Princesse de Guermantes, whose rooms swarmed with them and who would say "my little Coburgs" as she might have said "my little dogs." And so she said: "It will be most alarming," out of sheer silliness, a characteristic which, in society people, overrides even their vanity. With regard to her own genealogy, she knew less than a history graduate. As regards the people of her circle, she liked to show that she knew the nicknames with which they had been labelled. Having asked me whether I was dining the following week with the Marquise de la Pommelière, who was often called "la Pomme," the Princess, having elicited a negative reply, remained silent for some moments. Then, without any other motive than a deliberate display of involuntary erudition, banality, and conformity to the prevailing spirit, she added: "She's quite an agreeable woman, la Pomme!"

While the Princess was talking to me, it so happened that the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes made their entrance. But I was unable to go at once to meet them, for I was waylaid by the Turkish Ambassadress, who, pointing to our hostess whom I had just left, exclaimed as she seized me by the arm: "Ah! What a delightful woman the Princess is! What a superior person! I feel sure that, if I were a man," she went on, with a trace of oriental servility and sensuality, "I would give my life for that heavenly creature." I replied that I did indeed find her charming, but that I knew her cousin the Duchess better. "But there is no comparison," said the Ambassadress. "Oriane is a charming society woman who gets her wit from Mémé and Babal, whereas Marie-Gilbert is *somebody*."

I never much like to be told like this, without a chance to reply, what I ought to think about people whom I know. And there was no reason why the Turkish Ambassadress should be in any way better qualified than myself to judge the merits of the Duchesse de Guermantes. On the other hand (and this also explained my irritation with the Ambassadress), the defects of a mere acquaintance, and even of a friend, are to us real poisons, against which we are fortunately immunised. But, without applying any standard of scientific comparison and talking of anaphylaxis, we may say that, at the heart of our friendly or purely social relations, there lurks a hostility momentarily cured but sporadically recurrent. As a rule, we suffer little from these poisons so long as people are "natural." By saying "Babal" and "Mémé" to indicate people with whom she was not acquainted, the Turkish Ambassadress suspended the effects of the immunisation which normally made me find her tolerable. She irritated me, and this was all the more unfair inasmuch as she did not speak like this to make me think that she was an intimate friend of "Mémé," but owing to a too rapid education which made her name these noble lords in accordance with what she believed to be the custom of the country. She had crowded her course into a few months instead of working her way up gradually.

But on thinking it over, I found another reason for my disinclination to remain in the Ambassadress's company. It was not so very long since, at "Oriane's," this same diplomatic personage had said to me, with a purposeful and serious air, that she found the Princesse de Guermantes frankly antipathetic. I felt that I need not stop to consider this change of front: the invitation to the party this evening had brought it about. The Ambassadress was perfectly sincere in saying that the Princesse de Guermantes was a sublime creature. She had always thought so. But, having never before been invited to the Princess's house, she had felt herself bound to give this non-invitation the appearance of a deliberate abstention on principle. Now that she had been asked, and would presumably continue to be asked in the future, she could give free expression to her feelings. There is no need, in accounting for nine out of ten of the opinions that we hold about other people, to go so far as crossed love or exclusion from public office. Our judgment remains uncertain: the withholding or bestowal of an invitation determines it. At all events, the Turkish Ambassadress, as the Duchesse de Guermantes remarked while making a tour of inspection through the rooms with me, "looked well." She was, above all, extremely useful. The real stars of society are tired of appearing there. He who is curious to gaze at them must often migrate to another hemisphere, where they are more or less alone. But women like the Ottoman Ambassadress, a newcomer to society, are never weary of shining there, and, so to speak, everywhere at once. They are of value at entertainments of the sort known as receptions or routs, to which they would let themselves be dragged from their deathbeds rather than miss one. They are the supers upon whom a hostess can always count, determined never to miss a party. Hence foolish young men, unaware that they are false stars, take them for the queens of fashion, whereas it would require a formal lecture to explain to them by virtue of what reasons Mme Standish, who remains unknown to them, painting cushions far away from society, is at least as great a lady as the Duchesse de Doudeauville.

In the ordinary course of life, the eyes of the Duchesse de Guermantes were abstracted and slightly melancholy; she made them sparkle with a flame of wit only when she had to greet some friend or other, precisely as though the said friend had been some witty remark, some charming touch, some treat for delicate palates, the sampling of which has brought an expression of refined delight to the face of the connoisseur. But at big receptions, as she had too many greetings to bestow, she decided that it would be tiring to have to switch off the light after each. Just as a literary enthusiast, when he goes to the theatre to see a new play by one of the masters of the stage, testifies to his certainty that he is not going to spend a dull evening by having, while he hands his hat and coat to the attendant, his lip adjusted in readiness for a sapient smile, his eye kindled for knowing approval; similarly it was from the very moment of her arrival that the Duchess lit up for the whole evening. And while she was handing over her evening cloak, of a magnificent Tiepolo red, exposing a huge collar of rubies round her neck, having cast over her dress that final rapid, meticulous and exhaustive dressmaker's glance which is also that of a woman of the world, Oriane made sure that her eyes were sparkling no less brightly than her other jewels. In vain did sundry "kind friends" such as M. de Jouville fling themselves upon the Duke to keep him from entering: "But don't you know that poor Mama is at the point of death? He has just been given the last sacraments." "I know, I know," answered M. de Guermantes, thrusting

the tiresome fellow aside in order to enter the room. "The viaticum has had an excellent effect," he added with a smile of pleasure at the thought of the ball which he was determined not to miss after the Prince's party. "We didn't want people to know that we had come back," the Duchess said to me, unaware of the fact that the Princess had already disproved this statement by telling me that she had seen her cousin for a moment and that she had promised to come. The Duke, after a protracted stare with which he proceeded to crush his wife for the space of five minutes, observed: "I told Oriane about your misgivings." Now that she saw that they were unfounded, and that she need take no action to dispel them, she pronounced them absurd, and went on chaffing me about them. "The idea of supposing that you weren't invited! One's always invited! Besides, there was me. Do you think I couldn't have got you an invitation to my cousin's house?" I must admit that subsequently she often did things for me that were far more difficult; nevertheless, I took care not to interpret her words in the sense that I had been too modest. I was beginning to learn the exact value of the language, spoken or mute, of aristocratic affability, an affability that is happy to shed balm upon the sense of inferiority of those towards whom it is directed, though not to the point of dispelling that inferiority, for in that case it would no longer have any *raison d'être*. "But you are our equal, if not our superior," the Guermantes seemed, in all their actions, to be saying; and they said it in the nicest way imaginable, in order to be loved and admired, but not to be believed; that one should discern the fictitious character of this affability was what they called being well-bred; to suppose it to be genuine, a sign of ill-breeding. Shortly after this, as it happened, I was to receive a lesson which finally enlightened me, with the most perfect accuracy, as to the extent and limits of certain forms of aristocratic affability. It was at an afternoon party given by the Duchesse de Montmorency for the Queen of England. There was a sort of royal procession to the buffet, at the head of which walked Her Majesty on the arm of the Duc de Guermantes. I happened to arrive at that moment. With his free hand the Duke conveyed to me, from a distance of nearly fifty yards, countless signs of friendly welcome, which appeared to mean that I need not be afraid to approach, that I should not be devoured alive instead of the sandwiches. But I, who was becoming word-perfect in the language of the court, instead of going even one step nearer, made a deep bow from where I was, without smiling, the sort of bow that I should have made to someone I scarcely knew, then proceeded in the opposite direction. Had I written a masterpiece, the Guermantes would have given me less credit for it than I earned by that bow. Not only did it not pass unperceived by the Duke, although he had that day to acknowledge the greetings of more than five hundred people; it also caught the eye of the Duchess, who, happening to meet my mother, told her of it, and, so far from suggesting that I had done wrong, that I ought to have gone up to him, said that her husband had been lost in admiration of my bow, that it would have been impossible for anyone to put more into it. They never ceased to find in that bow every possible merit, without however mentioning the one which had seemed the most precious of all, to wit that it had been tactful; nor did they cease to pay me compliments which I understood to be even less a reward for the past than a hint for the future, after the fashion of a hint delicately conveyed to his pupils by the head of an educational establishment: "Do not forget, my boys, that these prizes are intended not so much for you as for your parents, so that they may send you back next term." So it was that Mme de Marsantes, when someone from a different world entered her circle, would praise in his hearing those unobtrusive people "who are there when you want them and the rest of the time let you forget their existence," as one indirectly reminds a servant who smells that the practice of taking a bath is beneficial to the health.

While, before she had even left the entrance hall, I was talking to Mme de Guermantes, I could hear a voice of a sort which henceforth I was able to identify without the least possibility of error. It was, in this particular instance, the voice of M. de Vaugoubert talking to M. de Charlus. A skilled physician need not even make his patient unbutton his shirt, nor listen to his breathing—the sound of his voice is enough. How often, in time to come, was my ear to be caught in a drawing-room by the intonation or laughter of some man whose artificial voice, for all that he was reproducing exactly the language of his profession or the manners of his class, affecting a stern aloofness or a coarse familiarity, was enough to indicate "He is a Charlus" to my trained ear, like the note of a tuning-fork! At that moment the entire staff of one of the embassies went past, pausing to greet M. de Charlus. For all that my discovery of the sort of malady in question dated only from that afternoon (when I had surprised M. de Charlus with Jupien) I should have had no need to ask questions or to sound the chest before giving a diagnosis. But M. de Vaugoubert, when talking to M. de Charlus, appeared uncertain. And yet he should have known where he stood after the doubts of his adolescence. The invert believes himself to be the only one of his kind in the universe; it is only in later years that he imagines—another exaggeration—that the unique exception is the normal man. But, ambitious and timorous, M. de Vaugoubert had not for many years past surrendered himself to what would to him have meant pleasure. The career of diplomacy had had the same effect upon his life as taking orders. Combined with his assiduous frequentation of the School of Political Sciences, it had doomed him from his twentieth year to the chastity of a Desert Father. And so, as each of our senses loses some of its strength and keenness, becomes atrophied when it is no longer exercised, M. de Vaugoubert, just as the civilised man is no longer capable of the feats of strength, of the acuteness of hearing of the cave-dweller, had lost that special perspicacity which was rarely lacking in M. de Charlus; and at official banquets, whether in Paris or abroad, the Minister Plenipotentiary was no longer capable of identifying those who, beneath the disguise of their uniform, were at heart his congeners. Certain names mentioned by M. de Charlus, indignant if he himself was cited for his inclinations, but always delighted to give away those of other people, caused M. de Vaugoubert an exquisite surprise. Not that, after all these years, he dreamed of taking advantage of any windfall. But these rapid revelations, similar to those which in Racine's tragedies inform Athalie and Abner that Joas is of the House of David, that Esther,

“enthroned in the purple,” has “Yid” parents, changing the aspect of the X——Legation, or of one or another department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rendered those palaces as mysterious, in retrospect, as the Temple at Jerusalem or the throne-room at Susa. At the sight of the youthful staff of his embassy advancing in a body to shake hands with M. de Charlus, M. de Vaugoubert assumed the astonished air of Elise exclaiming, in *Esther*: “Great heavens! What a swarm of innocent beauties issuing from all sides presents itself to my gaze! How charming a modesty is depicted on their faces!” Then, athirst for more definite information, he glanced smilingly at M. de Charlus with a fatuously interrogative and concupiscent expression: “Why, of course they are,” said M. de Charlus with the learned air of a scholar speaking to an ignoramus. From that instant M. de Vaugoubert (greatly to the annoyance of M. de Charlus) could not tear his eyes away from these young secretaries whom the X——Ambassador to France, an old stager, had not chosen blindfold. M. de Vaugoubert remained silent; I could only see his eyes. But, being accustomed from my childhood to apply, even to what is voiceless, the language of the classics, I read into M. de Vaugoubert’s eyes the lines in which *Esther* explains to Elise that Mordecai, in his zeal for his religion, has made it a rule that only those maidens who profess it shall be employed about the Queen’s person. “And now his love for our nation has peopled this palace with daughters of Zion, young and tender flowers wafted by fate, transplanted like myself beneath a foreign sky. In a place set apart from profane eyes, he” (the worthy Ambassador) “devotes his skill and labour to shaping them.”

At length M. de Vaugoubert spoke, otherwise than with his eyes. “Who knows,” he said sadly, “whether in the country where I live the same thing does not exist also?” “It is probable,” replied M. de Charlus, “starting with King Theodosius, though I don’t know anything definite about him.” “Oh, dear, no! not in the least!” “Then he has no right to look it so completely. Besides, he has all the little tricks. He has that ‘my dear’ manner, which I detest more than anything in the world. I should never dare to be seen walking in the street with him. Anyhow, you must know him for what he is, it’s common knowledge.” “You’re entirely mistaken about him. In any case he’s quite charming. On the day the agreement with France was signed, the King embraced me. I’ve never been so moved.” “That was the moment to tell him what you wanted.” “Oh, good heavens! What an idea! If he were even to suspect such a thing! But I have no fear in that direction.” Words which I heard, for I was standing close by, and which made me recite to myself: “The King unto this day knows not who I am, and this secret keeps my tongue still enchained.”

This dialogue, half mute, half spoken, had lasted only a few moments, and I had barely entered the first of the drawing-rooms with the Duchesse de Guermantes, when a little dark lady, extremely pretty, stopped her:

“I’ve been looking for you everywhere. D’Annunzio saw you from a box in the theatre, and he wrote the *Princesse de T——* a letter in which he says that he never saw anything so lovely. He would give his life for ten minutes’ conversation with you. In any case, even if you can’t or won’t, the letter is in my possession. You must fix a day to come and see me. There are some secrets which I cannot tell you here. I see you don’t remember me,” she added, turning to me; “I met you at the *Princesse de Parme’s*” (where I had never been). “The Emperor of Russia is anxious for your father to be sent to Petersburg. If you could come in on Tuesday, Isvolski himself will be there, and he’ll talk to you about it. I have a present for you, my dear,” she went on, turning back to the Duchess, “which I should not dream of giving to anyone but you. The manuscripts of three of Ibsen’s plays, which he sent to me by his old attendant. I shall keep one and give you the other two.”

The Duc de Guermantes was not overpleased by these offers. Uncertain whether Ibsen or D’Annunzio were dead or alive, he could see in his mind’s eye a tribe of authors and playwrights coming to call upon his wife and putting her in their works. People in society are too apt to think of a book as a sort of cube one side of which has been removed, so that the author can at once “put in” the people he meets. This is obviously rather underhand, and writers are a pretty low class. True, it’s not a bad thing to meet them once in a way, for thanks to them, when one reads a book or an article, one “gets to know the inside story,” one “sees people in their true colours.” On the whole, though, the wisest thing is to stick to dead authors. M. de Guermantes considered “perfectly decent” only the gentleman who did the funeral notices in the *Gaulois*. He, at any rate, was content to include M. de Guermantes at the head of the list of people present “among others” at funerals at which the Duke had given his name. When he preferred that his name should not appear, instead of giving it, he sent a letter of condolence to the relatives of the deceased, assuring them of his deep and heartfelt sympathy. If, then, the family inserted an announcement in the paper: “Among the letters received, we may mention one from the Duc de Guermantes,” etc., this was the fault not of the ink-slinger but of the son, brother, father of the deceased whom the Duke thereupon denounced as upstarts, and with whom he decided for the future to have no further dealings (what he called, not being very well up in the meaning of such expressions, “having a bone to pick”). At all events, the names of Ibsen and D’Annunzio, and his uncertainty as to their continued survival, brought a frown to the brow of the Duke, who was not yet far enough away from us to avoid hearing the various blandishments of Mme Timoléon d’Amoncourt. She was a charming woman, her wit, like her beauty, so entrancing that either of them by itself would have made her shine. But, born outside the world in which she now lived, having aspired at first merely to a literary salon, the friend successively—by no means the lover, her morals were above reproach—and exclusively of all the great writers, who gave her their manuscripts, wrote books for her, chance having once introduced her into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, these literary privileges served her well there. She was now in a position where she had no need to dispense other graces than those shed by her presence. But, accustomed in the past to worldly wisdom, social wiles, services to render, she persevered in these things even when they were no longer necessary. She had always a state secret to reveal to you, a potentate whom you must meet, a water-colour by a master to present to you. There was indeed in all these superfluous attractions a trace of falsehood, but they made her life a comedy that

scintillated with complications, and it was true to say that she was responsible for the appointment of prefects and generals.

As she strolled by my side, the Duchesse de Guermantes allowed the azure light of her eyes to float in front of her, but vaguely, so as to avoid the people with whom she did not wish to enter into relations, whose presence she discerned from time to time like a menacing reef in the distance. We advanced between a double hedge of guests, who, conscious that they would never come to know "Oriane," were anxious at least to point her out, as a curiosity, to their wives: "Quick, Ursule, come and look at Madame de Guermantes talking to that young man." And one felt that in another moment they would be clambering upon the chairs for a better view, as at the military review on the 14th July or the Grand Prix at Longchamp. Not that the Duchesse de Guermantes had a more aristocratic salon than her cousin. The former's was frequented by people whom the latter would never have been willing to invite, chiefly because of her husband. She would never have been at home to Mme Alphonse de Rothschild, who, an intimate friend of Mme de La Trémoille and of Mme de Sagan, as was Oriane herself, was constantly to be seen in the house of the last-named. It was the same with Baron Hirsch, whom the Prince of Wales had brought to her house but not to that of the Princess, who would not have approved of him, and also with certain outstanding Bonapartist or even Republican celebrities whom the Duchess found interesting but whom the Prince, a convinced Royalist, would on principle not have allowed inside his house. His anti-semitism, being also founded on principle, did not yield before any social distinction, however strongly accredited, and if he was at home to Swann, whose friend he had been from time immemorial—being, however, the only Guermantes who addressed him as Swann and not as Charles—this was because, knowing that Swann's grandmother, a Protestant married to a Jew, had been the Duc de Berry's mistress, he endeavoured, from time to time, to believe in the legend which made out Swann's father to be that prince's natural son. On this hypothesis, which incidentally was false, Swann, the son of a Catholic father himself the son of a Bourbon by a Catholic mother, was a Gentile to his fingertips.

"What, you don't know these splendours?" said the Duchess, referring to the rooms through which we were moving. But, having given its due meed of praise to her cousin's "palace," she hastened to add that she infinitely preferred her own "humble den." "This is an admirable house to visit. But I should die of misery if I had to stay and sleep in rooms that have witnessed so many historic events. It would give me the feeling of having been left behind after closing-time, forgotten, in the Château of Blois, or Fontainebleau, or even the Louvre, with no antidote to my depression except to tell myself that I was in the room in which Monaldeschi was murdered. As a sedative, that is not good enough. Why, here comes Mme de Saint-Euverte. We've just been dining with her. As she is giving her great annual beanfeast tomorrow, I supposed she would be going straight to bed. But she can never miss a party. If this one had been in the country, she would have jumped on a delivery-van rather than not go to it."

As a matter of fact, Mme de Saint-Euverte had come this evening less for the pleasure of not missing another person's party than in order to ensure the success of her own, recruit the latest additions to her list, and, so to speak, hold an eleventh-hour review of the troops who were on the morrow to perform such brilliant manoeuvres at her garden-party. For in the course of the years the guests at the Saint-Euverte parties had almost entirely changed. The female celebrities of the Guermantes world, formerly so sparsely scattered, had—loaded with attentions by their hostess—begun gradually to bring their friends. At the same time, by a similarly gradual process, but in the opposite direction, Mme de Saint-Euverte had year by year reduced the number of persons unknown to the world of fashion. One after another had ceased to be seen. For some time the "batch" system was in operation, which enabled her, thanks to parties over which a veil of silence was drawn, to summon the unelected separately to entertain one another, which dispensed her from having to invite them with the best people. What cause had they for complaint? Were they not given (*panem et circenses*) light refreshments and a select musical programme? And so, in a kind of symmetry with the two exiled duchesses whom formerly, when the Saint-Euverte salon was only starting, one used to see holding up its shaky pediment like a pair of caryatids, in these later years one could distinguish, mingling with the fashionable throng, only two heterogeneous persons: old Mme de Cambremer and the architect's wife with a fine voice who often had to be asked to sing. But, no longer knowing anybody at Mme de Saint-Euverte's, bewailing their lost comrades, feeling out of place, they looked as though they might at any moment die of cold, like two swallows that have not migrated in time. And so, the following year, they were not invited. Mme de Franquetot made an appeal on behalf of her cousin, who was so fond of music. But as she could obtain for her no more explicit reply than the words: "Why, people can always come in and listen to music, if they like; there's nothing criminal about that!" Mme de Cambremer did not find the invitation sufficiently pressing, and abstained.

Such a transformation having been effected by Mme de Saint-Euverte, from a leper colony to a gathering of great ladies (the latest form, apparently ultra-smart, that it had assumed), it might seem odd that the person who on the following day was to give the most brilliant party of the season should need to appear overnight to address a final appeal to her troops. But the fact was that the preeminence of Mme de Saint-Euverte's salon existed only for those whose social life consists exclusively in reading the accounts of afternoon and evening parties in the *Gaulois* or the *Figaro*, without ever having been present at any of them. To these worldlings who see the world only through the newspapers, the enumeration of the British, Austrian, etc., ambassadresses, of the Duchesses d'Uzès, de La Trémoille, etc., etc., was sufficient to make them automatically imagine the Saint-Euverte salon to be the first in Paris, whereas it was among the last. Not that the reports were mendacious. The majority of the persons mentioned had indeed been present. But each of them had come in response to entreaties, civilities, favours, and with the sense of doing infinite honour to Mme de Saint-Euverte. Such



salons, shunned rather than sought after, which are attended as a sort of official duty, deceive no one but the fair readers of the "Society" columns. They pass over a really fashionable party, the sort at which the hostess, who could have had all the duchesses in existence, every one of them athirst to be "numbered among the elect," has invited only two or three. And so these hostesses, who do not send a list of their guests to the papers, ignorant or contemptuous of the power that publicity has acquired today, are considered fashionable by the Queen of Spain but are overlooked by the crowd, because the former knows and the latter does not know who they are.

Mme de Saint-Euverte was not one of these women, and, like the busy bee she was, had come to gather up for the morrow everyone who had been invited. M. de Charlus was not among these, having always refused to go to her house. But he had quarrelled with so many people that Mme de Saint-Euverte might put this down to his peculiar nature.

Of course, if it had been only Oriane, Mme de Saint-Euverte need not have put herself to the trouble, for the invitation had been given by word of mouth, and moreover accepted with that charming and deceptive grace which is practised to perfection by those Academicians from whose doors the candidate emerges with a warm glow, never doubting that he can count upon their support. But there were others as well. The Prince d'Agrigente—would he come? And Mme de Durfort? And so, keeping a weather eye open, Mme de Saint-Euverte had thought it expedient to appear on the scene in person; insinuating with some, imperative with others, to all alike she hinted in veiled words at unimaginable attractions which could never be seen anywhere again, and promised each of them that they would find at her house the person they most desired or the personage they most needed to meet. And this sort of function with which she was invested on one day in the year—like certain public offices in the ancient world—as the person who is to give on the morrow the biggest garden-party of the season, conferred upon her a momentary authority. Her lists were made up and closed, so that while she wandered slowly through the Princess's rooms dropping into one ear after another: "You won't forget tomorrow," she had the ephemeral glory of averting her eyes, while continuing to smile, if she caught sight of some ugly duckling who was to be avoided or some country squire for whom the bond of a schoolboy friendship had secured admission to "Gilbert's," and whose presence at her garden-party would be no gain. She preferred not to speak to him so as to be able to say later on: "I issued my invitations verbally, and unfortunately I didn't meet you anywhere." And so she, a mere Saint-Euverte, set to work with her gimlet eyes to pick and choose among the guests at the Princess's party. And she imagined herself, in so doing, to be every inch a Duchesse de Guermantes.

It must be said that the latter too did not enjoy to the extent that one might suppose the unrestricted use of her greetings and smiles. Sometimes, no doubt, when she withheld them, it was deliberately: "But the woman bores me to tears," she would say. "Am I expected to talk to her about the party for the next hour?" (A duchess of swarthy complexion went past, whose ugliness and stupidity, and certain irregularities of conduct, had exiled her not from society but from certain elegant circles. "Ah!" murmured Mme de Guermantes, with the sharp, unerring glance of the connoisseur who is shown a false jewel, "so they invite *that* here!") From the mere sight of this semi-tarnished lady, whose face was overburdened with moles from which black hairs sprouted, Mme de Guermantes gauged the mediocrity of this party. They had been brought up together, but she had severed all relations with the lady; and responded to her greeting only with the curtest little nod. "I cannot understand," she said to me as if to excuse herself, "how Marie-Gilbert can invite us with all these dregs. It looks as though there are people from every parish. Mélanie Pourtalès arranged things far better. She could have the Orthodox Synod and the Oratoire Protestants in her house if she liked, but at least she didn't invite us on those days.") But in many cases, it was from timidity, fear of a scene with her husband, who did not like her to entertain artists and such-like (Marie-Gilbert took a kindly interest in dozens of them: you had to take care not to be accosted by some illustrious German diva), from some misgivings, too, with regard to nationalist feeling, which, inasmuch as she was endowed like M. de Charlus with the wit of the Guermantes, she despised from the social point of view (people were now, for the greater glory of the General Staff, sending a plebeian general in to dinner before certain dukes), but to which nevertheless, as she knew that she was considered unsound in her views, she made large concessions, even dreading the prospect of having to shake hands with Swann in these anti-semitic surroundings. With regard to this, her mind was soon set at rest, for she learned that the Prince had refused to have Swann in the house and had had "a sort of an altercation" with him. There was no risk of her having to converse in public with "poor Charles," whom she preferred to cherish in private.

"And who in the world is that?" Mme de Guermantes exclaimed, on seeing a little lady with a slightly lost air, in a black dress so simple that you would have taken her for a pauper, make her a deep bow, as did also her husband. She did not recognise the lady and, in her insolent way, drew herself up as though offended and stared at her without responding: "Who is that person, Basin?" she asked with an air of astonishment, while M. de Guermantes, to atone for Oriane's impoliteness, bowed to the lady and shook hands with her husband. "Why, it's Mme de Chaussepierre, you were most impolite." "I've never heard of Chaussepierre." "Old mother Chaulivault's nephew." "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about. Who is the woman, and why does she bow to me?" "But you know perfectly well; she's Mme de Charleval's daughter, Henriette Montmorency." "Oh, but I knew her mother quite well. She was charming, extremely intelligent. What made her go and marry all these people I've never heard of? You say she calls herself Mme de Chaussepierre?" she asked, spelling out the name with a questioning look, as though she were afraid of getting it wrong. The Duke looked at her sternly. "It's not so ridiculous as you appear to think, to be called Chaussepierre! Old Chaussepierre was the brother of the aforesaid Chaulivault, of Mme de Sennecour and of the Vicomtesse du Merlerault. They're

excellent people." "Oh, do stop," cried the Duchess, who, like a lion-tamer, never cared to give the impression of being intimidated by the devouring glare of the animal. "Basin, you are the joy of my life. I can't imagine where you unearthed those names, but I congratulate you on them. If I did not know Chaussepierre, I have at least read Balzac—you're not the only one—and I've even read Labiche. I can appreciate Chantivault, I do not object to Charleval, but I must confess that du Merlerault is a masterpiece. However, I must admit that Chaussepierre is not bad either. You must have gone about collecting them, it's not possible. You mean to write a book," she added, turning to me, "you ought to make a note of Charleval and du Merlerault. You won't find anything better." "He'll find himself in the dock, and will go to prison; you're giving him very bad advice, Oriane." "I hope, for his own sake, that he has younger people than me at his disposal if he wishes to ask for bad advice, especially if he means to follow it. But if he means to do nothing worse than write a book!"

At some distance from us, a wonderful, proud young woman stood out delicately from the throng in a white dress, all diamonds and tulle. Mme de Guermantes watched her talking to a whole group of people fascinated by her grace.

"Your sister is the belle of the ball, as usual; she is charming tonight," she said, as she took a chair, to the Prince de Chimay who was passing.

Colonel de Froberville (the General of that name was his uncle) came and sat down beside us, as did M. de Bréauté, while M. de Vaugoubert, after hovering about us (by an excess of politeness which he maintained even when playing tennis, thus, by dint of asking leave of the eminent personages present before hitting the ball, invariably losing the game for his partner), returned to M. de Charlus (until that moment almost concealed by the huge skirt of the Comtesse Molé, whom he professed to admire above all other women), just as several members of the latest diplomatic mission to Paris chanced to be greeting the Baron. At the sight of a young secretary with a particularly intelligent look, M. de Vaugoubert fastened on M. de Charlus a smile in which a single question visibly shone. M. de Charlus would perhaps readily have compromised someone else, but he was exasperated to feel himself compromised by a smile on another person's lips which could have but one meaning. "I know absolutely nothing about the matter. I beg you to keep your curiosity to yourself. It leaves me more than cold. Besides, in this instance, you are making a mistake of the first order. I believe this young man to be absolutely the opposite." Here M. de Charlus, irritated at being thus given away by a fool, was not speaking the truth. Had the Baron been correct, the secretary would have been the exception to the rule in that embassy. It was in fact composed of widely different personalities, many of them extremely second-rate, so that, if one sought to discover what could have been the motive of the selection that had brought them together, the only one possible seemed to be inversion. By setting at the head of this little diplomatic Sodom an ambassador on the contrary enamoured of women with the comic exaggeration of a revue compère, who drilled his battalion of transvestites like clockwork, the authorities seemed to have been obeying the law of contrasts. In spite of what he had beneath his nose, he did not believe in inversion. He gave an immediate proof of this by marrying his sister to a chargé d'affaires whom he believed, quite mistakenly, to be a womaniser. After this he became rather a nuisance and was soon replaced by a new Excellency, who ensured the homogeneity of the party. Other embassies sought to rival this one, but could never dispute the prize (as in the *concours général*, where a certain *lycée* always heads the list), and more than ten years had to pass before, heterogeneous attaches having been introduced into this too perfect unit, another could at last wrest the disreputable palm from it and march out in front.

Reassured as regards her fear of having to talk to Swann, Mme de Guermantes now felt merely curious as to the subject of the conversation he had had with their host. "Do you know what it was about?" the Duke asked M. de Bréauté. "I did hear," the other replied, "that it was about a little play which the writer Bergotte produced at their house. It was a delightful show, I gather. But it seems the actor made himself up to look like Gilbert, whom, as it happens, Master Bergotte had intended to depict." "Oh, I should have loved to see Gilbert taken off," said the Duchess with a dreamy smile. "It was about this little performance," M. de Bréauté went on, thrusting forward his rodent's jaw, "that Gilbert demanded an explanation from Swann, who merely replied what everyone thought very witty: 'Why, not at all, it wasn't the least bit like you, you are far funnier!' It appears, though," M. de Bréauté continued, "that the little play was quite delightful. Mme Molé was there, and she was immensely amused." "What, does Mme Molé go there?" said the Duchess in astonishment. "Ah! that must be Mémé's doing. That's what always happens in the end to that sort of house. One fine day everybody begins to flock to it, and I, who have deliberately remained aloof on principle, find myself left to mope alone in my corner." Already, since M. de Bréauté's speech, the Duchesse de Guermantes (with regard, if not to Swann's house, at least to the hypothesis of encountering him at any moment) had, as we see, adopted a fresh point of view. "The explanation that you have given us," said Colonel de Froberville to M. de Bréauté, "is entirely unfounded. I have good reason to know. The Prince purely and simply gave Swann a dressing-down and begged to instruct him, as our fathers used to say, that he was not to show his face in the house again, in view of the opinions he flaunts. And, to my mind, my uncle Gilbert was right a thousand times over, not only in giving Swann a piece of his mind—he ought to have broken off relations with a professed Dreyfusard six months ago."

Poor M. de Vaugoubert, from being a too dawdling tennis-player having now become a mere inert tennis-ball which is driven to and fro without compunction, found himself projected towards the Duchesse de Guermantes, to whom he made obeisance. He was none too well received, Oriane living in the belief that all the diplomats—or politicians—of her world were nincompoops.

M. de Froberville had inevitably benefited from the preferential position that had of late been accorded to military men in the social world. Unfortunately, if the wife of his bosom was a quite authentic relative of the

Germantes, she was also an extremely poor one, and, as he himself had lost his fortune, they went scarcely anywhere, and were the sort of people who were apt to be overlooked except on big occasions, when they had the good fortune to bury or marry a relation. Then, they did really enter into communion with high society, like those nominal Catholics who approach the altar rails only once a year. Their material situation would indeed have been deplorable had not Mme de Saint-Euverte, faithful to her affection for the late General de Froberville, done everything to help the household, providing frocks and entertainments for the two girls. But the Colonel, though generally considered a good fellow, was lacking in the spirit of gratitude. He was envious of the splendours of a benefactress who celebrated them herself without pause or restraint. The annual garden-party was for him, his wife and children a marvellous pleasure which they would not have missed for all the gold in the world, but a pleasure poisoned by the thought of the joy of self-satisfied pride that Mme de Saint-Euverte derived from it. The accounts of this garden-party in the newspapers, which, after giving a detailed report, would add with Machiavellian guile: "We shall come back to this brilliant gathering," the complementary details about the women's clothes, appearing for several days in succession—all this was so painful to the Frobervilles that although they were cut off from most pleasures and knew that they could count upon the pleasure of this one afternoon, they were moved every year to hope that bad weather would spoil the success of the party, to consult the barometer and to anticipate with delight the threatenings of a storm that might ruin everything.

"I shall not discuss politics with you, Froberville," said M. de Germantes, "but, so far as Swann is concerned, I can tell you frankly that his conduct towards ourselves has been beyond words. Although he was originally introduced into society by ourselves and the Duc de Chartres, they tell me now that he is openly Dreyfusard. I should never have believed it of him, an epicure, a man of practical judgment, a collector, a connoisseur of old books, a member of the Jockey, a man who enjoys the respect of all, who knows all the good addresses and used to send us the best port you could wish to drink, a dilettante, a family man. Ah! I feel badly let down. I don't mind about myself, it's generally agreed that I'm only an old fool whose opinion counts for nothing, mere ragtag and bobtail, but if only for Oriane's sake, he ought not to have done that, he should have openly disavowed the Jews and the partisans of the accused.

"Yes, after the friendship my wife has always shown him," went on the Duke, who evidently considered that to denounce Dreyfus as guilty of high treason, whatever opinion one might hold in one's heart of hearts as to his guilt, constituted a sort of thank-offering for the manner in which one had been received in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, "he ought to have dissociated himself. For, you can ask Oriane, she had a real friendship for him."

The Duchess, thinking that a quiet, ingenuous tone would give a more dramatic and sincere value to her words, said in a schoolgirl voice, as though simply letting the truth fall from her lips, and merely allowing a slightly melancholy expression to becloud her eyes: "Yes, it's true, I have no reason to conceal the fact that I did feel a sincere affection for Charles!"

"There, you see, I don't have to make her say it. And after that, he carries his ingratitude to the point of being a Dreyfusard!"

"Talking of Dreyfusards," I said, "it appears that Prince Von is one."

"Ah, I'm glad you reminded me of him," exclaimed M. de Germantes, "I was forgetting that he had asked me to dine with him on Monday. But whether he's a Dreyfusard or not is entirely immaterial to me, since he's a foreigner. I don't give two straws for his opinion. With a Frenchman it's another matter. It's true that Swann is a Jew. But, until today—forgive me, Froberville—I have always been foolish enough to believe that a Jew can be a Frenchman, I mean an honourable Jew, a man of the world. Now, Swann was that in every sense of the word. Well, now he forces me to admit that I was mistaken, since he has taken the side of this Dreyfus (who, guilty or not, never moved in his world, whom he wouldn't ever have met) against a society that had adopted him, had treated him as one of its own. There's no question about it, we were all of us prepared to vouch for Swann, I would have answered for his patriotism as for my own. And this is how he repays us! I must confess that I should never have expected such a thing from him. I thought better of him. He was a man of intelligence (in his own line, of course). I know that he had already been guilty of the aberration of that shameful marriage. And by the way, do you know someone who was really hurt by Swann's marriage? My wife. Oriane often has what I might call an affectation of insensibility. But at heart she feels things with extraordinary keenness." (Mme de Germantes, delighted by this analysis of her character, listened to it with a modest air but did not utter a word, from a scrupulous reluctance to acquiesce in it but principally from fear of cutting it short. M. de Germantes might have gone on talking for an hour on this subject and she would have sat as still, or even stiller, than if she had been listening to music.) "Well, I remember when she heard of Swann's marriage she was genuinely hurt. She felt that it was very bad on the part of someone to whom we had shown so much friendship. She was very fond of Swann; she was deeply grieved. Am I not right, Oriane?"

Mme de Germantes felt that she ought to reply to so direct a challenge on a point of fact which would enable her unobtrusively to confirm the tribute which she felt had come to an end. In a shy and simple tone, and with an air all the more studied in that it sought to appear "heartfelt," she said with a meek reserve: "It's true, Basin is quite right."

"But still, that wasn't quite the same thing as this. After all, love is love, although, in my opinion, it ought to confine itself within certain limits. I could excuse a young fellow, a snotty-nosed youth, for letting himself be carried away by utopian ideas. But Swann, a man of intelligence, of proved refinement, a fine judge of pictures, an intimate friend of the Duc de Chartres, of Gilbert himself!"

The tone in which M. de Guermantes said this was, incidentally, quite inoffensive, without a trace of the vulgarity which he too often showed. He spoke with a slightly indignant melancholy, but his whole manner exuded that gentle gravity which constitutes the broad and unctuous charm of certain portraits by Rembrandt, that of the Burgomaster Six, for example. One felt that for the Duke there was no question of the immorality of Swann's conduct with regard to the "Affair," so self-evident was it; it caused him the grief of a father who sees one of his sons, for whose education he has made the greatest sacrifices, deliberately ruin the magnificent position he has created for him and dishonour a respected name by escapades which the principles or prejudices of his family cannot allow. It is true that M. de Guermantes had not displayed so profound and pained an astonishment when he learned that Saint-Loup was a Dreyfusard. But, for one thing, he regarded his nephew as a young man gone astray, from whom nothing would be surprising until he began to mend his ways, whereas Swann was what M. de Guermantes called "a level-headed man, a man occupying a position in the front rank." Moreover, and above all, a considerable period of time had elapsed during which, if, from the historical point of view, events had to some extent seemed to justify the Dreyfusard thesis, the anti-Dreyfusard opposition had greatly increased in violence, and from being purely political had become social. It was now a question of militarism, of patriotism, and the waves of anger that had been stirred up in society had had time to gather the force which they never have at the beginning of a storm. "Don't you see," M. de Guermantes went on, "even from the point of view of his beloved Jews, since he is absolutely determined to stand by them, Swann has made a bloomer of incalculable significance. He has proved that they're all secretly united and are somehow forced to give their support to anyone of their own race, even if they don't know him personally. It's a public menace. We've obviously been too easy-going, and the mistake Swann is making will create all the more stir since he was respected, not to say received, and was almost the only Jew that anyone knew. People will say: *Ab uno disce omnes*." (Satisfaction at having hit at the right moment upon so apt a quotation alone brightened with a proud smile the melancholy countenance of the betrayed nobleman.)

I was longing to know exactly what had happened between the Prince and Swann, and to catch the latter, if he had not already gone home. "I don't mind telling you," the Duchess answered me when I spoke to her of this desire, "that I for my part am not over-anxious to see him, because it appears, from what I was told just now at Mme de Saint-Euverte's, that he wants me to make the acquaintance of his wife and daughter before he dies. God knows I'm terribly distressed that he should be ill, but in the first place I hope it isn't as serious as all that. And besides, it isn't a valid reason, because otherwise it would be really too easy. A writer with no talent would only have to say: 'Vote for me at the Academy because my wife is dying and I wish to give her this last happiness.' There would be no more entertaining if one was obliged to make friends with all the dying. My coachman might come to me with: 'My daughter is seriously ill, get me an invitation to the Princesse de Parme's.' I adore Charles, and I should hate having to refuse him, and so I prefer to avoid the risk of his asking me. I hope with all my heart that he isn't dying, as he says, but really, if it has to happen, it wouldn't be the moment for me to make the acquaintance of those two creatures who have deprived me of the most agreeable of my friends for the last fifteen years, and whom he would leave on my hands without my even being able to make use of their society to see him, since he would be dead!"

Meanwhile M. de Bréauté had not ceased to brood upon the refutation of his story by Colonel de Froberville.

"I don't question the accuracy of your version, my dear fellow," he said, "but I had mine from a good source. It was the Prince de La Tour d'Auvergne who told me."

"I'm surprised that a learned man like yourself should still say 'Prince de La Tour d'Auvergne,' " the Duc de Guermantes broke in. "You know that he's nothing of the kind. There is only one member of that family left: Oriane's uncle, the Duc de Bouillon."

"Mme de Villeparisis's brother?" I asked, remembering that she had been Mlle de Bouillon.

"Precisely. Oriane, Mme de Lambresac is saying how-d'ye-do to you."

And indeed, one saw from time to time, forming and fading like a shooting star, a faint smile directed by the Duchesse de Lambresac at somebody whom she had recognised. But this smile, instead of taking definite shape in an active affirmation, in a language mute but clear, was drowned almost immediately in a sort of ideal ecstasy which expressed nothing, while her head drooped in a gesture of blissful benediction, recalling that which a slightly senile prelate bestows upon a crowd of communicants. There was not the least trace of senility about Mme de Lambresac. But I was already acquainted with this particular type of old-fashioned distinction. At Combray and in Paris, all my grandmother's friends were in the habit of greeting one another at a social gathering with as seraphic an air as if they had caught sight of someone of their acquaintance in church, at the moment of the Elevation or during a funeral, and were offering him a languid greeting which ended in prayer. At this point a remark made by M. de Guermantes was to complete the comparison that I was making. "But you have seen the Duc de Bouillon," he said to me. "He was just leaving my library this afternoon as you came in, a short gentleman with white hair." It was the man I had taken for a man of business from Combray, and yet, now that I came to think it over, I could see the resemblance to Mme de Villeparisis. The similarity between the evanescent greetings of the Duchesse de Lambresac and those of my grandmother's friends had begun to arouse my interest by showing me how in all narrow and closed societies, be they those of the minor gentry or of the great nobility, the old manners persist, enabling us to recapture, like an archaeologist, something of the upbringing, and the ethos it reflects, that prevailed in the days of the Vicomte d'Arlincourt and Loïsa Puget. Better still now, the perfect conformity in appearance between a petty bourgeois from Combray of his generation and the Duc de Bouillon reminded me of what had already struck me so forcibly when I had seen Saint-Loup's maternal grandfather, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, in a

daguerreotype in which he was exactly similar, in dress, appearance and manner, to my great-uncle—that social, and even individual, differences are merged when seen from a distance in the uniformity of an epoch. The truth is that similarity of dress and also the reflexion of the spirit of the age in facial composition occupy so much more important a place in a person's make-up than his caste, which bulks large only in his own self-esteem and the imagination of other people, that in order to realise that a nobleman of the time of Louis-Philippe differs less from an ordinary citizen of the time of Louis-Philippe than from a nobleman of the time of Louis XV, it is not necessary to visit the galleries of the Louvre.

At that moment, a Bavarian musician with long hair, whom the Princesse de Guermantes had taken under her wing, bowed to Oriane. She responded with a nod, but the Duke, furious at seeing his wife greet a person whom he did not know, who looked rather weird, and, so far as M. de Guermantes understood, had an extremely bad reputation, turned upon his wife with a terrible and inquisitorial air, as much as to say: "Who in the world is that barbarian?" Poor Mme de Guermantes's position was already distinctly complicated, and if the musician had felt a little pity for this martyred wife, he would have made off as quickly as possible. But, whether from a desire not to submit to the humiliation that had just been inflicted on him in public, before the eyes of the Duke's oldest and most intimate friends, whose presence there had perhaps been responsible to some extent for his silent bow, and to show that it was on the best of grounds and not without knowing her already that he had greeted the Duchesse de Guermantes, or whether in obedience to an obscure but irresistible impulse to commit a gaffe which drove him—at a moment when he ought to have trusted to the spirit—to apply the whole letter of the law of etiquette, the musician came closer to Mme de Guermantes and said to her: "Madame la Duchesse, I should like to have the honour of being presented to the Duke." Mme de Guermantes was miserable in the extreme. But after all, even if she was a deceived wife, she was still Duchesse de Guermantes and could not appear to have been stripped of the right to introduce to her husband the people whom she knew. "Basin," she said, "allow me to present to you M. d'Herweck."

"I need not ask whether you are going to Mme de Saint-Euverte's tomorrow," Colonel de Froberville said to Mme de Guermantes, to dispel the painful impression produced by M. d'Herweck's ill-timed request. "The whole of Paris will be there."

Meanwhile, turning towards the indiscreet musician with a single movement and as though he were carved out of a solid block, the Duc de Guermantes, drawing himself up, monumental, mute, wrathful, like Jupiter Tonans, remained thus motionless for some seconds, his eyes ablaze with anger and astonishment, his crinkly hair seeming to emerge from a crater. Then, as though carried away by an impulse which alone enabled him to perform the act of politeness that was demanded of him, and after appearing by his aggressive demeanour to be calling the entire company to witness that he did not know the Bavarian musician, clasping his white-gloved hands behind his back, he jerked his body forward and bestowed upon the musician a bow so profound, instinct with such stupefaction and rage, so abrupt, so violent, that the trembling artist recoiled, bowing as he went, in order not to receive a formidable butt in the stomach.

"Well, the fact is I shan't be in Paris," the Duchess answered Colonel de Froberville. "I must tell you (though I ought to be ashamed to confess such a thing) that I have lived all these years without seeing the stained-glass windows at Montfort-l'Amaury. It's shocking, but there it is. And so, to make amends for my shameful ignorance, I decided that I would go and see them tomorrow."

M. de Bréauté smiled a subtle smile. For he was well aware that, if the Duchess had been able to live all these years without seeing the windows at Montfort-l'Amaury, this artistic excursion had not all of a sudden taken on the urgent character of an "emergency" operation and might without danger, after having been put off for more than twenty-five years, be retarded for twenty-four hours. The plan that the Duchess had formed was simply the Guermantes way of decreeing that the Saint-Euverte establishment was definitely not a socially respectable house, but a house to which you were invited so that your name might afterwards be flaunted in the account in the *Gaulois*, a house that would award the seal of supreme elegance to those, or at any rate to her (should there be but one), who would not be seen there. The delicate amusement of M. de Bréauté, coupled with the poetical pleasure which society people felt when they saw Mme de Guermantes do things which their own inferior position did not allow them to imitate but the mere sight of which brought to their lips the smile of the peasant tied to his glebe when he sees freer and more fortunate men pass by above his head—this delicate pleasure could in no way be compared with the concealed but frantic delight which M. de Froberville instantaneously experienced.

The efforts that this gentleman was making so that people should not hear his laughter had made him turn as red as a turkey-cock, in spite of which it was with a running interruption of hiccups of joy that he exclaimed in a pitying tone: "Oh! poor aunt Saint-Euverte, she'll make herself sick over it! No, the unhappy woman isn't to have her duchess! What a blow! It'll be the death of her!" He doubled up with laughter, and in his exhilaration could not help stamping his feet and rubbing his hands. Smiling out of one eye and one small corner of her lips at M. de Froberville, whose amiable intention she appreciated, though she found less tolerable the deadly boredom of his company, Mme de Guermantes finally decided to leave him.

"I say, I'm afraid I'm going to *have* to bid you goodnight," she said to him as she rose with an air of melancholy resignation, and as though it grieved her. Beneath the magic spell of her blue eyes her gently musical voice made one think of the poetical lament of a fairy. "Basin wants me to go and talk to Marie for a while."

In reality, she was tired of listening to Froberville, who went on envying her her visit to Montfort-l'Amaury, when she knew quite well that he had never heard of the windows before in his life, and besides would not for anything in the world have missed going to the Saint-Euverte party. "Good-bye, I've barely said a word to

you, but it's always like that at parties—we never really see each other, we never say the things we should like to; in fact it's the same everywhere in this life. Let's hope that when we are dead things will be better arranged. At any rate we shan't always be having to put on low-cut dresses. And yet one never knows. We may perhaps have to display our bones and worms on great occasions. Why not? Just look at old mother Rampillon—do you see any great difference between her and a skeleton in an open dress? It's true that she has every right to look like that, for she must be at least a hundred. She was already one of those sacred monsters before whom I refused to bow the knee when I made my first appearance in society. I thought she had been dead for years; which for that matter would be the only possible explanation for the spectacle she presents. It's most impressive and liturgical; quite *Campo Santo*!”

The Duchess had moved away from Froberville. He followed her: “Just one word in your ear.” Slightly irritated, “Well, what is it now?” she said to him stiffly. And he, having been afraid lest at the last moment she might change her mind about Montfort-l'Amaury: “I didn't like to mention it for Mme de Saint-Euverte's sake, so as not to upset her, but since you don't intend to be there, I may tell you that I'm glad for your sake, because she has measles in the house!” “Oh, good gracious!” said Oriane, who had a horror of diseases. “But that wouldn't matter to me, I've had it already. You can't get it twice.” “So the doctors say. I know people who've had it four times. Anyhow, you are warned.” As for himself, the fictitious measles would have needed to attack him in reality and to chain him to his bed before he would have resigned himself to missing the Saint-Euverte party to which he had looked forward for so many months. He would have the pleasure of seeing so many smart people there, the still greater pleasure of remarking that certain things had gone wrong, and the supreme pleasure of being able for long afterwards to boast that he had mingled with the former and, exaggerating or inventing them, of deploring the latter.

I took advantage of the Duchess's moving to rise also in order to make my way to the smoking-room and find out the truth about Swann. “Don't believe a word of what Babal told us,” she said to me. “Little Molé would never poke her nose into a place like that. They tell us that to entice us. Nobody ever goes to them and they are never asked anywhere either. He admits it himself: ‘We spend the evenings alone by our own fireside.’ As he always says *we*, not like royalty, but to include his wife, I don't press him. But I know all about it.” We passed two young men whose great and dissimilar beauty derived from the same woman. They were the two sons of Mme de Surgis, the latest mistress of the Duc de Guermantes. Both were resplendent with their mother's perfections, but each in a different way. To one had passed, rippling through a virile body, the regal bearing of Mme de Surgis, and the same glowing, rufous, pearly paleness flooded the marmoreal cheeks of mother and son; but his brother had received the Grecian brow, the perfect nose, the statuesque neck, the eyes of infinite depth; composed thus of separate gifts, which the goddess had shared between them, their twofold beauty offered one the abstract pleasure of thinking that the cause of that beauty was something outside themselves; it was as though the principal attributes of their mother had been incarnated in two different bodies; this one was her stature and her complexion, the other her gaze, as Mars and Venus were only the Strength and the Beauty respectively of Jupiter. Full of respect though they were for M. de Guermantes, of whom they said: “He is a great friend of our parents,” the elder nevertheless thought that it would be wiser not to come up and greet the Duchess, of whose hostility towards his mother he was aware though without perhaps understanding the reason, and at the sight of us he slightly averted his head. The younger, who imitated his brother in everything, because, being stupid and moreover short-sighted, he did not dare to have his own opinion, inclined his head at the same angle, and the pair slipped past us towards the card-room, one behind the other, like a pair of allegorical figures.

Just as I reached this room, I was stopped by the Marquise de Citri, still beautiful though practically foaming at the mouth. Of decently noble birth, she had sought and made a brilliant match in marrying M. de Citri, whose great-grandmother had been an Aumale-Lorraine. But no sooner had she tasted this satisfaction than her natural cantankerousness had given her a horror of high society which did not absolutely preclude social life. Not only, at a party, did she deride everyone present, but her derision was so violent that mere laughter was not sufficiently acrid and developed into a guttural hiss. “Ah!” she said to me, pointing to the Duchesse de Guermantes who had now left my side and was already some way off, “what defeats me is that she can lead this sort of existence.” Was this the remark of a frenzied saint, astonished that the Gentiles did not come of their own accord to perceive the Truth, or that of an anarchist athirst for carnage? In any case there could be no possible justification for this criticism. In the first place, the “existence led” by Mme de Guermantes differed very little (except in indignation) from that led by Mme de Citri. Mme de Citri was amazed to find the Duchess capable of that mortal sacrifice: attendance at one of Marie-Gilbert's parties. It must be said in this particular instance that Mme de Citri was genuinely fond of the Princess, who was indeed the kindest of women, and knew that by attending her reception she was giving her great pleasure. Hence, in order to come to the party, she had put off a dancer whom she regarded as a genius and who was to have initiated her into the mysteries of Russian choreography. Another reason which to some extent stultified the concentrated rage which Mme de Citri felt on seeing Oriane greet one or other of the guests was that the Duchess, although at a far less advanced stage, showed the symptoms of the malady that was devouring Mme de Citri. We have seen, moreover, that she had carried the germs of it from her birth. In fact, being more intelligent than Mme de Citri, Mme de Guermantes would have had more justification than she for this nihilism (which was more than merely social), but it is true that certain qualities help us to endure the defects of our neighbour more than they make us suffer from them; and a man of great talent will normally pay less attention to other people's foolishness than would a fool. We have already described at sufficient length the nature of the Duchess's wit to convince the reader that, if it had nothing in common with high

intelligence, it was at least wit, a wit adroit in making use (like a translator) of different grammatical forms. Now nothing of this sort seemed to entitle Mme de Citri to look down upon qualities so closely akin to her own. She found everyone idiotic, but in her conversation, in her letters, showed herself distinctly inferior to the people whom she treated with such disdain. She had moreover such a thirst for destruction that, when she had more or less given up society, the pleasures that she then sought were subjected, each in turn, to her terrible undermining power. After she had given up parties for musical evenings, she used to say: "You like listening to that sort of thing, to music? Goodness me, it depends on the mood. But how deadly it can be! Ah, Beethoven!—what a bore! (*la barbe*).” With Wagner, then with Franck, with Debussy, she did not even take the trouble to say the word *barbe*, but merely drew her hand over her face with a tonsorial gesture. Presently, everything became boring. "Beautiful things are such a bore. Ah, pictures!—they're enough to drive you mad. How right you are, it is such a bore having to write letters!" Finally it was life itself that she declared to be boring (*rasante*), leaving you to wonder where she took her term of comparison.

I do not know whether it was the effect of what the Duchesse de Guermantes, on the evening when I first dined at her house, had said of this interior, but the card-room or smoking-room, with its pictorial floor, its tripods, its figures of gods and animals that gazed at you, the sphinxes stretched out along the arms of the chairs, and most of all the huge table of marble or enamelled mosaic, covered with symbolical signs more or less imitated from Etruscan and Egyptian art, gave me the impression of a magician's cell. And, indeed, on a chair drawn up to the glittering augural table, M. de Charlus in person, never touching a card, oblivious of what was going on around him, incapable of observing that I had entered the room, seemed precisely a magician applying all the force of his will and reason to drawing a horoscope. Not only were his eyes starting from his head like the eyes of a Pythian priestess on her tripod, but, so that nothing might distract him from labours which required the cessation of the most simple movements, he had (like a mathematician who will do nothing else until he has solved his problem) laid down beside him the cigar which he had previously been holding between his lips but had no longer the necessary equanimity of mind to think of smoking. Seeing the two crouching deities on the arms of the chair that stood facing him, one might have thought that the Baron was endeavouring to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, had it not been rather that of a young and living Oedipus seated in that very armchair where he had settled down to play. Now, the figure to which M. de Charlus was applying all his mental powers with such concentration, and which was not in fact one of the sort that are commonly studied *more geometrico*, was that which was proposed to him by the lineaments of the young Comte de Surgis; it appeared, so profound was M. de Charlus's absorption in front of it, to be some rebus, some riddle, some algebraical problem, of which he must try to penetrate the mystery or to work out the formula. In front of him the sibylline signs and the figures inscribed upon that Table of the Law seemed the grimoire which would enable the old sorcerer to tell in what direction the young man's destiny was shaping. Suddenly he became aware that I was watching him, raised his head as though he were waking from a dream, smiled at me and blushed. At that moment Mme de Surgis's other son came up behind the one who was playing, to look at his cards. When M. de Charlus had learned from me that they were brothers, his face could not conceal the admiration he felt for a family which could create masterpieces so splendid and so diverse. And what would have added to the Baron's enthusiasm would have been the discovery that the two sons of Mme de Surgis-le-Duc were sons not only of the same mother but of the same father. The children of Jupiter are dissimilar, but that is because he married first Metis, whose destiny it was to bring into the world wise children, then Themis, and after her Eurynome, and Mnemosyne, and Leto, and only as a last resort Juno. But to a single father Mme de Surgis had borne these two sons who had each received beauty from her, but a different beauty.

At last I had the pleasure of seeing Swann come into this room, which was extremely large, so large that he did not at first catch sight of me. A pleasure mingled with sadness, a sadness which the other guests did not, perhaps, feel, their feeling consisting rather in that sort of fascination which is exercised by the strange and unexpected signs of an approaching death, a death that a man already has, in the popular saying, written on his face. And it was with an almost offensive amazement, in which there were elements of tactless curiosity, of cruelty, of relieved and at the same time anxious self-scrutiny (a blend of *suave mari magno* and *memento quia pulvis*, Robert would have said), that all eyes were fastened on that face the cheeks of which had been so eaten away, so whittled down, by illness, like a waning moon, that except at a certain angle, the angle doubtless from which Swann looked at himself, they stopped short like a flimsy piece of scenery to which only an optical illusion can add the appearance of depth. Whether because of the absence of those cheeks, no longer there to modify it, or because arteriosclerosis, which is also a form of intoxication, had reddened it as would drunkenness, or deformed it as would morphine, Swann's punchinello nose, absorbed for long years into an agreeable face, seemed now enormous, tumid, crimson, the nose of an old Hebrew rather than of a dilettante Valois. Perhaps, too, in these last days, the physical type that characterises his race was becoming more pronounced in him, at the same time as a sense of moral solidarity with the rest of the Jews, a solidarity which Swann seemed to have forgotten throughout his life, and which, one after another, his mortal illness, the Dreyfus case and the anti-semitic propaganda had reawakened. There are certain Jews, men of great refinement and social delicacy, in whom nevertheless there remain in reserve and in the wings, ready to enter their lives at a given moment, as in a play, a cad and a prophet. Swann had arrived at the age of the prophet. Certainly, with that face of his from which, under the influence of his disease, whole segments had vanished, as when a block of ice melts and whole slabs of it fall off, he had of course changed. But I could not help being struck by the much greater extent to which he had changed in relation to myself. Admirable and cultivated though he was, a man I was anything but bored to meet, I could not for the life of me understand

how I had been able to invest him long ago with such mystery that his appearance in the Champs-Élysées in his silk-lined cape would make my heart beat to the point where I was ashamed to approach him, and that at the door of the flat where such a being dwelt I could not ring the bell without being overcome with boundless agitation and alarm. All this had vanished not only from his house but from his person, and the idea of talking to him might or might not be agreeable to me, but had no effect whatever upon my nervous system.

And furthermore, how he had changed since that very afternoon, when I had met him—after all, only a few hours earlier—in the Duc de Guermantes's study! Had he really had a scene with the Prince, which had deeply upset him? The supposition was not necessary. The slightest efforts that are demanded of a person who is very ill quickly become for him an excessive strain. He has only to be exposed, when already tired, to the heat of a crowded drawing-room, for his features to change dramatically and turn blue, as happens in a few hours with an overripe pear or milk that is about to turn. Besides this, Swann's hair had thinned in places, and, as Mme de Guermantes remarked, needed attention from the furrier, looked as if it had been camphorated, and camphorated badly. I was just crossing the room to speak to Swann when unfortunately a hand fell upon my shoulder.

"Hallo, old boy, I'm in Paris for forty-eight hours. I called at your house and they told me you were here, so that it's to you that my aunt is indebted for the honour of my company at her party." It was Saint-Loup. I told him how greatly I admired the house. "Yes, it's very much the historic monument. Personally I find it deadly. We mustn't go near my uncle Palamède, or we shall be caught. Now that Mme Molé has gone (she's the one who rules the roost just now) he's rather at a loose end. I gather it was quite a spectacle, he never let her out of his sight for a moment, and didn't leave her until he'd seen her into her carriage. I bear my uncle no ill will, only I do think it odd that my family council, which has always been so hard on me, should be composed of the very ones who have lived it up the most, beginning with the biggest roisterer of the lot, my uncle Charlus, who is my surrogate guardian, has had more women than Don Juan, and is still carrying on in spite of his age. There was talk at one time of having me made a ward of court. I bet when all those gay old dogs met to consider the question and had me up to preach to me and tell me I was breaking my mother's heart, they dared not look one another in the face for fear of laughing. If you examined the composition of the council, you'd think they had deliberately chosen the greatest skirt-chasers."

Leaving aside M. de Charlus, with regard to whom my friend's astonishment did not seem to me more justified—though for different reasons, reasons which, moreover, were afterwards to undergo some modification in my mind—Robert was quite wrong to think it extraordinary that lessons in worldly wisdom should be given to a young man by people who have played the fool or are still doing so. Even if it is simply a question of atavism and family likeness, it is inevitable that the uncle who delivers the lecture should have more or less the same failings as the nephew whom he has been deputed to scold. Nor is the uncle in the least hypocritical in so doing, deluded as he is by the faculty people have of believing, in every new set of circumstances, that "this is quite different," a faculty which enables them to adopt artistic, political and other errors without perceiving that they are the same errors which they exposed, ten years ago, in another school of painting which they condemned, another political affair which they felt to deserve a loathing that they no longer feel, and espouse those errors without recognising them in a fresh disguise. Besides, even if the faults of the uncle are different from those of the nephew, heredity may none the less to a certain extent be responsible, for the effect does not always resemble the cause, as a copy resembles its original, and even if the uncle's faults are worse, he may easily believe them to be less serious.



When M. de Charlus had made indignant remonstrances to Robert, who in any case was unaware of his uncle's true inclinations at the time—and even if it had still been the time when the Baron used to denounce his own inclinations—he might perfectly well have been sincere in considering, from the point of view of a man of the world, that Robert was infinitely more culpable than himself. Had not Robert, at the time when his uncle had been deputed to make him listen to reason, come within an inch of getting himself ostracised by society? Had he not very nearly been blackballed at the Jockey? Had he not made himself a public laughing-stock by the vast sums that he threw away upon a woman of the lowest type, by his friendships with people—authors, actors, Jews—not one of whom moved in society, by his opinions, which were indistinguishable from those held by traitors, by the grief he was causing to all his family? How could this scandalous existence be compared with that of M. de Charlus who had managed, so far, not only to retain but to enhance still further his position as a Guermantes, being in society an absolutely privileged person, sought after, adulated in the most exclusive circles, and a man who, married to a Bourbon princess, a woman of eminence, had succeeded in making her happy, had shown a devotion to her memory more fervent, more scrupulous than is customary in society, and had thus been as good a husband as a son?

"But are you sure that M. de Charlus has had all those mistresses?" I asked, not, of course, with the diabolical intention of revealing to Robert the secret that I had discovered, but irritated, nevertheless, at hearing him maintain an erroneous theory with such smug assurance. He merely shrugged his shoulders in response to what he took for ingenuousness on my part. "Not that I blame him in the least, I consider that he's perfectly right." And he proceeded to outline to me a theory of conduct that would have horrified him at Balbec (where he was not content with branding seducers, death seeming to him the only punishment adequate to their crime). Then, however, he had still been in love and jealous. Now he even went so far as to sing the praises of houses of assignation. "They're the only places where you can find a shoe to fit you, sheathe your weapon, as we say in the Army." He no longer felt for places of that sort the disgust that had inflamed him at Balbec when I made an allusion to them, and hearing what he now said, I told him that Bloch had introduced me to one, but Robert replied that the one which Bloch frequented must be "pretty vile, a poor man's paradise!—It all depends, though: where was it?" I remained vague, for I had just remembered that it was there that Rachel whom Robert had so passionately loved used to give herself for a louis. "Anyhow, I can take you to some far better ones, full of stunning women." Hearing me express the desire that he should take me as soon as possible to the ones he knew, which must indeed be far superior to the house to which Bloch had introduced me, he expressed sincere regret that he would be unable to do so on this occasion as he was leaving Paris next day. "It will have to be my next leave," he said. "You'll see, there are young girls there, even," he added with an air of mystery. "There's a little Mademoiselle de ... I think it's d'Orgeville—I can let you have the exact name—who is the daughter of quite tip-top people; her mother was by way of being a La Croix-l'Evêque, and they're really out of the top drawer—in fact they're more or less related, if I'm not mistaken, to my aunt Oriane. Anyhow, you have only to see the child to realise at once that she must be somebody's daughter" (I could detect, hovering for a moment over Robert's voice, the shadow of the Guermantes family genie, which passed like a cloud, but at a great height and without stopping). "She looks to me a marvellous proposition. The parents are always ill and can't look after her. Gad, the child must have some amusement, and I count upon you to provide it!" "Oh, when are you coming back?" "I don't know. If you don't absolutely insist upon duchesses" (duchess being for the aristocracy the only title that denotes a particularly brilliant rank, as the lower orders talk of "princesses"), "in a different class of goods there's Mme Putbus's chambermaid."

At this moment, Mme de Surgis entered the room in search of her sons. As soon as he saw her M. de Charlus went up to her with a friendliness by which the Marquise was all the more agreeably surprised in that an icy coldness was what she had expected from the Baron, who had always posed as Oriane's protector and alone of the family—the rest being too often inclined to indulgence towards the Duke's irregularities because of his wealth and from jealousy of the Duchess—kept his brother's mistresses ruthlessly at a distance. And so Mme de Surgis would have fully understood the motives for the attitude that she dreaded to find in the Baron, but never for a moment suspected those for the wholly different welcome that she did receive from him. He spoke to her with admiration of the portrait that Jacquet had painted of her years before. This admiration waxed indeed to an enthusiasm which, if it was partly calculating, with the object of preventing the Marquise from going away, of "engaging" her, as Robert used to say of enemy armies whose forces one wants to keep tied down at a particular point, was also perhaps sincere. For, if everyone was pleased to admire in her sons the regal bearing and the beautiful eyes of Mme de Surgis, the Baron could taste an inverse but no less keen pleasure in finding those charms combined in the mother, as in a portrait which does not in itself provoke desire, but feeds, with the aesthetic admiration that it does provoke, the desires that it awakens. These now gave in retrospect a voluptuous charm to Jacquet's portrait itself, and at that moment the Baron would gladly have purchased it to study therein the physiological pedigree of the two Surgis boys.

"You see, I wasn't exaggerating," Robert said in my ear. "Just look at my uncle's attentiveness to Mme de Surgis. Though I must say it does surprise me. If Oriane knew, she would be furious. Really, there are enough women in the world without his having to go and pounce on her," he went on. Like everybody who is not in love, he imagined that one chooses the person one loves after endless deliberation and on the strength of diverse qualities and advantages. Besides, while completely mistaken about his uncle, whom he supposed to be devoted to women, Robert, in his rancour, spoke too lightly of M. de Charlus. One is not always somebody's nephew with impunity. It is often through him that a hereditary habit is transmitted sooner or later. We might indeed arrange a whole gallery of portraits, named like the German comedy *Uncle and Nephew*, in which we

should see the uncle watching jealously, albeit unconsciously, for his nephew to end by becoming like himself. I might even add that this gallery would be incomplete were we not to include in it uncles who are not blood relations, being the uncles only of their nephews' wives. For the Messieurs de Charlus of this world are so convinced that they themselves are the only good husbands, and what is more the only ones of whom a wife would not be jealous, that generally, out of affection for their niece, they make her marry another Charlus. Which tangles the skein of family likenesses. And, to affection for the niece is added at times affection for her betrothed as well. Such marriages are not uncommon, and are often what is called happy.

"What were we talking about? Oh yes, that big, fair girl, Mme Putbus's maid. She goes with women too, but I don't suppose you mind that. I tell you frankly, I've never seen such a gorgeous creature." "I imagine her as being rather Giorgionesque?" "Wildly Giorgionesque! Oh, if I only had a little time in Paris, what wonderful things there are to be done! And then one goes on to the next. Because love is all rot, you know, I've finished with all that."

I soon discovered, to my surprise, that he had equally finished with literature, whereas it was merely with regard to literary men that he had struck me as being disillusioned at our last meeting. ("They're practically all a pack of scoundrels," he had said to me, a remark that was to be explained by his justified resentment towards certain of Rachel's friends. For they had persuaded her that she would never have any talent if she allowed Robert, "scion of an alien race," to acquire an influence over her, and with her used to make fun of him, to his face, at the dinners he gave for them.) But in reality Robert's love of Letters was in no sense profound, did not spring from his true nature, was only a by-product of his love of Rachel, and had faded with the latter at the same time as his loathing for voluptuaries and his religious respect for the virtue of women.

"There's something rather strange about those two young men. Look at that curious passion for gambling, Marquise," said M. de Charlus, drawing Mme de Surgis's attention to her two sons, as though he were completely unaware of their identity. "They must be a pair of orientals, they have certain characteristic features, they're perhaps Turks," he went on, so as to give further support to his feigned innocence and at the same time to exhibit a vague antipathy, which, when in due course it gave place to affability, would prove that the latter was addressed to the young men solely in their capacity as sons of Mme de Surgis, having begun only when the Baron discovered who they were. Perhaps, too, M. de Charlus, whose insolence was a natural gift which he delighted in exercising, was taking advantage of the few moments in which he was supposed not to know the name of these two young men to have a little fun at Mme de Surgis's expense and to indulge in his habitual mockery, as Scapin takes advantage of his master's disguise to give him a sound drubbing.

"They are my sons," said Mme de Surgis, with a blush that would not have coloured her cheeks had she been shrewder without necessarily being more virtuous. She would then have understood that the air of absolute indifference or of sarcasm which M. de Charlus displayed towards a young man was no more sincere than the wholly superficial admiration which he showed for a woman expressed his true nature. The woman to whom he could go on indefinitely paying the prettiest compliments might well be jealous of the look which, while talking to her, he shot at a man whom he would pretend afterwards not to have noticed. For that look was different from the looks which M. de Charlus kept for women; a special look, springing from the depths, which even at a party could not help straying naïvely in the direction of young men, like the look in a tailor's eye which betrays his profession by immediately fastening upon your attire.

"Oh, how very odd!" replied M. de Charlus with some insolence, as though his mind had to make a long journey to arrive at a reality so different from what he had pretended to suppose. "But I don't know them," he added, fearing lest he might have gone a little too far in the expression of his antipathy and have thus paralysed the Marquise's intention of effecting an introduction. "Would you allow me to introduce them to you?" Mme de Surgis inquired timidly. "Why, good gracious, just as you please, I don't mind, but I'm perhaps not very entertaining company for such young people," M. de Charlus intoned with the air of chilly reluctance of someone allowing himself to be forced into an act of politeness.

"Arnulphe, Victurnien, come here at once," said Mme de Surgis. Victurnien rose purposefully. Arnulphe, though he could not see further than his brother, followed him meekly.

"It's the sons' turn, now," muttered Saint-Loup. "It's enough to make one die laughing. He tries to curry favour with everyone, down to the dog in the yard. It's all the funnier as my uncle detests pretty boys. And just look how seriously he's listening to them. If it was me who tried to introduce them to him, he'd send me away with a flea in my ear. Listen, I shall have to go and say howd'ye-do to Oriane. I have so little time in Paris that I want to try and see all the people here that otherwise I ought to leave cards on."

"How well brought-up they seem, what charming manners," M. de Charlus was saying.

"Do you think so?" Mme de Surgis replied, highly delighted.

Swann, having caught sight of me, came over to Saint-Loup and myself. His Jewish gaiety was less subtle than his socialite witticisms: "Good evening," he said to us. "Heavens! all three of us together—people will think it's a meeting of the Syndicate. In another minute they'll be looking for the money-box!" He had not observed that M. de Beauséart was just behind him and could hear what he said. The General could not help wincing. We heard the voice of M. de Charlus close beside us: "What, so you're called Victurnien, after the *Cabinet des Antiques*," the Baron was saying, to prolong his conversation with the two young men. "By Balzac, yes," replied the elder Surgis, who had never read a line of that novelist's work, but to whom his tutor had remarked, a few days earlier, upon the similarity of his Christian name and d'Esgrignon's. Mme de Surgis was delighted to see her son shine, and M. de Charlus in ecstasy at such a display of learning.

"It appears that Loubet<sup>4</sup> is entirely on our side, I have it from an absolutely trustworthy source," Swann informed Saint-Loup, but this time in a lower tone so as not to be overheard by the General. He had begun to find his wife's Republican connexions more interesting now that the Dreyfus case had become his chief preoccupation. "I tell you this because I know that you are with us up to the hilt."

"Not quite to that extent; you're completely mistaken," Robert replied. "It's a bad business, and I'm sorry I ever got involved in it. It was no affair of mine. If it were to begin over again, I should keep well clear of it. I'm a soldier, and my first loyalty is to the Army. If you stay with M. Swann for a moment, I shall be back presently. I must go and talk to my aunt."

But I saw that it was with Mlle d'Ambresac that he went to talk, and was distressed by the thought that he had lied to me about the possibility of their engagement. My mind was set at rest when I learned that he had been introduced to her half an hour earlier by Mme de Marsantes, who was anxious for the marriage, the Ambresacs being extremely rich.

"At last," said M. de Charlus to Mme de Surgis. "I find a young man with some education, who has read a bit, who knows who Balzac is. And it gives me all the more pleasure to meet him where that sort of thing has become most rare, in the house of one of my peers, one of ourselves," he added, laying stress upon the words. It was all very well for the Guermantes to profess to regard all men as equal; on the great occasions when they found themselves among "well-born" people, especially if they were not quite so "well-born" as themselves, whom they were anxious and able to flatter, they did not hesitate to trot out old family memories. "At one time," the Baron went on, "the word aristocrat meant the best people, in intellect and in heart. Now, here is the first person I've come across in our world who has ever heard of Victurnien d'Esgrignon. No, I'm wrong in saying the first. There are also a Polignac and a Montesquiou," added M. de Charlus, who knew that this twofold association must inevitably thrill the Marquise. "However, in your sons' case it runs in the family: their maternal grandfather had a famous eighteenth-century collection. I will show you mine if you will give me the pleasure of coming to luncheon with me one day," he said to the young Victurnien. "I can show you an interesting edition of the *Cabinet des Antiques* with corrections in Balzac's own hand. I shall be charmed to bring the two Victurniens face to face."

I could not bring myself to leave Swann. He had arrived at that stage of exhaustion in which a sick man's body becomes a mere retort in which to study chemical reactions. His face was mottled with tiny spots of Prussian blue, which seemed not to belong to the world of living things, and emitted the sort of odour which, at school, after "experiments," makes it so unpleasant to have to remain in a "science" classroom. I asked him if it was true that he had had a long conversation with the Prince de Guermantes and if he would tell me what it had been about.

"Yes," he said, "but go for a moment first with M. de Charlus and Mme de Surgis. I'll wait for you here."

And indeed M. de Charlus, having suggested to Mme de Surgis that they should leave this room, which was too hot, and go and sit for a while in another, had invited not the two sons to accompany their mother, but myself. In this way he had made himself appear, after having successfully hooked them, to have lost all interest in the two young men. He was moreover paying me an inexpensive compliment, Mme de Surgis-le-Duc being socially in rather bad odour.

Unfortunately, no sooner had we sat down in an alcove from which there was no way of escape than Mme de Saint-Euverte, a favourite butt for the Baron's jibes, came past. She, perhaps to mask or else openly to disregard the ill will which she inspired in M. de Charlus, and above all to show that she was on intimate terms with a woman who was talking so familiarly to him, gave a disdainfully friendly greeting to the famous beauty, who acknowledged it while peeping out of the corner of her eye at M. de Charlus with a mocking smile. But the alcove was so narrow that Mme de Saint-Euverte, when she went behind us to continue her canvass of her guests for the morrow, found herself cornered and could not easily escape—a heaven-sent opportunity which M. de Charlus, anxious to display his insolent wit before the mother of the two young men, took good care not to let slip. A silly question which I put to him without any malicious intent gave him the cue for a triumphal tirade of which the wretched Saint-Euverte, more or less immobilised behind us, could not have missed a single word.

"Would you believe it, this impertinent young man," he said, indicating me to Mme de Surgis, "has just asked me, without the slightest concern for the proper reticence in regard to such needs, whether I was going to Mme de Saint-Euverte's, in other words, I suppose, whether I was suffering from diarrhoea. I should endeavour in any case to relieve myself in some more comfortable place than the house of a person who, if my memory serves me, was celebrating her centenary when I first began to move in society, that is to say, not in her house. And yet who could be more interesting to listen to? What a host of historic memories, seen and lived through in the days of the First Empire and the Restoration, and intimate revelations, too, which certainly had nothing of the 'Saint' about them but must have been extremely 'vertes'<sup>5</sup> if one may judge by the friskiness still left in those venerable hams. What would prevent me from questioning her about those thrilling times is the sensitiveness of my olfactory organ. The proximity of the lady is enough. I suddenly say to myself: oh, good lord, someone has broken the lid of my cesspool, when it's simply the Marquise opening her mouth to emit some invitation. And you can imagine that if I had the misfortune to go to her house, the cesspool would expand into a formidable sewage-cart. She bears a mystic name, though, which has always made me think with jubilation, although she has long since passed the date of her jubilee, of that stupid line of so-called 'deliquescent' poetry: 'Ah, green, how green my soul was on that day ...' But I require a cleaner sort of verdure. They tell me that the indefatigable old street-walker gives 'garden-parties.' Myself, I should describe them as 'invitations to explore the sewers.' Are you going to wallow there?" he asked Mme de Surgis, who now

found herself in a quandary. Wishing to pretend for the Baron's benefit that she was not going, and knowing that she would give days of her life rather than miss the Saint-Euverte party, she got out of it by a compromise, that is to say by expressing uncertainty. This uncertainty took a form so clumsily amateurish and so miserably tacked together that M. de Charlus, not afraid of offending Mme de Surgis, whom nevertheless he was anxious to please, began to laugh to show her that "it didn't wash."

"I always admire people who make plans," she said. "I often change mine at the last moment. There's a question of a summer frock which may alter everything. I shall act upon the inspiration of the moment."

For my part, I was incensed at the abominable little speech that M. de Charlus had just made. I would have liked to shower blessings upon the giver of garden-parties. Unfortunately, in the social as in the political world, the victims are such cowards that one cannot for long remain indignant with their executioners. Mme de Saint-Euverte, who had succeeded in escaping from the alcove to which we were barring the entry, brushed against the Baron inadvertently as she passed him, and, by a reflex of snobbishness which wiped out all her anger, perhaps even in the hope of securing an opening of a kind at which this could not be the first attempt, exclaimed: "Oh! I beg your pardon, Monsieur de Charlus, I hope I did not hurt you," as though she were kneeling before her lord and master. The latter did not deign to reply otherwise than by a broad ironical smile, and conceded only a "Good evening," which, uttered as though he had noticed the Marquise's presence only after she had greeted him, was an additional insult. Finally, with an extreme obsequiousness which pained me for her sake, Mme de Saint-Euverte came up to me and, drawing me aside, murmured in my ear: "Tell me, what have I done to M. de Charlus? They say that he doesn't consider me smart enough for him," she added, laughing heartily. I remained serious. For one thing, I thought it stupid of her to appear to believe or to wish other people to believe that nobody, really, was as smart as herself. For another thing, people who laugh so heartily at what they themselves have said, when it is not funny, dispense us accordingly, by taking upon themselves the responsibility for the mirth, from joining in it.

"Other people assure me that he is cross because I don't invite him. But he doesn't give me much encouragement. He seems to avoid me." (This expression struck me as inadequate.) "Try to find out, and come and tell me tomorrow. And if he feels remorseful and wishes to come too, bring him. Forgive and forget. Indeed, I should be quite glad to see him, because it would annoy Mme de Surgis. I give you a free hand. You have a remarkable flair for these matters and I don't wish to appear to be begging my guests to come. In any case, I count upon you absolutely."

It occurred to me that Swann must be getting tired of waiting for me. Moreover I did not wish to be too late in returning home because of Albertine, and, taking leave of Mme de Surgis and M. de Charlus, I went in search of my invalid in the card-room. I asked him whether what he had said to the Prince in their conversation in the garden was really what M. de Bréauté (whom I did not name) had reported to us, about a little play by Bergotte. He burst out laughing: "There's not a word of truth in it, not one, it's a complete fabrication and would have been an utterly stupid thing to say. It's really incredible, this spontaneous generation of falsehood. I won't ask who it was that told you, but it would be really interesting, in a field as limited as this, to work back from one person to another and find out how the story arose. Anyhow, what concern can it be of other people, what the Prince said to me? People are very inquisitive. I've never been inquisitive, except when I was in love, and when I was jealous. And a lot I ever learned! Are you jealous?" I told Swann that I had never experienced jealousy, that I did not even know what it was. "Well, you can count yourself lucky. A little jealousy is not too unpleasant, for two reasons. In the first place, it enables people who are not inquisitive to take an interest in the lives of others, or of one other at any rate. And then it makes one feel the pleasure of possession, of getting into a carriage with a woman, of not allowing her to go about by herself. But that's only in the very first stages of the disease, or when the cure is almost complete. In between, it's the most agonising torment. However, I must confess that I haven't had much experience even of the two pleasures I've mentioned—the first because of my own nature, which is incapable of sustained reflexion; the second because of circumstances, because of the woman, I should say the women, of whom I've been jealous. But that makes no difference. Even when one is no longer attached to things, it's still something to have been attached to them; because it was always for reasons which other people didn't grasp. The memory of those feelings is something that's to be found only in ourselves; we must go back into ourselves to look at it. You mustn't laugh at this idealistic jargon, but what I mean to say is that I've been very fond of life and very fond of art. Well, now that I'm a little too weary to live with other people, those old feelings, so personal and individual, that I had in the past, seem to me—it's the mania of all collectors—very precious. I open my heart to myself like a sort of showcase, and examine one by one all those love affairs of which the rest of the world can have known nothing. And of this collection, to which I'm now even more attached than to my others, I say to myself, rather as Mazarin said of his books, but in fact without the least distress, that it will be very tiresome to have to leave it all. But, to come back to my conversation with the Prince, I shall tell one person only, and that person is going to be you."

My attention was distracted by the conversation that M. de Charlus, who had returned to the card-room, was carrying on endlessly nearby. "And are you a reader too? What do you do?" he asked Comte Arnulphe, who had never heard even the name of Balzac. But his short-sightedness, since it caused him to see everything very small, gave him the appearance of seeing great distances, so that—rare poetry in a statuesque Greek god—remote, mysterious stars seemed to be engraved upon his pupils.

"Suppose we took a turn in the garden," I said to Swann, while Comte Arnulphe, in a lisping voice which seemed to indicate that mentally at least his development was incomplete, replied to M. de Charlus with an artlessly obliging precision: "Oh, you know, mainly golf, tennis, football, running, and especially polo." Thus

had Minerva, having subdivided herself, ceased in certain cities to be the goddess of wisdom, and had become partly incarnated in a purely sporting, horse-loving deity, Athene Hippia. And he went to St Moritz also to ski, for Pallas Tritogeneia frequents the high peaks and outruns swift horsemen. "Ah!" replied M. de Charlus with the transcendental smile of the intellectual who does not even take the trouble to conceal his derision, but, on the other hand, feels himself so superior to other people and so far despises the intelligence of those who are least stupid that he barely differentiates between them and the most stupid, as long as the latter are attractive to him in some other way. While talking to Arnulphe, M. de Charlus felt that by the mere act of addressing him he was conferring upon him a superiority which everyone else must recognise and envy. "No," Swann replied, "I'm too tired to walk about. Let's sit down somewhere in a corner, I cannot remain on my feet any longer." This was true, and yet the act of beginning to talk had already restored to him a certain vivacity. For it is a fact that in the most genuine exhaustion there is, especially in highly-strung people, an element that depends on attention and is preserved only by an act of memory. We feel suddenly weary as soon as we are afraid of feeling weary, and, to throw off our fatigue, it suffices us to forget about it. To be sure, Swann was far from being one of those indefatigable invalids who, entering a room worn out and ready to drop, revive in conversation like a flower in water and are able for hours on end to draw from their own words a reserve of strength which they do not, alas, communicate to their hearers, who appear more and more exhausted the more the talker comes back to life. But Swann belonged to that stout Jewish race, in whose vital energy, its resistance to death, its individual members seem to share. Stricken severally by their own diseases, as it is stricken itself by persecution, they continue indefinitely to struggle against terrible agonies which may be prolonged beyond every apparently possible limit, when already one can see only a prophet's beard surmounted by a huge nose which dilates to inhale its last breath, before the hour strikes for the ritual prayers and the punctual procession of distant relatives begins, advancing with mechanical movements as upon an Assyrian frieze.

We went to sit down, but, before moving away from the group formed by M. de Charlus with the two young Surgis and their mother, Swann could not resist fastening upon the lady's bosom the lingering, dilated, concupiscent gaze of a connoisseur. He even put up his monocle for a better view, and, while he talked to me, kept glancing in her direction.

"Here, word for word," he said to me when we were seated, "is my conversation with the Prince, and if you remember what I said to you just now, you will see why I choose you as my confidant. There is another reason as well, which you will learn one day. 'My dear Swann,' the Prince de Guermantes said to me, 'you must forgive me if I have appeared to be avoiding you for some time past.' (I had never even noticed it, having been ill and avoiding society myself.) 'In the first place, I had heard it said, and I fully expected, that in the unhappy affair which is splitting the country in two your views were diametrically opposed to mine. Now, it would have been extremely painful to me to hear you express these views in my presence. I was so sensitive on the matter that when the Princess, two years ago, heard her brother-in-law, the Grand Duke of Hesse, say that Dreyfus was innocent, she was not content with promptly challenging the assertion but refrained from repeating it to me in order not to upset me. At about the same time, the Crown Prince of Sweden came to Paris and, having probably heard someone say that the Empress Eugénie was a Dreyfusist, confused her with the Princess (a strange confusion, you will admit, between a woman of the rank of my wife and a Spaniard, a good deal less well-born than people make out, and married to a mere Bonaparte) and said to her: Princess, I am doubly glad to meet you, for I know that you hold the same view as myself of the Dreyfus case, which does not surprise me since Your Highness is Bavarian. Which drew down upon the Prince the answer: Sir, I am no longer anything but a French Princess, and I share the views of all my fellow-countrymen. Well, my dear Swann, about eighteen months ago, a conversation I had with General de Beausseuil made me suspect that, not an error, but grave illegalities, had been committed in the conduct of the trial.' "

We were interrupted (Swann did not want his story to be overheard) by the voice of M. de Charlus who (without, as it happened, paying us the slightest attention) came past escorting Mme de Surgis and stopped in the hope of detaining her for a moment longer, either on account of her sons or from that reluctance common to all the Guermantes to bring anything to an end, which kept them plunged in a sort of anxious inertia. Swann informed me in this connexion, a little later, of something that, for me, stripped the name Surgis-le-Duc of all the poetry that I had found in it. The Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc boasted a far higher social position, far grander connexions by marriage, than her cousin the Comte de Surgis, who had no money and lived on his estate in the country. But the suffix to her title, "le Duc," had not at all the origin which I attributed to it, and which had made me associate it in my imagination with Bourg-l'Abbé, Bois-le-Roi, etc. All that had happened was that a Comte de Surgis had married, under the Restoration, the daughter of an immensely rich industrial magnate, M. Leduc, or Le Duc, himself the son of a chemical manufacturer, the richest man of his day and a peer of France. King Charles X had created for the son born of this marriage the marquise of Surgis-le-Duc, a marquise of Surgis existing already in the family. The addition of the bourgeois surname had not prevented this branch from allying itself, on the strength of its enormous fortune, with the first families of the realm. And the present Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc, being extremely well-born, could have enjoyed a very high position in society. A demon of perversity had driven her, scorning the position ready-made for her, to flee from the conjugal roof and live a life of open scandal. Whereupon the society she had scorned at twenty, when it was at her feet, had cruelly spurned her at thirty, when, after ten years, nobody except a few faithful friends greeted her any longer, and she had had to set to work to reconquer laboriously, inch by inch, what she had possessed as a birthright (a round trip that isn't uncommon).

As for the great nobles, her kinsmen, whom she had disowned in the past, and who in their turn had disowned her, she found an excuse for the joy that she would feel in gathering them again to her bosom in the memories of childhood that she would be able to recall with them. And in saying this, with the object of disguising her snobbery, she was perhaps being less untruthful than she supposed. "Basin is all my girlhood!" she said on the day on which he came back to her. And indeed it was partly true. But she had miscalculated when she chose him for her lover. For all the women friends of the Duchesse de Guermantes were to rally round her, and so Mme de Surgis must descend for the second time that slope up which she had so laboriously toiled. "Well!" M. de Charlus was saying to her in an effort to prolong the conversation, "you must lay my tribute at the feet of the beautiful portrait. How is it? What has become of it?" "Why," replied Mme de Surgis, "you know I haven't got it now; my husband wasn't pleased with it." "Not pleased! With one of the greatest works of art of our time, equal to Nattier's Duchesse de Châteauroux, and, moreover, perpetuating no less majestic and heart-shattering a goddess. Oh, that little blue collar! I swear, Vermeer himself never painted a fabric more consummately—but we must not say it too loud or Swann will fall upon us to avenge his favourite painter, the Master of Delft." The Marquise, turning round, addressed a smile and held out her hand to Swann, who had risen to greet her. But almost without concealment, because his advanced years had deprived him either of the will, from indifference to the opinion of others, or the physical power, from the intensity of his desire and the weakening of the controls that help to disguise it, as soon as Swann, on taking the Marquise's hand, had seen her bosom at close range and from above, he plunged an attentive, serious, absorbed, almost anxious gaze into the depths of her corsage, and his nostrils, drugged by her perfume, quivered like the wings of a butterfly about to alight upon a half-glimpsed flower. Abruptly he shook off the intoxication that had seized him, and Mme de Surgis herself, although embarrassed, stifled a deep sigh, so contagious can desire prove at times. "The painter was offended," she said to M. de Charlus, "and took it back. I have heard that it is now at Diane de Saint-Euverte's." "I decline to believe," said the Baron, "that a great picture can have such bad taste."

"He is talking to her about her portrait. I could talk to her about that portrait just as well as Charlus," said Swann, affecting a drawling, raffish tone as he followed the retreating couple with his eyes. "And I should certainly enjoy talking about it more than Charlus," he added.

I asked him whether the things that were said about M. de Charlus were true, in doing which I was lying twice over, for if I had no proof that anybody ever had said anything, I had on the other hand been perfectly aware since that afternoon that what I was hinting at was true. Swann shrugged his shoulders, as though I had suggested something quite absurd.

"It's quite true that he's a charming friend. But I need hardly add that his friendship is purely platonic. He is more sentimental than other men, that's all; on the other hand, as he never goes very far with women, that has given a sort of plausibility to the idiotic rumours to which you refer. Charlus is perhaps greatly attached to his men friends, but you may be quite certain that the attachment is only in his head and in his heart. However, now we may perhaps be left in peace for a moment. Well, the Prince de Guermantes went on to say: 'I don't mind telling you that this idea of a possible illegality in the conduct of the trial was extremely painful to me, because I have always, as you know, worshipped the Army. I discussed the matter again with the General, and, alas, there could be no room for doubt. I need hardly tell you that, all this time, the idea that an innocent man might be undergoing the most infamous punishment had never even crossed my mind. But tormented by this idea of illegality, I began to study what I had always declined to read, and then the possibility, this time not only of illegality but of the prisoner's innocence, began to haunt me. I did not feel that I could talk about it to the Princess. Heaven knows that she has become just as French as myself. From the day of our marriage, I took such pride in showing her our country in all its beauty, and what to me is its greatest splendour, its Army, that it would have been too painful for me to tell her of my suspicions, which involved, it is true, a few officers only. But I come of a family of soldiers, and I was reluctant to believe that officers could be mistaken. I discussed the case again with Beauséjour, and he admitted that there had been culpable intrigues, that the memorandum was possibly not in Dreyfus's writing, but that an overwhelming proof of his guilt did exist. This was the Henry document. And a few days later we learned that it was a forgery. After that, unbeknownst to the Princess, I began to read the *Siècle* and the *Aurore* every day. Soon I had no more doubts, and I couldn't sleep. I confided my distress to our friend, the abbé Poiré, who, I was astonished to find, held the same conviction, and I got him to say masses for Dreyfus, his unfortunate wife and their children. Meanwhile, one morning as I went into the Princess's room, I saw her maid trying to hide something from me that she had in her hand. I asked her, chaffingly, what it was, and she blushed and refused to tell me. I had the greatest confidence in my wife, but this incident disturbed me considerably (and the Princess too, no doubt, who must have heard about it from her maid), for my dear Marie barely uttered a word to me that day at luncheon. I asked the abbé Poiré that day whether he could say my mass for Dreyfus the following morning ...' And so much for that!" exclaimed Swann, breaking off his narrative.

I looked up, and saw the Duc de Guermantes bearing down upon us. "Forgive me for interrupting you, my boys. Young man," he went on, addressing me, "I am instructed to give you a message from Oriane. Marie and Gilbert have asked us to stay and have supper at their table with only five or six other people: the Princess of Hesse, Mme de Ligne, Mme de Tarente, Mme de Chevreuse, the Duchesse d'Arenberg. Unfortunately, we can't stay—we're going on to a little ball of sorts." I was listening, but whenever we have something definite to do at a given moment, we depute a certain person inside us who is accustomed to that sort of duty to keep an eye on the clock and warn us in time. This inner servant reminded me, as I had asked him to remind me a few hours before, that Albertine, who at the moment was far from my thoughts, was to come and see me

immediately after the theatre. And so I declined the invitation to supper. This does not mean that I was not enjoying myself at the Princesse de Guermantes's. The truth is that men can have several sorts of pleasure. The true pleasure is the one for which they abandon the other. But the latter, if it is apparent, or rather if it alone is apparent, may put people off the scent of the other, reassure or mislead the jealous, create a false impression. And yet, all that is needed to make us sacrifice it to the other is a little happiness or a little suffering. Sometimes a third category of pleasures, more serious, but more essential, does not yet exist for us, its potential existence betraying itself only by arousing regrets and discouragement. And yet it is to these pleasures that we shall devote ourselves in time to come. To give a very minor example, a soldier in time of peace will sacrifice social life to love, but, once war is declared (and without there being any need to introduce the idea of patriotic duty), will sacrifice love to the passion, stronger than love, for fighting. For all that Swann assured me that he was happy to tell me his story, I could feel that his conversation with me, because of the lateness of the hour, and because he was so ill, was one of those exertions for which those who know that they are killing themselves by sitting up late, by overdoing things, feel an angry regret when they return home, a regret similar to that felt at the wild extravagance of which they have again been guilty by the spendthrifts who will nevertheless be unable to restrain themselves from throwing money out of the window again tomorrow. Once we have reached a certain degree of enfeeblement, whether it is caused by age or by ill health, all pleasure taken at the expense of sleep outside our normal habits, every disturbance of routine, becomes a nuisance. The talker continues to talk, from politeness, from excitement, but he knows that the hour at which he might still have been able to go to sleep has already passed, and he knows also the reproaches that he will heap upon himself during the insomnia and fatigue that must ensue. Already, moreover, even the momentary pleasure has come to an end, body and brain are too far drained of their strength to welcome with any readiness what seems entertaining to one's interlocutor. They are like a house on the morning before a journey or removal, where visitors become a perfect plague, to be received sitting upon locked trunks, with our eyes on the clock.

"At last we're alone," he said. "I quite forget where I was. Oh yes, I had just told you, hadn't I, that the Prince asked the abbé Poiré if he could say his mass next day for Dreyfus. 'No, the abbé informed me' ('I say me,' Swann explained to me, 'because it's the Prince who is speaking, you understand?'), 'for I have another mass that I've been asked to say for him tomorrow as well.—What, I said to him, is there another Catholic as well as myself who is convinced of his innocence?—It appears so.—But this other supporter's conviction must be more recent than mine.—Maybe, but this other was asking me to say masses when you still believed Dreyfus guilty.—Ah, I can see that it's no one in our world.—On the contrary!—Really, there are Dreyfusists among us, are there? You intrigue me; I should like to unbosom myself to this rare bird, if it is someone I know.—It is.—What is his name?—The Princesse de Guermantes. While I was afraid of offending my dear wife's nationalistic opinions, her faith in France, she had been afraid of alarming my religious opinions, my patriotic sentiments. But privately she had been thinking as I did, though for longer than I had. And what her maid had been hiding as she went into her room, what she went out to buy for her every morning, was the *Aurore*. My dear Swann, from that moment I thought of the pleasure that I should give you if I told you how closely akin my views upon this matter were to yours; forgive me for not having done so sooner. If you bear in mind that I had never said a word to the Princess, it will not surprise you to be told that thinking the same as yourself must at that time have kept me further apart from you than thinking differently. For it was an extremely painful topic for me to broach. The more I believe that an error, that crimes even, have been committed, the more my heart bleeds for the Army. It had never occurred to me that opinions like mine could possibly cause you similar pain, until I was told the other day that you emphatically condemned the insults to the Army and the fact that the Dreyfusists agreed to ally themselves with those who insulted it. That settled it. I admit that it has been most painful for me to confess to you what I think of certain officers, few in number fortunately, but it is a relief to me not to have to keep away from you any longer, and above all a relief to make it clear to you that if I had other feelings it was because I hadn't a shadow of doubt as to the soundness of the verdict. As soon as my doubts began, I could wish for only one thing, that the mistake should be rectified.' I confess that I was deeply moved by the Prince de Guermantes's words. If you knew him as I do, if you could realise the distance he has had to travel in order to reach his present position, you would admire him as he deserves. Not that his opinion surprises me, his is such an upright nature!"

Swann was forgetting that during the afternoon he had on the contrary told me that people's opinions as to the Dreyfus case were dictated by atavism. At the most he had made an exception on behalf of intelligence, because in Saint-Loup it had managed to overcome atavism and had made a Dreyfusard of him. Now he had just seen that this victory had been of short duration and that Saint-Loup had passed into the opposite camp. And so it was to moral uprightness that he now assigned the role which had previously devolved upon intelligence. In reality we always discover afterwards that our adversaries had a reason for being on the side they espoused, which has nothing to do with any element of right that there may be on that side, and that those who think as we do do so because their intelligence, if their moral nature is too base to be invoked, or their uprightness, if their perception is weak, has compelled them to.

Swann now found equally intelligent anybody who was of his opinion, his old friend the Prince de Guermantes as well as my schoolfellow Bloch, whom previously he had avoided and whom he now invited to lunch. Swann interested Bloch greatly by telling him that the Prince de Guermantes was a Dreyfusard. "We must ask him to sign our appeal on behalf of Picquart; a name like his would have a tremendous effect." But Swann, blending with his ardent conviction as a Jew the diplomatic moderation of a man of the world, whose habits he had too thoroughly acquired to be able to shed them at this late hour, refused to allow Bloch to

send the Prince a petition to sign, even on his own initiative. "He cannot do such a thing, we mustn't expect the impossible," Swann repeated. "There you have a charming man who has travelled thousands of miles to come over to our side. He can be very useful to us. If he were to sign your petition, he would simply be compromising himself with his own people, would be made to suffer on our account, might even repent of his confidences and do nothing more." Furthermore, Swann withheld his own name. He considered it too Hebraic not to create a bad effect. Besides, even if he approved of everything that concerned reconsideration, he did not wish to be mixed up in any way in the anti-militarist campaign. He wore, a thing he had never done previously, the decoration he had won as a young militiaman in '70, and added a codicil to his will asking that, contrary to its previous provisions, he might be buried with the military honours due to his rank as Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. A request which assembled round the church of Combray a whole squadron of those troopers over whose fate Françoise used to weep in days gone by, when she envisaged the prospect of war. In short, Swann refused to sign Bloch's petition, with the result that, if he passed in the eyes of many people as a fanatical Dreyfusard, my friend found him lukewarm, infected with nationalism, and jingoistic.

Swann left me without shaking hands so as not to be forced into a general leave-taking in this room where he had too many friends, but said to me: "You ought to come and see your friend Gilberte. She has really grown up now and altered, you wouldn't know her. She would be so pleased!" I no longer loved Gilberte. She was for me like a dead person for whom one has long mourned, and then forgetfulness has come, and if she were to be resuscitated would no longer fit into a life which has ceased to be fashioned for her. I no longer had any desire to see her, not even that desire to show her that I did not wish to see her which, every day, when I was in love with her, I vowed to myself that I would flaunt before her when I loved her no longer.

Hence, seeking now only to give myself in Gilberte's eyes the air of having longed with all my heart to meet her again and of having been prevented by circumstances of the kind called "beyond our control," which indeed only occur, with any consistency at least, when we do nothing to thwart them, so far from accepting Swann's invitation with reserve, I did not leave him until he had promised to explain in detail to his daughter the mischances that had prevented and would continue to prevent me from going to see her. "In any case I shall write to her as soon as I get home," I added. "But be sure to tell her it will be a threatening letter, for in a month or two I shall be quite free, and then let her tremble, for I shall be coming to your house as regularly as in the old days."

Before parting from Swann, I had a word with him about his health. "No, it's not as bad as all that," he told me. "Still, as I was saying, I'm pretty worn out, and I accept with resignation whatever may be in store for me. Only, I must say that it would be very irritating to die before the end of the Dreyfus case. Those scoundrels have more than one card up their sleeves. I have no doubt of their being defeated in the end, but still they're very powerful, they have supporters everywhere. Just as everything is going on splendidly, it all collapses. I should like to live long enough to see Dreyfus rehabilitated and Picquart a colonel."

When Swann had left, I returned to the big drawing-room to find the Princesse de Guermantes, with whom I did not then know that I was one day to be so intimate. Her passion for M. de Charlus did not reveal itself to me at first. I noticed only that the Baron, after a certain date, and without having taken to the Princesse de Guermantes one of those sudden dislikes so familiar with him, while continuing to feel for her just as strong if not a stronger affection perhaps than ever, appeared irritated and displeased whenever one mentioned her name to him. He never included it now in his list of people with whom he wished to dine.

It is true that before this time I had heard an extremely malicious man about town say that the Princess had completely changed, that she was in love with M. de Charlus, but this slander had appeared to me absurd and had made me angry. I had indeed remarked with astonishment that, when I was telling her something that concerned myself, if M. de Charlus's name cropped up in the middle, the Princess's attention at once became screwed up to a higher pitch, like that of a sick man who, hearing us talk about ourselves and listening, in consequence, in a listless and absent-minded fashion, suddenly realises that a name we have mentioned is that of the disease from which he is suffering, which at once interests and delights him. Thus, if I said to her: "Actually, M. de Charlus was telling me ..." the Princess at once gathered up the slackened reins of her attention. And having on one occasion said in her hearing that M. de Charlus had at that time a warm regard for a certain person, I was astonished to see in the Princess's eyes that momentary glint, like the trace of a fissure in the pupils, which is due to a thought that our words have unwittingly aroused in the mind of the person to whom we are talking, a secret thought that will not find expression in words but will rise from the depths which we have stirred to the momentarily altered surface of his gaze. But if my remark had moved the Princess, I did not then suspect in what way.

At all events, shortly after this she began to talk to me about M. de Charlus, and almost without circumlocution. If she made any allusion to the rumours which a few people here and there were spreading about the Baron, it was merely to reject them as absurd and infamous inventions. But on the other hand she said: "I feel that any woman who fell in love with a man of such immense worth as Palamède ought to be magnanimous enough and devoted enough to accept him and understand him as a whole, for what he is, to respect his freedom, humour his whims, seek only to smooth out his difficulties and console him in his griefs." Now, by such words, vague as they were, the Princesse de Guermantes gave away what she was seeking to idealise, just as M. de Charlus himself did at times. Have I not heard him, again and again, say to people who until then had been uncertain whether or not he was being slandered: "I, who have had so many ups and downs in my life, who have known all manner of people, thieves as well as kings, and indeed, I must confess, with a slight preference for the thieves, I who have pursued beauty in all its forms," and so forth; and by these



words which he thought adroit, and by contradicting rumours which no one knew of (or, from inclination, restraint or concern for verisimilitude, to make a concession to the truth that he was alone in regarding as minimal), he removed the last doubts from the minds of some of his hearers, and inspired others, who had not yet begun to doubt him, with their first. For the most dangerous of all concealments is that of the crime itself in the mind of the guilty party. His constant awareness of it prevents him from imagining how generally unknown it is, how readily a complete lie would be accepted, and on the other hand from realising at what degree of truth other people will begin to detect an admission in words which he believes to be innocent. In any case there was no real need to try to hush it up, for there is no vice that does not find ready tolerance in the best society, and one has seen a country house turned upside down in order that two sisters might sleep in adjoining rooms as soon as their hostess learned that theirs was a more than sisterly affection. But what revealed to me all of a sudden the Princess's love was a particular incident on which I shall not dwell here, for it forms part of quite another story, in which M. de Charlus allowed a queen to die rather than miss an appointment with the hairdresser who was to singe his hair for the benefit of a bus conductor whom he found prodigiously intimidating. However, to finish with the Princess's love, I shall say briefly what the trifle was that opened my eyes. I was, on the day in question, alone with her in her carriage. As we were passing a post office she stopped the coachman. She had come out without a footman. She half drew a letter from her muff and was preparing to step down from the carriage to put it into the box. I tried to stop her, she made a show of resistance, and we both realised that our instinctive movements had been, hers compromising, in appearing to be protecting a secret, mine indiscreet, in thwarting that protection. She was the first to recover. Suddenly turning very red, she gave me the letter. I no longer dared not to take it, but, as I slipped it into the box, I could not help seeing that it was addressed to M. de Charlus.

To return to this first evening at the Princesse de Guermantes's, I went to bid her good night, for her cousins, who had promised to take me home, were in a hurry to be gone. M. de Guermantes wished, however, to say good-bye to his brother, Mme de Surgis having found time to mention to the Duke as she left that M. de Charlus had been charming to her and to her sons. This great kindness on his brother's part, the first moreover that he had ever shown in that line, touched Basin deeply and aroused in him old family feelings which were never dormant for long. As we were saying good-bye to the Princess he insisted, without actually thanking M. de Charlus, on expressing his fondness for him, either because he genuinely had difficulty in containing it or in order that the Baron might remember that actions of the sort he had performed that evening did not escape the eyes of a brother, just as, with the object of creating salutary associations of memory for the future, we give a lump of sugar to a dog that has done its trick. "Well, little brother!" said the Duke, stopping M. de Charlus and taking him tenderly by the arm, "so we walk past our elders without so much as a word? I never see you now, Mémé, and you can't think how I miss you. I was turning over some old letters the other day and came upon some from poor Mamma, which are all so full of tenderness for you."

"Thank you, Basin," M. de Charlus replied in a broken voice, for he could never speak of their mother without emotion.

"You must let me fix up a cottage for you at Guermantes," the Duke went on.

"It's nice to see the two brothers so affectionate towards each other," the Princess said to Oriane.

"Yes, indeed! I don't suppose you could find many brothers like them. I shall invite you with him," the Duchess promised me. "You've not quarrelled with him? ... But what can they be talking about?" she added in an anxious tone, for she could catch only an occasional word of what they were saying. She had always felt a certain jealousy of the pleasure that M. de Guermantes found in talking to his brother of a past from which he was inclined to keep his wife shut out. She felt that, when they were happily together like this and she, unable to restrain her impatient curiosity, came and joined them, her arrival was not well received. But this evening, this habitual jealousy was reinforced by another. For if Mme de Surgis had told M. de Guermantes how kind his brother had been to her so that the Duke might thank his brother, at the same time devoted female friends of the Guermantes couple had felt it their duty to warn the Duchess that her husband's mistress had been seen in close conversation with his brother. And Mme de Guermantes was tormented by this.

"Think of the fun we used to have at Guermantes long ago," the Duke went on. "If you came down sometimes in summer we could take up our old life again. Do you remember old Father Courveau: 'Why is Pascal disturbing? Because he is dis ... dis ...' " "Turbed," put in M. de Charlus as though he were still responding to his tutor. "And why is Pascal disturbed?; because he is dis ... because he is dis ..." "Turbing." "Very good, you'll pass, you're certain to get a distinction, and Madame la Duchesse will give you a Chinese dictionary." How it all comes back to me, Mémé, and the old Chinese vase Hervey de Saint-Denis<sup>6</sup> brought back for you, I can see it now. You used to threaten us that you would go and spend your life in China, you were so enamoured of the country; even then you used to love going for long rambles. Ah, you were always an odd one, for I can honestly say that you never had the same tastes as other people in anything ..." But no sooner had he uttered these words than the Duke turned scarlet, for he was aware of his brother's reputation, if not of his actual habits. As he never spoke to him about it, he was all the more embarrassed at having said something which might be taken to refer to it, and still more at having shown his embarrassment. After a moment's silence: "Who knows," he said, to cancel the effect of his previous words, "you were perhaps in love with a Chinese girl before loving so many white ones, and finding favour with them, if I am to judge by a certain lady to whom you have given great pleasure this evening by talking to her. She was delighted with you." The Duke had vowed to himself that he would not mention Mme de Surgis, but, in the confusion that the gaffe he had just made had wrought in his ideas, he had pounced on the one that was uppermost in his mind, which happened to be precisely the one that ought not to have appeared in the conversation, although it had started

it. But M. de Charlus had observed his brother's blush. And, like guilty persons who do not wish to appear embarrassed that you should talk in their presence of the crime which they are supposed not to have committed, and feel obliged to prolong a dangerous conversation: "I am charmed to hear it," he replied, "but I should like to go back to what you were saying before, which struck me as being profoundly true. You were saying that I never had the same ideas as other people—how right you are!—and you said that I had unorthodox tastes." "No I didn't," protested M. de Guermantes, who, as a matter of fact, had not used those words, and may not have believed that their meaning was applicable to his brother. Besides, what right had he to bully him about idiosyncrasies which in any case were vague enough or secret enough to have in no way impaired the Baron's tremendous position in society? What was more, feeling that the resources of his brother's position were about to be placed at the service of his mistresses, the Duke told himself that this was well worth a little tolerance in exchange; had he at that moment known of some "unorthodox" relationship of his brother's, then in the hope of the support that the other might give him, a hope linked with pious remembrance of the old days, M. de Guermantes would have passed it over, shutting his eyes to it, and if need be lending a hand. "Come along, Basin; good night, Palamède," said the Duchess, who, devoured by rage and curiosity, could endure no more, "if you have made up your minds to spend the night here, we might just as well stay to supper. You've been keeping Marie and me standing for the last half-hour." The Duke parted from his brother after a meaningful hug, and the three of us began to descend the immense staircase of the Princess's house.

On either side of us, on the topmost steps, were scattered couples who were waiting for their carriages. Erect, isolated, flanked by her husband and myself, the Duchess kept to the left of the staircase, already wrapped in her Tiepolo cloak, her throat clasped in its band of rubies, devoured by the eyes of women and men alike, who sought to divine the secret of her beauty and elegance. Waiting for her carriage on the same step of the staircase as Mme de Guermantes, but at the opposite side of it, Mme de Gallardon, who had long abandoned all hope of ever receiving a visit from her cousin, turned her back so as not to appear to have seen her, and, what was more important, so as not to offer proof of the fact that the other did not greet her. Mme de Gallardon was in an extremely bad temper because some gentlemen in her company had taken it upon themselves to speak to her of Oriane: "I haven't the slightest desire to see her," she had replied to them, "I did notice her, as a matter of fact, just now, and she's beginning to show her age. It seems she can't get over it, Basin says so himself. And I can well understand it, because, since she hasn't any brains, is as nasty as can be, and has bad manners, she must know very well that, once her looks go, she'll have nothing left to fall back on."

I had put on my overcoat, for which M. de Guermantes, who dreaded chills, reproached me as we went down together, because of the heated atmosphere indoors. And the generation of noblemen who more or less passed through the hands of Mgr Dupanloup speak such bad French (except the Castellane brothers) that the Duke expressed what was in his mind thus: "It is better not to put on your coat before going out of doors, at least as a *general thesis*." I can see all that departing crowd now; I can see, if I am not mistaken in placing him upon that staircase, a portrait detached from its frame, the Prince de Sagan, whose last appearance in society this must have been, paying his respects to the Duchess with so ample a sweep of his top hat in his white-gloved hand, harmonising with the gardenia in his buttonhole, that one was surprised that it was not a plumed felt hat of the *ancien régime*, several ancestral faces from which were exactly reproduced in the face of this noble lord. He stopped for only a short time in front of her, but his attitudes in that brief moment were sufficient to compose a complete tableau vivant and, as it were, a historical scene. Moreover, as he has since died, and as I never had more than a glimpse of him in his lifetime, he has become for me so much a character in history, social history at least, that I am sometimes astonished when I think that a woman and a man whom I know are his sister and nephew.

While we were going down the staircase, a woman who appeared to be about forty but was in fact older was climbing it with an air of lassitude that became her. This was the Princesse d'Orvillers, a natural daughter, it was said, of the Duke of Parma, whose pleasant voice rang with a vaguely Austrian accent. She advanced, tall and stooping, in a gown of white flowered silk, her exquisite bosom heaving with exhaustion beneath a harness of diamonds and sapphires. Tossing her head like a royal palfrey embarrassed by its halter of pearls, of an incalculable value but an inconvenient weight, she let fall here and there a soft and charming gaze, of an azure which, as it gradually began to fade, became more caressing still, and greeted most of the departing guests with a friendly nod. "A fine time to arrive, Paulette!" said the Duchess. "Yes, I am so sorry! But really it was a physical impossibility," replied the Princesse d'Orvillers, who had acquired this sort of expression from the Duchesse de Guermantes, but added to it her own natural sweetness and the air of sincerity conveyed by the force of a distantly Teutonic accent in so tender a voice. She appeared to be alluding to complications of life too elaborate to be related, and not merely to parties, although she had just come on from a succession of these. But it was not they that forced her to come so late. As the Prince de Guermantes had for many years forbidden his wife to receive Mme d'Orvillers, the latter, when the ban was lifted, contented herself with replying to the other's invitations, so as not to appear to be thirsting after them, by simply leaving cards. After two or three years of this method, she came in person, but very late, as though after the theatre. In this way she gave herself the appearance of attaching no importance to the party, nor to being seen at it, but simply of having come to pay the Prince and Princess a visit, for their own sakes, because she liked them, at an hour when, the great majority of their guests having already gone, she would "have them more to herself."

"Oriane has really sunk very low," muttered Mme de Gallardon. "I cannot understand Basin's allowing her to speak to Mme d'Orvillers. I'm sure M. de Gallardon would never have allowed me." For my part, I had

recognised in Mme d'Orvillers the woman who, outside the Hôtel Guermantes, used to cast languishing glances at me, turn round, stop and gaze into shop windows. Mme de Guermantes introduced me. Mme d'Orvillers was charming, neither too friendly nor piqued. She gazed at me as at everyone else with her soft eyes ... But I was never again, when I met her, to receive from her one of those overtures with which she had seemed to be offering herself. There is a special kind of look, apparently of recognition, which a young man receives from certain women—and from certain men—only until the day on which they have made his acquaintance and have learned that he is the friend of people with whom they too are intimate.

We were told that the carriage was at the door. Mme de Guermantes gathered up her red skirt as though to go downstairs and get into the carriage, but, seized perhaps by remorse, or by the desire to give pleasure and above all to profit by the brevity which the material obstacle to prolonging it imposed upon so boring an action, looked at Mme de Gallardon; then, as though she had only just caught sight of her, acting upon a sudden inspiration, before going down she tripped across the whole width of the step and, upon reaching her delighted cousin, held out her hand. "Such a long time," said the Duchess, who then, so as not to have to enlarge upon all the regrets and legitimate excuses that this formula might be supposed to contain, turned with a look of alarm towards the Duke, who indeed, having gone down with me to the carriage, was storming with rage on seeing that his wife had gone over to Mme de Gallardon and was holding up the stream of carriages. "Orianne is really very beautiful still!" said Mme de Gallardon. "People amuse me when they say that we're on bad terms; we may (for reasons which we have no need to tell other people) go for years without seeing one another, but we have too many memories in common ever to be separated, and deep down she must know that she cares far more for me than for all sorts of people whom she sees every day and who are not of her blood." Mme de Gallardon was in fact like those scorned lovers who try desperately to make people believe that they are better loved than those whom their fair one cherishes. And (by the praises which, oblivious of how they contradicted what she had been saying shortly before, she now lavished on the Duchesse de Guermantes) she proved indirectly that the other was thoroughly conversant with the maxims that ought to guide in her career a great lady of fashion who, at the selfsame moment when her most marvellous gown is exciting envy along with admiration, must be able to cross the whole width of a staircase to disarm it. "Do at least take care not to wet your shoes" (a brief but heavy shower of rain had fallen), said the Duke, who was still furious at having been kept waiting.

On our homeward drive, in the confined space of the coupé, those red shoes were of necessity very close to mine, and Mme de Guermantes, fearing that she might actually have touched me, said to the Duke: "This young man is going to be obliged to say to me, like the person in some cartoon or other: 'Madame, tell me at once that you love me, but don't tread on my feet like that.' " My thoughts, however, were far from Mme de Guermantes. Ever since Saint-Loup had spoken to me of a young girl of good family who frequented a house of ill-fame, and of the Baroness Putbus's chambermaid, it was in these two persons that had now become coalesced and embodied the desires inspired in me day by day by countless beauties of two classes, on the one hand the vulgar and magnificent, the majestic lady's-maids of great houses, swollen with pride and saying "we" in speaking of duchesses, and on the other hand those girls of whom it was enough sometimes, without even having seen them go past in carriages or on foot, to have read the names in the account of a ball for me to fall in love with them and, having conscientiously searched the social directory for the country houses in which they spent the summer (as often as not letting myself be led astray by a similarity of names), to dream alternately of going to live amid the plains of the West, the dunes of the North, the pine-woods of the South. But in vain did I fuse together all the most exquisite fleshly matter to compose, after the ideal outline traced for me by Saint-Loup, the young girl of easy virtue and Mme Putbus's maid, my two possessible beauties still lacked what I should never know until I had seen them: individual character. I was to wear myself out in vain trying to picture, during the months when my desires were focused on young girls, what the one Saint-Loup had spoken of looked like, and who she was, and during the months in which I would have preferred a lady's-maid, the lineaments of Mme Putbus's. But what peace of mind, after having been perpetually troubled by my restless desires for so many fugitive creatures whose very names I often did not know and who were in any case so hard to find, harder still to get to know, impossible perhaps to conquer, to have drawn from all that scattered, fugitive, anonymous beauty two choice specimens duly labelled, whom I was at least certain of being able to procure when I wished! I kept putting off the hour for getting down to this twofold pleasure, as I put off the hour for getting down to work, but the certainty of having it whenever I chose dispensed me almost from the necessity of taking it, like those sleeping tablets which one has only to have within hand's reach to be able to do without them and to fall asleep. In the whole universe I now desired only two women, of whose faces I could not, it is true, form any picture, but whose names Saint-Loup had given me and whose compliance he had guaranteed. So that if, by what he had said this evening, he had set my imagination a heavy task, he had at the same time procured an appreciable relaxation, a prolonged rest for my will.

"Well!" said the Duchess, "aside from your parties, can I be of any use to you? Have you found a salon to which you would like me to introduce you?" I replied that I was afraid the only one that tempted me was hardly elegant enough for her. "Whose is that?" she asked in a hoarse, menacing voice, scarcely opening her lips. "Baroness Putbus." This time she pretended to be really angry. "Ah, no, really! I believe you're trying to make a fool of me. I don't even know how I come to have heard the creature's name. But she is the dregs of society. It's as though you were to ask me for an introduction to my dressmaker. In fact worse, for my dressmaker is charming. You must be a little bit cracked, my poor boy. In any case, I beseech you to be polite to the people I've introduced you to, to leave cards on them, and go and see them, and not talk to them about Baroness Putbus of whom they have never heard." I asked whether Mme d'Orvillers was not inclined to be

flighty. "Oh, not in the least, you're mixing her up with someone else. She's rather strait-laced, if anything. Isn't she, Basin?" "Yes, in any case I don't think there has ever been any talk about her," said the Duke.

"You won't come with us to the ball?" he asked me. "I can lend you a Venetian cloak and I know someone who will be deucedly glad to see you there—Orianne for one, that goes without saying—but the Princesse de Parme. She never tires of singing your praises, and swears by you. It's lucky for you—since she's a trifle mature—that she is a model of virtue. Otherwise she would certainly have taken you on as a *cicisbeo*, as they used to say in my young days, a sort of *cavaliere servente*."

I was interested not in the ball but in my rendezvous with Albertine. And so I refused. The carriage had stopped, the footman was shouting for the gate to be opened, the horses pawed the ground until it was flung apart and the carriage passed into the courtyard. "So long," said the Duke. "I've sometimes regretted living so close to Marie," the Duchess said to me, "because although I'm very fond of her, I'm not quite so fond of her company. But I've never regretted it so much as tonight, since it has allowed me so little of yours." "Come, Orianne, no speechmaking."

The Duchess would have liked me to come inside for a minute. She laughed heartily, as did the Duke, when I said that I could not because I was expecting a girl to call at any moment. "You choose a funny time to receive visitors," she said to me.

"Come along, my sweet, there's no time to lose," said M. de Guermantes to his wife. "It's a quarter to twelve, and time we were dressed ..." He came into collision, outside his front door which they were grimly guarding, with the two ladies with the walking-sticks, who had not been afraid to descend at dead of night from their mountain-top to prevent a scandal. "Basin, we felt we must warn you, in case you were seen at that ball: poor Amanien has just died, an hour ago." The Duke was momentarily dismayed. He saw the famous ball collapsing in ruins for him now that these accursed mountaineers had informed him of the death of M. d'Osmond. But he quickly recovered himself and flung at his cousins a retort which reflected, together with his determination not to forgo a pleasure, his incapacity to assimilate exactly the niceties of the French language: "He's dead! No, no, they're exaggerating, they're exaggerating!" And without giving a further thought to his two relatives who, armed with their alpenstocks, prepared to make their nocturnal ascent, he fired off a string of questions at his valet:

"Are you sure my helmet has come?" "Yes, Monsieur le Duc." "You're sure there's a hole in it I can breathe through? I don't want to be suffocated, damn it!" "Yes, Monsieur le Duc." "Oh, hell and damnation, everything's going wrong this evening. Orianne, I forgot to ask Babal whether the shoes with pointed toes were for you!" "But, my dear, the dresser from the Opéra-Comique is here, he will tell us. I don't see how they could go with your spurs." "Let's go and find the dresser," said the Duke. "Good-bye, my boy, I'd ask you to come in while we are trying on our costumes—it would amuse you. But we should only waste time talking, it's nearly midnight and we mustn't be late in getting there or we shall spoil the show."

I too was in a hurry to get away from M. and Mme de Guermantes as quickly as possible. *Phèdre* finished at about half past eleven. Albertine must have arrived by now. I went straight to Françoise: "Is Mlle Albertine here?" "No one has called."

Good God, did that mean that no one would call! I was in torment, Albertine's visit seeming to me now all the more desirable the less certain it had become.

Françoise was upset too, but for quite a different reason. She had just installed her daughter at the table for a succulent repast. But, on hearing me come in, and seeing that there was no time to whip away the dishes and put out needles and thread as though it were a work party and not a supper party: "She's just had a spoonful of soup, and I forced her to gnaw a bit of bone," Françoise explained to me, to reduce thus to nothing her daughter's supper, as though its copiousness were a crime. Even at lunch or dinner, if I committed the sin of going into the kitchen, Françoise would pretend that they had finished, and would even excuse herself by saying: "I just felt like a *scrap*," or "a *mouthful*." But I was speedily reassured on seeing the multitude of dishes that covered the table, which Françoise, surprised by my sudden entry, like a thief in the night which she was not, had not had time to whisk out of sight. Then she added: "Go along to your bed now, you've done enough work today" (for she wished to make it appear that her daughter not only cost us nothing and lived frugally, but was actually working herself to death in our service). "You're only cluttering up the kitchen and disturbing Monsieur, who is expecting a visitor. Go on, upstairs," she repeated, as though she were obliged to use her authority to send her daughter to bed when in fact she was only there for appearances's sake now that supper had been ruined, and if I had stayed five minutes longer would have withdrawn of her own accord. And turning to me, in that charming, popular and yet highly individual French that was hers, Françoise added: "Monsieur can see that her face is just cut in two with want of sleep." I remained, delighted not to have to talk to Françoise's daughter.

I have said that she came from a small village which was quite close to her mother's, and yet differed from it in the nature of the soil and its cultivation, in dialect, and above all in certain characteristics of the inhabitants. Thus the "butcheress" and Françoise's niece did not get on at all well together, but had this point in common, that when they went out on an errand, they would linger for hours at "the sister's" or "the cousin's," being themselves incapable of finishing a conversation, in the course of which the purpose with which they had set out faded so completely from their minds that, if we said to them on their return: "Well! will M. le Marquis de Norpois be at home at a quarter past six?" they did not even slap their foreheads and say: "Oh, I forgot all about it," but "Oh! I didn't understand that Monsieur wanted to know that, I thought I had just to go and bid him good-day." If they "lost their heads" in this way about something that had been said to them an hour earlier, it was on the other hand impossible to get out of their heads what they had once

heard said by "the" sister or "the" cousin. Thus, if the butcheress had heard it said that the English made war on us in '70 at the same time as the Prussians (and I explained to her until I was tired that this was not the case), every three weeks the butcheress would repeat to me in the course of conversation: "It's all because of that war the English made on us in '70 with the Prussians." "But I've told you a hundred times that you're wrong," I would say, and she would then answer, implying that her conviction was in no way shaken: "In any case, that's no reason for wishing them any harm. Plenty of water has flowed under the bridges since '70," and so forth. On another occasion, advocating a war with England which I opposed, she said: "To be sure, it's always better not to go to war; but when you must, it's best to do it at once. As the sister was explaining just now, ever since that war the English made on us in '70, the commercial treaties have ruined us. After we've beaten them, we won't allow one Englishman into France unless he pays three hundred francs admission, as we have to pay now to land in England."

Such was, in addition to great decency and civility and, when they were talking, an obstinate refusal to allow any interruption, going back time and time again to the point they had reached if one did interrupt them, thus giving their talk the unshakeable solidity of a Bach fugue, the character of the inhabitants of this tiny village which did not boast five hundred, set among its chestnuts, its willows, and its fields of potatoes and beetroot.

Françoise's daughter, on the other hand (regarding herself as an up-to-date woman who had got out of the old ruts), spoke Parisian slang and was well versed in all the jokes of the day. Françoise having told her that I had come from the house of a princess: "Oh, indeed! The Princess of Brazil, I suppose, where the nuts come from." Seeing that I was expecting a visitor, she pretended to believe that my name was Charles. I replied innocently that it was not, which enabled her to get in: "Oh, I thought it was! And I was just saying to myself, *Charles attend* (charlatan)." This was not in the best of taste. But I was less unmoved when, to console me for Albertine's delay, she said to me: "I expect you'll go on waiting till doomsday. She's never coming. Ah, these modern flappers!"

And so her speech differed from her mother's; but, what is more curious, her mother's speech was not the same as that of her grandmother, a native of Bailleau-le-Pin, which was so close to Françoise's village. And yet the dialects differed slightly, like the two landscapes, Françoise's mother's village, on a slope descending into a ravine, being overgrown with willows. And, miles away from either of them, there was a small area of France where the people spoke almost precisely the same dialect as in Méséglise. I made this discovery at the same time as I experienced its tediousness, for I once came upon Françoise deep in conversation with a neighbour's housemaid, who came from this village and spoke its dialect. They could more or less understand one another, I could not understand a word, and they knew this but nevertheless continued (excused, they felt, by the joy of being fellow-countrywomen although born so far apart) to converse in this strange tongue in front of me, like people who do not wish to be understood. These picturesque studies in linguistic geography and below-stairs comradeship were renewed weekly in the kitchen, without my deriving any pleasure from them.

Since, whenever the outer gate opened, the concierge pressed an electric button which lighted the stairs, and since all the occupants of the building had already come in, I left the kitchen immediately and went to sit down in the hall, keeping my eyes fastened on the point where the slightly too narrow curtain did not completely cover the glass panel of our front door, leaving visible a vertical strip of semi-darkness from the stairs. If, suddenly, this strip turned to a golden yellow, that would mean that Albertine had just entered the building and would be with me in a minute; nobody else could be coming at that time of night. And I sat there, unable to take my eyes from the strip which persisted in remaining dark; I bent my whole body forward to make certain of noticing any change; but, gaze as I might, the vertical black band, despite my impassioned longing, did not give me the intoxicating delight that I should have felt had I seen it changed by a stroke of sudden and significant magic to a luminous bar of gold. This was indeed a great fuss to make about Albertine, to whom I had not given three minutes' thought during the Guermantes reception! But, reviving the feelings of anxious expectancy I had had in the past over other girls, Gilberte especially when she was late in coming, the prospect of having to forgo a simple physical pleasure caused me an intense mental suffering.

I was obliged to go back to my room. Françoise followed me. She felt that, as I had come away from my party, there was no point in my keeping the rose that I had in my buttonhole, and approached to take it from me. Her action, by reminding me that Albertine might perhaps not come, and by obliging me also to confess that I wished to look smart for her benefit, caused me an irritation that was intensified by the fact that, in tugging myself free, I crushed the flower and Françoise said to me: "It would have been better to let me take it than to go and spoil it like that." Indeed, her slightest word exasperated me. When we are waiting, we suffer so keenly from the absence of the person for whom we are longing that we cannot endure the presence of anyone else.

Françoise having left the room, it occurred to me that if I was now so concerned about my appearance for Albertine's sake, it was a great pity that I had so often let her see me unshaved, with several days' growth of beard, on the evenings when I let her come round to renew our caresses. I felt that she was indifferent to me and was giving me the cold shoulder. To make my room look a little more attractive, in case Albertine should still come, and because it was one of the prettiest things that I possessed, for the first time in years I placed on the bedside table the turquoise-studded cover which Gilberte had had made for me to hold Bergotte's booklet and which for so long I had insisted on keeping by me while I slept, together with the agate marble. As much perhaps as Albertine herself, who still did not come, her presence at that moment in an "elsewhere" which she had evidently found more agreeable, and of which I knew nothing, gave me a painful feeling which, in spite of what I had said to Swann scarcely an hour before as to my incapacity for being jealous, might, if I

had seen her at less protracted intervals, have changed into an anxious need to know where, and with whom, she was spending her time. I dared not send round to Albertine's house, as it was too late, but in the hope that, having supper perhaps with some other girls in a café, she might take it into her head to telephone me, I turned the switch and, restoring the connexion to my own room, cut it off between the post office and the porter's lodge to which it was generally switched at that hour. A receiver in the little passage on to which Françoise's room opened would have been simpler, less inconvenient, but useless. The advance of civilisation enables people to display unsuspected qualities or fresh defects which make them dearer or more insupportable to their friends. Thus Bell's invention had enabled Françoise to acquire an additional defect, which was that of refusing, however important, however urgent the occasion might be, to make use of the telephone. She would manage to disappear whenever anybody tried to teach her how to use it, as people disappear when it is time for them to be vaccinated. And so the telephone was installed in my bedroom, and, so that it might not disturb my parents, a whirring noise had been substituted for the bell. I did not move, for fear of not hearing it. So motionless did I remain that, for the first time for months, I noticed the tick of the clock. Françoise came in to tidy up the room. She chatted to me, but I hated her conversation, beneath the uniformly trivial continuity of which my feelings were changing from one minute to the next, passing from fear to anxiety, from anxiety to complete despair. Belying the vaguely cheerful words which I felt obliged to address to her, I could sense that my face was so wretched that I pretended to be suffering from rheumatism, to account for the discrepancy between my feigned indifference and that woebegone expression; then I was afraid that her talk, although carried on in a low voice (not on account of Albertine, for Françoise considered that all possibility of her coming was long past), might prevent me from hearing the saving call which now would never come. At length Françoise went off to bed; I dismissed her firmly but gently, so that the noise she made in leaving the room should not drown that of the telephone. And I settled down again to listen, to suffer; when we are waiting, from the ear which takes in sounds to the mind which dissects and analyses them, and from the mind to the heart to which it transmits its results, the double journey is so rapid that we cannot even perceive its duration, and imagine that we have been listening directly with our heart.

I was tortured by the incessant recurrence of my longing, ever more anxious and never gratified, for the sound of a call; having arrived at the culminating point of a tortuous ascent through the coils of my lonely anguish, from the depths of a populous, nocturnal Paris brought miraculously close to me, there beside my bookcase, I suddenly heard, mechanical and sublime, like the fluttering scarf or the shepherd's pipe in *Tristan*, the top-like whirr of the telephone. I sprang to the instrument; it was Albertine. "I'm not disturbing you, ringing you up at this hour?" "Not at all ..." I said, restraining my joy, for her remark about the lateness of the hour was doubtless meant as an apology for coming round in a moment, so late, and not that she was not coming. "Are you coming round?" I asked in a tone of indifference. "Well ... no, unless you absolutely must see me."

Part of me, which the other part sought to join, was in Albertine. It was essential that she should come, but I did not tell her so at first; now that we were in communication, I said to myself that I could always oblige her at the last moment either to come to me or to let me rush round to her. "Yes, I'm near home," she said, "and miles away from you. I hadn't read your note properly. I've just found it again and was afraid you might be waiting up for me." I felt sure she was lying, and now, in my fury, it was from a desire not so much to see her as to inconvenience her that I was determined to make her come. But I felt it better to refuse at first what in a few moments I should try to procure. But where was she? With the sound of her voice were blended other sounds: a cyclist's horn, a woman's voice singing, a brass band in the distance, rang out as distinctly as the beloved voice, as though to show me that it was indeed Albertine in her actual surroundings who was beside me at that moment, like a clod of earth together with which we have carried away all the grass that was growing from it. The same sounds that I heard were striking her ear also, and were distracting her attention: true-to-life details, extraneous to the subject, valueless in themselves, all the more necessary to our perception of the miracle for what it was; simple, charming features descriptive of some Parisian street, bitter, cruel features, too, of some unknown festivity which, after she had come away from *Phèdre*, had prevented Albertine from coming to me. "I must warn you first of all that it's not that I wanted you to come, because, at this time of night, it would be a frightful nuisance ..." I said to her. "I'm dropping with sleep. And besides, well, there are endless complications. I'm bound to say that there was no possibility of your misunderstanding my letter. You answered that it was all right. Well then, if you hadn't understood, what did you mean by that?" "I said it was all right, only I couldn't quite remember what we had arranged. But I see you're cross with me, I'm sorry. I wish now I'd never gone to *Phèdre*. If I'd known there was going to be all this fuss about it ..." she went on, as people invariably do when, being in the wrong over one thing, they pretend to believe that they are being blamed for another. "I'm not in the least annoyed about *Phèdre*, seeing it was I who asked you to go to it." "Then you *are* angry with me; it's a nuisance it's so late now, otherwise I should have come round, but I shall call tomorrow or the day after and make it up." "Oh, please don't, Albertine, I beg of you; after making me waste an entire evening, the least you can do is to leave me in peace for the next few days. I shan't be free for a fortnight or three weeks. Listen, if it worries you to think that we seem to be parting in anger—and perhaps you're right, after all—then I'd much prefer, all things considered, since I've been waiting for you all this time and you're still out, that you should come at once. I'll have a cup of coffee to keep myself awake." "Couldn't you possibly put it off till tomorrow? Because the trouble is ..." As I listened to these words of excuse, uttered as though she did not intend to come, I felt that, with the longing to see again the velvet-soft face which in the past, at Balbec, used to direct all my days towards the moment when, by the mauve September sea, I should be beside that roseate flower, a very different element was painfully endeavouring to combine. This terrible need

of a person was something I had learned to know at Combray in the case of my mother, to the point of wanting to die if she sent word to me by Françoise that she could not come upstairs. This effort on the part of the old feeling to combine and form a single element with the other, more recent, which had for its voluptuous object only the coloured surface, the flesh-pink bloom of a flower of the sea-shore, was one that often results simply in creating (in the chemical sense) a new body, which may last only a few moments. That evening, at any rate, and for long afterwards, the two elements remained apart. But already, from the last words that had reached me over the telephone, I was beginning to understand that Albertine's life was situated (not in a physical sense, of course) at so great a distance from mine that I should always have to make exhausting explorations in order to seize hold of it, and moreover was organised like a system of earthworks which, for greater security, were of the kind that at a later period we learned to call "camouflaged." Albertine, in fact, belonged, although at a slightly higher social level, to that type of person to whom the concierge promises your messenger that she will deliver your letter when she comes in—until the day when you realise that it is precisely she, the person you have met in a public place and to whom you have ventured to write, who is the concierge, so she does indeed live—though in the lodge only—at the address she has given you (which moreover is a private brothel of which the concierge is the madame). Or else she gives as her address an apartment house, where she is known to accomplices who will not reveal her secret to you, from which your letters will be forwarded, but where she doesn't live, where at the very most she has left some belongings. Lives entrenched behind five or six lines of defence, so that when you try to see this woman, or to find out about her, you invariably aim too far to the right, or to the left, or too far in front, or too far behind, and can remain in total ignorance for months, even years. In the case of Albertine, I felt that I should never discover anything, that, out of that tangled mass of details of fact and falsehood, I should never unravel the truth: and that it would always be so, unless I were to shut her up in prison (but prisoners escape) until the end. That evening, this conviction gave me only a vague anxiety, in which however I could detect a shuddering anticipation of prolonged suffering to come.

"No," I replied, "I told you a moment ago that I wouldn't be free for the next three weeks—tomorrow no more than any other day." "Very well, in that case ... I shall come this very instant ... It's a nuisance, because I'm at a friend's house, and she ..." I sensed that she had not believed that I would accept her offer to come, which therefore was not sincere, and I decided to force her hand. "What do you suppose I care about your friend? Either come or don't, it's for you to decide. I'm not asking you to come, it was you who suggested it." "Don't be angry. I'll jump into a cab now and I'll be with you in ten minutes."

Thus, from that nocturnal Paris out of whose depths the invisible message had already wafted into my very room, delimiting the field of action of a faraway person, what was now about to materialise, after this preliminary annunciation, was the Albertine whom I had known long ago beneath the sky of Balbec, when the waiters of the Grand Hotel, as they laid the tables, were blinded by the glow of the setting sun, when, the glass panels having been drawn wide open, the faintest evening breeze passed freely from the beach, where the last strolling couples still lingered, into the vast dining-room in which the first diners had not yet taken their places, and when, in the mirror placed behind the cashier's desk, there passed the red reflexion of the hull and, lingering long, the grey reflexion of the smoke of the last steamer for Rivebelle. I had ceased to wonder what could have made Albertine late, and when Françoise came into my room to inform me: "Mademoiselle Albertine is here," if I answered without even turning my head: "What in the world makes Mademoiselle Albertine come at this time of night?" it was only out of dissimulation. But then, raising my eyes to look at Françoise, as though curious to hear her answer which must corroborate the apparent sincerity of my question, I perceived, with admiration and fury, that, capable of rivalling Berma herself in the art of endowing with speech inanimate garments and the lines of her face, Françoise had taught their parts to her bodice, her hair—the whitest threads of which had been brought to the surface, were displayed there like a birth-certificate—and her neck, bent with fatigue and obedience. They commiserated with her for having been dragged from her sleep and from her warm bed, in the middle of the night, at her age, obliged to bundle into her clothes in haste, at the risk of catching pneumonia. And so, afraid that I might have seemed to be apologising for Albertine's late arrival, I added: "Anyhow, I'm very glad she has come, it's all for the best," and I gave free vent to my profound joy. It did not long remain unclouded, when I had heard Françoise's reply. Without uttering a word of complaint, seeming indeed to be doing her best to stifle an irrepressible cough, and simply folding her shawl over her bosom as though she felt cold, she began by telling me everything that she had said to Albertine, having not forgotten to ask after her aunt's health. "I was just saying, Monsieur must have been afraid that Mademoiselle wasn't coming, because this is no time to pay visits, it's nearly morning. But she must have been in some place that she was having a good time because she never so much as said she was sorry she had kept Monsieur waiting, she answered me as saucy as you please: 'Better late than never!'" And Françoise added these words that pierced my heart: "When she said that she gave herself away. Perhaps she would really have liked to hide herself, but ..."

I had little cause for astonishment. I have said that Françoise rarely brought back word, when she was sent on an errand, if not of what she herself had said, on which she readily enlarged, at any rate of the awaited answer. But if, exceptionally, she repeated to us the words that our friends had said, however brief, she generally contrived, thanks if need be to the expression, the tone that, she assured us, had accompanied them, to make them somehow wounding. At a pinch, she would admit to having received a snub (probably quite imaginary) from a tradesman to whom we had sent her, provided that, being addressed to her as our representative, who had spoken in our name, it might rebound on us. The only thing then would be to tell her that she had misunderstood the man, that she was suffering from persecution mania and that the shopkeepers

were not in league against her. However, their sentiments affected me little. Those of Albertine were a different matter. And in repeating the sarcastic words: "Better late than never!" Françoise at once evoked for me the friends with whom Albertine had finished the evening, thus preferring their company to mine. "She's a comical sight, she has a little flat hat on, and with those big eyes of hers it does make her look funny, especially with her cloak which she did ought to have sent to the amender's, for it's all in holes. She makes me laugh," Françoise added, as though mocking Albertine. Though she rarely shared my impressions, she felt the need to communicate her own. I refused even to appear to understand that this laugh was indicative of scorn and derision, but, to give tit for tat, replied, although I had never seen the little hat to which she referred: "What you call a 'little flat hat' is simply ravishing ..." "That's to say, it's just a bit of rubbish," said Françoise, giving expression, frankly this time, to her genuine contempt. Then (in a mild and leisurely tone so that my mendacious answer might appear to be the expression not of my anger but of the truth, though without wasting any time in order not to keep Albertine waiting) I addressed these cruel words to Françoise: "You are excellent," I said to her in a honeyed voice, "you are kind, you have endless qualities, but you have never learned a single thing since the day you first came to Paris, either about ladies' clothes or about how to pronounce words without making howlers." And this reproach was particularly stupid, for those French words which we are so proud of pronouncing accurately are themselves only "howlers" made by Gaulish lips which mispronounced Latin or Saxon, our language being merely a defective pronunciation of several others. The genius of language in its living state, the future and past of French, that is what ought to have interested me in Françoise's mistakes. Wasn't "amender" for "mender" just as curious as those animals that survive from remote ages, such as the whale or the giraffe, and show us the states through which animal life has passed?

"And," I went on, "since you haven't managed to learn in all these years, you never will. But don't let that distress you: it doesn't prevent you from being a very good soul, and making spiced beef with jelly to perfection, and lots of other things as well. The hat that you think so simple is copied from a hat belonging to the Princesse de Guermantes which cost five hundred francs. In fact I mean to give Mlle Albertine an even finer one very soon."

I knew that what would annoy Françoise more than anything was the thought of my spending money on people she disliked. She answered me in a few words which were made almost unintelligible by a sudden attack of breathlessness. When I discovered afterwards that she had a weak heart, how remorseful I felt that I had never denied myself the fierce and sterile pleasure of thus answering her back! Françoise detested Albertine, moreover, because, being poor, Albertine could not enhance what Françoise regarded as my superior position. She smiled benevolently whenever I was invited by Mme de Villeparisis. On the other hand, she was indignant that Albertine did not practise reciprocity. I found myself being obliged to invent fictitious presents from the latter, in the existence of which Françoise never for an instant believed. This want of reciprocity shocked her most of all in the matter of food. That Albertine should accept dinners from Mamma, when we were not invited to Mme Bontemps's (who in any case spent half her time out of Paris, her husband accepting "posts" as in the old days when he had had enough of the Ministry), seemed to her an indelicacy on the part of my friend which she rebuked indirectly by repeating a saying current at Combray:

"Let's eat my bread."

"Ay, that's the stuff."

"Let's eat thy bread."

"I've had enough."

I pretended to be writing.

"Who were you writing to?" Albertine asked me as she entered the room.

"To a pretty little friend of mine, Gilberte Swann. Don't you know her?"

"No."

I decided not to question Albertine as to how she had spent the evening, feeling that I should only reproach her and that we should have no time left, seeing how late it was already, to be reconciled sufficiently to proceed to kisses and caresses. And so it was with these that I chose to begin from the first moment. Besides, if I was a little calmer, I was not feeling happy. The loss of all equanimity, of all sense of direction, that we feel when we are kept waiting, persists after the arrival of the person awaited, and, taking the place inside us of the calm spirit in which we had been picturing her coming as so great a pleasure, prevents us from deriving any from it. Albertine was in the room: my disordered nerves, continuing to flutter, were still awaiting her.

"Can I have a nice kiss, Albertine?"

"As many as you like," she said to me in her good-natured way. I had never seen her looking so pretty.

"Another one? You know it's a great, great pleasure to me."

"And a thousand times greater to me," she replied. "Oh, what a pretty book-cover you have there!"

"Take it, I give it to you as a keepsake."

"You really are nice ..."

One would be cured for ever of romanticism if one could make up one's mind, in thinking of the woman one loves, to try to be the man one will be when one no longer loves her. Gilberte's book-cover and her agate marble must have derived their importance in the past from some purely inward state, since now they were to me a book-cover and a marble like any others.

I asked Albertine if she would like something to drink. "I seem to see oranges over there and water," she said. "That will be perfect." I was thus able to taste, together with her kisses, that refreshing coolness which



had seemed to me to be superior to them at the Princesse de Guermantes's. And the orange squeezed into the water seemed to yield to me, as I drank, the secret life of its ripening growth, its beneficent action upon certain states of that human body which belongs to so different a kingdom, its powerlessness to make that body live but on the other hand the process of irrigation by which it was able to benefit it—countless mysteries unveiled by the fruit to my sensory perception, but not at all to my intelligence.

When Albertine had gone, I remembered that I had promised Swann that I would write to Gilberte, and courtesy, I felt, demanded that I should do so at once. It was without emotion, and as though finishing off a boring school essay, that I traced upon the envelope the name *Gilberte Swann* with which at one time I used to cover my exercise-books to give myself the illusion that I was corresponding with her. For if, in the past, it had been I who wrote that name, now the task had been deputed by Habit to one of the many secretaries whom she employs. He could write down Gilberte's name all the more calmly in that, placed with me only recently by Habit, having but recently entered my service, he had never known Gilberte, and knew only, without attaching any reality to the words, because he had heard me speak of her, that she was a girl with whom I had once been in love.

I could not accuse her of coldness. The person I now was in relation to her was the clearest possible proof of what she herself had been: the book-cover, the agate marble had simply become for me in relation to Albertine what they had been for Gilberte, what they would have been to anybody who had not suffused them with the glow of an internal flame. But now there was in me a new turmoil which in its turn distorted the real force of things and words. And when Albertine said to me, in a further outburst of gratitude: "I do love turquoises!" I answered her: "Don't let these die," entrusting to them as to some precious jewel the future of our friendship, which in fact was no more capable of inspiring a sentiment in Albertine than it had been of preserving the sentiment that had once bound me to Gilberte.

There occurred at about this time a phenomenon which deserves mention only because it recurs in every important period of history. At the very moment I was writing to Gilberte, M. de Guermantes, just home from his ball, still wearing his helmet, was thinking that next day he would be compelled to go into formal mourning, and decided to bring forward by a week the cure he was due to take at a spa. When he returned from it three weeks later (to anticipate for a moment, since I have only just finished my letter to Gilberte), those friends of his who had seen him, so indifferent at the start, turn into a fanatical anti-Dreyfusard, were left speechless with amazement when they heard him (as though the action of the cure had not been confined to his bladder) declare: "Oh, well, there'll be a fresh trial and he'll be acquitted. You can't sentence a fellow without any evidence against him. Did you ever see anyone so gaga as Froberville? An officer leading the French people to the slaughter (meaning war)! Strange times we live in." The fact was that, in the meantime, the Duke had met at the spa three charming ladies (an Italian princess and her two sisters-in-law). After hearing them make a few remarks about the books they were reading or a play that was being given at the Casino, the Duke had at once realised that he was dealing with women of superior intellect whom, as he expressed it, he "wasn't up to." He had been all the more delighted to be asked to play bridge by the princess. But, the moment he entered her sitting-room, as he began to say to her, in the fervour of his double-dyed anti-Dreyfusism: "Well, we don't hear very much about the famous Dreyfus re-trial," his stupefaction had been great when he heard the princess and her sisters-in-law say: "It's becoming more certain every day. They can't keep a man in prison who has done nothing." "Eh? Eh?" the Duke had gasped at first, as at the discovery of a fantastic nickname employed in his household to turn to ridicule a person whom he had always regarded as intelligent. But, after a few days, just as, from cowardice and the spirit of imitation, we shout "Hallo, Jojotte" without knowing why at a great artist whom we hear so addressed by the rest of the household, the Duke, still greatly embarrassed by the novelty of this attitude, began nevertheless to say: "After all, if there's no evidence against him." The three charming ladies considered that he was not progressing rapidly enough and bullied him a bit: "But really, nobody with a grain of intelligence can ever have believed for a moment that there was anything." Whenever any revelation came out that was "damning" to Dreyfus, and the Duke, supposing that now he was going to convert the three charming ladies, came to inform them of it, they burst out laughing and had no difficulty in proving to him, with great dialectic subtlety, that his argument was worthless and quite absurd. The Duke had returned to Paris a fanatical Dreyfusard. And of course we do not suggest that the three charming ladies were not, in this instance, messengers of truth. But it is to be observed that, every ten years or so, when we have left a man imbued with a genuine conviction, it so happens that an intelligent couple, or simply a charming lady, comes into his life and after a few months he is won over to the opposite camp. And in this respect there are many countries that behave like the sincere man, many countries which we have left full of hatred for another race and which, six months later, have changed their minds and reversed their alliances.

I ceased for some time to see Albertine, but continued, failing Mme de Guermantes who no longer spoke to my imagination, to visit other fairies and their dwellings, as inseparable from themselves as is the pearly or enamelled valve or the crenellated turret of its shell from the mollusc that made it and shelters inside it. I should not have been able to classify these ladies, the problem being insignificant and impossible not only to resolve but to pose. Before coming to the lady, one had to approach the fairy mansion. Now as one of them was always at home after lunch in the summer months, before I reached her house I would be obliged to lower the hood of my cab, so scorching were the sun's rays, the memory of which, without my realising it, was to enter into my general impression. I supposed that I was merely being driven to the Cours-la-Reine; in reality, before arriving at the gathering which a man of wider experience might well have derided, I would receive, as though on a journey through Italy, a delicious, dazzled sensation from which the house was never

afterwards to be separated in my memory. What was more, in view of the heat of the season and the hour, the lady would have hermetically closed the shutters of the vast rectangular saloons on the ground floor in which she entertained. I would have difficulty at first in recognising my hostess and her guests, even the Duchesse de Guermantes, who in her husky voice bade me come and sit down next to her, in a Beauvais armchair illustrating the Rape of Europa. Then I would begin to make out on the walls the huge eighteenth-century tapestries representing vessels whose masts were hollyhocks in blossom, beneath which I sat as though in the palace not of the Seine but of Neptune, by the brink of the river Oceanus, where the Duchesse de Guermantes became a sort of goddess of the waters. I should never get to the end of it if I began to describe all the different types of drawing-room. This example will suffice to show that I introduced into my social judgments poetical impressions which I never took into account when I came to add up the sum, so that, when I was calculating the merits of a drawing-room, my total was never correct.

Certainly, these were by no means the only sources of error, but I have no time left, before my departure for Balbec (where to my sorrow I am going to make a second stay which will also be my last), to start upon a series of pictures of society which will find their place in due course. Here I need only say that to this first erroneous reason (my relatively frivolous existence which made people suppose that I was fond of society) for my letter to Gilberte, and for that reconciliation with the Swann family to which it seemed to point, Odette might very well, and with equal inaccuracy, have added a second. I have suggested hitherto the different aspects that the social world assumes in the eyes of a single person only by supposing that it does not change: if the selfsame woman who the other day knew nobody now goes everywhere, and another who occupied a commanding position is ostracised, one is inclined to see in these changes merely those purely personal ups and downs which from time to time bring about, in the same section of society, in consequence of speculations on the stock exchange, a resounding collapse or enrichment beyond the dreams of avarice. But there is more to it than that. To a certain extent social manifestations (vastly less important than artistic movements, political crises, the trend that leads public taste towards the theatre of ideas, then towards Impressionist painting, then towards music that is German and complicated, then music that is Russian and simple, or towards ideas of social service, ideas of justice, religious reaction, outbursts of patriotism) are nevertheless an echo of them, distant, disjointed, uncertain, changeable, blurred. So that even salons cannot be portrayed in a static immobility which has been conventionally employed up to this point for the study of characters, though these too must be carried along as it were in a quasi-historical momentum. The thirst for novelty that leads men of the fashionable world who are more or less sincere in their eagerness to keep abreast of intellectual developments to frequent the circles in which they can follow them makes them prefer as a rule some hostess as yet undiscovered, who represents still in their first freshness the hopes of a superior culture so faded and tarnished in the women who for long years have wielded the social sceptre and who, having no secrets from these men, no longer appeal to their imagination. And every period finds itself personified thus in new women, in a new group of women, who, closely identified with whatever may be the latest object of curiosity, seem, in their new attire, to be at that moment making their first appearance, like an unknown species born of the last deluge, irresistible beauties of each new Consulate, each new Directory. But very often the new hostesses are simply, like certain statesmen who may be in office for the first time but have for the last forty years been knocking at every door without seeing any open, women who were not known in society but who nevertheless had been entertaining for years past, for want of anyone better, a few "chosen friends." To be sure, this is not always the case, and when, with the prodigious flowering of the Russian Ballet, revealing one after another Bakst, Nijinsky, Benois and the genius of Stravinsky, Princess Yourbeletieff, the youthful sponsor of all these new great men, appeared wearing on her head an immense, quivering aigrette that was new to the women of Paris and that they all sought to copy, it was widely supposed that this marvellous creature had been imported in their copious luggage, and as their most priceless treasure, by the Russian dancers; but when presently, by her side in her stage box at every performance of the "Russians," seated like a true fairy godmother, unknown until that moment to the aristocracy, we see Mme Verdurin, we shall be able to tell the society people who may well suppose her to have recently entered the country with Diaghileff's troupe, that this lady, too, had already existed in different periods and had passed through various avatars from which this one differed only in being the first to bring about at last, henceforth assured, and more and more swiftly on the march, the success so long awaited by the Mistress. In Mme Swann's case, it is true, the novelty she represented had not the same collective character. Her salon had crystallised round one man, a dying man, who had progressed almost overnight, at the moment when his talent was exhausted, from obscurity to a blaze of glory. The craze for Bergotte's works was unbounded. He spent the whole day, on show, at Mme Swann's, who would whisper to some influential man: "I shall say a word to him: he'll write an article for you." He was, in fact, in a condition to do so, and even to write a little play for Mme Swann. A stage nearer to death, he was not quite so ill as at the time when he used to come and inquire after my grandmother. This was because intense physical pain had enforced a regime on him. Illness is the most heeded of doctors: to kindness and wisdom we make promises only; pain we obey.

It is true that the Verdurins and their little clan were at this time of far more lively interest than the faintly nationalist, more markedly literary, and pre-eminently Bergottesque salon of Mme Swann. The little clan was in fact the active centre of a long political crisis which had reached its maximum of intensity: Dreyfusism. But society people were for the most part so violently against reconsideration that a Dreyfusian salon seemed to them as inconceivable a phenomenon as, at an earlier period, a Communard salon. True, the Princesse de Caprarola, who had made Mme Verdurin's acquaintance over a big exhibition which she had organised, had been to pay her a long visit in the hope of seducing a few interesting specimens of the little clan and

incorporating them in her own salon, a visit in the course of which the Princess (playing a poor man's Duchesse de Guermantes) had taken the opposing view to accepted opinion and declared that the people in her world were idiots, all of which Mme Verdurin had thought most courageous. But this courage did not subsequently take her to the point of daring, under the gimlet eyes of nationalist ladies, to bow to Mme Verdurin at the Balbec races. As for Mme Swann, on the other hand, the anti-Dreyfusards gave her credit for being "sound," which, in a woman married to a Jew, was doubly meritorious. Nevertheless, people who had never been to her house imagined her as visited only by a few obscure Jews and disciples of Bergotte. In this way women far better qualified than Mme Swann are placed on the lowest rung of the social ladder, whether on account of their origins, or because they do not care about dinner-parties and receptions, at which they are never seen (an absence erroneously assumed to be due to their not having been invited), or because they never speak of their social connexions but only of literature and art, or because people conceal the fact that they go to their houses, or they, to avoid impoliteness to yet other people, conceal the fact that they entertain them—in short for countless reasons which, added together, make of this or that woman, in certain people's eyes, the sort of woman whom one does not know. So it was with Odette. Mme d'Epinoï, when busy collecting some subscriptions for the "Patrie française," having been obliged to go and see her, as she would have gone to her dressmaker, convinced moreover that she would find only a lot of faces that were not even despised but completely unknown, stood rooted to the ground when the door opened not upon the drawing-room she imagined but upon a magic hall in which, as in the transformation scene of a pantomime, she recognised in the dazzling chorus, reclining upon divans, seated in armchairs, addressing their hostess by her Christian name, the highnesses, the duchesses whom she, the Princesse d'Epinoï, had the greatest difficulty in enticing into her own drawing-room, and to whom at that moment, beneath the benevolent gaze of Odette, the Marquis du Lau, Comte Louis de Turenne, Prince Borghese, the Duc d'Estrées, carrying orangeade and petits fours, were acting as cupbearers and pantlers. The Princesse d'Epinoï, as she instinctively took people's social status to be inherent in themselves, was obliged to disincarnate Mme Swann and reincarnate her in a fashionable woman. Ignorance of the real existence led by women who do not advertise it in the newspapers draws a veil of mystery over certain situations, thereby contributing to the diversification of salons. In Odette's case, at the start, a few men of the highest society, anxious to meet Bergotte, had gone to dine in privacy at her house. She had had the tact, recently acquired, not to advertise their presence; they found when they went there—a memory perhaps of the little nucleus, whose traditions Odette had preserved in spite of the schism—a place laid for them at table, and so forth. Odette took them with Bergotte (whom these excursions, incidentally, finished off) to interesting first nights. They spoke of her to various women of their own world who were capable of taking an interest in such novelty. These women were convinced that Odette, an intimate friend of Bergotte, had more or less collaborated in his works, and believed her to be a thousand times more intelligent than the most outstanding women of the Faubourg, for the same reason that made them pin all their political faith to certain staunch Republicans such as M. Doumer and M. Deschanel, whereas they visualised France on the brink of ruin were her destinies entrusted to the monarchists who were in the habit of dining with them, men like Charette or Doudeauville. This change in Odette's status had been achieved with a discretion on her part that made it more secure and more rapid but allowed no suspicion to filter through to the public, which is prone to refer to the social columns of the *Gaulois* for evidence as to the advance or decline of a salon, with the result that one day, at the dress rehearsal of a play by Bergotte given in one of the most fashionable theatres in aid of a charity, the really dramatic moment was when people saw coming in and sitting down beside Mme Swann in the centre box, which was that reserved for the author, Mme de Marsantes and the lady who, by the gradual self-effacement of the Duchesse de Guermantes (glutted with honours, and taking the easy way out), was on the way to becoming the lioness, the queen of the age: the Comtesse Molé. "We never even imagined that she had begun to climb," people said of Odette as they saw the Comtesse Molé enter the box, "and look, she has reached the top of the ladder."

So that Mme Swann might suppose that it was from snobbery that I was taking up again with her daughter.

Odette, notwithstanding her brilliant friends, listened with close attention to the play, as though she had come there solely to see it performed, just as in the past she used to walk across the Bois for her health, as a form of exercise. Men who in the past had been less assiduously attentive to her came to the edge of the box, disturbing the whole audience, to reach up to her hand and so approach the imposing circle that surrounded her. She, with a smile that was still one of friendliness rather than of irony, replied patiently to their questions, affecting greater calm than might have been expected, a calm that was perhaps sincere, this exhibition being only the belated revelation of a habitual and discreetly hidden intimacy. Behind these three ladies to whom every eye was drawn was Bergotte flanked by the Prince d'Agrigente, Comte Louis de Turenne, and the Marquis de Bréauté. And it is easy to understand that, to men who were received everywhere and could not expect any further distinction save one for original research, this demonstration of their merit which they considered they were making in succumbing to the allurements of a hostess with a reputation for profound intellectuality, in whose house they expected to meet all the fashionable dramatists and novelists of the day, was more exciting, more lively than those evenings at the Princesse de Guermantes's, which, without any change of programme or fresh attraction, had been going on year after year, all more or less like the one we have described at such length. In that exalted world, the world of the Guermantes, in which people were beginning to lose interest, the latest intellectual fashions were not embodied in entertainments fashioned in their image, as in those sketches that Bergotte used to write for Mme Swann, or those veritable Committees of Public Safety (had society been capable of taking an interest in the Dreyfus case) at which, in Mme Verdurin's house, Picquart, Clemenceau, Zola, Reinach and Labori used to assemble.

Gilberte, too, helped to strengthen her mother's position, for an uncle of Swann's had just left her nearly eighty million francs, which meant that the Faubourg Saint-Germain was beginning to take notice of her. The reverse of the medal was that Swann (who, however, was dying) held Dreyfusard opinions, though even this did not injure his wife and was actually of service to her. It did not injure her because people said: "He is dotty, his mind has quite gone, nobody pays any attention to him, his wife is the only person who counts and she is charming." But Swann's Dreyfusism was positively useful to Odette. Left to herself, she might have been unable to resist making advances to fashionable women which would have been her undoing. Whereas on the evenings when she dragged her husband out to dine in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Swann, sitting sullenly in his corner, would not hesitate, if he saw Odette seeking an introduction to some nationalist lady, to exclaim aloud: "Really, Odette, you must be mad. I beg you to keep quiet. It's abject of you to ask to be introduced to anti-semites. I forbid it." People in society whom everyone else runs after are not accustomed either to such pride or to such ill-breeding. For the first time they were seeing someone who thought himself "superior" to them. Swann's growlings were much talked about, and cards with turned-down corners rained upon Odette. When she came to call upon Mme d'Arpajon there was a lively stir of friendly curiosity. "You didn't mind my introducing her to you," said Mme d'Arpajon. "She's very nice. It was Marie de Marsantes who told me about her." "No, not at all, I hear she's so wonderfully clever, and she is charming. I'd been longing to meet her; do tell me where she lives." Mme d'Arpajon told Mme Swann that she had enjoyed herself hugely at the latter's house the other evening, and had joyfully forsaken Mme de Saint-Euverte for her. And it was true, for to prefer Mme Swann was to show that one was intelligent, like going to concerts instead of to tea-parties. But when Mme de Saint-Euverte called on Mme d'Arpajon at the same time as Odette, as Mme de Saint-Euverte was a great snob and Mme d'Arpajon, albeit she treated her without ceremony, valued her invitations, she did not introduce Odette, so that Mme de Saint-Euverte should not know who she was. The Marquise, imagining that it must be some princess who seldom went out since she had never seen her, prolonged her call, replying indirectly to what Odette was saying, but Mme d'Arpajon remained adamant. And when Mme de Saint-Euverte admitted defeat and took her leave, "I didn't introduce you," her hostess told Odette, "because people don't much care about going to her house and she's always inviting one; you'd never have heard the last of her." "Oh, that's all right," said Odette with a pang of regret. But she retained the idea that people did not care to go to Mme de Saint-Euverte's, which was to a certain extent true, and concluded that she herself held a position in society vastly superior to Mme de Saint-Euverte's, although that lady had a very high position, and Odette, so far, none at all.

She was not aware of this, and although all Mme de Guermantes's friends were friends also of Mme d'Arpajon, whenever the latter invited Mme Swann, she would say with an air of compunction: "I'm going to Mme d'Arpajon's, but—you'll think me dreadfully old-fashioned, I know—it shocks me because of Mme de Guermantes" (whom, as it happened, she had never met). Elegant men thought that the fact that Mme Swann knew hardly anyone in high society meant that she must be a superior woman, probably a great musician, and that it would be a sort of extra-social distinction, as for a duke to be a Doctor of Science, to go to her house. Utterly insignificant society women were attracted towards Odette for a diametrically opposite reason; hearing that she attended the Colonne concerts and professed herself a Wagnerian, they concluded from this that she must be "rather a lark," and were greatly excited by the idea of getting to know her. But, being themselves none too firmly established, they were afraid of compromising themselves in public if they appeared to be on friendly terms with Odette, and if they caught sight of her at a charity concert, would turn away their heads, deeming it impossible to greet, under the very nose of Mme de Rochechouart, a woman who was perfectly capable of having been to Bayreuth, which was as good as saying that she would stick at nothing.

Since everybody becomes different when a guest in another's house—quite apart from the marvellous metamorphoses that were accomplished thus in the fairy palaces—in Mme Swann's drawing-room M. de Bréauté, suddenly enhanced by the absence of the people with whom he was normally surrounded, by his air of self-satisfaction at finding himself there, just as if instead of going out to a party he had slipped on his spectacles to shut himself up and read the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, by the mystic rite that he appeared to be performing in coming to see Odette, M. de Bréauté himself seemed a new man. I would have given a great deal to see what transformations the Duchesse de Montmorency-Luxembourg would have undergone in this new environment. But she was one of the people who could never be induced to meet Odette. Mme de Montmorency, a great deal kinder about Oriane than Oriane was about her, surprised me greatly by saying of Mme de Guermantes: "She knows some clever people, and everybody likes her. I believe that if she had had a little more persistence she would have succeeded in forming a salon. The fact is, she never bothered about it, and she's quite right, she's very well off as she is, sought after by everyone." If Mme de Guermantes did not have a "salon," what in the world could a "salon" be? The stupefaction which these words induced in me was no greater than that which I caused Mme de Guermantes when I told her that I enjoyed going to Mme de Montmorency's. Oriane thought her an old cretin. "I go there," she said, "because I'm forced to, she's my aunt; but you! She doesn't even know how to get agreeable people to come to her house." Mme de Guermantes did not realise that agreeable people left me cold, that when she spoke to me of "the Arpajon salon" I saw a yellow butterfly, and of "the Swann salon" (Mme Swann was at home in the winter months between 6 and 7) a black butterfly with its wings powdered with snow. At a pinch this last salon, which was not one at all, she considered, although out of bounds for herself, permissible for me on account of the "clever people" to be found there. But Mme de Luxembourg! Had I already "produced" something that had attracted attention, she would have concluded that an element of snobbishness may be combined with talent. But I put the finishing touch to her disillusionment; I confessed to her that I did not go to Mme de Montmorency's (as she supposed)

to "take notes" and "make a study." Mme de Guermantes was in this respect no more in error than the social novelists who analyse mercilessly from the outside the actions of a snob or supposed snob, but never place themselves inside his skin, at the moment when a whole social springtime is bursting into blossom in the imagination. I myself, when I sought to analyse the great pleasure that I found in going to Mme de Montmorency's, was somewhat taken aback. She occupied, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, an old mansion ramifying into pavilions which were separated by small gardens. In the outer hall a statuette, said to be by Falconet, represented a spring which did indeed exude a perpetual moisture. A little further on the concierge, her eyes always red, either from grief or neurasthenia, a headache or a cold in the head, never answered your inquiry, waved her arm vaguely to indicate that the Duchess was at home, and let a drop or two trickle from her eyelids into a bowl filled with forget-me-nots. The pleasure that I felt on seeing the statuette, because it reminded me of a "little gardener" in plaster that stood in one of the Combray gardens, was nothing to that which was given me by the great staircase, damp and resonant, full of echoes, like the stairs in certain old-fashioned bathing establishments, the vases filled with cinerarias—blue against blue—in the ante-room, and most of all the tinkle of the bell, which was exactly that of the bell in Eulalie's room. This tinkle brought my enthusiasm to its peak, but seemed to me too humble a matter for me to be able to explain it to Mme de Montmorency, with the result that she invariably saw me in a state of rapture of which she never guessed the cause.

#### THE INTERMITTENCIES OF THE HEART

My second arrival at Balbec was very different from the first. The manager had come in person to meet me at Pont-à-Coulevre, reiterating how greatly he valued his titled patrons, which made me afraid that he had ennobled me until I realised that, in the obscurity of his grammatical memory, *titré* meant simply *attitré*, or accredited. In fact, the more new languages he learned the worse he spoke the others. He informed me that he had placed me at the very top of the hotel. "I hope," he said, "that you will not interpolate this as a want of discourtesy. I was worried about giving you a room of which you are unworthy, but I did it in connexion with the noise, because in that room you will not have anyone above your head to disturb your *trepan*" (tympan). "And do not worry, I shall have the windows closed, so that they don't bang. Upon that point, I am intolerable" (this last word expressing not his own thought, which was that he would always be found inexorable in that respect, but, quite possibly, the thoughts of his underlings). The rooms were, as it proved, those we had had before. They were no lower down, but I had risen in the manager's esteem. I could light a fire if I liked (for, on the doctors' orders, I had left Paris at Easter), but he was afraid there might be "fixtures" in the ceiling. "See that you always wait before alighting a fire until the preceding one is extenuated" (extinguished). "The important thing is to take care not to avoid setting fire to the chimney, especially as, to cheer things up a bit, I have put an old china pottage on the mantelpiece which might become damaged."

He informed me with great sorrow of the death of the president of the Cherbourg bar: "He was an old foggy," he said (probably meaning "foxy") and gave me to understand that his end had been hastened by the dissertations, otherwise the dissipations, of his life. "For some time past I noticed that after dinner he would take a catnip in the reading-room" (catnap, presumably). "The last times, he was so changed that if you hadn't known who it was, to look at him, he was barely recognisable" (presumably recognisable).

A happy compensation: the senior judge from Caen had just received his "carton" (cordon) as Commander of the Legion of Honour. "Surely enough, he has capacities, but seems they gave him it principally because of his general impotence." There was a mention of this decoration, as it happened, in the previous day's *Echo de Paris*, of which the manager had as yet read only "the first paraph," in which M. Caillaux's foreign policy was severely trounced. "I consider they're quite right," he said. "He is putting us too much under the thumb of Germany" (under the thumb). As the discussion of a subject of this sort with a hotel-keeper seemed to me boring, I ceased to listen. I thought of the visual images that had made me decide to return to Balbec. They were very different from those of the earlier time, for the vision in quest of which I had come was as dazzlingly clear as the former had been hazy; they were to prove no less disappointing. The images selected by memory are as arbitrary, as narrow, as elusive as those which the imagination had formed and reality has destroyed. There is no reason why, existing outside ourselves, a real place should conform to the pictures in our memory rather than those in our dreams. And besides, a fresh reality will perhaps make us forget, detest even, the desires on account of which we set out on our journey.

Those that had made me set out for Balbec sprang to some extent from my discovery that the Verdurins (whose invitations I had never taken up, and who would certainly be delighted to see me, if I went to call upon them in the country with apologies for never having been able to call upon them in Paris), knowing that several of the faithful would be spending the holidays on that part of the coast, and having, for that reason, taken for the whole season one of M. de Cambremer's houses (La Raspelière), had invited Mme Putbus to stay with them. The evening on which I learned this (in Paris) I lost my head completely and sent our young footman to find out whether that lady would be taking her chambermaid to Balbec with her. It was eleven o'clock at night. The porter was a long time opening the front door, and for a wonder did not send my messenger packing, did not call the police, merely gave him a dressing-down, but with it the information that I desired. He said that the head lady's-maid would indeed be accompanying her mistress, first of all to the waters in Germany, then to Biarritz, and at the end of the season to Mme Verdurin's. From that moment my mind had been set at rest, content to have this iron in the fire. I had been able to dispense with those pursuits

in the streets, wherein I lacked that letter of introduction to the beauties I encountered which I should have to the "Giorgione" in the fact of my having dined that very evening with her mistress at the Verdurins'. Besides, she might perhaps form a still better opinion of me when she learned that I knew not merely the middle-class tenants of La Raspelière but its owners, and above all Saint-Loup who, unable to commend me to the chambermaid from a distance (since she did not know him by name), had written an enthusiastic letter about me to the Cambremers. He believed that, quite apart from any service that they might be able to render me, Mme de Cambremer, the Legrandin daughter-in-law, would interest me by her conversation. "She is an intelligent woman," he had assured me. "She won't say anything definitive" (*definitive* having taken the place of *sublime* with Robert, who, every five or six years, would modify a few of his favourite expressions while preserving the more important intact), "but she's a real personality, she has character and intuition, and throws out quite pertinent remarks. From time to time she's maddening, she dashes off nonsense to 'put on dog,' which is all the more ridiculous as nobody could be less grand than the Cambremers, she's not always 'in the swim,' but, taking her all round, she is one of the people it's most bearable to talk to."

No sooner had Robert's letter of introduction reached them than the Cambremers, whether from a snobbishness that made them anxious to oblige Saint-Loup, even indirectly, or from gratitude for what he had done for one of their nephews at Doncières, or (most probably) from kindness of heart and traditions of hospitality, had written long letters insisting that I should stay with them, or, if I preferred to be more independent, offering to find me lodgings. When Saint-Loup had pointed out that I should be staying at the Grand Hotel at Balbec, they replied that at least they would expect a call from me as soon as I arrived and, if I did not appear, would come without fail to hunt me out and invite me to their garden-parties.

No doubt there was no essential connexion between Mme Putbus's maid and the country round Balbec; she would not be for me like the peasant girl whom, as I strayed alone along the Méséglise way, I had so often summoned up in vain with all the force of my desire. But I had long since given up trying to extract from a woman as it were the square root of her unknown quantity, the mystery of which a mere introduction was generally enough to dispel. At least at Balbec, where I had not been for so long, I should have the advantage, failing the necessary connexion between the place and this woman, that my sense of reality would not be destroyed by habit as in Paris, where, whether in my own home or in a bedroom that I already knew, pleasure indulged in with a woman could not give me for one instant, amid everyday surroundings, the illusion that it was opening the door for me to a new life. (For if habit is a second nature, it prevents us from knowing our first, whose cruelties it lacks as well as its enchantments.) But I might perhaps experience this illusion in a strange place, where one's sensibility is revived by a ray of sunshine, and where my ardour would be finally consummated by the chambermaid I desired. However, we shall see that circumstances conspired in such a way that not only did this woman fail to come to Balbec, but I dreaded nothing so much as the possibility of her coming, so that the principal object of my expedition was neither attained nor indeed pursued.

It was true that Mme Putbus was not to be at the Verdurins' so early in the season; but pleasures which we have chosen may be remote if their coming is assured and if, in the interval of waiting, we can devote ourselves to the idleness of seeking to attract while powerless to love. Moreover, I was not going to Balbec in a frame of mind as little practical as on the first occasion; there is always less egoism in pure imagination than in recollection; and I knew that I was going to find myself in one of those very places where fair strangers must abound; a beach offers them in no less profusion than a ball-room, and I looked forward to strolling up and down outside the hotel, on the front, with the same sort of pleasure that Mme de Guermantes would have procured me if, instead of getting me invited to brilliant dinner-parties, she had given my name more often for their lists of partners to hostesses who gave dances. To make female acquaintances at Balbec would be as easy for me now as it had been difficult before, for I was now as well supplied with friends and resources there as I had been destitute of them on my first visit.

I was roused from my meditations by the voice of the manager, to whose political dissertations I had not been listening. Changing the subject, he told me of the judge's delight on hearing of my arrival, and said that he was coming to pay me a visit in my room that very evening. The thought of this visit so alarmed me (for I was beginning to feel tired) that I begged him to prevent it (which he promised to do) and, as a further precaution, to post members of his staff on guard, for the first night, on my landing. He did not seem overfond of his staff. "I am obliged to keep running after them all the time because they are lacking in inertia. If I was not there they would never stir. I shall post the lift-boy on sentry outside your door." I asked him if the boy had yet become "head page." "He is not old enough yet in the house," was the answer. "He has comrades more aged than he is. It would cause an outcry. We must act with granulation in everything. I quite admit that he strikes a good aptitude at the door of his lift. But he is still a trifle young for such positions. With others in the place of longer standing, it would make a contrast. He is a little wanting in seriousness, which is the primitive quality" (doubtless, the primordial, the most important quality). "He needs his leg screwed on a bit tighter" (my interlocutor meant to say his head). "Anyhow, he can leave it all to me. I know what I'm about. Before I won my stripes as manager of the Grand Hotel, I smelt powder under M. Paillard." I was impressed by this simile, and thanked the manager for having come in person as far as Pont-à-Coulevre. "Oh, that's nothing! The loss of time has been quite infinite" (for infinitesimal). Meanwhile, we had arrived.

Upheaval of my entire being. On the first night, as I was suffering from cardiac fatigue, I bent down slowly and cautiously to take off my boots, trying to master my pain. But scarcely had I touched the topmost button than my chest swelled, filled with an unknown, a divine presence, I was shaken with sobs, tears streamed from my eyes. The being who had come to my rescue, saving me from barrenness of spirit, was the same who, years before, in a moment of identical distress and loneliness, in a moment when I had nothing left of myself, had

come in and had restored me to myself, for that being was myself and something more than me (the container that is greater than the contained and was bringing it to me). I had just perceived, in my memory, stooping over my fatigue, the tender, preoccupied, disappointed face of my grandmother, as she had been on that first evening of our arrival, the face not of that grandmother whom I had been astonished and remorseful at having so little missed, and who had nothing in common with her save her name, but of my real grandmother, of whom, for the first time since the afternoon of her stroke in the Champs-Élysées, I now recaptured the living reality in a complete and involuntary recollection. This reality does not exist for us so long as it has not been re-created by our thought (otherwise men who have been engaged in a titanic struggle would all of them be great epic poets); and thus, in my wild desire to fling myself into her arms, it was only at that moment—more than a year after her burial, because of the anachronism which so often prevents the calendar of facts from corresponding to the calendar of feelings—that I became conscious that she was dead. I had often spoken about her since then, and thought of her also, but behind my words and thoughts, those of an ungrateful, selfish, cruel young man, there had never been anything that resembled my grandmother, because, in my frivolity, my love of pleasure, my familiarity with the spectacle of her ill health, I retained within me only in a potential state the memory of what she had been. No matter at what moment we consider it, our total soul has only a more or less fictitious value, in spite of the rich inventory of its assets, for now some, now others are unrealisable, whether they are real riches or those of the imagination—in my own case, for example, not only of the ancient name of Guermantes but those, immeasurably graver, of the true memory of my grandmother. For with the perturbations of memory are linked the intermittencies of the heart. It is, no doubt, the existence of our body, which we may compare to a vase enclosing our spiritual nature, that induces us to suppose that all our inner wealth, our past joys, all our sorrows, are perpetually in our possession. Perhaps it is equally inexact to suppose that they escape or return. In any case if they remain within us, for most of the time it is in an unknown region where they are of no use to us, and where even the most ordinary are crowded out by memories of a different kind, which preclude any simultaneous occurrence of them in our consciousness. But if the context of sensations in which they are preserved is recaptured, they acquire in turn the same power of expelling everything that is incompatible with them, of installing alone in us the self that originally lived them. Now, inasmuch as the self that I had just suddenly become once again had not existed since that evening long ago when my grandmother had undressed me after my arrival at Balbec, it was quite naturally, not at the end of the day that had just passed, of which that self knew nothing, but—as though Time were to consist of a series of different and parallel lines—without any solution of continuity, immediately after the first evening at Balbec long ago, that I clung to the minute in which my grandmother had stooped over me. The self that I then was, that had disappeared for so long, was once again so close to me that I seemed still to hear the words that had just been spoken, although they were now no more than a phantasm, as a man who is half awake thinks he can still make out, close by, the sound of his receding dream. I was now solely the person who had sought a refuge in his grandmother's arms, had sought to obliterate the traces of his sorrow by smothering her with kisses, that person whom I should have had as much difficulty in imagining when I was one or other of those that for some time past I had successively been as now I should have had in making the sterile effort to experience the desires and joys of one of those that for a time at least I no longer was. I remembered how, an hour before the moment when my grandmother had stooped in her dressing-gown to unfasten my boots, as I wandered along the stiflingly hot street, past the pastry-cook's, I had felt that I could never, in my need to feel her arms round me, live through the hour that I had still to spend without her. And now that this same need had reawakened, I knew that I might wait hour after hour, that she would never again be by my side. I had only just discovered this because I had only just, on feeling her for the first time alive, real, making my heart swell to breaking-point, on finding her at last, learned that I had lost her for ever. Lost for ever; I could not understand, and I struggled to endure the anguish of this contradiction: on the one hand an existence, a tenderness, surviving in me as I had known them, that is to say created for me, a love which found in me so totally its complement, its goal, its constant lodestar, that the genius of great men, all the genius that might have existed from the beginning of the world, would have been less precious to my grandmother than a single one of my defects; and on the other hand, as soon as I had relived that bliss, as though it were present, feeling it shot through by the certainty, throbbing like a recurrent pain, of an annihilation that had effaced my image of that tenderness, had destroyed that existence, retrospectively abolished our mutual predestination, made of my grandmother, at the moment when I had found her again as in a mirror, a mere stranger whom chance had allowed to spend a few years with me, as she might have done with anyone else, but to whom, before and after those years, I was and would be nothing.

Instead of the pleasures that I had been experiencing of late, the only pleasure that it would have been possible for me to enjoy at that moment would have been, by touching up the past, to diminish the sorrows and sufferings of my grandmother's life. But I did not remember her only in that dressing-gown, a garment so appropriate as to have become almost symbolic of the pains, unhealthy no doubt but comforting too, which she took for me; gradually I began to remember all the opportunities that I had seized, by letting her see my sufferings and exaggerating them if necessary, to cause her a grief which I imagined as being obliterated immediately by my kisses, as though my tenderness had been as capable as my happiness of making her happy; and, worse than that, I who could conceive of no other happiness now but that of finding happiness shed in my memory over the contours of that face, moulded and bowed by tenderness, had striven with such insensate frenzy to expunge from it even the smallest pleasures, as on the day when Saint-Loup had taken my grandmother's photograph and I, unable to conceal from her what I thought of the childish, almost ridiculous vanity with which she posed for him, with her wide-brimmed hat, in a flattering half light, had allowed myself

to mutter a few impatient, wounding words, which, I had sensed from a contraction of her features, had struck home; it was I whose heart they were rending, now that the consolation of countless kisses was for ever impossible.

But never again would I be able to erase that tightening of her face, that anguish of her heart, or rather of mine; for as the dead exist only in us, it is ourselves that we strike without respite when we persist in recalling the blows that we have dealt them. I clung to this pain, cruel as it was, with all my strength, for I realised that it was the effect of the memory I had of my grandmother, the proof that this memory was indeed present within me. I felt that I did not really remember her except through pain, and I longed for the nails that riveted her to my consciousness to be driven yet deeper. I did not try to mitigate my suffering, to embellish it, to pretend that my grandmother was only somewhere else and momentarily invisible, by addressing to her photograph (the one taken by Saint-Loup, which I had with me) words and entreaties as to a person who is separated from us but, retaining his personality, knows us and remains bound to us by an indissoluble harmony. Never did I do this, for I was determined not merely to suffer, but to respect the original form of my suffering as it had suddenly come upon me unawares, and I wanted to continue to feel it, following its own laws, whenever that contradiction of survival and annihilation, so strangely intertwined within me, returned. I did not know for certain whether one day I would draw a little truth from this painful and for the moment incomprehensible impression, but I knew that if I ever could extract that little truth, it would only be from this impression and from none other, an impression at once so particular and so spontaneous, which had neither been traced by my intelligence nor deflected or attenuated by my pusillanimity, but which death itself, the sudden revelation of death, striking like a thunderbolt, had carved within me, along a supernatural and inhuman graph, in a double and mysterious furrow. (As for that forgetfulness of my grandmother in which I had been living until now, I could not even think of clinging to it to find some truth; since in itself it was nothing but a negation, a weakening of the faculty of thought incapable of re-creating a real moment of life and obliged to substitute for it conventional and neutral images.) Perhaps, however, the instinct of self-preservation, the ingenuity of the mind in safeguarding us from pain, already beginning to lay the foundations of its necessary but baneful edifice on the still smoking ruins, I relished too keenly the sweet joy of recalling this or that opinion held by the beloved being, recalling them as though she had been able to hold them still, as though she existed, as though I continued to exist for her. But as soon as I had succeeded in falling asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes closed to the things of the outer world, the world of sleep (on whose frontier my intelligence and my will, momentarily paralysed, could no longer strive to rescue me from the cruelty of my real impressions) reflected, refracted the painful synthesis of survival and annihilation, in the organic and now translucent depths of the mysteriously lighted viscera. World of sleep—in which our inner consciousness, subordinated to the disturbances of our organs, accelerates the rhythm of the heart or the respiration, because the same dose of terror, sorrow or remorse acts with a strength magnified a hundredfold if thus injected into our veins: as soon as, to traverse the arteries of the subterranean city, we have embarked upon the dark current of our own blood as upon an inward Lethe meandering sixfold, tall solemn forms appear to us, approach and glide away, leaving us in tears. I sought in vain for my grandmother's form when I had entered beneath the sombre portals; yet I knew that she did exist still, if with a diminished life, as pale as that of memory; the darkness was increasing, and the wind; my father, who was to take me to her, had not yet arrived. Suddenly my breath failed me, I felt my heart turn to stone; I had just remembered that for weeks on end I had forgotten to write to my grandmother. What must she be thinking of me? "Oh God," I said to myself, "how wretched she must be in that little room which they have taken for her, as small as for an old servant, where she's all alone with the nurse they have put there to look after her, from which she cannot stir, for she's still slightly paralysed and has always refused to get up! She must think that I've forgotten her now that she's dead; how lonely she must be feeling, how deserted! Oh, I must hurry to see her, I mustn't lose a minute, I can't wait for my father to come—but where is it? How can I have forgotten the address? Will she know me again, I wonder? How can I have forgotten her all these months? It's so dark, I shan't be able to find her; the wind is holding me back; but look! there's my father walking ahead of me"; I call out to him: "Where is grandmother? Tell me her address. Is she all right? Are you quite sure she has everything she needs?" "Yes, yes," says my father, "you needn't worry. Her nurse is well trained. We send a very small sum from time to time, so she can get your grandmother the little she needs. She sometimes asks what's become of you. She was told you were going to write a book. She seemed pleased. She wiped away a tear." And then I seemed to remember that shortly after her death, my grandmother had said to me, sobbing, with a humble look, like an old servant who has been given notice, like a stranger: "You will let me see something of you occasionally, won't you; don't let too many years go by without visiting me. Remember that you were my grandson, once, and that grandmothers don't forget." And seeing again that face of hers, so submissive, so sad, so gentle, I wanted to run to her at once and say to her, as I ought to have said to her then: "Why, grandmother, you can see me as often as you like, I have only you in the world, I shall never leave you any more." What tears my silence must have made her shed through all those months in which I have never been to the place where she is lying! What can she have been saying to herself? And it is in a voice choked with tears that I too say to my father: "Quick, quick, her address, take me to her." But he says: "Well ... I don't know whether you will be able to see her. Besides, you know, she's very frail now, very frail, she's not at all herself, I'm afraid you would find it rather painful. And I can't remember the exact number of the avenue." "But tell me, you who know, it's not true that the dead have ceased to exist. It can't possibly be true, in spite of what they say, because grandmother still exists." My father smiles sadly: "Oh, hardly at all, you know, hardly at all. I think it would be better if you didn't go. She has everything that she wants. They come



and keep the place tidy for her." "But is she often alone?" "Yes, but that's better for her. It's better for her not to think, it could only make her unhappy. Thinking often makes people unhappy. Besides, you know, she's quite faded now. I shall leave a note of the exact address, so that you can go there; but I don't see what good you can do, and I don't suppose the nurse will allow you to see her." "But you know quite well I shall always live close to her, stags, stags, Francis Jammes, fork." But already I had retraced the dark meanderings of the stream, had ascended to the surface where the world of the living opens, so that if I still repeated: "Francis Jammes, stags, stags," the sequence of these words no longer offered me the limpid meaning and logic which they had expressed so naturally for me only a moment before, and which I could not now recall. I could not even understand why the word "Aias" which my father had said to me just now had immediately signified: "Take care you don't catch cold," without any possibility of doubt.

I had forgotten to close the shutters, and so probably the daylight had awakened me. But I could not bear to have before my eyes those sea vistas on which my grandmother used to gaze for hours on end; the fresh image of their heedless beauty was at once supplemented by the thought that she could not see them; I should have liked to stop my ears against their sound, for now the luminous plenitude of the beach carved out an emptiness in my heart; everything seemed to be saying to me, like those paths and lawns of a public garden in which I had once lost her, long ago, when I was still a little child: "We haven't seen her," and beneath the roundness of the pale vault of heaven I felt crushed as though beneath a huge bluish bell enclosing an horizon from which my grandmother was excluded. So as not to see anything any more, I turned towards the wall, but alas, what was now facing me was that partition which used to serve us as a morning messenger, that partition which, as responsive as a violin in rendering every nuance of a feeling, reported so exactly to my grandmother my fear at once of waking her and, if she were already awake, of not being heard by her and so of her not coming, then immediately, like a second instrument taking up the melody, informing me of her coming and bidding me be calm. I dared not put out my hand to that wall, any more than to a piano on which my grandmother had been playing and which still vibrated from her touch. I knew that I might knock now, even louder, that nothing would wake her any more, that I should hear no response, that my grandmother would never come again. And I asked nothing more of God, if a paradise exists, than to be able, there, to knock on that wall with the three little raps which my grandmother would recognise among a thousand, and to which she would give those answering knocks which meant: "Don't fuss, little mouse, I know you're impatient, but I'm just coming," and that he would let me stay with her throughout eternity, which would not be too long for the two of us.

The manager came in to ask whether I should like to come down. He had most carefully supervised, just in case, my "placement" in the dining-room. As he had seen no sign of me, he had been afraid that I might have had a recurrence of my spasms. He hoped that it might be only a little "sore throats" and assured me that he had heard it said that they could be soothed with what he called "calyptus."

He brought me a message from Albertine. She had not been due to come to Balbec that year but, having changed her plans, had been for the last three days not in Balbec itself but ten minutes away by train at a neighbouring watering-place. Fearing that I might be tired after the journey, she had stayed away the first evening, but sent word now to ask when I could see her. I inquired whether she had called in person, not because I wished to see her, but so that I might arrange not to see her. "Yes," replied the manager. "But she would like it to be as soon as possible, unless you have not some quite necessitous reasons. You see," he concluded, "that everybody here desires you in the end." But for my part, I wished to see nobody.

And yet the day before, on my arrival, I had been seized once again by the indolent charm of seaside existence. The same taciturn lift-boy, silent this time from respect and not from disdain, and glowing with pleasure, had set the lift in motion. As I rose upon the ascending column, I had travelled once again through what had formerly been for me the mystery of a strange hotel, in which when you arrive, a tourist without protection or prestige, each resident returning to his room, each young girl going down to dinner, each servant passing along the eerie perspective of a corridor, not to mention the young lady from America with her chaperon, gives you a look in which you can read nothing that you would have liked to. This time, on the contrary, I had felt the almost too soothing pleasure of passing up through a hotel that I knew, where I felt at home, where I had performed once again that operation which we must always start afresh, longer, more difficult than the turning inside out of an eyelid, and which consists in the imposition of our own familiar soul on the terrifying soul of our surroundings. Must I now, I had asked myself, little suspecting the sudden change of mood that was in store for me, go always to new hotels where I shall be dining for the first time, where Habit will not yet have killed upon each landing, outside each door, the terrible dragon that seemed to be watching over an enchanted existence, where I shall have to approach those unknown women whom grand hotels, casinos, watering-places seem to bring together to live a communal existence as though in vast polyparies?

I had found pleasure even in the thought that the tedious judge was so eager to see me; I could see, on the first evening, the waves, the azure mountain ranges of the sea, its glaciers and its cataracts, its elevation and its careless majesty, merely upon smelling for the first time after so long an interval, as I washed my hands, that peculiar odour of the over-scented soap of the Grand Hotel—which, seeming to belong at once to the present moment and to my past visit, floated between them like the real charm of a particular form of existence in which one comes home only to change one's tie. The sheets on my bed, too fine, too light, too large, impossible to tuck in, to keep in position, which billowed out from beneath the blankets in shifting whorls, would have distressed me before. Now they merely cradled upon the awkward, swelling fullness of their sails the glorious sunrise, big with hopes, of my first morning. But that sun did not have time to appear.

That very night the terrible, divine presence had returned to life. I asked the manager to leave me, and to give orders that no one was to enter my room. I told him that I should remain in bed and rejected his offer to send to the chemist's for the excellent drug. He was delighted by my refusal for he was afraid that other visitors might be bothered by the smell of the "calyptus." It earned me the compliment: "You are in the movement" (he meant: "in the right"), and the warning: "Take care you don't dirty yourself at the door, I've had the lock 'elucidated' with oil; if any of the servants dares to knock at your door, he'll be beaten 'black and white.' And they can mark my words, for I'm not a repeater" (this evidently meant that he did not say a thing twice). "But wouldn't you care for a drop of old wine, just to set you up; I have a pig's head of it downstairs" (presumably hogshead). "I shan't bring it to you on a silver dish like the head of Jonathan, and I warn you that it is not Château-Lafite, but it is virtually equivocal" (equivalent). "And as it's quite light, they might fry you a little sole." I declined everything, but was surprised to hear the name of the fish pronounced like that of the first king of Israel, Saul, by a man who must have ordered so many in his life.

Despite the manager's promises, a little later I was brought a calling-card from the Marquise de Cambremer. Having come over to see me, the old lady had inquired whether I was there and when she heard that I had arrived only the day before and was unwell, had not insisted but (not without stopping, doubtless, at the chemist's or the haberdasher's, while the footman jumped down from the box and went in to pay a bill or to give an order) had driven back to Féterne in her old barouche upon eight springs drawn by a pair of horses. Not infrequently indeed was the rumble of the latter to be heard and its trappings admired in the streets of Balbec and of various other little places along the coast, between Balbec and Féterne. Not that these halts outside shops were the object of these excursions. It was on the contrary some tea-party or garden-party at the house of some squire or burgess, socially quite unworthy of the Marquise. But she, though completely overshadowing, by her birth and her wealth, the petty nobility of the district, was in her perfect goodness and simplicity of heart so afraid of disappointing anyone who had invited her that she would attend all the most insignificant social gatherings in the neighbourhood. Certainly, rather than travel such a distance to listen, in the stifling heat of a tiny drawing-room, to a singer who generally had no voice and whom in her capacity as the lady bountiful of the countryside and as a renowned musician she would afterwards be compelled to congratulate with exaggerated warmth, Mme de Cambremer would have preferred to go for a drive or to remain in her marvellous gardens at Féterne, at the foot of which the drowsy waters of a little bay float in to die amid the flowers. But she knew that the probability of her coming had been announced by the host, whether he was a noble or a freeman of Maineville-la-Teinturière or of Chattoncourt-l'Orgueilleux. And if Mme de Cambremer had driven out that afternoon without making a formal appearance at the party, one or other of the guests who had come from one of the little places that lined the coast might have seen or heard the Marquise's barouche, thus depriving her of the excuse that she had not been able to get away from Féterne. Moreover, for all that these hosts had often seen Mme de Cambremer appear at concerts given in houses which they considered were no place for her, the slight depreciation which in their eyes the position of the too obliging Marquise suffered thereby vanished as soon as it was they who were entertaining her, and it was with feverish anxiety that they would ask themselves whether or not they were going to see her at their little party. What an assuagement of the doubts and fears of days if, after the first song had been sung by the daughter of the house or by some amateur on holiday in the neighbourhood, one of the guests announced (an infallible sign that the Marquise was coming to the party) that he had seen the famous barouche and pair drawn up outside the watchmaker's or the chemist's! Thereupon Mme de Cambremer (who indeed would arrive before long, followed by her daughter-in-law and the guests who were staying with her at the moment and whom she had asked permission, joyfully granted, to bring) shone once more with undiminished lustre in the eyes of the host and hostess, for whom the hoped-for reward of her coming had perhaps been the determining if unavowed cause of the decision they had made a month earlier to burden themselves with the trouble and expense of an afternoon party. Seeing the Marquise present at their gathering, they remembered no longer her readiness to attend those given by their less qualified neighbours, but the antiquity of her family, the splendour of her house, the rudeness of her daughter-in-law, *née* Legrandin, who by her arrogance emphasised the slightly insipid good-nature of the dowager. Already they could see in their mind's eye, in the social column of the *Gaulois*, the paragraph which they would concoct themselves in the family circle, with all the doors shut and barred, about "the little corner of Brittany where they have a good time, the ultra-select party from which the guests could hardly tear themselves away, promising their charming host and hostess that they would soon pay them another visit." Day after day they would watch for the newspaper to arrive, worried that they had not yet seen any notice in it of their party, and afraid lest they should have had Mme de Cambremer for their other guests alone and not for the whole reading public. At length the blessed day would arrive: "The season is exceptionally brilliant this year at Balbec. Small afternoon concerts are the fashion ..." Heaven be praised, Mme de Cambremer's name had been spelt correctly, and "mentioned at random" but at the head of the list. All that remained would be to appear annoyed at this journalistic indiscretion which might get them into difficulties with people whom they had not been able to invite, and to ask hypocritically in Mme de Cambremer's hearing who could have been so treacherous as to send the notice, upon which the Marquise, every inch the lady bountiful, would say: "I can understand your being annoyed, but I must say I'm only too delighted that people should know I was at your party."

On the card that was brought me, Mme de Cambremer had scribbled the message that she was giving an afternoon party "the day after tomorrow." And indeed only two days earlier, tired as I was of social life, it would have been a real pleasure to me to taste it, transplanted amid those gardens in which, thanks to the exposure of Féterne, fig trees, palms, rose bushes grew out in the open and stretched down to a sea often as

blue and calm as the Mediterranean, upon which the hosts' little yacht would sail across, before the party began, to fetch the most important guests from the places on the other side of the bay, would serve, with its awnings spread to shut out the sun, as an open-air refreshment room after the party had assembled, and would set sail again in the evening to take back those whom it had brought. A charming luxury, but so costly that it was partly to meet the expenditure that it entailed that Mme de Cambremer had sought to increase her income in various ways, notably by letting for the first time one of her properties, very different from Féterne: La Raspelière. Yes, two days earlier, how welcome such a party, peopled with minor nobles all unknown to me, in a new setting, would have been to me as a change from the "high life" of Paris! But now pleasures had no longer any meaning for me. And so I wrote to Mme de Cambremer to decline, just as, an hour ago, I had sent Albertine away: grief had destroyed in me the possibility of desire as completely as a high fever takes away one's appetite. My mother was to arrive the following day. I felt that I was less unworthy to live in her company, that I should understand her better, now that a whole alien and degrading existence had given way to the resurgence of the heart-rending memories that encircled and ennobled my soul, like hers, with their crown of thorns. So I thought; but in reality there is a world of difference between real grief, like my mother's—which literally crushes the life out of one for years if not for ever, when one has lost the person one loves—and that other kind of grief, transitory when all is said, as mine was to be, which passes as quickly as it has been slow in coming, which we do not experience until long after the event because in order to feel it we need first to "understand" the event; grief such as so many people feel, from which the grief that was torturing me at this moment differed only in assuming the form of involuntary memory.

That I was one day to experience a grief as profound as that of my mother will be seen in the course of this narrative, but it was neither then nor thus that I imagined it. Nevertheless, like an actor who ought to have learned his part and to have been in his place long beforehand but, having arrived only at the last moment and having read over once only what he has to say, manages to improvise so skilfully when his cue comes that nobody notices his unpunctuality, my new-found grief enabled me, when my mother came, to talk to her as though it had existed always. She supposed merely that the sight of these places which I had visited with my grandmother (which was not at all the case) had revived it. For the first time then, and because I felt a sorrow which was as nothing compared with hers but which opened my eyes, I realised with horror what she must be suffering. For the first time I understood that the blank, tearless gaze (because of which Françoise had little pity for her) that she had worn since my grandmother's death was fixed on that incomprehensible contradiction between memory and non-existence. Moreover, since, though still in deep mourning, she was more "dressed up" in this new place, I was more struck by the transformation that had occurred in her. It is not enough to say that she had lost all her gaiety; fused, congealed into a sort of imploring image, she seemed to be afraid of affronting by too sudden a movement, by too loud a tone of voice, the sorrowful presence that never left her. But above all, as soon as I saw her enter in her crape overcoat, I realised—something that had escaped me in Paris—that it was no longer my mother that I had before my eyes, but my grandmother. As, in royal and ducal families, on the death of the head of the house his son takes his title and, from being Duc d'Orléans, Prince de Tarente or Prince des Laumes, becomes King of France, Duc de La Trémoille, Duc de Guermantes, so by an accession of a different order and more profound origin, the dead annex the living who become their replicas and successors, the continuators of their interrupted life. Perhaps the great sorrow that, in a daughter such as Mamma, follows the death of her mother simply breaks the chrysalis a little sooner, hastens the metamorphosis and the appearance of a being whom we carry within us and who, but for this crisis which annihilates time and space, would have emerged more gradually. Perhaps, in our regret for her who is no more, there is a sort of auto-suggestion which ends by bringing out in our features resemblances which potentially we already bore, and above all a cessation of our most characteristically individual activity (in my mother, her common sense and the mocking gaiety that she inherited from her father), which, so long as the beloved person was alive, we did not shrink from exercising, even at her expense, and which counterbalanced the traits that we derived exclusively from her. Once she is dead, we hesitate to be different, we begin to admire only what she was, what we ourselves already were, only blended with something else, and what in future we shall be exclusively. It is in this sense (and not in that other sense, so vague, so false, in which the phrase is generally understood) that we may say that death is not in vain, that the dead continue to act upon us. They act upon us even more than the living because, true reality being discoverable only by the mind, being the object of a mental process, we acquire a true knowledge only of things that we are obliged to re-create by thought, things that are hidden from us in everyday life ... Lastly, in this cult of grief for our dead, we pay an idolatrous worship to the things that they loved. My mother could not bear to be parted, not only from my grandmother's bag, which had become more precious than if it had been studded with sapphires and diamonds, from her muff, from all those garments which served to accentuate the physical resemblance between them, but even from the volumes of Mme de Sévigné which my grandmother took with her everywhere, copies which my mother would not have exchanged even for the original manuscript of the *Letters*. She had often teased my grandmother, who could never write to her without quoting some phrase of Mme de Sévigné or Mme de Beauséjour. In each of the three letters that I received from Mamma before her arrival at Balbec, she quoted Mme de Sévigné to me as though those three letters had been written not by her to me but by my grandmother to her. She must at once go out on to the front to see that beach of which my grandmother had spoken to her every day in her letters. I saw her from my window, dressed in black, and carrying her mother's sunshade, advancing with timid, pious steps over the sands which beloved feet had trodden before her, and she looked as though she were going in search of a corpse which the waves would cast up at her feet. So that she should not have to dine alone, I had to join her downstairs. The judge and the

president's widow asked to be introduced to her. And everything that was in any way connected with my grandmother was so precious to her that she was deeply touched, and remembered ever afterwards with gratitude what the judge said to her, just as she was hurt and indignant that on the contrary the president's wife had not a word to say in memory of the dead woman. In reality, the judge cared no more about my grandmother than the president's wife. The affecting words of the one and the other's silence, for all that my mother put so vast a distance between them, were but alternative ways of expressing that indifference which we feel towards the dead. But I think that my mother found most comfort in the words in which I unintentionally betrayed a little of my own anguish. It could not but make Mamma happy (notwithstanding all her affection for myself), like everything else that guaranteed my grandmother survival in people's hearts. Daily after this my mother went down and sat on the beach, in order to do exactly what her mother had done, and read her two favourite books, the *Memoirs* of Mme de Beausergent and the *Letters* of Mme de Sévigné. She, like all the rest of us, could not bear to hear the latter called the "witty Marquise" any more than to hear La Fontaine called "le Bonhomme." But when, in reading the *Letters*, she came upon the words "my daughter," she seemed to be listening to her mother's voice.

She had the misfortune, on one of these pilgrimages during which she did not like to be disturbed, to meet on the beach a lady from Combray, accompanied by her daughters. Her name was, I think, Mme Poussin. But among ourselves we always referred to her as "Just You Wait," for it was by the perpetual repetition of this phrase that she warned her daughters of the evils that they were laying up for themselves, saying for instance if one of them was rubbing her eyes: "Just you wait until you go and get ophthalmia." She greeted my mother from afar with long, lachrymose bows, a sign not of condolence but of the nature of her social training. Had we not lost my grandmother and had we only had reasons to be happy, she would have done the same. Living in comparative retirement at Combray within the walls of her large garden, she could never find anything soft enough for her liking, and subjected words and even proper names to a softening process. She felt "spoon" to be too hard a word to apply to the piece of silverware which measured out her syrups, and said, in consequence, "spune"; she would have been afraid of offending the gentle bard of Télémaque by calling him bluntly Fénelon—as I myself did with every reason to know, having as my dearest friend the best, bravest, most intelligent of men, whom no one who knew him could forget: Bertrand de Fénelon—and invariably said "Fénélon," feeling that the acute accent added a certain softness. The far from soft son-in-law of this Mme Poussin, whose name I have forgotten, having been notary public at Combray, ran off with the funds, and relieved my uncle, in particular, of a considerable sum of money. But most of the inhabitants of Combray were on such friendly terms with the rest of the family that no coolness ensued and people were merely sorry for Mme Poussin. She never entertained, but whenever people passed by her railings they would stop to admire the shade of her admirable trees, without being able to make out anything else. She hardly gave us any trouble at Balbec, where I encountered her only once, at a moment when she was saying to a daughter who was biting her nails: "Just you wait till you get a good whitlow."

While Mamma sat reading on the beach I remained in my room by myself. I recalled the last weeks of my grandmother's life, and everything connected with them, the outer door of the flat which had been propped open when I went out with her for the last time. In contrast with all this the rest of the world seemed scarcely real and my anguish poisoned everything in it. Finally my mother insisted on my going out. But at every step, some forgotten view of the casino, of the street along which, while waiting for her that first evening, I had walked as far as the Duguay-Trouin monument, prevented me, like a wind against which it is hopeless to struggle, from going further; I lowered my eyes in order not to see. And after I had recovered my strength a little I turned back towards the hotel, the hotel in which I knew that it was henceforth impossible that, however long I might wait, I should find my grandmother as I had found her there before, on the evening of our arrival. As it was the first time that I had gone out of doors, a number of servants whom I had not yet seen gazed at me curiously. On the very threshold of the hotel a young page took off his cap to greet me and at once put it on again. I supposed that Aimé had, to borrow his own expression, "tipped him the wink" to treat me with respect. But I saw a moment later that, as someone else entered the hotel, he doffed it again. The fact of the matter was that this young man had no other occupation in life than to take off and put on his cap, and did it to perfection. Having realised that he was incapable of doing anything else but excelled in that, he practised it as many times a day as possible, thus winning a discreet but widespread regard from the hotel guests, coupled with great regard from the hall porter upon whom devolved the duty of engaging the boys and who, until this rare bird alighted, had never succeeded in finding anyone who wasn't sacked within a week, greatly to the astonishment of Aimé who used to say: "After all, in that job they've only got to be polite, which can't be so very difficult." The manager required in addition that they should have what he called a good "present," meaning thereby that they should stay there, or more likely having misremembered the word "presence." The appearance of the lawn behind the hotel had been altered by the creation of several flower-beds and by the removal not only of an exotic shrub but of the page who, at the time of my former visit, used to provide an external decoration with the supple stem of his figure and the curious colouring of his hair. He had gone off with a Polish countess who had taken him as her secretary, following the example of his two elder brothers and their typist sister, snatched from the hotel by persons of different nationality and sex who had been attracted by their charm. The only one remaining was the youngest, whom nobody wanted because he squinted. He was highly delighted when the Polish countess or the protectors of the other two brothers came on a visit to the hotel at Balbec. For, although he envied his brothers, he was fond of them and could in this way cultivate his family feelings for a few weeks in the year. Was not the Abbess of Fontevault, deserting her nuns for the occasion, in the habit of going to partake of the hospitality which Louis XIV offered to that

other Mortemart, his mistress, Madame de Montespan? The boy was still in his first year at Balbec; he did not as yet know me, but having heard his comrades of longer standing supplement the word "Monsieur" with my surname when they addressed me, he copied them from the first with an air of self-satisfaction, either at showing his familiarity with a person whom he supposed to be well-known, or at conforming with a usage of which five minutes earlier he had been unaware but which he felt it was imperative to observe. I could well appreciate the charm that this great hotel might have for certain persons. It was arranged like a theatre, and was filled to the flies with a numerous and animated cast. For all that the visitor was only a sort of spectator, he was perpetually involved in the performance, not simply as in one of those theatres where the actors play a scene in the auditorium, but as though the life of the spectator was going on amid the sumptuosities of the stage. The tennis-player might come in wearing a white flannel blazer, but the porter would have put on a blue frock-coat with silver braid in order to hand him his letters. If this tennis-player did not choose to walk upstairs, he was equally involved with the actors in having by his side, to propel the lift, its attendant no less richly attired. The corridors on each floor engulfed a flock of chambermaids and female couriers, fair visions against the sea, like the frieze of the Panathenaea, to whose modest rooms devotees of ancillary feminine beauty would penetrate by cunning detours. Downstairs, it was the masculine element that predominated and that made this hotel, in view of the extreme and idle youth of the servants, a sort of Judaeo-Christian tragedy given bodily form and perpetually in performance. And so I could not help reciting to myself, when I saw them, not indeed the lines of Racine that had come into my head at the Princesse de Guermantes's while M. de Vaugoubert stood watching young embassy secretaries greet M. de Charlus, but other lines of Racine, taken this time not from *Esther* but from *Athalie*: for in the doorway of the hall, what in the seventeenth century was called the portico, "a flourishing race" of young pages clustered, especially at tea-time, like the young Israelites of Racine's choruses. But I do not believe that a single one of them could have given even the vague answer that Joas finds to satisfy *Athalie* when she inquires of the infant Prince: "What is your office, then?" for they had none. At the most, if one had asked of any of them, like the old Queen: "But all these people shut within this place, what is it that they do?" he might have said: "I watch the solemn order of these ceremonies—and bear my part." Now and then one of the young supers would approach some more important personage, then this young beauty would rejoin the chorus, and, unless it was the moment for a spell of contemplative relaxation, they would all interweave their useless, respectful, decorative, daily movements. For, except on their "day off," "reared in seclusion from the world" and never crossing the threshold, they led the same ecclesiastical existence as the Levites in *Athalie*, and as I gazed at that "young and faithful troop" playing at the foot of the steps draped with sumptuous carpets, I felt inclined to ask myself whether I was entering the Grand Hotel at Balbec or the Temple of Solomon.

I went straight up to my room. My thoughts kept constantly turning to the last days of my grandmother's illness, to her sufferings which I relived, intensifying them with that element, still harder to bear than even the sufferings of others, which is added to them by our cruel pity; when we believe we are merely re-creating the grief and pain of a beloved person, our pity exaggerates them; but perhaps it is our pity that speaks true, more than the sufferers' own consciousness of their pain, they being blind to that tragedy of their existence which pity sees and deplores. But my pity would have transcended my grandmother's sufferings in a new surge had I known then what I did not know until long afterwards, that on the eve of her death, in a moment of consciousness and after making sure that I was not in the room, she had taken Mamma's hand, and, after pressing her fevered lips to it, had said: "Good-bye, my child, good-bye for ever." And this may also perhaps have been the memory upon which my mother never ceased to gaze so fixedly. Then sweeter memories returned to me. She was my grandmother and I was her grandson. Her facial expressions seemed written in a language intended for me alone; she was everything in my life, other people existed merely in relation to her, to the opinion she would express to me about them. But no, our relations were too fleeting to have been anything but accidental. She no longer knew me, I should never see her again. We had not been created solely for one another; she was a stranger to me. This stranger was before my eyes at the moment in the photograph taken of her by Saint-Loup. Mamma, who had met Albertine, had insisted upon my seeing her because of the nice things she had said about my grandmother and myself. I had accordingly made an appointment with her. I told the manager that she was coming, and asked him to put her in the drawing-room to wait for me. He told me that he had known her for years, herself and her friends, long before they had attained "the age of purity," but that he was annoyed with them because of certain things they had said about the hotel. "They can't be very 'illegitimate' if they talk like that. Unless people have been slandering them." I had no difficulty in guessing that "purity" here meant "puberty." "Illegitimate" puzzled me more. Was it perhaps a confusion with "illiterate," which in that case was a further confusion with "literate"? As I waited until it was time to go down and meet Albertine, I kept my eyes fixed, as on a drawing which one ceases to see by dint of staring at it, upon the photograph that Saint-Loup had taken, and all of a sudden I thought once again: "It's grandmother, I am her grandson," as a man who has lost his memory remembers his name, as a sick man changes his personality. Françoise came in to tell me that Albertine was there, and, catching sight of the photograph: "Poor Madame, it's the very image of her, down to the beauty spot on her cheek; that day the Marquis took her picture, she was very poorly, she had been taken bad twice. 'Whatever happens, Françoise,' she says to me, 'you mustn't let my grandson know.' And she hid it well, she was always cheerful in company. When she was by herself, though, I used to find that she seemed to be in rather monotonous spirits now and then. But she soon got over it. And then she says to me, she says: 'If anything happened to me, he ought to have a picture of me to keep. And I've never had a single one made.' So then she sent me along with a message to the Marquis, and he was never to let you know that it was she had asked him, but could he take her photograph. But when I came back

and told her yes, she didn't want it any longer, because she was looking so poorly. 'It would be even worse,' she says to me, 'than no photograph at all.' But she was a clever one, she was, and in the end she got herself up so well in that big pulled-down hat that it didn't show at all when she was out of the sun. She was so pleased with her photograph, because at that time she didn't think she would ever leave Balbec alive. It was no use me saying to her: 'Madame, it's wrong to talk like that, I don't like to hear Madame talk like that,' she'd got it into her head. And, lord, there were plenty of days when she couldn't eat a thing. That was why she used to make Monsieur go and dine far out in the country with M. le Marquis. Then instead of going to table she'd pretend to be reading a book, and as soon as the Marquis's carriage had started, up she'd go to bed. Some days she wanted to send word to Madame to come down so's she could see her once more. And then she was afraid of alarming her, as she hadn't said anything to her about it. 'It will be better for her to stay with her husband, don't you see, Françoise.' Looking me in the face, Françoise asked me all of a sudden if I was "feeling queer." I said that I was not; and she went on: "Here you are keeping me tied up chatting with you, and perhaps your visitor's already here. I must go down. She's not the sort of person to have here. Why, a fast one like that, she may be gone again by now. She doesn't like to be kept waiting. Oh, nowadays, Mademoiselle Albertine, she's somebody!" "You are quite wrong, she's a very respectable person, too good for this place. But go and tell her that I shan't be able to see her today."

What compassionate declamations I should have provoked from Françoise if she had seen me cry. I carefully hid myself from her. Otherwise I should have had her sympathy. But I gave her mine. We do not put ourselves sufficiently in the place of these poor maidservants who cannot bear to see us cry, as though crying hurt us; or hurt them, perhaps, for Françoise used to say to me when I was a child: "Don't cry like that, I don't like to see you crying like that." We dislike high-sounding phrases, asseverations, but we are wrong, for in that way we close our hearts to the pathos of country folk, to the legend which the poor serving woman, dismissed, unjustly perhaps, for theft, pale as death, grown suddenly more humble as if it were a crime merely to be accused, unfolds, invoking her father's honesty, her mother's principles, her grandmother's admonitions. It is true that those same servants who cannot bear our tears will have no hesitation in letting us catch pneumonia because the maid downstairs likes draughts and it would not be polite to her to shut the windows. For it is necessary that even those who are right, like Françoise, should be wrong also, so that Justice may be made an impossible thing. Even the humble pleasures of servants provoke either the refusal or the ridicule of their masters. For it is always a mere nothing, but foolishly sentimental, unhygienic. And so they are in a position to say: "I only ask for this one thing in the whole year, and I'm not allowed it." And yet their masters would allow them far more, provided it was not stupid and dangerous for them—or for the masters themselves. To be sure, the humility of the wretched maid, trembling, ready to confess the crime that she has not committed, saying "I shall leave tonight if you wish," is a thing that nobody can resist. But we must learn also not to remain unmoved, despite the solemn and threatening banality of the things that she says, her maternal heritage and the dignity of the family "kaleyard," at the sight of an old cook draped in the honour of her life and of her ancestry, wielding her broom like a sceptre, putting on a tragic act, her voice broken with sobs, drawing herself up majestically. That afternoon, I remembered or imagined scenes of this sort which I associated with our old servant, and from then onwards, in spite of all the harm that she might do to Albertine, I loved Françoise with an affection, intermittent it is true, but of the strongest kind, the kind that is founded upon pity.

True, I suffered all day long as I sat gazing at my grandmother's photograph. It tortured me. Not so acutely, though, as the visit I received that evening from the manager. When I had spoken to him about my grandmother, and he had reiterated his condolences, I heard him say (for he enjoyed using the words that he pronounced wrongly): "Like the day when Madame your grandmother had that sincup, I wanted to tell you about it, because you see, on account of the other guests it might have given the place a bad name. She ought really to have left that evening. But she begged me to say nothing about it and promised me that she wouldn't have another sincup, or the first time she had one, she would go. However, the floor waiter reported to me that she had had another. But, lord, you were old clients we wanted to please, and since nobody made any complaint ..." And so my grandmother had had syncopes which she never mentioned to me. Perhaps at the very moment when I was being least kind to her, when she was obliged, in the midst of her pain, to make an effort to be good-humoured so as not to irritate me, and to appear well so as not to be turned out of the hotel. "Sincup" was a word which, so pronounced, I should never have imagined, which might perhaps, applied to other people, have struck me as ridiculous, but which in its strange tonal novelty, like that of an original discord, long retained the faculty of arousing in me the most painful sensations.

Next day I went, at Mamma's request, to lie down for a while on the beach, or rather among the dunes, where one is hidden by their folds, and where I knew that Albertine and her friends would not be able to find me. My drooping eyelids allowed but one kind of light to pass, entirely pink, the light of the inner walls of the eyes. Then they shut altogether. Whereupon my grandmother appeared to me, seated in an armchair. So feeble was she that she seemed to be less alive than other people. And yet I could hear her breathe; now and again she made a sign to show that she had understood what we were saying, my father and I. But in vain did I take her in my arms, I could not kindle a spark of affection in her eyes, a flush of colour in her cheeks. Absent from herself, she appeared not to love me, not to know me, perhaps not to see me. I could not interpret the secret of her indifference, of her dejection, of her silent displeasure. I drew my father aside. "You can see, all the same," I said to him, "there's no doubt about it, she understands everything perfectly. It's a perfect imitation of life. If only we could fetch your cousin, who maintains that the dead don't live! Why, she's been dead for more than a year and yet she's still alive. But why won't she give me a kiss?" "Look, her poor head is

drooping again." "But she wants to go to the Champs-Élysées this afternoon." "It's madness!" "You really think it can do her any harm, that she can die any further? It isn't possible that she no longer loves me. I keep on hugging her, won't she ever smile at me again?" "What can you expect, the dead are the dead."

A few days later I was able to look with pleasure at the photograph that Saint-Loup had taken of her; it did not revive the memory of what Françoise had told me, because that memory had never left me and I was growing used to it. But by contrast with what I imagined to have been her grave and pain-racked state that day, the photograph, still profiting by the ruses which my grandmother had adopted, which succeeded in taking me in even after they had been disclosed to me, showed her looking so elegant, so carefree, beneath the hat which partly hid her face, that I saw her as less unhappy and in better health than I had supposed. And yet, her cheeks having without her knowing it an expression of their own, leaden, haggard, like the expression of an animal that senses it has been chosen and marked down, my grandmother had an air of being under sentence of death, an air involuntarily sombre, unconsciously tragic, which escaped me but prevented Mamma from ever looking at that photograph, that photograph which seemed to her a photograph not so much of her mother as of her mother's disease, of an insult inflicted by that disease on my grandmother's brutally buffeted face.

Then one day I decided to send word to Albertine that I would see her presently. This was because, on a morning of intense and premature heat, the myriad cries of children at play, of bathers disporting themselves, of newsvendors, had traced for me in lines of fire, in wheeling, interlacing flashes, the scorching beach which the little waves came up one by one to sprinkle with their coolness; then the symphony concert had begun, mingled with the lapping of the surf, through which the violins hummed like a swarm of bees that had strayed out over the sea. At once I had longed to hear Albertine's laughter and to see her friends again, those girls silhouetted against the waves who had remained in my memory the inseparable charm, the characteristic flora of Balbec; and I had decided to send a line via Françoise to Albertine, making an appointment for the following week, while the sea, gently rising, with the unfurling of each wave completely buried in layers of crystal the melody whose phrases appeared to be separated from one another like those angel lutanists which on the roof of an Italian cathedral rise between the pinnacles of blue porphyry and foaming jasper. But on the day on which Albertine came, the weather had turned dull and cold again, and moreover I had no opportunity of hearing her laugh; she was in a very bad mood. "Balbec is deadly dull this year," she said to me. "I don't mean to stay any longer than I can help. You know I've been here since Easter, that's more than a month. There's not a soul here. You can imagine what fun it is." Notwithstanding the recent rain and a sky that changed every moment, after escorting Albertine as far as Epreville, for she was, to borrow her expression, "shuttling" between that little watering-place, where Mme Bontemps had her villa, and Incarville, where she had been taken "en pension" by Rosemonde's family, I went off by myself in the direction of the high road that Mme de Villeparisis's carriage used to take when we went for drives with my grandmother; pools of water, which the sun, now bright again, had not yet dried, made a regular quagmire of the ground, and I thought of my grandmother who could never walk a yard without covering herself in mud. But on reaching the road I found a dazzling spectacle. Where I had seen with my grandmother in the month of August only the green leaves and, so to speak, the disposition of the apple-trees, as far as the eye could reach they were in full bloom, unbelievably luxuriant, their feet in the mire beneath their ball-dresses, heedless of spoiling the most marvellous pink satin that was ever seen, which glittered in the sunlight; the distant horizon of the sea gave the trees the background of a Japanese print; if I raised my head to gaze at the sky through the flowers, which made its serene blue appear almost violent, they seemed to draw apart to reveal the immensity of their paradise. Beneath that azure a faint but cold breeze set the blushing bouquets gently trembling. Blue-tits came and perched upon the branches and fluttered among the indulgent flowers, as though it had been an amateur of exotic art and colours who had artificially created this living beauty. But it moved one to tears because, to whatever lengths it went in its effects of refined artifice, one felt that it was natural, that these apple-trees were there in the heart of the country, like peasants on one of the high roads of France. Then the rays of the sun gave place suddenly to those of the rain; they streaked the whole horizon, enclosing the line of apple-trees in their grey net. But these continued to hold aloft their pink and blossoming beauty, in the wind that had turned icy beneath the drenching rain: it was a day in spring.

## Chapter Twelve

In my fear lest the pleasure I found in this solitary excursion might weaken my memory of my grandmother, I sought to revive it by thinking of some great sorrow that she had experienced; in response to my appeal, that sorrow tried to reconstruct itself in my heart, threw up vast pillars there; but my heart was doubtless too small for it, I had not the strength to bear so great a pain, my attention was distracted at the moment when it was approaching completion, and its arches collapsed before they had joined, as the waves crumble before reaching their pinnacle.

And yet, if only from my dreams when I was asleep, I might have learned that my grief for my grandmother's death was diminishing, for she appeared in them less crushed by the idea that I had formed of her non-existence. I saw her an invalid still, but on the road to recovery; I found her in better health. And if she made any allusion to what she had suffered, I stopped her mouth with my kisses and assured her that she was now permanently cured. I should have liked to call the sceptics to witness that death is indeed a malady from which one recovers. Only, I no longer found in my grandmother the rich spontaneity of old. Her words were no more than a feeble, docile response, almost a mere echo of mine; she was now no more than the reflexion of my own thoughts.

Although I was still incapable of feeling a renewal of physical desire, Albertine was beginning nevertheless to inspire in me a desire for happiness. Certain dreams of shared affection, always hovering within us, readily combine, by a sort of affinity, with the memory (provided that this has already become slightly vague) of a woman with whom we have taken our pleasure. This sentiment recalled to me aspects of Albertine's face more gentle, less gay, quite different from those that would have been evoked by physical desire; and as it was also less pressing than that desire, I would gladly have postponed its realisation until the following winter, without seeking to see Albertine again at Balbec before her departure. But, even in the midst of a grief that is still acute, physical desire will revive. From my bed, where I was made to spend hours every day resting, I longed for Albertine to come and resume our former amusements. Do we not see, in the very room in which they have lost a child, its parents soon come together again to give the little angel a baby brother? I tried to distract my mind from this desire by going to the window to look at that day's sea. As in the former year, the seas, from one day to another, were rarely the same. Nor indeed did they at all resemble those of that first year, whether because it was now spring with its storms, or because, even if I had come down at the same time of year as before, the different, more changeable weather might have discouraged from visiting this coast certain indolent, vaporous, fragile seas which on blazing summer days I had seen slumbering upon the beach, their bluish breasts faintly stirring with a soft palpitation or above all because my eyes, taught by Elstir to retain precisely those elements that once I had deliberately rejected, would now gaze for hours at what in the former year they had been incapable of seeing. The contrast that used then to strike me so forcibly, between the country drives that I took with Mme de Villeparisis and the fluid, inaccessible, mythological proximity of the eternal Ocean, no longer existed for me. And there were days now when, on the contrary, the sea itself seemed almost rural. On the days, few and far between, of really fine weather, the heat had traced upon the waters, as though across fields, a dusty white track at the end of which the pointed mast of a fishing-boat stood up like a village steeple. A tug, of which only the funnel was visible, smoked in the distance like a factory set apart, while alone against the horizon a convex patch of white, sketched there doubtless by a sail but seemingly solid and as it were calcareous, was reminiscent of the sunlit corner of some isolated building, a hospital or a school. And the clouds and the wind, on the days when these were added to the sun, completed, if not the error of judgment, at any rate the illusion of the first glance, the suggestion that it aroused in the imagination. For the alternation of sharply defined patches of colour like those produced in the country by the proximity of different crops, the rough, yellow, almost muddy irregularities of the marine surface, the banks, the slopes that hid from sight a vessel upon which a crew of nimble sailors seemed to be harvesting, all this on stormy days made the sea a thing as varied, as solid, as undulating, as populous, as civilised as the earth with its carriage roads over which I used to travel and was soon to be travelling again. And once, unable any longer to hold out against my desire, instead of going back to bed I put on my clothes and set off for Incarville to find Albertine. I would ask her to come with me to Douville, where I would pay calls on Mme de Cambremer at Féterne and on Mme Verdurin at La Raspelière. Albertine would wait for me meanwhile upon the beach and we would return together after dark. I went to take the train on the little local railway, of which I had picked up from Albertine and her friends all the nicknames current in the district, where it was known as the *Twister* because of its numberless windings, the *Crawler* because the train never seemed to move, the *Transatlantic* because of a horrible siren which it sounded to clear people off the line, the *Decauville* and the *Funi*, albeit there was nothing funicular about it but because it climbed the cliff, and, though not strictly speaking a Decauville, had a 60 centimetre gauge, the *B.A.G.* because it ran between Balbec and Grattevast via Angerville, the *Tram* and the *T.S.N.* because it was a branch of the Tramways of Southern Normandy. I took my seat in a compartment in which I was alone; it was a day of glorious sunshine, and stiflingly hot; I drew down the blue blind which shut off all but a single ray of sunlight. But immediately I saw my grandmother, as she had appeared sitting in the train on our departure from Paris for Balbec, when, in her distress at seeing me drink beer, she had preferred not to look, to shut her eyes and pretend to be asleep. I, who in my childhood had been unable to endure her anguish when my grandfather took a drop of brandy, had



not only inflicted upon her the anguish of seeing me accept, at the invitation of another, a drink which she regarded as harmful to me, but had forced her to leave me free to swill it down to my heart's content; worse still, by my bursts of anger, my fits of breathlessness, I had forced her to help, to advise me to do so, with a supreme resignation of which I saw now in my memory the mute, despairing image, her eyes closed to shut out the sight. So vivid a memory had, like the stroke of a magic wand, restored the mood that I had been gradually outgrowing for some time past; what could I have done with Albertine when my lips were wholly possessed by the desperate longing to kiss a dead woman? What could I have said to the Cambremers and the Verdurins when my heart was beating so violently because the pain that my grandmother had suffered was being constantly renewed in it? I could not remain in the compartment. As soon as the train stopped at Maineville-la-Teinturière, abandoning all my plans, I alighted. Maineville had of late acquired considerable importance and a reputation all its own, because a director of various casinos, a purveyor of pleasure, had set up just outside it, with a luxurious display of bad taste that could vie with that of any grand hotel, an establishment to which we shall return anon and which was, to put it bluntly, the first brothel for smart people that it had occurred to anyone to build upon the coast of France. It was the only one. True, every port has its own, but intended for sailors only, and for lovers of the picturesque who are amused to see, next door to the age-old parish church, the hardly less ancient, venerable and moss-grown bawd standing in front of her ill-famed door waiting for the return of the fishing fleet.

Hurrying past the glittering house of "pleasure," insolently erected there despite the protests which the heads of families had addressed in vain to the mayor, I reached the cliff and followed its winding paths in the direction of Balbec. I heard, without responding to it, the appeal of the hawthorns. Less opulent neighbours of the blossoming apple-trees, they found them rather heavy, without denying the fresh complexion of the rosy-petalled daughters of those wealthy brewers of cider. They knew that, though less well endowed, they were more sought after, and were more than attractive enough simply in their crumpled whiteness.

On my return, the hotel porter handed me a blackbordered letter in which the Marquis and the Marquise de Gonnevillle, the Vicomte and the Vicomtesse d'Amfreville, the Comte and the Comtesse de Berneville, the Marquis and the Marquise de Graincourt, the Comte d'Amenoncourt, the Comtesse de Maineville, the Comte and the Comtesse de Franquetot, the Comtesse de Chaverny *née* d'Aigleville, begged to announce, and from which I understood at length why it had been sent to me when I caught sight of the names of the Marquise de Cambremer *née* du Mesnil La Guichard, the Marquis and the Marquise de Cambremer, and saw that the deceased, a cousin of the Cambremers, was named Eléonore-Euphrasie-Humbertine de Cambremer, Comtesse de Criqueot. In the whole expanse of this provincial family, the enumeration of which filled several closely printed lines, not a single commoner, and on the other hand not a single known title, but the entire muster-roll of the nobles of the region who made their names—those of all the interesting places in the neighbourhood—ring out with their joyous endings in *ville*, in *court*, or sometimes on a duller note (in *tot*). Garbed in the roof-tiles of their castle or in the roughcast of their parish church, their nodding heads barely reaching above the vault of the nave or hall, and then only to cap themselves with the Norman lantern or the timbers of the pepperpot turret, they gave the impression of having sounded the rallying call to all the charming villages straggling or scattered over a radius of fifty leagues, and to have paraded them in massed formation, without a single absentee or a single intruder, on the compact, rectangular chess-board of the aristocratic letter edged with black.

My mother had gone upstairs to her room, meditating this sentence from Mme de Sévigné: "I see none of the people who seek to distract me; in veiled words they seek to prevent me from thinking of you, and that offends me"—because the judge had told her that she ought to find some distraction. To me he whispered: "That's the Princesse de Parme!" My fears were dispelled when I saw that the woman whom the judge pointed out to me bore not the slightest resemblance to Her Royal Highness. But as she had engaged a room in which to spend the night after paying a visit to Mme de Luxembourg, the report of her coming had the effect upon many people of making them take each newcomer for the Princesse de Parme—and upon me of making me go and shut myself up in my attic.

I had no wish to remain there by myself. It was barely four o'clock. I asked Françoise to go and find Albertine, so that she might spend the evening with me.

It would be untrue, I think, to say that there were already symptoms of that painful and perpetual mistrust which Albertine was to inspire in me, not to mention the special character, emphatically Gomorrhian, which that mistrust was to assume. Certainly, even that afternoon—but not for the first time—I waited a little anxiously. Françoise, once she had started, stayed away so long that I began to despair. I had not lighted the lamp. The daylight had almost gone. The flag over the Casino flapped in the wind. And, feebler still in the silence of the beach over which the tide was rising, and like a voice expressing and intensifying the jarring emptiness of this restless, unnatural hour, a little barrel-organ that had stopped outside the hotel was playing Viennese waltzes. At length Françoise arrived, but unaccompanied. "I've been as quick as I could but she wouldn't come because she didn't think she was looking smart enough. If she was five minutes painting herself and powdering herself, she was a good hour by the clock. It'll be a regular scentshop in here. She's coming, she stayed behind to tidy herself at the mirror. I thought I should find her here." There was still a long time to wait before Albertine appeared. But the gaiety and the charm that she showed on this occasion dispelled my gloom. She informed me (contrary to what she had said the other day) that she would be staying for the whole season and asked me whether we could not arrange, as in the former year, to meet daily. I told her that at the moment I was too sad and that I would rather send for her from time to time at the last moment, as I did in Paris. "If ever you're feeling gloomy or if you're in the mood, don't hesitate," she told me, "just send for me and I shall come at once, and if you're not afraid of its creating a scandal in the hotel, I shall stay as long as you like." Françoise, in bringing her to me, had assumed the joyous air she wore whenever she had gone to some trouble on my behalf and had succeeded in giving me pleasure. But her joy had nothing to do with Albertine herself, and the very next day she was to greet me with these penetrating words: "Monsieur ought not to see that young lady. I know quite well the sort she is, she'll make you unhappy." As I escorted Albertine to the door I saw in the lighted dining-room the Princesse de Parme. I merely gave her a glance, taking care not to be seen. But I must confess that I found a certain grandeur in the royal politeness which had made me smile at the Guermentes's. It is a fundamental rule that sovereign princes are at home wherever they are, and this rule is conventionally expressed in obsolete and useless customs such as that which requires the host to carry his hat in his hand in his own house to show that he is not in his own home but in the Prince's. Now the Princesse de Parme may not have formulated this idea to herself, but she was so imbued with it that all her actions, spontaneously invented to suit the circumstances, expressed it. When she rose from table she handed a lavish tip to Aimé, as though he had been there solely for her and she were rewarding, before leaving a country house, a butler who had been detailed to wait upon her. Nor did she stop at the tip, but with a gracious smile bestowed on him a few friendly, flattering words, with a store of which her mother had provided her. She all but told him that, just as the hotel was perfectly managed, so Normandy was a garden of roses and that she preferred France to any other country in the world. Another coin slipped from the

Princess's fingers for the wine waiter whom she had sent for and to whom she insisted on expressing her satisfaction like a general after an inspection. The lift-boy had come up at that moment with a message for her; he too received a word, a smile and a tip, all this interspersed with simple, encouraging remarks intended to prove to them that she was only one of themselves. As Aimé, the wine waiter, the lift-boy and the rest felt that it would be impolite not to grin from ear to ear at a person who smiled at them, she was presently surrounded by a cluster of servants with whom she chatted benevolently; such ways being unfamiliar in smart hotels, the people who passed by, not knowing who she was, thought they were seeing a regular visitor to Balbec who because of her mean extraction or for professional reasons (she was perhaps the wife of an agent for champagne) was less different from the domestics than the really smart visitors. As for me, I thought of the palace at Parma, of the advice, partly religious, partly political, given to this Princess, who behaved towards the lower orders as though she had been obliged to conciliate them in order to reign over them one day; or indeed, as though she were already reigning.

I went upstairs to my room, but I was not alone there. I could hear someone mellifluously playing Schumann. No doubt it happens at times that people, even those whom we love best, become permeated with the gloom or irritation that emanates from us. There is however an inanimate object which is capable of a power of exasperation to which no human being will ever attain: to wit, a piano.

Albertine had made me take a note of the dates on which she would be going away for a few days to visit various friends, and had made me write down their addresses as well, in case I should want her on one of those evenings, for none of them lived very far away. This meant that in seeking her out, from one girlfriend to another, I found her more and more entwined in ropes of flowers. I must confess that many of her friends—I was not yet in love with her—gave me, at one watering-place or another, moments of pleasure. These obliging young playmates did not seem to me to be very many. But recently I thought of them again, and their names came back to me. I counted that, in that one season, a dozen conferred on me their ephemeral favours. Another name came back to me later, which made thirteen. I then had a sort of childish fear of settling on that number. Alas, I realised that I had forgotten the first, Albertine who was no more and who made the fourteenth.

To resume the thread of my narrative, I had written down the names and addresses of the girls with whom I should find her on the days when she was not to be at Incarville, but had decided that on those days I would rather take the opportunity to call on Mme Verdurin. In any case, our desires for different women vary in intensity. One evening we cannot bear to be deprived of one who, after that, for the next month or two, will trouble us scarcely at all. And then there are the laws of alternation—which it is not the place to study here—whereby, after an over-exertion of the flesh, the woman whose image haunts our momentary senility is one to whom we would barely give more than a kiss on the forehead. As for Albertine, I saw her seldom, and only on the very infrequent evenings when I felt that I could not do without her. If such a desire seized me when she was too far from Balbec for Françoise to be able to go and fetch her, I used to send the lift-boy to Epreville, to La Sogne, to Saint-Frichoux, asking him to finish his work a little earlier than usual. He would come into my room, but would leave the door open, for although he was conscientious at his "job" which was pretty hard, consisting in endless cleanings from five o'clock in the morning, he could never bring himself to make the effort to shut a door, and, if one pointed out to him that it was open, would turn back and, summoning up all his strength, give it a gentle push. With the democratic pride that marked him, a pride to which, in the liberal avocations, the members of a profession that is at all numerous never attain, barristers, doctors and men of letters speaking simply of a "brother" barrister, doctor or man of letters, he, rightly employing a term that is confined to close corporations like the Academy, would say to me in speaking of a page who was in charge of the lift on alternate days: "I'll see if I can get my *colleague* to take my place." This pride did not prevent him from accepting remuneration for his errands, with a view to increasing what he called his "salary," a fact which had made Françoise take a dislike to him: "Yes, the first time you see him you'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but there's days when he's as friendly as a prison gate. They're all money-grubbers." This was the category in which she had so often included Eulalie, and in which, alas (when I think of all the trouble that it was eventually to bring), she already placed Albertine, because she saw me often asking Mamma for trinkets and other little presents on behalf of my impecunious friend, something which Françoise considered inexcusable because Mme Bontemps had only a general help.

A moment later the lift-boy, having removed what I should have called his livery and he called his tunic, would appear wearing a straw hat, carrying a cane and holding himself stiffly erect, for his mother had warned him never to adopt a "working-class" or "messenger boy" manner. Just as, thanks to books, all knowledge is open to a working man, who ceases to be such when he has finished his work, so, thanks to a "boater" and a pair of gloves, elegance became accessible to the lift-boy who, having ceased for the evening to take the guests upstairs, imagined himself, like a young surgeon who has taken off his smock, or Sergeant Saint-Loup out of uniform, a typical young man about town. He was not for that matter lacking in ambition, or in talent either in manipulating his machine and not bringing you to a standstill between two floors. But his vocabulary was defective. I credited him with ambition because he said in speaking of the porter, who was his immediate superior, "my porter," in the same tone in which a man who owned what the lift-boy would have called a "private mansion" in Paris would have referred to his janitor. As for the lift-boy's vocabulary, it is curious that someone who heard people, fifty times a day, calling for the "lift," should never himself call it anything but a "liff." There were certain things about this lift-boy that were extremely irritating: whatever I might say to him he would interrupt with the phrase: "I should think so!" or "Of course!" which seemed either to imply that my remark was so obvious that anybody would have thought of it, or else to take all the credit for it to himself, as

though it were he that was drawing my attention to the subject. "I should think so!" or "Of course!", exclaimed with the utmost emphasis, issued from his lips every other minute, in connexion with things he would never have dreamed of, a trick which irritated me so much that I immediately began to say the opposite to show him that he had no idea what he was talking about. But to my second assertion, although it was incompatible with the first, he would reply no less stoutly: "I should think so!" "Of course!" as though these words were inevitable. I found it difficult, also, to forgive him the trick of employing certain terms that were proper to his calling, and would therefore have sounded perfectly correct in their literal sense, in a figurative sense only, which gave them an air of feeble witticism—for instance the verb "to pedal." He never used it when he had gone anywhere on his bicycle. But if, on foot, he had hurried to arrive somewhere in time, then, to indicate that he had walked fast, he would exclaim: "I should say I didn't half pedal!" The lift-boy was on the small side, ill-made and rather ugly. This did not prevent him, whenever one spoke to him of some tall, slim, lithe young man, from saying: "Oh, yes, I know, a fellow who is just my height." And one day when I was expecting him to bring me a message, hearing somebody come upstairs, I had in my impatience opened the door of my room and caught sight of a page as handsome as Endymion, with incredibly perfect features, who was bringing a message to a lady whom I did not know. When the lift-boy returned, in telling him how impatiently I had waited for the message, I mentioned to him that I had thought I heard him come upstairs but that it had turned out to be a page from the Hôtel de Normandie. "Oh, yes, I know," he said, "they have only the one, a fellow about my build. He's so like me in face, too, that we could easily be mistaken for one another; anybody would think he was my brother." Lastly, he always wanted to appear to have understood you perfectly from the first second, which meant that as soon as you asked him to do anything he would say: "Yes, yes, yes, yes, I understand all that," with a precision and a tone of intelligence which for some time deceived me; but other people, as we get to know them, are like a metal dipped in an acid bath, and we see them gradually lose their qualities (and their defects too, at times). Before giving him my instructions, I saw that he had left the door open; I pointed this out to him, for I was afraid that people might hear us; he acceded to my request and returned, having reduced the gap. "Anything to oblige. But there's nobody on this floor except us two." Immediately I heard one, then a second, then a third person go by. This annoyed me partly because of the risk of my being overheard, but mainly because I could see that it did not in the least surprise him and was a perfectly normal coming and going. "Yes, that'll be the maid next door going for her things. Oh, that's of no importance, it's the wine waiter putting away his keys. No, no, it's nothing, you can say what you want, it's my colleague just going on duty." Then, as the reasons that all these people had for passing did not diminish my dislike of the thought that they might overhear me, at a formal order from me he went, not to shut the door, which was beyond the strength of this cyclist who longed for a "motor-bike," but to push it a little closer to. "Now we'll be nice and peaceful." So peaceful were we that an American lady burst in and withdrew with apologies for having mistaken the number of her room. "You are to bring this young lady back with you," I told him, after banging the door shut with all my might (which brought in another page to see whether a window had been left open). "You remember the name: Mlle Albertine Simonet. Anyhow it's on the envelope. You need only say to her that it's from me. She will be delighted to come," I added, to encourage him and preserve my own self-esteem. "I should think so!" "On the contrary, it isn't at all natural to suppose that she should be glad to come. It's very inconvenient getting here from Berneville." "Don't I know it!" "You will tell her to come with you." "Yes, yes, yes, yes, I understand perfectly," he replied, in that shrewd and precise tone which had long ceased to make a "good impression" upon me because I knew that it was almost mechanical and covered with its apparent clearness a great deal of vagueness and stupidity. "When will you be back?" "Shan't take too long," said the lift-boy, who, carrying to extremes the grammatical rule that forbids the repetition of personal pronouns before co-ordinate verbs, omitted the pronoun altogether. "Should be able to go all right. Actually, leave was stopped this afternoon, because there was a dinner for twenty at lunch-time. And it was my turn off duty today. Should be all right if I go out a bit this evening, though. Take my bike with me. Get there in no time." And an hour later he reappeared and said: "Monsieur's had to wait, but the young lady's come with me. She's down below." "Oh, thanks very much; the porter won't be cross with me?" "Monsieur Paul? Doesn't even know where I've been. Even the head doorman didn't say a word." But once, after I had told him: "You absolutely must bring her back with you," he reported to me with a smile: "You know I couldn't find her. She's not there. Couldn't wait any longer because I was afraid of coping it like my colleague who was 'missed from the hotel'" (for the lift-boy, who used the word "rejoin" of a profession which one joined for the first time—"I should like to rejoin the post office"—to make up for this, or to mitigate the calamity if his own career was at stake, or to insinuate it more suavely and treacherously if the victim was someone else, elided the prefix and said: "I know he's been 'missed'"). It was not out of malice that he smiled, but out of sheer timidity. He thought that he was diminishing the magnitude of his offence by making a joke of it. In the same way, when he said to me: "*You know* I couldn't find her," this did not mean that he really thought that I knew it already. On the contrary, he was all too certain that I did not know it, and, what was more, was scared of the fact. And so he said "you know" to spare himself the torments he would have to go through in uttering the words that would bring me the knowledge. We ought never to lose our tempers with people who, when we find them at fault, begin to snigger. They do so not because they are laughing at us, but because they are afraid of our displeasure. Let us show all pity and tenderness to those who laugh. For all the world as though he were having a stroke, the lift-boy's anxiety had wrought in him not merely an apoplectic flush but an alteration in his speech, which had suddenly become familiar. He wound up by telling me that Albertine was not at Epreville, that she would not be coming back there before nine o'clock, and that if

betimes (which meant, by chance) she came back earlier, my message would be given her and in any case she would be with me before one o'clock in the morning.

It was not on that evening, however, that my cruel mistrust began to take solid form. No, to reveal it here and now, although the incident did not occur until some weeks later, it arose out of a remark made by Cottard. On the day in question Albertine and her friends had wanted to drag me to the casino at Incarville where, to my ultimate good fortune, I would not have joined them (wanting to pay a visit to Mme Verdurin who had invited me several times), had I not been held up at Incarville itself by a train breakdown which required a considerable time to repair. As I strolled up and down waiting for the men to finish working at it, I found myself all of a sudden face to face with Dr Cottard, who had come to Incarville to see a patient. I almost hesitated to greet him as he had not answered any of my letters. But friendliness does not express itself in everyone in the same way. Not having been brought up to observe the same fixed rules of behaviour as society people, Cottard was full of good intentions of which one knew nothing and even denied the existence, until the day when he had an opportunity of displaying them. He apologised, had indeed received my letters, had reported my whereabouts to the Verdurins who were most anxious to see me and whom he urged me to go and see. He even proposed to take me there that very evening, for he was waiting for the little local train to take him back there for dinner. As I was uncertain and as he had still some time before his train (for the breakdown threatened to be a fairly long one), I made him come with me to the little casino, one of those that had struck me as being so gloomy on the evening of my first arrival, now filled with the tumult of the girls, who, in the absence of male partners, were dancing together. Andrée came sliding along the floor towards me; I was meaning to go off with Cottard in a moment to the Verdurins', when I finally declined his offer, seized by an irresistible desire to stay with Albertine. The fact was that I had just heard her laugh. And this laugh at once evoked the flesh-pink, fragrant surfaces with which it seemed to have just been in contact and of which it seemed to carry with it, pungent, sensual and revealing as the scent of geraniums, a few almost tangible and secretly provoking particles.

One of the girls, a stranger to me, sat down at the piano, and Andrée invited Albertine to waltz with her. Happy in the thought that I was going to remain in this little casino with these girls, I remarked to Cottard how well they danced together. But he, taking the professional point of view of a doctor and with an ill-breeding which overlooked the fact that they were my friends, although he must have seen me greet them, replied: "Yes, but parents are very rash to allow their daughters to form such habits. I should certainly never let mine come here. Are they pretty, though? I can't make out their features. There now, look," he went on, pointing to Albertine and Andrée who were waltzing slowly, tightly clasped together, "I've left my glasses behind and I can't see very well, but they are certainly keenly roused. It's not sufficiently known that women derive most excitement through their breasts. And theirs, as you see, are touching completely." And indeed the contact between the breasts of Andrée and of Albertine had been constant. I do not know whether they heard or guessed Cottard's observation, but they drew slightly apart while continuing to waltz. At that moment Andrée said something to Albertine, who laughed with the same deep and penetrating laugh that I had heard before. But the unease it roused in me this time was nothing but painful; Albertine appeared to be conveying, to be making Andrée share, some secret and voluptuous thrill. It rang out like the first or the last chords of an alien celebration. I left the place with Cottard, absorbed in conversation with him, thinking only at odd moments of the scene I had just witnessed. Not that Cottard's conversation was interesting. It had indeed, at that moment, become rather sour, for we had just seen Dr du Boulbon go past without noticing us. He had come down to spend some time on the other side of the bay from Balbec, where he was greatly in demand. Now, albeit Cottard was in the habit of declaring that he did no professional work during the holidays, he had hoped to build up a select practice along the coast, an ambition which du Boulbon's presence there was likely to hinder. Certainly, the Balbec doctor could not stand in Cottard's way. He was merely a thoroughly conscientious doctor who knew everything, and to whom you could not mention the slightest itch without his immediately prescribing, in a complicated formula, the ointment, lotion or liniment that would put you right. As Marie Gineste used to say in her pretty parlance, he knew how to "charm" cuts and sores. But he was in no way eminent. True, he had caused Cottard some slight annoyance. The latter, now that he was anxious to exchange his chair for that of Therapeutics, had begun to specialise in toxic actions. These, a perilous innovation in medicine, give an excuse for changing the labels in the chemists' shops, where every preparation is declared to be in no way toxic, unlike its substitutes, and indeed to be disintoxicant. It is the fashionable cry; at the most there may survive below in illegible lettering, like the faint trace of an older fashion, the assurance that the preparation has been carefully antisepticised. Toxic actions serve also to reassure the patient, who learns with joy that his paralysis is merely a toxic disturbance. Now, a grand duke who had come for a few days to Balbec and whose eye was extremely swollen had sent for Cottard who, in return for a wad of hundred-franc notes (the Professor refused to see anyone for less), had put down the inflammation to a toxic condition and prescribed a disintoxicant treatment. As the swelling did not go down, the grand duke fell back upon the general practitioner of Balbec, who in five minutes had removed a speck of dust. The following day, the swelling had gone. A celebrated specialist in nervous diseases was, however, a more dangerous rival. He was a rubicund, jovial man, at once because the constant society of nervous wrecks did not prevent him from enjoying excellent health, and also in order to reassure his patients by the hearty merriment of his "Good morning" and "Good-bye," while quite ready to lend the strength of his muscular arms to fastening them in strait-jackets later on. Nevertheless, whenever you spoke to him at a gathering, whether political or literary, he would listen to you with benevolent attention, as though he were saying: "What can I do for you?" without at once giving an opinion, as though it were a medical consultation. But anyhow he, whatever his

talent might be, was a specialist. And so the whole of Cottard's rage was concentrated upon du Boulbon. But I soon took my leave of the Verdurins' professor friend, and returned to Balbec, after promising him that I would pay them a visit before long.

The mischief that his remarks about Albertine and Andrée had done me was extreme, but its worst effects were not immediately felt by me, as happens with those forms of poisoning which begin to act only after a certain time.

Albertine, on the night the lift-boy had failed to find her, did not appear, in spite of his assurances. There is no doubt that a person's charms are a less frequent cause of love than a remark such as: "No, this evening I shan't be free." We barely notice this remark if we are with friends; we remain gay all the evening, a certain image never enters our mind; during those hours it remains dipped in the necessary solution; when we return home we find the plate developed and perfectly clear. We become aware that life is no longer the life which we would have surrendered for a trifle the day before, because, even if we continue not to fear death, we no longer dare think of a parting.

From, however, not one o'clock in the morning (the limit fixed by the lift-boy), but three o'clock, I no longer felt as in former times the distress of seeing the chance of her coming diminish. The certainty that she would not now come brought me a complete and refreshing calm; this night was simply a night like so many others during which I did not see her—such was the notion on which I based myself. And thenceforth the thought that I should see her next day or some other day, outlining itself upon the blank which I submissively accepted, became comforting. Sometimes, during these nights of waiting, our anguish is due to a drug which we have taken. The sufferer, misinterpreting his own symptoms, thinks that he is anxious about the woman who fails to appear. Love is engendered in these cases, as are certain nervous ailments, by the inaccurate interpretation of a painful discomfort. An interpretation which it is useless to correct, at any rate so far as love is concerned, it being a sentiment which (whatever its cause) is invariably erroneous.

Next day, when Albertine wrote to me that she had only just got back to Epreville, and so had not received my note in time, and would come, if she might, to see me that evening, behind the words of her letter, as behind those that she had said to me once over the telephone, I thought I could detect the presence of pleasures, of people, whom she had preferred to me. Once again, my whole body was stirred by the painful longing to know what she could have been doing, by the latent love which we always carry within us; I almost thought for a moment that it was going to bind me to Albertine, but it did no more than shudder on the spot and its last echoes died out without its getting under way.

I had failed, during my first visit to Balbec—and perhaps, for that matter, Andrée had failed equally—to understand Albertine's character. I had believed it was through simple frivolity on her part that all our supplications didn't succeed in keeping her with us and making her forgo a garden-party, a donkey-ride, a picnic. During my second visit to Balbec, I began to suspect that this frivolity was merely a semblance, the garden-party a mere screen, if not an invention. There occurred in a variety of forms a phenomenon of which the following is an example (a phenomenon as seen by me, of course, from my side of the glass, which was by no means transparent, and without my having any means of determining what reality there was on the other side). Albertine was making the most passionate protestations of affection. She looked at the time because she had to go and call upon a lady who was at home, it appeared, every afternoon at five o'clock, at Infreville. Tormented by suspicion, and feeling at the same time far from well, I asked Albertine, I implored her to stay with me. It was impossible (and indeed she could stay only five minutes longer) because it would anger the lady who was rather inhospitable, susceptible and, said Albertine, very boring. "But one can easily cut a social call." "No, my aunt has always told me that one must above all be polite." "But I've often seen you being impolite." "It's not the same thing, this lady would be angry with me and would get me into trouble with my aunt. I'm pretty well in her bad books already. She insists that I should go and see her at least once." "But if she's at home every day?" Here Albertine, feeling that she was caught, changed her line of argument. "I know she's at home every day. But today I've made arrangements to meet some other girls there. It will be less boring that way." "So then, Albertine, you prefer this lady and your friends to me since, rather than miss paying a boring call, you prefer to leave me here alone, sick and wretched?" "That the visit will be boring is neither here nor there. I'm going for their sake. I shall bring them home in my trap. Otherwise they won't have any way of getting back." I pointed out to Albertine that there were trains from Infreville up to ten o'clock at night. "Quite true, but don't you see, it's possible that we may be asked to stay to dinner. She's very hospitable." "Very well then, you'll refuse." "I should only make my aunt angry." "Besides, you can dine with her and catch the ten o'clock train." "It's cutting it rather fine." "Then I can never go and dine in town and come back by train. But listen, Albertine, I'll tell you what we'll do. I feel that the fresh air will do me good; since you can't give up your lady, I'll come with you to Infreville. Don't be alarmed, I shan't go as far as the Tour Elisabeth (the lady's villa), "I shall see neither the lady nor your friends." Albertine looked as though she had received a violent blow. For a moment, she was unable to speak. She explained that the sea bathing was not doing her any good. "If you don't want me to come with you?" "How can you say such a thing, you know that there's nothing I enjoy more than going out with you." A sudden change of tactics had occurred. "Since we're going out together," she said to me, "why not go in the other direction. We might dine together. It would be so nice. After all, that side of Balbec is much the prettier. I'm getting sick and tired of Infreville and all those little cabbage-green places." "But your aunt's friend will be annoyed if you don't go and see her." "Very well, let her be." "No, it's wrong to annoy people." "But she won't even notice that I'm not there, she has people every day; I can go tomorrow, the next day, next week, the week after, it's exactly the same." "And what about your friends?" "Oh, they've ditched me often enough. It's my turn now." "But from the direction you

suggest there's no train back after nine." "Well, what's the matter with that? Nine will do perfectly. Besides, one should never worry about how to get back. We can always find a cart, a bike or, if the worst comes to the worst, we have legs." "We can always find." Albertine, how you go on! Out Infreville way, where the villages run into one another, well and good. But the other way, it's a very different matter." "That way too. I promise to bring you back safe and sound." I sensed that Albertine was giving up for my sake some plan arranged beforehand of which she refused to tell me, and that there was someone else who would be as unhappy as I was. Seeing that what she had intended to do was out of the question, since I insisted upon accompanying her, she was giving it up altogether. She knew that the loss was not irremediable. For, like all women who have a number of irons in the fire, she could rely on something that never fails: suspicion and jealousy. Of course she did not seek to arouse them, quite the contrary. But lovers are so suspicious that they instantly scent out falsehood. With the result that Albertine, being no better than anyone else, knew from experience (without for a moment imagining that she owed it to jealousy) that she could always be sure of not losing the people she had jilted for an evening. The unknown person whom she was deserting for me would be hurt, would love her all the more for that (though Albertine did not know that this was the reason), and, so as not to prolong the agony, would return to her of his own accord, as I should have done. But I had no desire either to give pain to another, or to tire myself, or to enter upon the terrible path of investigation, of multiform, unending vigilance. "No, Albertine, I don't want to spoil your pleasure. You can go to your lady at Infreville, or rather the person for whom she is a pseudonym, it's all the same to me. The real reason why I'm not coming with you is that you don't want me to, because the outing with me is not the one you wanted—the proof of it is that you've contradicted yourself at least five times without noticing it." Poor Albertine was afraid that her contradictions, which she had not noticed, had been more serious than they were. Not knowing exactly what fibs she had told me, "It's quite on the cards that I did contradict myself," she said. "The sea air makes me lose my head altogether. I'm always calling things by the wrong names." And (what proved to me that she would not, now, require many tender affirmations to make me believe her) I felt a stab in my heart as I listened to this admission of what I had but faintly imagined. "Very well, that's settled, I'm off," she said in a tragic tone, not without looking at the time to see whether she was making herself late for the other person, now that I had provided her with an excuse for not spending the evening with myself. "It's too bad of you. I alter all my plans to spend a nice evening with you, and it's you that won't have it, and you accuse me of telling lies. I've never known you to be so cruel. The sea shall be my tomb. I shall never see you any more." At these words my heart missed a beat, although I was certain that she would come again next day, as she did. "I shall drown myself, I shall throw myself into the sea." "Like Sappho." "There you go, insulting me again. You suspect not only what I say but what I do." "But, my lamb, I didn't mean anything, I swear to you. You know Sappho flung herself into the sea." "Yes, yes, you have no faith in me." She saw from the clock that it was twenty minutes to the hour; she was afraid of missing her appointment, and choosing the shortest form of farewell (for which as it happened she apologised on coming to see me again next day, the other person presumably not being free then), she dashed from the room, crying: "Good-bye for ever," in a heartbroken tone. And perhaps she was heartbroken. For, knowing what she was about at that moment better than I, at once more severe and more indulgent towards herself than I was towards her, she may after all have had a fear that I might refuse to see her again after the way in which she had left me. And I believe that she was attached to me, so much so that the other person was more jealous than I was.

Some days later, at Balbec, while we were in the ballroom of the casino, there entered Bloch's sister and cousin, who had both turned out extremely pretty, but whom I refrained from greeting on account of my girl friends, because the younger one, the cousin, was notoriously living with the actress whose acquaintance she had made during my first visit. Andrée, at a whispered allusion to this scandal, said to me: "Oh! about that sort of thing I'm like Albertine; there's nothing we both loathe so much as that sort of thing." As for Albertine, sitting down to talk to me on the sofa, she had turned her back on the disreputable pair. I had noticed, however, that, before she changed her position, at the moment when Mlle Bloch and her cousin appeared, a look of deep attentiveness had momentarily flitted across her eyes, a look that was wont to impart to the face of this mischievous girl a serious, indeed a solemn air, and left her pensive afterwards. But Albertine had at once turned back towards me a gaze which nevertheless remained strangely still and dreamy. Mlle Bloch and her cousin having finally left the room after laughing very loud and uttering the most unseemly cries, I asked Albertine whether the little fair one (the one who was the friend of the actress) was not the gift who had won the prize the day before in the procession of flowers. "I don't know," said Albertine, "is one of them fair? I must confess they don't interest me particularly, I never looked at them. Is one of them fair?" she asked her friends with a detached air of inquiry. When applied to people whom Albertine passed every day on the front, this ignorance seemed to me too extreme to be entirely genuine. "They didn't appear to be looking at us much either," I said to Albertine, perhaps (on the assumption, which I did not however consciously envisage, that Albertine loved her own sex) to free her from any regret by pointing out to her that she had not attracted the attention of these girls and that, generally speaking, it is not customary even for the most depraved of women to take an interest in girls whom they do not know. "They weren't looking at us?" Albertine replied without thinking. "Why, they did nothing else the whole time." "But you can't possibly tell," I said to her, "you had your back to them." "Well then, what about that?" she replied, pointing out to me, set in the wall in front of us, a large mirror which I had not noticed and upon which I now realised that my friend, while talking to me, had never ceased to fix her beautiful preoccupied eyes.

From the day when Cottard accompanied me into the little casino at Incarville, although I did not share the opinion that he had expressed, Albertine seemed to me to be different; the sight of her made me angry. I

myself had changed, quite as much as she had changed in my eyes. I had ceased to wish her well; to her face, behind her back when there was a chance of my words being repeated to her, I spoke of her in the most wounding terms. There were, however, moments of respite. One day I learned that Albertine and Andrée had both accepted an invitation to Elstir's. Feeling certain that this was in order that they might, on the return journey, amuse themselves like schoolgirls on holiday by imitating the manners of fast young women, and in so doing find an unmaidenly pleasure the thought of which tormented me, without announcing my intention, to embarrass them and to deprive Albertine of the pleasure on which she was counting, I paid an unexpected call at Elstir's studio. But I found only Andrée there. Albertine had chosen another day when her aunt was to go there with her. Then I told myself that Cottard must have been mistaken; the favourable impression that I received from Andrée's presence there without her friend remained with me and made me feel more kindly disposed towards Albertine. But this feeling lasted no longer than the healthy moments of those delicate people who are subject to intermittent recoveries, and are prostrated again by the merest trifle. Albertine incited Andrée to actions which, without going very far, were perhaps not altogether innocent; pained by this suspicion, I would finally succeed in banishing it. No sooner was I cured of it than it revived under another form. I had just seen Andrée, with one of those graceful gestures that came naturally to her, lay her head lovingly on Albertine's shoulder and kiss her on the neck, half shutting her eyes; or else they had exchanged a glance; or a remark had been made by somebody who had seen them going down together to bathe: little trifles such as habitually float in the surrounding atmosphere where the majority of people absorb them all day long without injury to their health or alteration of their mood, but which have a morbid effect and breed fresh suffering in a nature predisposed to receive them. Sometimes even without my having seen Albertine, without anyone having spoken to me about her, I would suddenly call to mind some memory of her with Gisèle in a posture which had seemed to me innocent at the time but was enough now to destroy the peace of mind that I had managed to recover; I had no longer any need to go and breathe dangerous germs outside—I had, as Cottard would have said, supplied my own toxin. I thought then of all that I had been told about Swann's love for Odette, of the way in which Swann had been tricked all his life. Indeed, when I come to think of it, the hypothesis that made me gradually build up the whole of Albertine's character and give a painful interpretation to every moment of a life that I could not control in its entirety, was the memory, the rooted idea of Mme Swann's character, as it had been described to me. These accounts contributed towards the fact that, in the future, my imagination played with the idea that Albertine might, instead of being the good girl that she was, have had the same immorality, the same capacity for deceit as a former prostitute, and I thought of all the sufferings that would in that case have been in store for me if I had happened to love her.

One day, outside the Grand Hotel, where we were gathered on the front, I had just been addressing Albertine in the harshest, most humiliating language, and Rosemonde was saying: "Ah, how you've changed towards her; she used to be the only one who counted, it was she who ruled the roost, and now she isn't even fit to be thrown to the dogs." I was proceeding, in order to make my attitude towards Albertine still more marked, to say all the nicest possible things to Andrée, who, if she was tainted with the same vice, seemed to me more excusable since she was sickly and neurasthenic, when we saw Mme de Cambremer's barouche, drawn by its two horses at a jog-trot, coming into the side street at the corner of which we were standing. The judge, who at that moment was advancing towards us, sprang back upon recognising the carriage, in order not to be seen in our company; then, when he thought that the Marquise's eye might catch his, bowed to her with an immense sweep of his hat. But the carriage, instead of continuing along the Rue de la Mer as might have been expected, disappeared through the gate of the hotel. It was quite ten minutes later when the liftboy, out of breath, came to announce to me: "It's the Marquise de Camembert who's come to see Monsieur. I've been up to the room, I looked in the reading-room, I couldn't find Monsieur anywhere. Luckily I thought of looking on the beach." He had barely ended his speech when, followed by her daughter-in-law and by an extremely ceremonious gentleman, the Marquise advanced towards me, having probably come on from some tea-party in the neighbourhood, bowed down not so much by age as by the mass of costly trinkets with which she felt it more sociable and more befitting her rank to cover herself, in order to appear as "dressed up" as possible to the people whom she went to visit. It was in fact that "descent" of the Cambremers on the hotel which my grandmother had so greatly dreaded when she wanted us not to let Legrandin know that we might perhaps be going to Balbec. Then Mamma used to laugh at these fears inspired by an event which she considered impossible. And here it was actually happening, but by different channels and without Legrandin's having had any part in it. "Do you mind my staying here, if I shan't be in your way?" asked Albertine (in whose eyes there lingered, brought there by the cruel things I had just been saying to her, a few tears which I observed without seeming to see them, but not without rejoicing inwardly at the sight), "there's something I want to say to you." A hat with feathers, itself surmounted by a sapphire pin, was perched haphazardly on Mme de Cambremer's wig, like a badge the display of which was necessary but sufficient, its position immaterial, its elegance conventional and its stability superfluous. Notwithstanding the heat, the good lady had put on a jet-black cloak, like a bishop's vestment, over which hung an ermine stole the wearing of which seemed to depend not upon the temperature and season, but upon the nature of the ceremony. And on Mme de Cambremer's bosom a baronial crest, fastened to a chain, dangled like a pectoral cross. The gentleman was an eminent barrister from Paris, of noble family, who had come down to spend a few days with the Cambremers. He was one of those men whose consummate professional experience inclines them to look down upon their profession, and who say, for instance: "I know I plead well, so it no longer amuses me to plead," or: "I'm no longer interested in operating, because I know I operate well." Intelligent, "artistic," they see themselves in their maturity, richly endowed by success, shining with that "intelligence," that "artistic" nature which their professional brethren



acknowledge in them and which confer upon them an approximation of taste and discernment. They develop a passion for the paintings not of a great artist, but of an artist who nevertheless is highly distinguished, and spend upon the purchase of his work the fat incomes that their career procures for them. Le Sidaner was the artist chosen by the Cambremers' friend, who incidentally was extremely agreeable. He talked well about books, but not about the books of the true masters, those who have mastered themselves. The only irritating defect that this amateur displayed was his constant use of certain ready-made expressions, such as "for the most part," which gave an air of importance and incompleteness to the matter of which he was speaking. Mme de Cambremer had taken advantage, she told me, of a party which some friends of hers had been giving that afternoon in the Balbec direction to come and call upon me, as she had promised Robert de Saint-Loup. "You know he's coming down to these parts quite soon for a few days. His uncle Charlus is staying near here with his sister-in-law, the Duchesse de Luxembourg, and M. de Saint-Loup means to take the opportunity of paying his aunt a visit and going to see his old regiment, where he is very popular, highly respected. We often have visits from officers who are never tired of singing his praises. How nice it would be if you and he would give us the pleasure of coming together to Féterne."

I presented Albertine and her friends. Mme de Cambremer introduced us all to her daughter-in-law. The latter, so frigid towards the petty nobility with whom her seclusion at Féterne forced her to associate, so reserved, so afraid of committing herself, held out her hand to me with a radiant smile, feeling secure and delighted at seeing a friend of Robert de Saint-Loup, whom he, possessing a sharper social intuition than he allowed himself to betray, had mentioned to her as being a great friend of the Guermantes. So, unlike her mother-in-law, the young Mme de Cambremer employed two vastly different forms of politeness. It was at the most the former kind, curt and insufferable, that she would have conceded me had I met her through her brother Legrandin. But for a friend of the Guermantes she had not smiles enough. The most convenient room in the hotel for entertaining visitors was the reading-room, that place once so terrible into which I now went a dozen times every day, emerging freely, my own master, like those mildly afflicted lunatics who have so long been inmates of an asylum that the superintendent trusts them with a latch-key. And so I offered to take Mme de Cambremer there. And as this room no longer filled me with shyness and no longer held any charm for me, since the faces of things change for us like the faces of people, it was without any trepidation that I made this suggestion. But she declined it, preferring to remain out of doors, and we sat down in the open air, on the terrace of the hotel. I found there and rescued a volume of Mme de Sévigné which Mamma had not had time to carry off in her precipitate flight, when she heard that visitors had called for me. No less than my grandmother, she dreaded these invasions of strangers, and, in her fear of being too late to escape if she let herself be cornered, would flee with a rapidity which always made my father and me laugh at her. Mme de Cambremer carried in her hand, together with the handle of a sunshade, a number of embroidered bags, a hold-all, a gold purse from which there dangled strings of garnets, and a lace handkerchief. I could not help thinking that it would be more convenient for her to deposit them on a chair; but I felt that it would be improper and useless to ask her to lay aside the ornaments of her pastoral round and her social ministry. We gazed at the calm sea upon which, here and there, a few gulls floated like white petals. Because of the level of mere "medium" to which social conversation reduces us, and also of our desire to please not by means of those qualities of which we are ourselves unaware but of those which we think likely to be appreciated by the people who are with us, I began instinctively to talk to Mme de Cambremer née Legrandin in the strain in which her brother might have talked. "They have," I said, referring to the gulls, "the immobility and whiteness of water-lilies." And indeed they did appear to be offering a lifeless object to the little waves which tossed them about, so much so that the waves, by contrast, seemed in their pursuit of them to be animated by a deliberate intention, to have become imbued with life. The dowager Marquise could not find words enough to do justice to the superb view of the sea that we had from Balbec, and envied me, since from La Raspelière (where in fact she was not living that year), she had only such a distant glimpse of the waves. She had two remarkable habits, due at once to her exalted passion for the arts (especially for music) and to her want of teeth. Whenever she talked of aesthetic subjects her salivary glands—like those of certain animals when in rut—became so overcharged that the old lady's toothless mouth allowed to trickle from the corners of her faintly mustachioed lips a few drops of misplaced moisture. Immediately she drew it in again with a deep sigh, like a person recovering his breath. Secondly, if some overwhelming musical beauty was at issue, in her enthusiasm she would raise her arms and utter a few summary opinions, vigorously masticated and if necessary issuing from her nose. Now it had never occurred to me that the vulgar beach at Balbec could indeed offer a "seascape," and Mme de Cambremer's simple words changed my ideas in that respect. On the other hand, as I told her, I had always heard people praise the matchless view from La Raspelière, perched on the summit of the hill, where, in a great drawing-room with two fireplaces, one whole row of windows swept the gardens and, through the branches of the trees, the sea as far as Balbec and beyond, and another row the valley. "How nice of you to say so, and how well you put it: the sea through the branches. It's exquisite—reminiscent of ... a painted fan." And I gathered, from a deep breath intended to catch the falling spittle and dry the moustaches, that the compliment was sincere. But the Marquise née Legrandin remained cold, to show her contempt not for my words but for those of her mother-in-law. Indeed she not only despised the latter's intellect but deplored her affability, being always afraid that people might not form a sufficiently high idea of the Cambremers.

"And how charming the name is," said I. "One would like to know the origin of all those names."

"That one I can tell you," the old lady answered modestly. "It is a family place, it came from my grandmother Arrachepe, not an illustrious family, but good and very old country stock."

"What! not illustrious!" her daughter-in-law tartly interrupted her. "A whole window in Bayeux cathedral is filled with their arms, and the principal church at Avranches has all their tombs. If these old names interest you," she added, "you've come a year too late. We managed to appoint to the living at Criquetot, in spite of all the difficulties about changing from one diocese to another, the parish priest of a place where I myself have some land, a long way from here, Combray, where the worthy cleric felt that he was becoming neurasthenic. Unfortunately, the sea air didn't agree with him at his age; his neurasthenia grew worse and he has returned to Combray. But he amused himself while he was our neighbour in going about looking up all the old charters, and he compiled quite an interesting little pamphlet on the place-names of the district. It has given him a fresh interest, too, for it seems he is spending his last years in writing a magnum opus about Combray and its surroundings. I shall send you his pamphlet on the surroundings of Féterne. It's a most painstaking piece of scholarship. You'll find the most interesting things in it about our old Raspelière, of which my mother-in-law speaks far too modestly."

"In any case, this year," replied the dowager Mme de Cambremer, "La Raspelière is no longer ours and doesn't belong to me. But I can see that you have a painter's instincts; I am sure you sketch, and I should so like to show you Féterne, which is far finer than La Raspelière."

For ever since the Cambremers had let this latter residence to the Verdurins, its commanding situation had at once ceased to appear to them as it had appeared for so many years past, that is to say to offer the advantage, without parallel in the neighbourhood, of looking out over both sea and valley, and had on the other hand, suddenly and retrospectively, presented the drawback that one had always to go up or down hill to get to or from it. In short, one might have supposed that if Mme de Cambremer had let it, it was not so much to add to her income as to spare her horses. And she proclaimed herself delighted at being able at last to have the sea always so close at hand, at Féterne, she who for so many years (forgetting the two months that she spent there) had seen it only from up above and as though at the end of a vista. "I'm discovering it at my age," she said, "and how I enjoy it! It does me a world of good. I would let La Raspelière for nothing so as to be obliged to live at Féterne."

"To return to more interesting topics," went on Legrandin's sister, who addressed the old Marquise as "Mother" but with the passing of the years had come to treat her with insolence, "you mentioned water-lilies: I suppose you know Claude Monet's pictures of them. What a genius! They interest me particularly because near Combray, that place where I told you I had some land ..." But she preferred not to talk too much about Combray.

"Why, that must be the series that Elstir told us about, the greatest living painter," exclaimed Albertine, who had said nothing so far.

"Ah! I can see that this young lady loves the arts," cried old Mme de Cambremer; and drawing a deep breath, she recaptured a trail of spittle.

"You will allow me to put Le Sidaner before him. Mademoiselle," said the barrister, smiling with the air of a connoisseur. And as he had appreciated, or seen others appreciating, years ago, certain "audacities" of Elstir's, he added: "Elstir was gifted, indeed he almost belonged to the avant-garde, but for some reason or other he never kept up, he has wasted his life."

Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin agreed with the barrister so far as Elstir was concerned, but, greatly to the chagrin of her guest, bracketed Monet with Le Sidaner. It would be untrue to say that she was a fool; she overflowed with a kind of intelligence that I had no use for. As the sun was beginning to set, the seagulls were now yellow, like the water-lilies on another canvas of that series by Monet. I said that I knew it, and (continuing to imitate the language of her brother, whom I had not yet ventured to name) added that it was a pity that she had not thought of coming a day earlier, for, at the same hour, there would have been a Poussin light for her to admire. Had some Norman squireen, unknown to the Guermantes, told her that she ought to have come a day earlier, Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin would doubtless have drawn herself up with an offended air. But I might have been far more familiar still, and she would have been all smiles and sweetness; I might in the warmth of that fine afternoon devour my fill of that rich honey cake which the young Mme de Cambremer so rarely was and which took the place of the dish of pastries that it had not occurred to me to offer my guests. But the name of Poussin, without altering the amenity of the society lady, aroused the protests of the connoisseur. On hearing that name, she produced six times in almost continuous succession that little smack of the tongue against the lips which serves to convey to a child who is misbehaving at once a reproach for having begun and a warning not to continue. "In heaven's name, after a painter like Monet, who is quite simply a genius, don't go and mention an old hack without a vestige of talent, like Poussin. I don't mind telling you frankly that I find him the deadliest bore. I mean to say, you can't really call that sort of thing painting. Monet, Degas, Manet, yes, there are painters if you like! It's a curious thing," she went on, fixing a searching and ecstatic gaze upon a vague point in space where she could see what was in her mind, "it's a curious thing, I used at one time to prefer Manet. Nowadays I still admire Manet, of course, but I believe I like Monet even more. Ah, the cathedrals!" She was as scrupulous as she was condescending in informing me of the development of her taste. And one felt that the phases through which that taste had evolved were not, in her eyes, any less important than the different manners of Monet himself. Not that I had any reason to feel flattered by her confiding her enthusiasms to me, for even in the presence of the most dim-witted provincial lady, she could not remain for five minutes without feeling the need to confess them. When a noble lady of Avranches, who would have been incapable of distinguishing between Mozart and Wagner, said in the young Mme de Cambremer's hearing: "We saw nothing new of any interest while we were in Paris. We went once to the Opéra-Comique, they were doing *Pelléas et Mélisande*, it's dreadful stuff," Mme de Cambremer not only

boiled with rage but felt obliged to exclaim: "Not at all, it's a little gem," and to "argue the point." It was perhaps a Combray habit which she had picked up from my grandmother's sisters, who called it "fighting the good fight," and loved the dinner-parties at which they knew all through the week that they would have to defend their idols against the Philistines. Similarly, Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin enjoyed "getting worked up" and having "a good set-to" about art, as other people do about politics. She stood up for Debussy as she would have stood up for a woman friend whose conduct had been criticised. She must however have known very well that when she said: "Not at all, it's a little gem," she could not improvise, for the person whom she was putting in her place, the whole progression of artistic culture at the end of which they would have reached agreement without any need of discussion. "I must ask Le Sidaner what he thinks of Poussin," the barrister remarked to me. "He's a regular recluse, never opens his mouth, but I know how to wrinkle things out of him."

"Anyhow," Mme de Cambremer went on, "I have a horror of sunsets, they're so romantic, so operatic. That is why I can't abide my mother-in-law's house, with its tropical plants. You'll see, it's just like a public garden at Monte-Carlo. That's why I prefer your coast here. It's more sombre, more sincere. There's a little lane from which one doesn't see the sea. On rainy days, there's nothing but mud, it's a little world apart. It's just the same at Venice, I detest the Grand Canal and I don't know anything so touching as the little alleys. But it's all a question of atmosphere."

"But," I remarked to her, feeling that the only way to rehabilitate Poussin in her eyes was to inform her that he was once more in fashion, "M. Degas affirms that he knows nothing more beautiful than the Poussins at Chantilly."

"Really? I don't know the ones at Chantilly," said Mme de Cambremer, who had no wish to differ from Degas, "but I can speak about the ones in the Louvre, which are hideous."

"He admires them immensely too."

"I must look at them again. My memory of them is a bit hazy," she replied after a moment's silence, and as though the favourable opinion which she was certain to form of Poussin before very long would depend, not upon the information that I had just communicated to her, but upon the supplementary and this time definitive examination that she intended to make of the Poussins in the Louvre in order to be in a position to change her mind.

Contenting myself with what was a first step towards retraction, since, if she did not yet admire the Poussins, she was adjourning the matter for further consideration, in order not to keep her on the rack any longer I told her mother-in-law how much I had heard of the wonderful flowers at Féterne. In modest terms she spoke of the little presbytery garden that she had behind the house, into which in the mornings, by simply pushing open a door, she went in her dressing-gown to feed her peacocks, hunt for newlaid eggs, and gather the zinnias or roses which, on the sideboard, framing the creamed eggs or fried fish in a border of flowers, reminded her of her garden paths. "It's true, we have a great many roses," she told me, "our rose garden is almost too near the house, there are days when it makes my head ache. It's nicer on the terrace at La Raspelière where the breeze wafts the scent of the roses, but not so headily."

I turned to her daughter-in-law: "It's just like *Pelléas*," I said to her, to gratify her taste for the modern, "that scent of roses wafted up to the terraces. It's so strong in the score that, as I suffer from hay-fever and rose-fever, it sets me sneezing every time I listen to that scene."

"What a marvellous thing *Pelléas* is," cried the young Mme de Cambremer, "I'm mad about it"; and, drawing closer to me with the gestures of a wild woman seeking to captivate me, picking out imaginary notes with her fingers, she began to hum something which I took to represent for her *Pelléas*'s farewell, and continued with a vehement insistency as though it were important that she should at that moment remind me of that scene, or rather should prove to me that she remembered it. "I think it's even finer than *Parsifal*," she added, "because in *Parsifal* the most beautiful things are surrounded with a sort of halo of melodic phrases, outworn by the very fact of being melodic."

"I know you are a great musician, Madame," I said to the dowager. "I should so much like to hear you play."

Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin gazed at the sea so as not to be drawn into the conversation. Being of the opinion that what her mother-in-law liked was not music at all, she regarded the talent, bogus according to her, but in reality of the very highest order, that the other was acknowledged to possess as a technical accomplishment devoid of interest. It was true that Chopin's only surviving pupil declared, and with justice, that the Master's style of playing, his "feeling," had been transmitted, through herself, to Mme de Cambremer alone, but to play like Chopin was far from being a recommendation in the eyes of Legrandin's sister, who despised nobody so much as the Polish composer.

"Oh! they're flying away," exclaimed Albertine, pointing to the gulls which, casting aside for a moment their flowery incognito, were rising in a body towards the sun.

"Their giant wings from walking hinder them," quoted Mme de Cambremer, confusing the seagull with the albatross.

"I do love them; I saw some in Amsterdam," said Albertine. "They smell of the sea, they come and sniff the salt air even through the paving stones."

"Ah! so you've been in Holland. Do you know the Vermeers?" Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin asked imperiously, in the tone in which she would have said: "You know the Guermites?"—for snobbishness in changing its object does not change its accent. Albertine replied in the negative, thinking that they were living people. But her mistake was not apparent.

"I should be delighted to play to you," the dowager Mme de Cambremer said to me. "But you know I only play things that no longer appeal to your generation. I was brought up in the worship of Chopin," she said in a lowered tone, for she was afraid of her daughter-in-law, and knew that to the latter, who considered that Chopin was not music, to talk of playing him well or badly was meaningless. She admitted that her mother-in-law had technique, played the notes to perfection. "Nothing will ever make me say that she is a musician," was Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin's conclusion. Because she considered herself "advanced," because (in matters of art only) "one could never be far enough to the Left," she maintained not merely that music progressed, but that it progressed along a single straight line, and that Debussy was in a sense a super-Wagner, slightly more advanced again than Wagner. She did not realise that if Debussy was not as independent of Wagner as she herself was to suppose in a few years' time, because an artist will after all make use of the weapons he has captured to free himself finally from one whom he has momentarily defeated, he nevertheless sought, when people were beginning to feel surfeited with works that were too complete, in which everything was expressed, to satisfy an opposite need. There were theories, of course, to bolster this reaction temporarily, like those theories which, in politics, come to the support of the laws against the religious orders, or of wars in the East (unnatural teaching, the Yellow Peril, etc., etc.). People said that an age of speed required rapidity in art, precisely as they might have said that the next war could not last longer than a fortnight, or that the coming of railways would kill the little places beloved of the coaches, which the motor-car was none the less to restore to favour. Composers were warned not to strain the attention of their audience, as though we had not at our disposal different degrees of attention, among which it rests precisely with the artist himself to arouse the highest. For those who yawn with boredom after ten lines of a mediocre article have journeyed year after year to Bayreuth to listen to the *Ring*. In any case, the day was to come when, for a time, Debussy would be pronounced as flimsy as Massenet, and the agitations of *Mélisande* degraded to the level of *Manon*'s. For theories and schools, like microbes and corpuscles, devour one another and by their strife ensure the continuity of life. But that time was still to come.

As on the Stock Exchange, when a rise occurs, a whole group of securities profit by it, so a certain number of despised artists benefited from the reaction, either because they did not deserve such scorn, or simply—which enabled one to be original when one sang their praises—because they had incurred it. And people even went so far as to seek out, in an isolated past, men of independent talent upon whose reputation the present movement would not have seemed likely to have any influence, but of whom one of the new masters was understood to have spoken favourably. Often it was because a master, whoever he may be, however exclusive his school, judges in the light of his own untutored instincts, gives credit to talent wherever it is to be found, or rather not so much to talent as to some agreeable inspiration which he has enjoyed in the past, which reminds him of a precious moment in his adolescence. At other times it was because certain artists of an earlier generation have in some fragment of their work achieved something that resembles what the master has gradually become aware that he himself wanted to do. Then he sees the old master as a sort of precursor; he values in him, under a wholly different form, an effort that is momentarily, partially fraternal. There are bits of Turner in the work of Poussin, phrases of Flaubert in Montesquieu. Sometimes, again, this rumoured predilection of a master was due to an error, starting heaven knows where and circulated among his followers. But in that case the name mentioned profited by the auspices under which it was introduced in the nick of time, for if there is some independence, some genuine taste expressed in the master's choice, artistic schools go only by theory. Thus it was that the spirit of the times, following its habitual course which advances by digression, inclining first in one direction, then in the other, had brought back into the limelight a number of works to which the need for justice or for renewal, or the taste of Debussy, or a whim of his, or some remark that he had perhaps never made, had added the works of Chopin. Commended by the most trusted judges, profiting by the admiration that was aroused by *Pelléas*, they had acquired a fresh lustre, and even those who had not heard them again were so anxious to admire them that they did so in spite of themselves, albeit preserving the illusion of free will. But Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin spent part of the year in the country. Even in Paris, being an invalid, she was often confined to her room. It is true that the drawbacks of this mode of existence were noticeable chiefly in her choice of expressions, which she supposed to be fashionable but which would have been more appropriate to the written language, a distinction that she did not perceive, for she derived them more from reading than from conversation. The latter is not so necessary for an exact knowledge of current opinion as of the latest expressions. However, this rehabilitation of the *Nocturnes* had not yet been announced by the critics. The news of it had been transmitted only by word of mouth among the "young." Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin remained unaware of it. I gave myself the pleasure of informing her, but by addressing my remark to her mother-in-law, as when, at billiards, in order to hit a ball one plays off the cushion, that Chopin, so far from being out of date, was Debussy's favourite composer. "Really, how amusing," said the daughter-in-law with a knowing smile as though it had been merely a deliberate paradox on the part of the composer of *Pelléas*. Nevertheless it was now quite certain that in future she would always listen to Chopin with respect and even pleasure. Hence my words, which had sounded the hour of deliverance for the dowager, produced on her face an expression of gratitude to myself and above all of joy. Her eyes shone like the eyes of Latude in the play entitled *Latude, or Thirty-five Years in Captivity*, and her bosom inhaled the sea air with that dilatation which Beethoven has depicted so well in *Fidelio*, at the point where his prisoners at last breathe again "this life-giving air." I thought that she was going to press her hirsute lips to my cheek. "What, you like Chopin? He likes Chopin, he likes Chopin," she cried in an impassioned nasal twang, as she might have said: "What, you know Mme de Franquetot too?", with this difference, that my relations with Mme de Franquetot would have been a matter of profound indifference to her, whereas my knowledge of

Chopin plunged her into a sort of artistic delirium. Her salivary hyper-secretion no longer sufficed. Not having even attempted to understand the part played by Debussy in the rediscovery of Chopin, she felt only that my judgment of him was favourable. Her musical enthusiasm overpowered her. "Elodie! Elodie! He likes Chopin!" Her bosom rose and she beat the air with her arms. "Ah! I knew at once that you were a musician," she cried, "I can quite understand your liking his work, *hhartistic* as you are. It's so beautiful!" And her voice was as pebbly as if, to express her ardour for Chopin, she had imitated Demosthenes and filled her mouth with all the shingle on the beach. Then came the ebb-tide, reaching as far as her veil which she had not time to lift out of harm's way and which was drenched, and finally the Marquise wiped away with her embroidered handkerchief the tide-mark of foam in which the memory of Chopin had steeped her moustaches.

"Good heavens," Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin exclaimed to me, "I'm afraid my mother-in-law's cutting it rather fine: she's forgotten that we've got my uncle de Ch'nouville dining. And besides, Cancan doesn't like to be kept waiting." The name "Cancan" meant nothing to me, and I supposed that she might perhaps be referring to a dog. But as for the Ch'nouville relatives, the explanation was as follows. With the passage of time the young Marquise had outgrown the pleasure that she had once found in pronouncing their name in this manner. And yet it was the prospect of enjoying that pleasure that had decided her choice of a husband. In other social circles, when one referred to the Chenouville family, the custom was (whenever, that is to say, the particle was preceded by a word ending in a vowel, for in the opposite case you were obliged to lay stress upon the *de*, the tongue refusing to utter Madam' d'Ch'nonceaux) that it was the mute *e* of the particle that was sacrificed. One said: "Monsieur d'Chenouville." The Cambremer tradition was different, but no less imperious. It was the mute *e* of Chenouville that was suppressed. Whether the name was preceded by *mon cousin* or by *ma cousine*, it was always *de Ch'nouville* and never *de Chenouville*. (Of the father of these Chenouvilles they said "our uncle," for they were not sufficiently "upper crust" at F  terne to pronounce the word "unk" like the Guermantes, whose studied jargon, suppressing consonants and naturalising foreign words, was as difficult to understand as old French or a modern dialect.) Every newcomer into the family circle at once received, in the matter of the Ch'nouvilles, a lesson which Mlle Legrandin had not required. When, paying a call one day, she had heard a girl say: "my aunt d'Uzai," "my unk de Rouan," she had not at first recognised the illustrious names which she was in the habit of pronouncing Uz  s and Rohan; she had felt the astonishment, embarrassment and shame of a person who sees before him on the table a recently invented implement of which he does not know the proper use and with which he dare not begin to eat. But during that night and the next day she had rapturously repeated: "my aunt d'Uzai," with that suppression of the final *s* that had stupefied her the day before but which it now seemed to her so vulgar not to know that, one of her friends having spoken to her of a bust of the Duchesse d'Uz  s, Mlle Legrandin had answered her crossly and in a haughty tone: "You might at least pronounce her name properly: Mame d'Uzai." From that moment she had realised that, by virtue of the transmutation of solid bodies into more and more subtle elements, the considerable and so honourably acquired fortune that she had inherited from her father, the finished education that she had received, her assiduous attendance at the Sorbonne, whether at Caro's lectures or at Bruneti  re's, and at the Lamoureux concerts, all this was to vanish into thin air, to find its ultimate sublimation in the pleasure of being able one day to say: "my aunt d'Uzai." This did not exclude the thought that she would continue to associate, at least in the early days of her married life, not indeed with certain friends whom she liked and had resigned herself to sacrificing, but with certain others whom she did not like and to whom she looked forward to being able to say (since that, after all, was why she was marrying): "I must introduce you to my aunt d'Uzai," and, when she saw that such an alliance was beyond her reach, "I must introduce you to my aunt de Ch'nouville," and "I shall ask you to dinner with the Uzai." Her marriage to M. de Cambremer had procured for Mlle Legrandin the opportunity to use the former of these sentences but not the latter, the circle in which her parents-in-law moved not being that which she had supposed and of which she continued to dream. Thus, after saying to me of Saint-Loup (adopting for the purpose one of his expressions, for if in talking to her I employed Legrandin's expressions, she by an inverse suggestion answered me in Robert's dialect which she did not know had been borrowed from Rachel), bringing her thumb and forefinger together and half-shutting her eyes as though she were gazing at something infinitely delicate which she had succeeded in capturing: "He has a charming quality of mind," she began to extol him with such warmth that one might have supposed that she was in love with him (it had indeed been alleged that, some time back, when he was at Donci  res, Robert had been her lover), in reality simply in order that I might repeat her words to him, and ended up with: "You're a great friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes. I'm an invalid, I seldom go out, and I know that she sticks to a close circle of chosen friends, which I do think so wise of her, and so I know her very slightly, but I know she is a really remarkable woman." Aware that Mme de Cambremer barely knew her, and anxious to put myself on a level with her, I glossed over the subject and answered the Marquise that the person whom I did know well was her brother, M. Legrandin. At the sound of his name she assumed the same evasive air as I had on the subject of Mme de Guermantes, but combined with it an expression of displeasure, for she imagined that I had said this with the object of humiliating not myself but her. Was she gnawed by despair at having been born a Legrandin? So at least her husband's sisters and sisters-in-law asserted, noble provincial ladies who knew nobody and nothing, and were jealous of Mme de Cambremer's intelligence, her education, her fortune, and the physical attractions that she had possessed before her illness. "She can think of nothing else, that's what's killing her," these spiteful provincial ladies would say whenever they spoke of Mme de Cambremer to no matter whom, but preferably to a commoner, either—if he was conceited and stupid—to enhance, by this affirmation of the shameful condition of the commoner's condition, the value of the affability that they were showing him, or—if he was shy and sensitive and applied

the remark to himself—to give themselves the pleasure, while receiving him hospitably, of insulting him indirectly. But if these ladies thought that they were speaking the truth about their sister-in-law, they were mistaken. She suffered not at all from having been born Legrandin, for she had forgotten the fact altogether. She was offended by my reminding her of it, and remained silent as though she had failed to understand, not thinking it necessary to enlarge upon or even to confirm my statement.

“Our cousins are not the chief reason for our cutting short our visit,” said the dowager Mme de Cambremer, who was probably more satiated than her daughter-in-law with the pleasure to be derived from saying “Ch’nouvelle.” “But, so as not to bother you with too many people, Monsieur,” she went on, indicating the barrister, “was reluctant to bring his wife and son to the hotel. They are waiting for us on the beach, and must be getting impatient.” I asked for an exact description of them and hastened in search of them. The wife had a round face like certain flowers of the ranunculus family, and a large vegetal growth at the corner of her eye. And, the generations of mankind preserving their characteristics like a family of plants, just as on the blemished face of his mother, an identical growth, which might have helped towards the classification of a variety of the species, protruded below the eye of the son. The barrister was touched by my civility to his wife and son. He expressed an interest in the subject of my stay at Balbec. “You must find yourself a bit homesick, for the people here are for the most part foreigners.” And he kept his eye on me as he spoke, for, not caring for foreigners, albeit he had many foreign clients, he wished to make sure that I was not hostile to his xenophobia, in which case he would have beaten a retreat, saying: “Of course, Mme X— may be a charming woman. It’s a question of principle.” As at that time I had no definite opinion about foreigners, I showed no sign of disapproval, and he felt himself to be on safe ground. He went so far as to invite me to come one day to his house in Paris to see his collection of Le Sidaners, and to bring with me the Cambremers, with whom he evidently supposed me to be on intimate terms. “I shall invite you to meet Le Sidaner,” he said to me, confident that from that moment I would live only in expectation of that happy day. “You shall see what a delightful man he is. And his pictures will enchant you. Of course, I can’t compete with the great collectors, but I do believe that I own the largest number of his favourite canvases. They will interest you all the more, coming from Balbec, since they’re marine subjects, for the most part at least.” The wife and son, blessed with a vegetal nature, listened composedly. One felt that their house in Paris was a sort of temple to Le Sidaner. Temples of this sort are not without their uses. When the god has doubts about himself, he can easily stop the cracks in his opinion of himself with the irrefutable testimony of people who have dedicated their lives to his work.

At a signal from her daughter-in-law, the dowager Mme de Cambremer prepared to depart, and said to me: “Since you won’t come and stay at Féterne, won’t you at least come to luncheon, one day this week, tomorrow for instance?” And in her benevolence, to make the invitation irresistible, she added: “You will *find* the Comte de Crisenoy,” whom I had never lost, for the simple reason that I did not know him. She was beginning to dazzle me with yet further temptations, but stopped short; for the judge, who, on returning to the hotel, had been told that she was on the premises, had crept about searching for her everywhere, then waited his opportunity, and pretending to have caught sight of her by chance, came up now to pay her his respects. I gathered that Mme de Cambremer did not mean to extend to him the invitation to lunch that she had just addressed to me. And yet he had known her far longer than I, having for years past been one of the regular guests at the afternoon parties at Féterne whom I used so to envy during my former visit to Balbec. But old acquaintance is not the only thing that counts in society. And hostesses are more inclined to reserve their luncheons for new acquaintances who still whet their curiosity, especially when they arrive preceded by a warm and glowing recommendation from a Saint-Loup. The dowager Mme de Cambremer calculated that the judge could not have heard what she was saying to me, but, to salve her conscience, spoke to him in the most friendly terms. In the sunlight on the horizon that flooded the golden coastline of Rivebelle, invisible as a rule, we could just make out, barely distinguishable from the luminous azure, rising from the water, rose-pink, silvery, faint, the little bells that were sounding the Angelus round about Féterne. “That is rather *Pelléas*, too,” I suggested to Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin. “You know the scene I mean.” “Of course I do” was what she said; but “I haven’t the faintest idea” was the message proclaimed by her voice and features, which did not mould themselves to the shape of any recollection, and by her smile, which floated in the air, without support. The dowager could not get over her astonishment that the sound of bells should carry so far, and rose, reminded of the time: “But, as a rule,” I said, “we never see that part of the coast from Balbec, nor hear it either. The weather must have changed and enlarged the horizon in more ways than one. Unless the bells have come to look for you, since I see that they are making you leave; to you they are a dinner bell.” The judge, little interested in the bells, glanced furtively along the esplanade, on which he was sorry to see so few people that evening. “You are a true poet,” the dowager Mme de Cambremer said to me. “One feels you are so responsive, so artistic. Do come, I shall play you some Chopin,” she went on, raising her arms with an air of ecstasy and pronouncing the words in a raucous voice that seemed to be shifting pebbles. Then came the deglutition of saliva, and the old lady instinctively wiped the stubble of her toothbrush moustache with her handkerchief. The judge unwittingly did me a great favour by offering the Marquise his arm to escort her to her carriage, a certain blend of vulgarity, boldness and love of ostentation prompting him to a mode of conduct which other people would hesitate to adopt but which is by no means unwelcome in society. He was in any case, and had been for years past, far more in the habit of such conduct than myself. While blessing him I did not venture to emulate him, and walked by the side of Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin who insisted upon seeing the book that I had in my hand. The name of Mme de Sévigné drew a grimace from her; and using a word which she had read in certain journals, but which, used in speech, given a feminine form and applied to a seventeenth-

century writer, had an odd effect, she asked me: "Do you really think she's 'talentuous'?" The dowager gave her footman the address of a pastry-cook where she had to call before taking the road, which was pink in the evening haze, with the humped cliffs stretching away into the bluish distance. She asked her old coachman whether one of the horses which was apt to catch cold had been kept warm enough, and whether the other's shoe were not hurting him. "I shall write to you and make a definite arrangement," she murmured to me. "I heard you talking about literature to my daughter-in-law. She's adorable," she added, not that she really thought so, but she had acquired the habit—and kept it up out of the kindness of her heart—of saying so, in order that her son might not appear to have married for money. "Besides," she added with a final enthusiastic mumble, "she's so *hartthhsttic*!" With this she stepped into her carriage, nodding her head, holding the crook of her sunshade aloft, and set off through the streets of Balbec, overloaded with the ornaments of her ministry, like an old bishop on his confirmation rounds.

"She has asked you to lunch," the judge said to me sternly when the carriage had passed out of sight and I came indoors with the girls. "We're not on the best of terms. She feels that I neglect her. Good heavens, I'm easy enough to get on with. If anybody needs me, I'm always there to say: Present! But they tried to get their hooks into me. And that," he went on with a shrewd look, waving his finger like a man arguing some subtle distinction, "that is a thing I will not allow. It's a threat to the liberty of my holidays. I was obliged to say: Stop there! You seem to be in her good books. When you reach my age you will see that society is a paltry thing, and you will be sorry you attached so much importance to these trifles. Well, I'm going to take a turn before dinner. Good-bye, children," he shouted back at us, as though he were already fifty paces away.

When I had said good-bye to Rosemonde and Gisèle, they saw with astonishment that Albertine was staying behind instead of accompanying them. "Why, Albertine, what are you doing, don't you know what time it is?" "Go home," she replied in a tone of authority. "I want to talk to him," she added, pointing to me with a submissive air. Rosemonde and Gisèle stared at me, filled with a new and strange respect. I enjoyed the feeling that, for a moment at least, in the eyes even of Rosemonde and Gisèle, I was to Albertine something more important than the time to go home, or than her friends, and might indeed share solemn secrets with her into which it was impossible for them to be admitted. "Shan't we see you again this evening?" "I don't know, it will depend on this person. Anyhow, tomorrow." "Let's go up to my room," I said to her when her friends had gone. We took the lift; she remained silent in the lift-boy's presence. The habit of being obliged to resort to personal observation and deduction in order to find out the business of their masters, those strange beings who converse among themselves and do not speak to them, develops in "employees" (as the lift-boy styled servants) a greater power of divination than "employers" possess. Our organs become atrophied or grow stronger or more subtle according as our need of them increases or diminishes. Since railways came into existence, the necessity of not missing trains has taught us to take account of minutes, whereas among the ancient Romans, who not only had a more cursory acquaintance with astronomy but led less hurried lives, the notion not only of minutes but even of fixed hours barely existed. Hence the lift-boy had gathered, and meant to inform his "colleagues," that Albertine and I were preoccupied. But he talked to us without ceasing because he had no tact. And yet I discerned upon his face, in place of the customary expression of friendliness and joy at taking me up in his lift, an air of extraordinary dejection and anxiety. Since I knew nothing of the cause of this, in an attempt to distract his thoughts—although I was more preoccupied with Albertine—I told him that the lady who had just left was called the Marquise de Cambremer and not de Camembert. On the floor which we were passing at that moment, I caught sight of a hideous chambermaid carrying a bolster, who greeted me with respect, hoping for a tip when I left. I should have liked to know if she was the one whom I had so ardently desired on the evening of my first arrival at Balbec, but I could never arrive at any certainty. The lift-boy swore to me with the sincerity of most false witnesses, but without shedding his woebegone expression, that it was indeed by the name of Camembert that the Marquise had told him to announce her. And as a matter of fact it was quite natural that he should have heard her say a name which he already knew. Besides, having only those very vague notions of nobility, and of the names with which titles are composed, which are shared by many people who are not lift-boys, the name Camembert had seemed to him all the more probable inasmuch as, that cheese being universally known, it was not in the least surprising that a marquise should have been extracted from so glorious a renown, unless it were the marquise that had bestowed its celebrity upon the cheese. Nevertheless, as he saw that I refused to admit that I might be mistaken, and as he knew that masters like to see their most futile whims obeyed and their most obvious lies accepted, he promised me like a good servant that in future he would say Cambremer. It is true that none of the shopkeepers in the town, none of the peasants in the district, where the name and persons of the Cambremers were perfectly familiar, could ever have made the lift-boy's mistake. But the staff of the "Grand Hotel of Balbec" were none of them natives. They came direct, together with all the equipment and stock, from Biarritz, Nice and Monte-Carlo, one division having been transferred to Deauville, another to Dinard and the third reserved for Balbec.

But the lift-boy's anxious gloom continued to grow. For him thus to forget to show his devotion to me by the customary smiles, some misfortune must have befallen him. Perhaps he had been "missed." I made up my mind in that case to try to secure his reinstatement, the manager having promised to ratify all my wishes with regard to his staff. "You can always do just what you like, I rectify everything in advance." Suddenly, as I stepped out of the lift, I guessed the meaning of the lift-boy's air of stricken misery. Because of Albertine's presence I had not given him the five francs which I was in the habit of slipping into his hand when I went up. And the idiot, instead of realising that I did not wish to make a display of largesse in front of a third person, had begun to tremble, supposing that it was all finished once and for all, that I would never give him anything again. He imagined that I was "on the rocks" (as the Duc de Guermantes would have said), and the

supposition inspired him with no pity for myself but with a terrible selfish disappointment. I told myself that I was less unreasonable than my mother thought when I had not dared, one day, not to give the extravagant but feverishly awaited sum that I had given the day before. But at the same time the meaning that I had until then, and without a shadow of doubt, ascribed to his habitual expression of joy, in which I had no hesitation in seeing a sign of devotion, seemed to me to have become less certain. Seeing him ready, in his despair, to fling himself down from the fifth floor of the hotel, I asked myself whether, if our respective social stations were to be altered, in consequence let us say of a revolution, instead of politely working his lift for me the lift-boy, having become a bourgeois, would not have flung me down the well, and whether there was not, in certain of the lower orders, more duplicity than in society, where, no doubt, people reserve their offensive remarks until we are out of earshot, but their attitude towards us would not be insulting if we were hard up.

One cannot however say that the lift-boy was the most commercially minded person in the Balbec hotel. From this point of view the staff might be divided into two categories: on the one hand, those who drew distinctions between the guests, and were more grateful for the modest tip of an old nobleman (who, moreover, was in a position to relieve them from 28 days of military service by saying a word for them to General de Beautreillis) than for the thoughtless liberalities of a flashy vulgarian who by his very extravagance revealed a lack of breeding which only to his face did they call generosity; on the other hand, those to whom nobility, intellect, fame, position, manners were non-existent, concealed under a cash valuation. For these there was but a single hierarchy, that of the money one has, or rather the money one gives. Perhaps even Aimé himself, although pretending, in view of the great number of hotels in which he had served, to a great knowledge of the world, belonged to this latter category. At the most he would give a social turn, showing that he knew who was who, to this sort of appreciation, as when he said of the Princesse de Luxembourg: "There's a pile of money among that lot?" (the question mark at the end being to ascertain the facts, or to check such information as he had already ascertained, before supplying a client with a "chef" for Paris, or promising him a table on the left, by the door, with a view of the sea, at Balbec). In spite of this, without being free from mercenary tendencies, he would not have displayed them with the fatuous despair of the lift-boy. And yet the latter's artlessness helped perhaps to simplify things. It is a convenient feature of a big hotel, or of a house such as Rachel used at one time to frequent, that, without any intermediary, at the sight of a hundred-franc note, still more a thousand-franc one, even though it is being given on that particular occasion to someone else, the hitherto stony face of a servant or a woman will light up with smiles and offers of service. Whereas in politics, or in the relations between lover and mistress, there are too many things interposed between money and docility—so many things indeed that the very people upon whose faces money finally evokes a smile are often incapable of following the internal process that links them together, and believe themselves to be, indeed are, more refined. Besides, it rids polite conversation of such speeches as: "There's only one thing left for me to do—you'll find me tomorrow in the mortuary." Hence one meets in polite society few novelists, or poets, few of all those sublime creatures who speak of the things that are not to be mentioned.

As soon as we were alone and had moved along the corridor, Albertine began: "What have you got against me?" Had my harsh treatment of her been more painful to myself? Hadn't it been merely an unconscious ruse on my part, with the object of bringing her round to that attitude of fear and supplication which would enable me to interrogate her, and perhaps to find out which of the two hypotheses that I had long since formed about her was the correct one? However that may be, when I heard her question I suddenly felt the joy of one who attains to a long-desired goal. Before answering her, I escorted her to the door of my room. Opening it, I scattered the roseate light that was flooding the room and turning the white muslin of the curtains drawn for the night to golden damask. I went across to the window; the gulls had settled again upon the waves; but this time they were pink. I drew Albertine's attention to them. "Don't change the subject," she said, "be frank with me." I lied. I told her that she must first listen to a confession, that of a great passion I had had for Andrée for some time past, and I made her this confession with a simplicity and frankness worthy of the stage, but seldom expressed in real life except in declaring a love which one does not feel. Reverting to the fiction I had employed with Gilberte before my first visit to Balbec, but varying it, I went so far (in order to make her more ready to believe me when I told her now that I did not love her) as to let fall the admission that at one time I had been on the point of falling in love with her, but that too long an interval had elapsed, that she was no more to me now than a good friend, and that, even if I wished, it would no longer be possible for me to feel a more ardent sentiment for her. As it happened, in thus underlining to Albertine these protestations of coldness towards her, I was merely—because of a particular circumstance and with a particular object in view—making more perceptible, accentuating more markedly, that binary rhythm which love adopts in all those who have too little confidence in themselves to believe that a woman can ever fall in love with them, and also that they themselves can genuinely fall in love with her. They know themselves well enough to have observed that in the presence of the most divergent types of woman they felt the same hopes, the same agonies, invented the same romances, uttered the same words, and to have realised therefore that their feelings, their actions, bear no close and necessary relation to the woman they love, but pass to one side of her, splash her, encircle her, like the incoming tide breaking against the rocks, and their sense of their own instability increases still further their misgivings that this woman, by whom they so long to be loved, does not love them. Why should chance have brought it about, when she is simply an accident placed in the path of our surging desires, that we should ourselves be the object of the desires that she feels? And so, while feeling the need to pour out to her all those sentiments, so different from the merely human sentiments that our neighbour inspires in us, those highly specialised sentiments which are those of lovers, after having taken a step forward, in avowing to the one we love our passion for her, our hopes, we are overcome at once by the



fear of offending her, and ashamed too that the language we have used to her was not fashioned expressly for her, that it has served us already, will serve us again for others, that if she does not love us she cannot understand us, and that we have spoken in that case with the lack of taste and discretion of a pedant who addresses an ignorant audience in subtle phrases which are not for them; and this fear and shame provoked the counter-rhythm, the reflux, the need, if only by first drawing back, hotly denying the affection previously confessed, to resume the offensive and regain respect and domination; the double rhythm is perceptible in the various periods of a single love affair, in all the corresponding periods of similar love affairs, in all those people whose self-analysis outweighs their self-esteem. If it was however somewhat more forcefully accentuated than usual in this speech which I was now making to Albertine, this was simply to allow me to pass more rapidly and more vigorously to the opposite rhythm which would be measured by my tenderness.

As though it must be painful to Albertine to believe what I was saying to her as to the impossibility of my loving her again after so long an interval, I justified what I called an eccentricity in my nature by examples taken from people with whom I had, by their fault or my own, allowed the time for loving them to pass, and been unable, however keenly I might have desired it, to recapture it. I thus appeared at one and the same time to be apologising to her, as for a want of courtesy, for this inability to begin loving her again, and to be seeking to make her understand the psychological reasons for that incapacity as though they had been peculiar to myself. But by explaining myself in this fashion, by dwelling upon the case of Gilberte, in regard to whom the argument had indeed been strictly true which was becoming so far from true when applied to Albertine, I was merely rendering my assertions as plausible as I pretended to believe that they were not. Sensing that Albertine appreciated what she believed to be my "plain speaking" and recognised my deductions as clearly self-evident, I apologised for the former by telling her that I knew that the truth was always unpleasant and in this instance must seem to her incomprehensible. She thanked me, on the contrary, for my sincerity and added that so far from being puzzled she understood perfectly a state of mind so frequent and so natural.

This avowal to Albertine of an imaginary sentiment for Andrée, and, towards herself, of an indifference which, so that it might appear altogether sincere and without exaggeration, I assured her incidentally, as though out of scrupulous politeness, must not be taken too literally, enabled me at length, without any danger that Albertine might interpret it as love, to speak to her with a tenderness which I had so long denied myself and which seemed to me exquisite. I almost caressed my confidante; as I spoke to her of her friend whom I loved, tears came to my eyes. But, coming at last to the point, I said to her that she knew what love was, its susceptibilities, its sufferings, and that perhaps, as the old friend that she now was, she might feel it in her heart to put an end to the distress she was causing me, not directly, since it was not herself that I loved, if I might venture to repeat that without offending her, but indirectly by wounding me in my love for Andrée. I broke off to admire and point out to Albertine a great, solitary, speeding bird which, far out in front of us, lashing the air with the regular beat of its wings, flew at full speed over the beach, which was stained here and there with gleaming reflexions like little torn scraps of red paper, and crossed it from end to end without slackening its pace, without diverting its attention, without deviating from its path, like an envoy carrying far afield an urgent and vital message. "It at least goes straight to the point!" said Albertine reproachfully. "You say that because you don't know what I was going to tell you. But it's so difficult that I prefer to leave it; I'm certain to make you angry; and then all that will have happened will be this: I shall in no way be better off with the girl I really love and I shall have lost a good friend." "But I swear to you that I won't be angry." She looked so sweet, so wistfully docile, as though her whole happiness depended on me, that I could barely restrain myself from kissing—with almost the same kind of pleasure that I should have had in kissing my mother—this new face which no longer presented the lively, flushed mien of a cheeky and perverse kitten with its little pink tip-tilted nose, but seemed, in the plenitude of its prostrate sadness, to have melted, in broad, flattened and pendent planes, into pure goodness. Leaving aside my love as though it were a chronic mania that had no connexion with her, putting myself in her place, I was moved to pity at the sight of this sweet girl, accustomed to being treated in a friendly and loyal fashion, whom the good friend that she might have supposed me to be had been pursuing for weeks past with persecutions which had at last arrived at their culminating point. It was because I placed myself at a standpoint that was purely human, external to both of us, from which my jealous love had evaporated, that I felt for Albertine that profound pity, which would have been less profound if I had not loved her. However, in that rhythmical oscillation which leads from a declaration to a quarrel (the surest, the most effectively perilous way of forming by opposite and successive movements a knot which will not be loosened and which attaches us firmly to a person), in the midst of the movement of withdrawal which constitutes one of the two elements of the rhythm, of what use is it to analyse further the refluences of human pity, which, the opposite of love, though springing perhaps unconsciously from the same cause, in any case produce the same effects? When we count up afterwards the sum of all that we have done for a woman, we often discover that the actions prompted by the desire to show that we love her, to make her love us, to win her favours, bulk scarcely larger than those due to the human need to repair the wrongs that we do to the loved one, from a mere sense of moral duty, as though we did not love her. "But tell me, what on earth have I done?" Albertine asked me. There was a knock at the door; it was the lift-boy; Albertine's aunt, who was passing the hotel in a carriage, had stopped on the chance of finding her there and taking her home. Albertine sent word that she could not come down, that they were to begin dinner without her, that she could not say at what time she would return. "But won't your aunt be angry?" "Not at all! She'll understand perfectly well." In other words—at this moment at least, which perhaps would never recur—a conversation with me was in Albertine's eyes, because of the circumstances, a thing of such self-evident

importance that it must be given precedence over everything, a thing to which, referring no doubt instinctively to a family code, enumerating certain situations in which, when the career of M. Bontemps was at stake, a journey had been made without thinking twice, my friend never doubted that her aunt would think it quite natural to see her sacrifice the dinner-hour. Having relinquished for my benefit that remote hour which she spent without me, among her own people, Albertine was giving it to me; I might make what use of it I chose. I finally made bold to tell her what had been reported to me about her way of life, and said that notwithstanding the profound disgust I felt for women tainted with that vice, I had not given it a thought until I had been told the name of her accomplice, and that she could readily understand, loving Andrée as I did, the pain that this had caused me. It would have been more astute perhaps to say that other women had also been mentioned but that they were of no interest to me. But the sudden and terrible revelation that Cottard had made to me had struck home, had lacerated me, just as it was, complete in itself without any accretions. And just as, before that moment, it would never have occurred to me that Albertine was enamoured of Andrée, or at any rate could find pleasure in caressing her, if Cottard had not drawn my attention to their posture as they waltzed together, so I had been incapable of passing from that idea to the idea, so different for me, that Albertine might have, with women other than Andrée, relations which could not even be excused by affection. Albertine, even before swearing to me that it was not true, expressed, like everyone upon learning that such things are being said about them, anger, concern, and, with regard to the unknown slanderer, a fierce curiosity to know who he was and a desire to be confronted with him so as to be able to confound him. But she assured me that she bore me, at least, no resentment. "If it had been true, I would have told you. But Andrée and I both loathe that sort of thing. We haven't reached our age without seeing women with cropped hair who behave like men and do the things you mean, and nothing revolts us more." Albertine merely gave me her word, a categorical word unsupported by proof. But this was precisely what was best calculated to calm me, jealousy belonging to that family of morbid doubts which are eliminated by the vigour of an affirmation far more surely than by its probability. It is moreover the property of love to make us at once more distrustful and more credulous, to make us suspect the loved one, more readily than we should suspect anyone else, and be convinced more easily by her denials. We must be in love before we can care that all women are not virtuous, which is to say before we can be aware of the fact, and we must be in love too before we can hope, that is to say assure ourselves, that some are. It is human to seek out what hurts us and then at once to seek to get rid of it. Statements that are capable of so relieving us seem all too readily true: we are not inclined to cavil at a sedative that works. Besides, however multiform the person we love may be, she can in any case present to us two essential personalities according to whether she appears to us as ours, or as turning her desires elsewhere. The first of these personalities possesses the peculiar power which prevents us from believing in the reality of the second, the secret remedy to heal the sufferings that this latter has caused us. The beloved object is successively the malady and the remedy that suspends and aggravates it. Doubtless I had long been conditioned, by the powerful impression made on my imagination and my faculty for emotion by the example of Swann, to believe in the truth of what I feared rather than of what I should have wished. Hence the comfort brought me by Albertine's affirmations came near to being jeopardised for a moment because I remembered the story of Odette. But I told myself that, if it was right to allow for the worst, not only when, in order to understand Swann's sufferings, I had tried to put myself in his place, but now that it concerned myself, in seeking the truth as though it concerned someone else I must nevertheless not, out of cruelty to myself, like a soldier who chooses the post not where he can be of most use but where he is most exposed, end up with the mistake of regarding one supposition as more true than the rest simply because it was the most painful. Was there not a vast gulf between Albertine, a girl of good middle-class parentage, and Odette, a whore sold by her mother in her childhood? There could be no comparison of their respective credibility. Besides, Albertine had in no sense the same interest in lying to me that Odette had had in lying to Swann. And in any case to him Odette had admitted what Albertine had just denied. I should therefore be guilty of an error of reasoning as serious—though in the opposite sense—as that which would have inclined me towards a certain assumption because it caused me less pain than any other, in not taking into account these material differences in their situations, and in reconstructing the real life of my beloved solely from what I had been told about Odette's. I had before me a new Albertine, of whom I had already, it was true, caught more than one glimpse towards the end of my previous visit to Balbec, a frank, kind Albertine who, out of affection for myself, had just forgiven me my suspicions and tried to dispel them. She made me sit down by her side on my bed. I thanked her for what she had said to me, assuring her that our reconciliation was complete, and that I would never be harsh to her again. I told her that she ought nevertheless to go home to dinner. She asked me whether I was not glad to have her with me. And drawing my head towards her for a caress which she had never given me before and which I owed perhaps to the healing of our quarrel, she drew her tongue lightly over my lips, which she attempted to force apart. At first I kept them tight shut. "What an old spoilsport you are!" she said to me.

I ought to have gone away that evening and never seen her again. I sensed there and then that in a love that is not shared—one might almost say in love, for there are people for whom there is no such thing as shared love—we can enjoy only that simulacrum of happiness which had been given to me at one of those unique moments in which a woman's good nature, or her caprice, or mere chance, respond to our desires, in perfect coincidence, with the same words, the same actions, as if we were really loved. The wiser course would have been to consider with curiosity, to appropriate with delight, that little particle of happiness failing which I should have died without ever suspecting what it could mean to hearts less difficult or more privileged; to pretend that it formed part of a vast and enduring happiness of which this fragment only was visible to me;

and—lest the next day should give the lie to this fiction—not to attempt to ask for any fresh favour after this one, which had been due only to the artifice of an exceptional moment. I ought to have left Balbec, to have shut myself up in solitude, to have remained there in harmony with the last vibrations of the voice which I had contrived to render loving for an instant, and of which I should have asked nothing more than that it might never address another word to me; for fear lest, by an additional word which henceforth could not but be different, it might shatter with a discord the sensory silence in which, as though by the pressure of a pedal, there might long have survived in me the tonality of happiness.

Calmed by my confrontation with Albertine, I began once again to live in closer intimacy with my mother. She loved to talk to me gently about the days when my grandmother had been younger. Fearing that I might reproach myself with the sorrows with which I had perhaps darkened the close of my grandmother's life, she preferred to turn back to the years when my first studies had given my grandmother a satisfaction which until now had always been kept from me. We talked of the old days at Combray. My mother reminded me that there at least I used to read, and that at Balbec I might well do the same, if I was not going to work. I replied that, to surround myself with memories of Combray and of the pretty coloured plates, I should like to re-read the *Arabian Nights*. As, long ago at Combray, when she gave me books for my birthday, so it was in secret, as a surprise for me, that my mother now sent for both Galland's version and that of Mardrus.<sup>7</sup> But, after casting her eye over the two translations, my mother would have preferred that I should stick to Galland's, albeit hesitating to influence me because of her respect for intellectual liberty, her dread of interfering with my intellectual life and the feeling that, being a woman, on the one hand she lacked, or so she thought, the necessary literary equipment, and on the other hand ought not to judge a young man's reading by what she herself found shocking. Happening upon certain of the tales, she had been revolted by the immorality of the subject and the coarseness of the expression. But above all, preserving like precious relics not only her mother's brooch, her sunshade, her cloak, her volume of Mme de Sévigné, but also her habits of thought and speech, invoking on every occasion the opinion that she would have expressed, my mother could have no doubt of the unfavourable judgment which my grandmother would have passed on Mardrus's version. She remembered that at Combray, while I sat reading Augustin Thierry before setting out for a walk along the Méséglise way, my grandmother, pleased with my reading and my walks, was indignant nevertheless at seeing the person whose name remained enshrined in the hemistich "Then reignèd Mérovée" called Merowig, and refused to say "Carolingians" for the "Carlovingians" to which she remained loyal. And then I told her what my grandmother had thought of the Greek names which Bloch, following Leconte de Lisle, used to give to Homer's gods, going so far, in the simplest matters, as to make it a religious duty, in which he supposed literary talent to consist, to adopt a Greek system of spelling. Having occasion, for instance, to mention in a letter that the wine which they drank at his home was true nectar, he would write "nektar," with a k, which enabled him to titter at the mention of Lamartine. Now if an *Odyssey* from which the names of Ulysses and Minerva were missing was no longer the *Odyssey* to her, what would she have said upon seeing corrupted, even on the cover, the title of her Arabian tales, upon no longer finding, exactly transcribed as she had all her life been in the habit of pronouncing them, the immortally familiar names of Scheherazade or Dinarzade, while, themselves debaptised (if one may use the expression of Muslim tales), even the charming Caliph and the powerful Genies were barely recognisable, being renamed, he the "Khalifa" and they the "Gennis." However, my mother handed over both books to me, and I told her that I would read them on the days when I felt too tired to go out.

These days were not very frequent, however. We used to go out picnicking as before in a band, Albertine, her friends and myself, on the cliff or to the farm called Marie-Antoinette. But there were times when Albertine bestowed on me a great pleasure. She would say to me: "Today I want to be alone with you for a while; it will be nicer if we are just by ourselves." Then she would give out that she had things to do—not that she had to account for her movements—and so that the others, if they went out for a picnic all the same without us, should not be able to find us, we would steal away like a pair of lovers, all by ourselves to Bagatelle or the Cross of Heulan, while the band, who would never think of looking for us there and never went there, waited indefinitely at Marie-Antoinette in the hope of seeing us appear. I remember the hot weather that we had then, when from the foreheads of the farm labourers toiling in the sun drops of sweat would fall, vertical, regular, intermittent, like drops of water from a cistern, alternating with the fall of the ripe fruit dropping from the tree in the adjoining orchard; they have remained to this day, together with that mystery of a woman's secret, the most enduring element in every love that offers itself to me. For a woman who is mentioned to me and to whom ordinarily I would not give a moment's thought, I will upset all my week's engagements to make her acquaintance, if it is a week of similar weather, and if I am to meet her in some isolated farmhouse. Even if I am aware that this kind of weather, this kind of assignation, have nothing to do with her, they are still the bait which, however familiar, I allow myself to be tempted by, and which is sufficient to hook me. I know that in cold weather, in a town, I might perhaps have desired this woman, but without the accompaniment of romantic feelings, without falling in love; love is none the less strong as soon as, by force of circumstances, it has enchained me—it is simply more melancholy, as over the years our feelings for other people become, in proportion as we grow more aware of the ever smaller part they play in our lives and realise that the new love which we would like to be so enduring, cut short in the same moment as life itself, will be the last.

There were still few people at Balbec, few girls. Sometimes I would see one standing on the beach, one devoid of charm and yet whom various coincidences seemed to identify as a girl whom I had been in despair at not being able to approach when she emerged with her friends from the riding school or gymnasium. If it

was the same one (and I took care not to mention the matter to Albertine), then the girl that I had thought so intoxicating did not exist. But I couldn't arrive at any certainty, for the faces of these girls did not fill a constant space, did not present a constant form upon the beach, contracted, dilated, transmogrified as they were by my own expectancy, the anxiousness of my desire, or by a sense of self-sufficient well-being, the different clothes they wore, the rapidity of their walk or their stillness. From close to, however, two or three of them seemed to me adorable. Whenever I saw one of these, I longed to take her to the Avenue des Tamaris, or among the sandhills, or better still on to the cliff. But although in desire, as opposed to indifference, there is already that element of audacity which a first step, if only unilateral, towards realisation entails, all the same, between my desire and the action that my asking to kiss her would have been, there was all the indefinite "vacancy" of hesitation and shyness. Then I went into the café-bar, and proceeded to drink, one after another, seven or eight glasses of port wine. At once, instead of the impassable gulf between my desire and action, the effect of the alcohol traced a line that joined them together. No longer was there any room for hesitation or fear. It seemed to me that the girl was about to fly into my arms. I went up to her, and there sprang to my lips of their own accord the words: "I should like to go for a walk with you. You wouldn't care to go along the cliff? We shan't be disturbed behind the little wood that keeps the wind off the wooden bungalow that is empty just now." All the difficulties of life were smoothed away, there were no longer any obstacles to the conjunction of our two bodies. No longer any obstacles for me, at least. For they had not been dissipated for her, who had not been drinking port wine. Had she done so, had the outer world lost some of its reality in her eyes, the long-cherished dream that would then have appeared to her to be suddenly realisable might have been not at all that of falling into my arms.

Not only were the girls few in number but, at this season which was not yet "the season," they stayed only a short time. There is one I remember with a russet skin, green eyes and a pair of ruddy cheeks, whose slight symmetrical face resembled the winged seeds of certain trees. I cannot say what breeze wafted her to Balbec or what other bore her away. So sudden was her removal that for some days afterwards I was haunted by a chagrin which I made bold to confess to Albertine when I realised that the girl had gone for ever.

I should add that several of them were girls whom I either did not know at all or had not seen for years. Often I wrote to them before meeting them. If their answers allowed me to believe in the possibility of love, what joy! One cannot, at the outset of a friendship with a woman, even if that friendship is destined to come to nothing, bear to be parted from these first letters that we receive. We like to have them with us all the time, like a present of rare flowers, still fresh, at which one ceases to gaze only to breathe their scent. The sentence that one knows by heart is pleasant to read again, and in those that one has committed less accurately to memory one wants to verify the degree of affection in some expression. Did she write: "Your precious letter"? A slight marring of one's bliss, which must be ascribed either to one's having read too quickly, or to the illegible handwriting of one's correspondent; she did not put: "your precious letter" but "your previous letter." But the rest is so tender. Oh, that more such flowers may come tomorrow! Then that is no longer enough, one must place the written words side by side with the eyes, the voice. One makes a rendezvous, and—without her having altered, perhaps—whereas one expected, from the description received or one's personal memory, to meet a Fairy Queen, one finds Puss-in-Boots. One makes another rendezvous, nevertheless, for the following day, for it is, after all, *she*, and it was she that one desired. For these desires for a woman of whom one has dreamed do not make the beauty of this or that particular feature absolutely essential. These desires are only the desire for this or that person; vague as perfumes, as styrax was the desire of Prothyraia, saffron the ethereal desire, spices the desire of Hera, myrrh the perfume of the clouds, manna the desire of Nike, incense the perfume of the sea. But these perfumes that are sung in the Orphic hymns are far fewer in number than the deities they cherish. Myrrh is the perfume of the clouds, but also of Protogonos, Neptune, Nereus, Leto; incense is the perfume of the sea, but also of the fair Dike, of Themis, of Circe, of the Nine Muses, of Eos, of Mnemosyne, of the Day, of Dikaioyne. As for styrax, manna and spices, it would be impossible to name all the deities that inspire them, so many are they. Amphietes has all the perfumes except incense, and Gaia rejects only beans and spices. So it was with these desires that I felt for different girls. Less numerous than the girls themselves, they changed into disappointments and regrets closely similar one to another. I never wished for myrrh. I reserved it for Jupien and for the Princesse de Guermantes, for it is the desire of Protogonos "of twofold sex, with the roar of a bull, of countless orgies, memorable, indescribable, descending joyously to the sacrifices of the Orgiophants."

But presently the season was in full swing; every day there was some new arrival, and for the sudden increase in the frequency of my outings, which took the place of the charmed perusal of the *Arabian Nights*, there was an unpleasurable reason which poisoned them all. The beach was now peopled with girls, and, since the idea suggested to me by Cottard, while not supplied with fresh suspicions, had rendered me sensitive and vulnerable in that quarter and careful not to let any suspicion take shape in my mind, as soon as a young woman arrived at Balbec I felt ill at ease and proposed to Albertine the most distant excursions so that she might not make the newcomer's acquaintance and if possible might not even set eyes on her. I dreaded naturally even more those women whose dubious ways were remarked or their bad reputation already known; I tried to persuade my beloved that this bad reputation had no foundation, was a slander, perhaps, without admitting it to myself, from a fear, as yet unconscious, that she might seek to make friends with the depraved woman or regret her inability to do so because of me, or might conclude from the number of examples that a vice so widespread could not be blameworthy. In denying it of every guilty woman, I was not far from contending that sapphism did not exist. Albertine adopted my incredulity as to the viciousness of this one or that: "No, I think it's just a pose, she wants to put on airs." But then I regretted almost that I had pleaded their

innocence, for it offended me that Albertine, formerly so severe, could believe that this “pose” was a thing so pleasing, so advantageous, that a woman innocent of such tastes should seek to adopt it. I began to wish that no more women would come to Balbec; I trembled at the thought that, as it was about the time when Mme Putbus was due to arrive at the Verdurins’, her maid, whose tastes Saint-Loup had not concealed from me, might take it into her head to come down to the beach, and, if it were a day on which I was not with Albertine, might seek to corrupt her. I went as far as to ask myself whether, as Cottard had made no secret of the fact that the Verdurins thought highly of me and, while not wishing to appear, as he put it, to be running after me, would give a great deal to have me come to their house, I might not, on the strength of promises to bring all the Guermantes in existence to call on them in Paris, induce Mme Verdurin on some pretext or other to inform Mme Putbus that it was impossible to keep her there any longer and make her leave the place at once.

Notwithstanding these thoughts, and as it was chiefly the presence of Andrée that disturbed me, the soothing effect that Albertine’s words had had upon me to some extent persisted—I knew moreover that presently I should have less need of it, since Andrée would be leaving with Rosemonde and Gisèle just about the time when the crowd began to arrive and would be spending only a few weeks more with Albertine. During these weeks, moreover, Albertine seemed to plan everything that she did, everything that was said, with a view to destroying my suspicions if any remained, or to preventing their recurrence. She contrived never to be left alone with Andrée, and insisted, when we came back from an excursion, on my accompanying her to her door, and on my coming to fetch her when we were going anywhere. Andrée meanwhile took just as much trouble on her side, seemed to avoid meeting Albertine. And this apparent understanding between them was not the only indication that Albertine must have informed her friend of our conversation and have asked her to be so kind as to calm my absurd suspicions.

About this time there occurred at the Grand Hotel a scandal which was not calculated to alter the trend of my anxieties. Bloch’s sister had for some time past been indulging, with a retired actress, in secret relations which presently ceased to suffice them. They felt that to be seen would add perversity to their pleasure, and chose to flaunt their dangerous embraces before the eyes of all the world. They began with caresses, which might, after all, be attributed to a friendly intimacy, in the card-room, round the baccarat-table. Then they grew bolder. And finally, one evening, in a corner of the big ballroom that was not even dark, on a sofa, they made no more attempt to conceal what they were doing than if they had been in bed. Two officers, who happened to be nearby with their wives, complained to the manager. It was thought for a moment that their protest would be effective. But they suffered from the disadvantage that, having come over for the evening from Netteholme, where they lived, they could not be of any use to the manager. Whereas, without her even knowing it, and whatever remarks the manager might make to her, there hovered over Mlle Bloch the protection of M. Nissim Bernard. I must explain why. M. Nissim Bernard practised the family virtues in the highest degree. Every year he rented a magnificent villa at Balbec for his nephew, and no invitation would have dissuaded him from going home to dine at his own table, which was really theirs. But he never lunched at home. Every day at noon he was at the Grand Hotel. The fact of the matter was that he was keeping, as other men keep a dancer from the *corps de ballet*, a fledgling waiter of much the same type as the pages of whom we have spoken, and who made us think of the young Israelites in *Esther* and *Athalie*. It is true that the forty years’ difference in age between M. Nissim Bernard and the young waiter ought to have preserved the latter from a contact that could scarcely have been agreeable. But, as Racine so wisely observes in those same choruses:

Great God, with what uncertain tread  
A budding virtue ‘mid such perils goes!  
What stumbling-blocks do lie before a soul  
That seeks Thee and would fain be innocent.

For all that the young waiter had been brought up “in seclusion from the world” in the Temple-Palace of Balbec, he had not followed the advice of Joad:

In riches and in gold put not thy trust.

He had perhaps justified himself by saying: “The wicked cover the earth.” However that might be, and albeit M. Nissim Bernard had not expected so rapid a conquest, on the very first day,

Whether in fear, or anxious to caress,  
He felt those childish arms about him thrown.

And by the second day, M. Nissim Bernard having taken the young waiter out,

The dire assault his innocence destroyed.

From that moment the boy’s life was altered. He might only carry bread and salt, as his superior bade him, but his whole face sang:

From flowers to flowers, from joys to joys  
Let our desires now range.  
Uncertain is our sum of fleeting years,  
Let us then hasten to enjoy this life!  
Honours and high office are the prize  
Of blind and meek obedience.  
For sorry innocence  
Who would want to raise his voice?

Since that day, M. Nissim Bernard had never failed to come and occupy his seat at the lunch-table (as a man might occupy his seat in the stalls who was keeping a dancer, a dancer in this case of a distinct and special type which still awaits its Degas). It was M. Nissim Bernard's delight to follow round the restaurant, as far as the remote vistas where beneath her palm the cashier sat enthroned, the gyrations of the adolescent in zealous attendance—attendance on everyone, and less on M. Nissim Bernard now that the latter was keeping him, whether because the young altar-boy did not think it necessary to display the same civility to a person by whom he supposed himself to be sufficiently well loved, or because that love annoyed him or he feared lest, if discovered, it might make him lose other opportunities. But this very coldness pleased M. Nissim Bernard, because of all that it concealed; whether from Hebraic atavism or in profanation of its Christian feeling, he took a singular pleasure in the Racinian ceremony, were it Jewish or Catholic. Had it been a real performance of *Esther* or *Athalie*, M. Bernard would have regretted that the gulf of centuries must prevent him from making the acquaintance of the author, Jean Racine, so that he might obtain for his protégé a more substantial part. But as the luncheon ceremony came from no author's pen, he contented himself with being on good terms with the manager and with Aimé, so that the "young Israelite" might be promoted to the coveted post of under-waiter, or even put in charge of a row of tables. A post in the cellars had been offered him. But M. Bernard made him decline it, for he would no longer have been able to come every day to watch him race about the green dining-room and to be waited upon by him like a stranger. Now this pleasure was so keen that every year M. Bernard returned to Balbec and had his lunch away from home, habits in which M. Bloch saw, in the former a poetical fancy for the beautiful light and the sunsets of this coast favoured above all others, in the latter the inveterate eccentricity of an old bachelor.

As a matter of fact, this misapprehension on the part of M. Nissim Bernard's relatives, who never suspected the true reason for his annual return to Balbec, and for what the pedantic Mme Bloch called his gastronomic absenteeism, was a deeper truth, at one remove. For M. Nissim Bernard himself was unaware of the extent to which a love for the beach at Balbec and for the view over the sea which one enjoyed from the restaurant, together with eccentricity of habit, contributed to the fancy that he had for keeping, like a little dancing girl of another kind which still lacks a Degas, one of his equally nubile servers. And so M. Nissim Bernard maintained excellent relations with the director of this theatre which was the hotel at Balbec, and with the stage-manager and producer Aimé—whose roles in this whole affair were far from clear. One day they would all contrive to procure an important part for his protégé, perhaps a post as head waiter. In the meantime M. Nissim Bernard's pleasure, poetical and calmly contemplative as it might be, was somewhat reminiscent of those women-loving men who always know—Swann, for example, in the past—that if they go out in society they will meet their mistress. No sooner had M. Nissim Bernard taken his seat than he would see the object of his affections appear on the scene, bearing in his hands fruit or cigars upon a tray. And so every morning, after kissing his niece, inquiring about my friend Bloch's work, and feeding his horses with lumps of sugar from the palm of his outstretched hand, he would betray a feverish haste to arrive in time for lunch at the Grand Hotel. Had the house been on fire, had his niece had a stroke, he would doubtless have started off just the same. So that he dreaded like the plague a cold that would confine him to his bed—for he was a hypochondriac—and would oblige him to ask Aimé to send his young friend across to visit him at home, between lunch and tea-time.

He loved moreover all the labyrinth of corridors, private offices, reception-rooms, cloakrooms, larders, galleries which composed the hotel at Balbec. With a strain of oriental atavism he loved a seraglio, and when he went out at night might be seen furtively exploring its purlieus.

While, venturing down to the basement and endeavouring at the same time to escape notice and to avoid a scandal, M. Nissim Bernard, in his quest of the young Levites, put one in mind of those lines in *La Juive*:

O God of our Fathers, come down to us again,  
Our mysteries veil from the eyes of wicked men!

I on the contrary would go up to the room of two sisters who had come to Balbec with an old foreign lady as her maids. They were what the language of hotels called two *courrières*, and that of Françoise, who imagined that a courier was a person who was there to run errands (*faire des courses*) two *coursières*. The hotels have remained, more nobly, in the period when people sang: "*C'est un courrier de cabinet.*"<sup>8</sup>

Difficult as it was for a guest to penetrate to the servants' quarters, and vice versa, I had very soon formed a mutual bond of friendship, as strong as it was pure, with these two young persons, Mlle Marie Gineste and Mme Céleste Albaret. Born at the foot of the high mountains in the centre of France, on the banks of rivulets and torrents (the water flowed actually under the family home, turning a millwheel, and the house had often been devastated by floods), they seemed to embody the spirit of those waters. Marie Gineste was more

regularly rapid and staccato, Céleste Albaret softer and more languishing, spread out like a lake, but with terrible boiling rages in which her fury suggested the peril of spates and whirlwinds that sweep everything before them. They often came in the morning to see me when I was still in bed. I have never known people so deliberately ignorant, who had learned absolutely nothing at school, and yet whose language was somehow so literary that, but for the almost wild naturalness of their tone, one would have thought their speech affected. With a familiarity which I reproduce verbatim, notwithstanding the eulogies (which I set down here in praise not of myself but of the strange genius of Céleste) and the criticisms, equally unfounded but absolutely sincere, which her remarks seem to imply towards me, while I dipped croissants in my milk, Céleste would say to me: "Oh! little black devil with raven hair, oh deep-dyed mischief! I don't know what your mother was thinking of when she made you, you're just like a bird. Look, Marie, wouldn't you say he was preening his feathers, and the supple way he turns his head right round, he looks so light, you'd think he was just learning to fly. Ah! it's lucky for you that you were born into the ranks of the rich, otherwise what would have become of you, spendthrift that you are? Look at him throwing away his croissant because it touched the bed. There he goes, now, look, he's spilling his milk. Wait till I tie a napkin round you, because you'll never do it for yourself, I've never seen anyone so foolish and clumsy as you." I would then hear the more regular sound of the torrent of Marie Gineste furiously reprimanding her sister: "Will you hold your tongue, now, Céleste. Are you mad, talking to Monsieur like that?" Céleste merely smiled; and as I detested having a napkin tied round my neck: "No, Marie, look at him, bang, he's shot straight up on end like a snake. A proper snake, I tell you." She was full of zoological similes, for, according to her, it was impossible to tell when I slept, I fluttered about all night like a moth, and in the daytime I was as swift as the squirrels, "you know, Marie, which we used to see at home, so nimble that even with the eyes you can't follow them." "But, Céleste, you know he doesn't like having a napkin when he's eating." "It isn't that he doesn't like it, it's so that he can say nobody can make him do anything he doesn't want to. He's a grand gentleman and he wants to show that he is. You change the sheets ten times over if need be, but he still won't be satisfied. Yesterday's had served their time, but today they've only just been put on the bed and they have to be changed already. Oh, I was right when I said that he was never meant to be born among the poor. Look, his hair's standing on end, puffing out with rage like a bird's feathers. Poor *feather-pether*!" Here it was not only Marie who protested, but myself, for I did not feel in the least like a grand gentleman. But Céleste would never believe in the sincerity of my modesty and would cut me short: "Oh, what a bag of tricks! Oh, the soft talk, the deceitfulness! Ah, rogue among rogues, churl of churls! Ah, Molière!" (This was the only writer's name that she knew, but she applied it to me, meaning thereby a person who was capable both of writing plays and of acting them.) "Céleste!" came the imperious cry from Marie, who, not knowing the name of Molière, was afraid that it might be some fresh insult. Céleste continued to smile: "Then you haven't seen the photograph of him in his drawer, when he was little? He tried to make us believe that he was always dressed quite simply. And there, with his little cane, he's all furs and lace, such as not even a prince ever wore. But that's nothing compared with his tremendous majesty and his even more profound kindness." "So you go rummaging in his drawers now, do you?" growled the torrent Marie. To calm Marie's fears I asked her what she thought of M. Nissim Bernard's behaviour ... "Ah! Monsieur, there are things I wouldn't have believed could exist until I came here." And for once going one better than Céleste with an even more profound observation, she added: "Ah! You see, Monsieur, one can never tell what there may be in a person's life." To change the subject, I spoke to her of the life led by my father, who worked night and day. "Ah! Monsieur, there are people who keep nothing of their life for themselves, not one minute, not one pleasure, the whole thing is a sacrifice for others, they are lives that are *offered up* ... Look, Céleste, simply the way he puts his hand on the counterpane and picks up his croissant, what distinction! He can do the most insignificant things, and you'd think that the whole nobility of France, right to the Pyrenees, was stirring in each of his movements."

Overwhelmed by this portrait that was so far from lifelike, I remained silent; Céleste interpreted my silence as a further instance of guile: "Ah! forehead that looks so pure and hides so many things, nice, cool cheeks like the inside of an almond, little hands all soft and satiny, nails like claws," and so forth. "There, Marie, look at him sipping his milk with a reverence that makes me want to say my prayers. What a serious air! Someone really ought to take a picture of him as he is just now. He's just like a child. Is it by drinking milk, like them, that you've kept that clear complexion? Ah, what youth! Ah, what lovely skin! You'll never grow old. You're lucky, you'll never need to raise your hand against anyone, for you have eyes that know how to impose their will. Look at him now, he's angry. He shoots up, straight as a gospel truth."

Françoise did not at all approve of those she called the two "wheedlers" coming to talk to me like this. The manager, who made his staff keep watch over everything that went on, even pointed out to me gravely that it was not proper for a customer to talk to servants. I, who found the "wheedlers" better company than any visitor in the hotel, merely laughed in his face, convinced that he would not understand my explanations. And the sisters returned. "Look, Marie, at his delicate features. Oh, perfect miniature, finer than the most precious you could see in a glass case, because he has movement, and words you could listen to for days and nights."

It was a miracle that a foreign lady could have brought them there, for, without knowing anything of history or geography, they heartily detested the English, the Germans, the Russians, the Italians, all foreign "vermin," and cared, with certain exceptions, for French people alone. Their faces had so far preserved the moisture of the malleable clay of their native river beds, that, as soon as one mentioned a foreigner who was staying in the hotel, in order to repeat what he had said Céleste and Marie at once took on his facial expression, their mouths became his mouth, their eyes his eyes—one would have liked to preserve these admirable comic masks. Céleste indeed, while pretending merely to be repeating what the manager or one of my friends had



said, would insert in her little narrative, apparently quite unwittingly, fictitious remarks in which were maliciously portrayed all the defects of Bloch, the judge, and others. Under the form of a report on a simple errand which she had obligingly undertaken, she would provide an inimitable portrait. They never read anything, not even a newspaper. One day, however, they found a book lying on my bed. It was a volume of the admirable but obscure poems of Saint-Léger Léger.<sup>9</sup> Céleste read a few pages and said to me: "But are you quite sure that it's poetry? Mightn't it just be riddles?" Obviously, to a person who had learned in her childhood a single poem: "Here below the lilacs die," there was a lack of transition. I fancy that their obstinate refusal to learn anything was due in part to the unhealthy climate of their early home. They had nevertheless all the gifts of a poet with more modesty than poets generally show. For if Céleste had said something noteworthy and, unable to remember it correctly, I asked her to repeat it, she would assure me that she had forgotten. They will never read any books, but neither will they ever write any.

Françoise was considerably impressed when she learned that the two brothers of these humble women had married, one the niece of the Archbishop of Tours, the other a relative of the Bishop of Rodez. To the manager, this would have conveyed nothing. Céleste would sometimes reproach her husband with his failure to understand her, and I myself was astonished that he could put up with her. For at certain moments, quivering, raging, destroying everything, she was detestable. It is said that the salt liquid which is our blood is only an internal survival of the primitive marine element. Similarly, I believe that Céleste, not only in her bursts of fury, but also in her hours of depression, preserved the rhythm of her native streams. When she was exhausted, it was after their fashion; she had literally run dry. Nothing could then have revitalised her. Then all of a sudden the circulation was restored in her tall, slender, magnificent body. The water flowed in the opaline transparency of her bluish skin. She smiled in the sun and became bluer still. At such moments she was truly celestial.

In spite of the fact that Bloch's family had never suspected the reason why their uncle never lunched at home, and had accepted it from the first as the idiosyncrasy of an elderly bachelor, attributable perhaps to the demands of a liaison with some actress, everything that concerned M. Nissim Bernard was taboo to the manager of the Balbec hotel. And it was for this reason that, without even referring to the uncle, he had finally not ventured to find fault with the niece, albeit recommending her to be a little more circumspect. Mlle Bloch and her friend, who for some days had imagined themselves to have been excluded from the Casino and the Grand Hotel, seeing that all was well, were delighted to show those respectable family men who held aloof from them that they might with impunity take the utmost liberties. No doubt they did not go so far as to repeat the public exhibition which had revolted everybody. But gradually they returned to their old ways. And one evening as I came out of the Casino, which was half in darkness, with Albertine and Bloch whom we had met there, they came by, linked together, kissing each other incessantly, and, as they passed us, crowed and chortled and uttered indecent cries. Bloch lowered his eyes so as to seem not to have recognised his sister, and I was tortured by the thought that this private and horrifying language was addressed perhaps to Albertine.

Another incident focused my preoccupations even more in the direction of Gomorrah. I had noticed on the beach a handsome young woman, slender and pale, whose eyes, round their centre, scattered rays so geometrically luminous that one was reminded, on meeting her gaze, of some constellation. I thought how much more beautiful she was than Albertine, and how much wiser it would be to give up the other. But the face of this beautiful young woman had been scoured by the invisible plane of a thoroughly depraved life, of the constant acceptance of vulgar expedients, so much so that her eyes, though nobler than the rest of her face, could radiate nothing but appetites and desires. On the following day, this young woman being seated a long way away from us in the Casino, I saw that she never ceased to fasten upon Albertine the alternating and revolving beam of her gaze. It was as though she were making signals to her with a lamp. It pained me that Albertine should see that she was being so closely observed, and I was afraid that these incessantly rekindled glances might be the agreed signal for an amorous assignation next day. For all I knew, this assignation might not be the first. The young woman with the flashing eyes might have come another year to Balbec. It was perhaps because Albertine had already yielded to her desires, or to those of a friend, that this woman allowed herself to address to her those flashing signals. If so, they were doing more than demand something for the present; they invoked a justification for it in pleasant hours in the past.

This assignation, in that case, must be not the first, but the sequel to adventures shared in past years. And indeed her glance did not say: "Will you?" As soon as the young woman had caught sight of Albertine, she had turned her head and beamed upon her glances charged with recollection, as though she were afraid and amazed that my beloved did not remember. Albertine, who could see her plainly, remained phlegmatically motionless, with the result that the other, with the same sort of discretion as a man who sees his old mistress with a new lover, ceased to look at her and paid no more attention to her than if she had not existed.

But a day or two later, I received proof of this young woman's tendencies, and also of the probability of her having known Albertine in the past. Often, in the hall of the Casino, when two girls were smitten with mutual desire, a sort of luminous phenomenon occurred, as it were a phosphorescent trail flashing from one to the other. It may be noted, incidentally, that it is by the aid of such materialisations, impalpable though they be, by these astral signs that set a whole section of the atmosphere ablaze, that Gomorrah, dispersed, tends in every town, in every village, to reunite its separated members, to rebuild the biblical city while everywhere the same efforts are being made, if only in view of an intermittent reconstruction, by the nostalgic, the hypocritical, sometimes the courageous exiles of Sodom.



Once I saw the unknown woman whom Albertine had appeared not to recognise, just at the moment when Bloch's cousin was passing by. The young woman's eyes flashed, but it was quite evident that she did not know the Jewish girl. She beheld her for the first time, felt a desire, scarcely any doubt, but by no means the same certainty as in the case of Albertine, Albertine upon whose friendship she must so far have counted that, in the face of her coldness, she had felt the surprise of a foreigner familiar with Paris but not a resident, who, having returned to spend a few weeks there, finds the site of the little theatre where he was in the habit of spending pleasant evenings occupied now by a bank.

Bloch's cousin went and sat down at a table where she turned the pages of a magazine. Presently the young woman came and sat down beside her with an abstracted air. But under the table one could presently see their feet wriggling, then their legs and hands intertwined. Words followed, a conversation began, and the young woman's guileless husband, who had been looking everywhere for her, was astonished to find her making plans for that very evening with a girl whom he did not know. His wife introduced Bloch's cousin to him as a childhood friend, under an inaudible name, for she had forgotten to ask her what her name was. But the husband's presence made their intimacy advance a stage further, for they addressed each other as *tu*, having known each other at their convent, an incident at which they laughed heartily later on, as well as at the hoodwinked husband, with a gaiety which afforded them an excuse for further caresses.

As for Albertine, I cannot say that anywhere, whether at the Casino or on the beach, her behaviour with any girl was unduly free. I found in it indeed an excess of coldness and indifference which seemed to be more than good breeding, to be a ruse planned to avert suspicion. When questioned by some girl, she had a quick, icy, prim way of replying in a very loud voice: "Yes, I shall be at the tennis-court about five. I shall go for a bathe tomorrow morning about eight," and of at once turning away from the person to whom she had said this—all of which had a horrible appearance of being meant to put one off the scent, and either to make an assignation, or rather, the assignation having already been made in a whisper, to utter these perfectly harmless words aloud so as not to attract undue attention. And when later on I saw her mount her bicycle and scorch away into the distance, I could not help thinking that she was on her way to join the girl to whom she had barely spoken.

However, when some handsome young woman stepped out of a motor-car at the end of the beach, Albertine could not help turning round. And she would at once explain: "I was looking at the new flag they've put up over the bathing place. They might have spent a bit more on it! The old one was pretty moth-eaten, but I really think this one is mouldier still."

On one occasion Albertine was not content with cold indifference, and this made me all the more wretched. She knew that I was concerned about the possibility of her meeting a friend of her aunt, who had a "bad name" and came now and again to spend a few days with Mme Bontemps. Albertine had pleased me by telling me that she would not speak to her again. And when this woman came to Incarville Albertine would say: "By the way, you know she's here. Have they told you?" as though to show me that she was not seeing her in secret. One day, when she told me this, she added: "Yes, I ran into her on the beach, and knocked against her as I passed, on purpose, to be rude to her." When Albertine told me this, there came back to my mind a remark made by Mme Bontemps, to which I had never given a second thought, when she had said to Mme Swann in my presence how brazen her niece Albertine was, as though that were a merit, and how Albertine reminded the wife of some official or other that her father had been a kitchen-boy. But a thing said by the woman we love does not long retain its purity; it cankers, it putrefies. An evening or two later, I thought again of Albertine's remark, and it was no longer the ill-breeding of which she boasted—and which could only make me smile—that it seemed to me to signify; it was something else, to wit that Albertine, perhaps even without any precise object, to tease this woman's senses, or wantonly to remind her of former propositions, accepted perhaps in the past, had swiftly brushed against her, had thought that I had perhaps heard of this as it had been done in public, and had wished to forestall an unfavourable interpretation.

However, the jealousy that was caused me by the women whom Albertine perhaps loved was abruptly to cease.

Albertine and I were waiting at the Balbec station of the little local railway. We had driven there in the hotel omnibus, because it was raining. Not far away from us was M. Nissim Bernard, who had a black eye. He had recently forsaken the chorister from *Athalie* for the waiter at a much frequented farmhouse in the neighbourhood, known as the "Cherry Orchard." This rubicund youth, with his blunt features, appeared for all the world to have a tomato instead of a head. A tomato exactly similar served as head to his twin brother. To the detached observer, the charm of these perfect resemblances between twins is that nature, as if momentarily industrialised, seems to be turning out identical products. Unfortunately M. Nissim Bernard looked at it from another point of view, and this resemblance was only external. Tomato No. 2 showed a frenzied zeal in catering exclusively to the pleasures of ladies; Tomato No. 1 was not averse to complying with the tastes of certain gentlemen. Now on every occasion when, stirred, as though by a reflex, by the memory of pleasant hours spent with Tomato No. 1, M. Bernard presented himself at the Cherry Orchard, being short-sighted (not that one had to be short-sighted to mistake them), the old Jewish gentleman, unwittingly playing Amphitryon, would accost the twin brother with: "Will you meet me somewhere this evening?" He at once received a thorough "hiding." It might even be repeated in the course of a single meal, when he continued with the second brother a conversation he had begun with the first. In the end this treatment, by association of ideas, so put him off tomatoes, even of the edible variety, that whenever he heard a newcomer order that vegetable at a neighbouring table in the Grand Hotel, he would murmur to him: "You must excuse me,

Monsieur, for addressing you without an introduction. But I heard you order tomatoes. They are bad today. I tell you in your own interest, for it makes no difference to me, I never touch them myself." The stranger would thank this philanthropic and disinterested neighbour effusively, call back the waiter, and pretend to have changed his mind: "No, on second thoughts, definitely no tomatoes." Aimé, who had seen it all before, would laugh to himself, and think: "He's an old rascal, that Monsieur Bernard, he's gone and made another of them change his order." M. Bernard, as he waited for the already overdue train, showed no eagerness to speak to Albertine and myself, because of his black eye. We were even less eager to speak to him. It would however have been almost inevitable if, at that moment, a bicycle had not come swooping towards us; the lift-boy sprang from its saddle, out of breath. Mme Verdurin had telephoned shortly after we left the hotel, to know whether I would dine with her two days later; we shall presently see why. Then, having given me the message in detail, the lift-boy left us, explaining, as one of those democratic "employees" who affect independence with regard to the gentry and restore the principle of authority among themselves, "I must be off, because of my chiefs."

Albertine's friends had gone away for some time. I was anxious to provide her with distractions. Even supposing that she might have found some happiness in spending the afternoons with no company but my own, at Balbec, I knew that such happiness is never complete and that Albertine, being still at the age (which some people never outgrow) when one has not yet discovered that this imperfection resides in the person who experiences the happiness and not in the person who gives it, might have been tempted to trace the cause of her disappointment back to me. I preferred that she should impute it to circumstances which, arranged by myself, would not give us an opportunity of being alone together, while at the same time preventing her from remaining in the Casino and on the beach without me. And so I had asked her that day to come with me to Doncières, where I was going to meet Saint-Loup. With the same object of keeping her occupied, I advised her to take up painting, in which she had had lessons in the past. While working she would not ask herself whether she was happy or unhappy. I would gladly have taken her also to dine now and again with the Verdurins and the Cambremers, who certainly would have been delighted to see any friend introduced by myself, but I must first make certain that Mme Putbus was not yet at La Raspelière. It was only by going there in person that I could make sure of this, and, as I knew beforehand that on the next day but one Albertine would be going on a visit with her aunt, I had seized this opportunity to send Mme Verdurin a telegram asking her whether I could visit her on Wednesday. If Mme Putbus was there, I would contrive to see her maid, ascertain whether there was any danger of her coming to Balbec, and if so find out when, so as to take Albertine out of reach on that day. The little local railway, making a loop which did not exist at the time when I had taken it with my grandmother, now extended to Doncières-la-Goupil, a big station at which important trains stopped, among them the express by which I had come down to visit Saint-Loup from Paris and thence returned. And, because of the bad weather, the omnibus from the Grand Hotel took Albertine and myself to the station of Balbec-Plage.

The little train had not yet arrived, but one could see the lazy, sluggish plume of smoke which it had left in its wake and which now, reduced to its own power of locomotion as a not very mobile cloud, was slowly mounting the green slope of the cliff of Criquetot. Finally the little train, which it had preceded by taking a vertical course, arrived in its turn, at a leisurely crawl. The passengers who were waiting to board it stepped back to make way for it, but without hurrying, knowing that they were dealing with a good-natured, almost human stroller, who, guided like the bicycle of a beginner by the obliging signals of the station-master, under the capable supervision of the engine-driver, was in no danger of running over anybody, and would come to a halt at the proper place.

My telegram explained the Verdurins' telephone message and had been all the more opportune since Wednesday (the next day but one happened to be a Wednesday) was the day set apart for big dinner-parties by Mme Verdurin, at La Raspelière as in Paris, a fact of which I was unaware. Mme Verdurin did not give "dinners," but she had "Wednesdays." These Wednesdays were works of art. While fully conscious that they had not their match anywhere, Mme Verdurin introduced shades of distinction between them. "Last Wednesday wasn't as good as the one before," she would say. "But I believe the next will be one of the most successful I've ever given." Sometimes she went so far as to admit: "This Wednesday wasn't worthy of the others. But I have a big surprise for you next week." In the closing weeks of the Paris season, before leaving for the country, the Mistress would announce the approaching end of the Wednesdays. It gave her an opportunity to spur on the faithful. "There are only three more Wednesdays left," or "Only two more," she would say, in the same tone as though the world were coming to an end. "You aren't going to let us down next Wednesday, for the finale." But this finale was a sham, for she would announce: "Officially, there will be no more Wednesdays. Today was the last for this year. But I shall be at home all the same on Wednesday. We'll celebrate Wednesday by ourselves; I dare say these little private Wednesdays will be the nicest of all." At La Raspelière, the Wednesdays were of necessity restricted, and since, if they met a friend who was passing that way, they would invite him for any evening he chose, almost every day of the week became a Wednesday. "I don't remember all the guests, but I know there's Madame la Marquise de Camembert," the lift-boy had told me; his memory of our discussion of the name Cambremer had not succeeded in conclusively supplanting that of the old word, whose syllables, familiar and full of meaning, came to the young employee's rescue when he was flummoxed by this difficult name, and were immediately preferred and readopted by him, not from laziness or as an old and ineradicable usage, but because of the need for logic and clarity which they satisfied.

We hastened in search of an empty carriage in which I could hold Albertine in my arms throughout the journey. Having failed to find one, we got into a compartment in which there was already installed a lady with a massive face, old and ugly, and a masculine expression, very much in her Sunday best, who was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Notwithstanding her vulgarity, she was ladylike in her gestures, and I amused myself wondering to what social category she could belong; I at once concluded that she must be the manageress of some large brothel, a procuress on holiday. Her face and her manner proclaimed the fact aloud. Only, I had hitherto been unaware that such ladies read the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Albertine drew my attention to her with a wink and a smile. The lady wore an air of extreme dignity; and as I, for my part, was inwardly aware that I was invited, two days hence, to the house of the celebrated Mme Verdurin at the terminal point of the little railway line, that at an intermediate station I was awaited by Robert de Saint-Loup, and that a little further on I would have given great pleasure to Mme de Cambremer by going to stay at Féterne, my eyes sparkled with irony as I gazed at this self-important lady who seemed to think that, because of her elaborate attire, the feathers in her hat, her *Revue des Deux Mondes*, she was a more considerable personage than myself. I hoped that the lady would not remain in the train much longer than M. Nissim Bernard, and that she would alight at least at Toutainville, but no. The train stopped at Epreville, and she remained seated. Similarly at Montmartinsur-Mer, at Parville-la-Bingard, at Incarville, so that in desperation, when the train had left Saint-Frichoux, which was the last station before Doncières, I began to embrace Albertine without bothering about the lady.

At Doncières, Saint-Loup had come to meet me at the station, with the greatest difficulty, he told me, for, as he was staying with his aunt, my telegram had only just reached him and he could not, having been unable to make any arrangements beforehand, spare me more than an hour of his time. This hour seemed to me, alas, far too long, for as soon as we had left the train Albertine devoted her attention exclusively to Saint-Loup. She did not say a word to me, barely answered me if I addressed her, repulsed me when I approached her. With Robert, on the other hand, she laughed her provoking laugh, she talked to him volubly, played with the dog he had brought with him, and, while teasing the animal, deliberately rubbed against its master. I remembered that, on the day when Albertine had allowed me to kiss her for the first time, I had smiled with inward gratitude towards the unknown seducer who had wrought so profound a change in her and had so simplified my task. I thought of him now with horror. Robert must have realised that I was not indifferent to Albertine, for he did not respond to her advances, which put her in a bad humour with myself; then he spoke to me as though I was alone, and this, when she noticed it, raised me again in her esteem. Robert asked me if I would like to try and find, among the friends with whom he used to take me to dine every evening at Doncières when I was staying there, those who were still in the garrison. And as he himself indulged in that sort of teasing affectation which he reproved in others, "What's the good of your having worked so hard to *charm* them if you don't want to see them again?" he asked. I declined his offer, for I did not wish to run the risk of being parted from Albertine, but also because now I was detached from them. From them, which is to say from myself. We passionately long for there to be another life in which we shall be similar to what we are here below. But we do not pause to reflect that, even without waiting for that other life, in this life, after a few years, we are unfaithful to what we once were, to what we wished to remain immortally. Even without supposing that death is to alter us more completely than the changes that occur in the course of our lives, if in that other life we were to encounter the self that we have been, we should turn away from ourselves as from those people with whom we were once on friendly terms but whom we have not seen for years—such as Saint-Loup's friends whom I used so much to enjoy meeting every evening at the Faisan Doré, and whose conversation would now have seemed to me merely a boring importunity. In this respect, and because I preferred not to go there in search of what had given me pleasure in the past, a stroll through Doncières might have seemed to me a prefiguration of an arrival in paradise. We dream much of paradise, or rather of a number of successive paradises, but each of them is, long before we die, a paradise lost, in which we should feel ourselves lost too.

He left us at the station. "But you may have nearly an hour to wait," he told me. "If you spend it here, you'll probably see my uncle Charlus, who is catching the train to Paris, ten minutes before yours. I've already said goodbye to him, because I have to be back before his train leaves. I didn't tell him about you, because I hadn't got your telegram."

To the reproaches which I heaped upon her when Saint-Loup had left us, Albertine replied that she had intended, by her coldness towards me, to dispel any idea that he might have formed if, at the moment when the train stopped, he had seen me leaning against her with my arm round her waist. He had indeed noticed this attitude (I had not caught sight of him, otherwise I should have sat up decorously beside Albertine), and had had time to murmur in my ear: "So *that's* one of those priggish little girls you told me about, who wouldn't go near Mlle de Stermaria because they thought her fast?" I had indeed mentioned to Robert, and in all sincerity, when I went down from Paris to visit him at Doncières, and when we were talking about our time at Balbec, that there was nothing to be done with Albertine, that she was virtue itself. And now that I had long since discovered for myself that this was false, I was even more anxious that Robert should believe it to be true. It would have been sufficient for me to tell Robert that I was in love with Albertine. He was one of those people who are capable of denying themselves a pleasure to spare a friend sufferings which they would feel as though they were their own. "Yes, she's still rather childish. But you don't know anything against her?" I added anxiously. "Nothing, except that I saw you clinging together like a pair of lovers."

"Your attitude dispelled absolutely nothing," I told Albertine when Saint-Loup had left us. "Quite true," she said to me, "it was stupid of me, I hurt your feelings, I'm far more unhappy about it than you are. You'll see, I shall never be like that again; forgive me," she pleaded, holding out her hand with a sorrowful air. At that

moment, from the waiting-room in which we were sitting, I saw M. de Charlus pass slowly by, followed at a respectful distance by a porter loaded with his baggage.

In Paris, where I encountered him only at evening receptions, immobile, strapped up in dress-clothes, maintained in a vertical posture by his proud erectness, his eagerness to be admired, his conversational verve, I had not realised how much he had aged. Now, in a light travelling suit which made him appear stouter, as he waddled along with his swaying paunch and almost symbolic behind, the cruel light of day decomposed, into paint on his lips, into face-powder fixed by cold cream on the tip of his nose, into mascara on his dyed moustache whose ebony hue contrasted with his grizzled hair, everything that in artificial light would have seemed the healthy complexion of a man who was still young.

While I stood talking to him, though briefly, because of his train, I kept my eye on Albertine's carriage to show her that I was coming. When I turned my head towards M. de Charlus, he asked me to be so kind as to summon a soldier, a relative of his, who was standing on the opposite platform, as though he were waiting to take our train, but in the opposite direction, away from Balbec. "He is in the regimental band," said M. de Charlus. "As you are so fortunate as to be still young enough, and I unfortunately am old enough for you to save me the trouble of going across to him ..." I felt obliged to go across to the soldier in question, and saw from the lyres embroidered on his collar that he was a bandsman. But, just as I was preparing to execute my commission, what was my surprise, and, I may say, my pleasure, on recognising Morel, the son of my uncle's valet, who recalled to me so many memories. They made me forget to convey M. de Charlus's message. "What, are you at Doncières?" "Yes, and they've put me in the band attached to the artillery." But he made this answer in a dry and haughty tone. He had become an intense "poseur," and evidently the sight of myself, reminding him of his father's profession, was displeasing to him. Suddenly I saw M. de Charlus bearing down on us. My dilatoriness had evidently taxed his patience. "I should like to listen to a little music this evening," he said to Morel without any preliminaries. "I pay five hundred francs for the evening, which may perhaps be of interest to one of your friends, if you have any in the band." Knowing as I did the insolence of M. de Charlus, I was none the less astonished at his not even bidding good-day to his young friend. He did not however give me time for reflexion. Holding out his hand to me affectionately, "Good-bye, my dear fellow," he said, implying that I might now leave them. I had in any case left my dear Albertine too long alone. "D'you know," I said to her as I climbed into the carriage, "the seaside life and the life of travel make me realise that the theatre of the world is stocked with fewer settings than actors, and with fewer actors than situations." "What makes you say that?" "Because M. de Charlus asked me just now to fetch one of his friends, whom this instant, on the platform of this station, I have just discovered to be one of my own." But as I uttered these words, I began to wonder how the Baron could have bridged the social gulf to which I had not given a thought. It occurred to me first of all that it might be through Jupien, whose niece, as the reader may remember, had seemed to become enamoured of the violinist. However, what baffled me completely was that, when due to leave for Paris in five minutes, the Baron should have asked for a musical evening. But, visualising Jupien's niece again in my memory, I was beginning to think that "recognitions" might indeed express an important part of life, if one knew how to penetrate to the romantic core of things, when all of a sudden the truth flashed across my mind and I realised that I had been absurdly ingenuous. M. de Charlus had never in his life set eyes upon Morel, nor Morel upon M. de Charlus, who, dazzled but also intimidated by a soldier even though he carried no weapon but a lyre, in his agitation had called upon me to bring him a person whom he never suspected that I already knew. In any case, for Morel, the offer of five hundred francs must have made up for the absence of any previous relations, for I saw that they were going on talking, oblivious of the fact that they were standing close beside our train. And remembering the manner in which M. de Charlus had come up to Morel and myself, I saw at once the resemblance to certain of his relatives when they picked up a woman in the street. The desired object had merely changed sex. After a certain age, and even if we develop in quite different ways, the more we become ourselves, the more our family traits are accentuated. For Nature, even while harmoniously fashioning the design of its tapestry, breaks the monotony of the composition thanks to the variety of the faces it catches. Besides, the haughtiness with which M. de Charlus had eyed the violinist is relative, and depends upon the point of view one adopts. It would have been recognised by three out of four society people, who bowed to him, not by the prefect of police who, a few years later, was to keep him under surveillance.

"The Paris train has been signalled, sir," said the porter who was carrying his suitcases. "But I'm not taking the train; put them in the cloakroom, damn you!" said M. de Charlus, giving twenty francs to the porter, who was astonished by the change of plan and charmed by the tip. This generosity at once attracted a flower-seller. "Take these carnations, look, this lovely rose, kind gentleman, it will bring you luck." M. de Charlus, exasperated, handed her a couple of francs, in exchange for which the woman gave him her blessing, and her flowers as well. "Good God, why can't she leave us alone," said M. de Charlus, addressing himself to Morel in an ironically querulous tone, as though he were at the end of his tether and found a certain comfort in appealing to him for support; "what we have to say to each other is quite complicated enough as it is." Perhaps, the porter not yet being out of earshot, M. de Charlus did not care to have too numerous an audience; perhaps these incidental remarks enabled his lofty timidity not to broach too directly the request for an assignation. The musician, turning with a frank, imperious and determined air to the flower-seller, raised a hand which repulsed her and indicated to her that her flowers were not wanted and that she was to clear off at once. M. de Charlus observed with ecstasy this authoritative, virile gesture, wielded by the graceful hand for which it ought still to have been too weighty, too massively brutal, with a precocious firmness and suppleness which gave to this still beardless adolescent the air of a young David capable of challenging

Goliath. The Baron's admiration was unconsciously blended with the sort of smile with which we observe in a child an expression of gravity beyond his years. "There's somebody I should like to have to accompany me on my travels and help me in my business. How he would simplify my life," M. de Charlus said to himself.

The train for Paris started, without M. de Charlus. Then Albertine and I took our seats in our own train, without my discovering what had become of M. de Charlus and Morel. "We must never quarrel any more, I beg your pardon again," Albertine said to me, alluding to the Saint-Loup incident. "We must always be nice to each other," she added tenderly. "As for your friend Saint-Loup, if you think that I'm the least bit interested in him, you're quite mistaken. All that I like about him is that he seems so very fond of you." "He's a very good fellow," I said, taking care not to attribute to Robert those imaginary excellences which I should not have failed to invent, out of friendship for him, had I been with anybody but Albertine. "He's an excellent creature, frank, devoted, loyal, someone you can rely on in any circumstances." In saying this I confined myself, restrained by my jealousy, to speaking the truth about Saint-Loup, but what I said was indeed the truth. But it expressed itself in precisely the same terms as Mme de Villeparisis had used in speaking to me of him, when I did not yet know him, imagined him to be so different, so proud, and said to myself: "People think him kind because he's a blue-blooded nobleman." In the same way, when she had said to me: "He would be so pleased," I thought to myself, after seeing him outside the hotel preparing to take the reins, that his aunt's words had been mere social banality, intended to flatter me. And I had realised afterwards that she had spoken sincerely, thinking of the things that interested me, of my reading, and because she knew that that was what Saint-Loup liked, as it was later to happen to me to say sincerely to somebody who was writing a history of his ancestor La Rochefoucauld, the author of the *Maximes*, and wished to consult Robert about him: "He will be so pleased." It was simply that I had learned to know him. But, when I set eyes on him for the first time, I had not supposed that an intelligence akin to my own could be enveloped in so much outward elegance of dress and attitude. By his feathers I had judged him to be a bird of another species. It was Albertine now who, perhaps a little because Saint-Loup, out of kindness to myself, had been so cold to her, said to me what I had once thought: "Ah, he's as devoted as all that! I notice that people are invariably credited with all the virtues when they belong to the Faubourg Saint-Germain." And yet, the fact that Saint-Loup belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain was something I had never once thought of again in the course of all these years in which, stripping himself of his prestige, he had demonstrated his virtues to me. Such a change of perspective in looking at other people, more striking already in friendship than in merely social relations, is all the more striking still in love, where desire so enlarges the scale, so magnifies the proportions of the slightest signs of coldness, that it had required far less than Saint-Loup had shown at first sight for me to believe myself disdained at first by Albertine, to imagine her friends as fabulously inhuman creatures, and to ascribe Elstir's judgment, when he said to me of the little band with exactly the same sentiment as Mme de Villeparisis speaking of Saint-Loup: "They're good girls," simply to the indulgence people have for beauty and a certain elegance. Yet was this not the verdict I would automatically have expressed when I heard Albertine say: "In any case, whether he's devoted or not, I sincerely hope I shall never see him again, since he's made us quarrel. We must never quarrel again. It isn't nice." Since she had seemed to desire Saint-Loup, I felt more or less cured for the time being of the idea that she cared for women, assuming that the two things were irreconcilable. And, looking at Albertine's mackintosh, in which she seemed to have become another person, the tireless vagrant of rainy days, and which, close-fitting, malleable and grey, seemed at that moment not so much intended to protect her clothes from the rain as to have been soaked by it and to be clinging to her body as though to take the imprint of her form for a sculptor, I tore off that tunic which jealously enwrapped a longed-for breast and, drawing Albertine towards me:

"But won't you, indolent traveller, rest your head  
And dream your dreams upon my shoulder?"

I said, taking her head in my hands, and showing her the wide meadows, flooded and silent, which extended in the gathering dusk to a horizon closed by the parallel chains of distant blue hills.

Two days later, on the famous Wednesday, in that same little train which I had again taken at Balbec to go and dine at La Raspelière, I was extremely anxious not to miss Cottard at Graincourt-Saint-Vast, where a second telephone message from Mme Verdurin had told me that I should find him. He was to join my train and would tell me where we had to get out to pick up the carriages that would be sent from La Raspelière to the station. And so, as the little train stopped for only a moment at Graincourt, the first station after Doncières, I had posted myself in readiness at the open window for fear of not seeing Cottard or of his not seeing me. Vain fears! I had not realised to what an extent the little clan had moulded all its regular members after the same type, so that, as they stood waiting on the platform, being moreover in full evening dress, they were immediately recognisable by a certain air of assurance, elegance and familiarity, by a look in their eyes which seemed to sweep across the serried ranks of the common herd as across an empty space in which there was nothing to arrest their attention, watching for the arrival of some fellow-member who had taken the train at an earlier station, and sparkling in anticipation of the talk that was to come. This sign of election, with which the habit of dining together had marked the members of the little group, was not all that distinguished them when they were massed together in full strength, forming a more brilliant patch in the midst of the troop of passengers—what Brichot called the *pecus*, the herd—upon whose drab faces could be discerned no notion relating to the name Verdurin, no hope of ever dining at La Raspelière. To be sure, these common travellers

would have been less interested than myself—notwithstanding the fame that several of the faithful had achieved—had anyone quoted in their hearing the names of these men whom I was astonished to see continuing to dine out when many of them had already been doing so, according to the stories that I had heard, before my birth, at a period at once so distant and so vague that I was inclined to exaggerate its remoteness. The contrast between the continuance not only of their existence, but of the fullness of their powers, and the obliteration of so many friends whom I had already seen vanish here or there, gave me the same feeling that we experience when in the stop-press column of the newspapers we read the very announcement that we least expected, for instance that of an untimely death, which seems to us fortuitous because the causes that have led up to it have remained outside our knowledge. This is the feeling that death does not descend uniformly upon all men, but that a more advanced wave of its tragic tide carries off a life situated at the same level as others which the waves that follow will long continue to spare. We shall see later on that the diversity of the forms of death that circulate invisibly is the cause of the peculiar unexpectedness of obituary notices in the newspapers. Then I saw that, with the passage of time, not only do real talents that may coexist with the most commonplace conversation reveal and impose themselves, but furthermore that mediocre persons arrive at those exalted positions, attached in the imagination of our childhood to certain famous elders, when it never occurred to us that a certain number of years later, their disciples, now become masters, would be famous too, and would inspire the respect and awe that they themselves once felt. But if the names of the faithful were unknown to the *pecus*, their aspect still singled them out in its eyes. Even in the train, when the coincidence of what they had been doing during the day assembled them all together, and they had only one isolated companion to collect at a subsequent station, the carriage in which they were gathered, designated by the sculptor Ski's elbow, flagged by Cottard's *Temps*, stood out from a distance like a special saloon, and rallied at the appointed station the tardy comrade. The only one who, because of his semi-blindness, might have missed these welcoming signals was Brichot. But one of the party would always volunteer to keep a look-out for him, and, as soon as his straw hat, his green umbrella and blue spectacles had been spotted, he would be gently but hastily guided towards the chosen compartment. So that it was inconceivable that one of the faithful, without exciting the gravest suspicions of his being "on the spree," or even of his not having come by the train, should not pick up the others in the course of the journey. Sometimes the opposite process occurred: one of the faithful might have had to go some distance down the line during the afternoon and would be obliged in consequence to make part of the journey alone before being joined by the group; but even when thus isolated, alone of his kind, he did not fail as a rule to produce a certain effect. The Future towards which he was travelling marked him out to the person on the seat opposite, who would say to himself "He must be somebody," and with the dim perspicacity of the travellers of Emmaus would discern a vague halo round the trilby of Cottard or of the sculptor Ski, and would be only half-astonished when at the next station an elegant crowd, if it were their terminal point, greeted the faithful one at the carriage door and escorted him to one of the waiting vehicles, all of them receiving a deep bow from the factotum of Douville station, or, if it were an intermediate station, invaded the compartment. This was what now occurred, with some precipitation, for several had arrived late, just as the train which was already in the station was about to start, with the troupe which Cottard led at the double towards the carriage at the window of which he had seen me signalling. Brichot, who was among this group of the faithful, had become more faithful than ever in the course of these years which had diminished the assiduity of others. As his sight became steadily weaker, he had been obliged, even in Paris, to reduce more and more his work after dark. Besides, he was out of sympathy with the modern Sorbonne, where ideas of scientific exactitude, after the German model, were beginning to prevail over humanism. He now confined himself exclusively to his lectures and to his duties as an examiner; hence he had a great deal more time to devote to social pursuits, that is to say to evenings at the Verdurins', or to those that now and again were given for the Verdurins by one or other of the faithful, tremulous with emotion. It is true that on two occasions love had almost succeeded in achieving what his work could no longer do: in detaching Brichot from the little clan. But Mme Verdurin, who "kept a weather eye open," and moreover, having acquired the habit in the interests of her salon, had come to take a disinterested pleasure in this sort of drama and execution, had brought about an irremediable breach between him and the dangerous person, being skilled (as she put it) at "putting things in order" and "stopping the rot." This she had found all the easier in the case of one of the dangerous persons in that the latter was simply Brichot's laundress, and Mme Verdurin, having free access to the fifth-floor rooms of the Professor, who was crimson with pride whenever she deigned to climb his stairs, had only had to throw the wretched woman out. "What!" the Mistress had said to Brichot, "a woman like myself does you the honour of calling upon you, and you entertain a creature like that?" Brichot had never forgotten the service that Mme Verdurin had rendered him by preventing his old age from foundering in the mire, and became more and more attached to her, whereas, in contrast to this renewal of affection and possibly because of it, the Mistress was beginning to be tired of this too docile follower of whose obedience she could be certain in advance. But Brichot acquired from his intimacy with the Verdurins a glamour which set him apart from all his colleagues at the Sorbonne. They were dazzled by the accounts that he gave them of dinner-parties to which they would never be invited, by the mention made of him in the reviews, or the portrait of him exhibited in the Salon, by some writer or painter of repute whose talent the occupants of the other chairs in the Faculty of Letters esteemed but whose attention they had no prospect of attracting, and in particular by the elegance of the mundane philosopher's attire, an elegance which they had mistaken at first for slovenliness until their colleague had benevolently explained to them that a top hat could quite acceptably be placed on the floor

when one was paying a call and was not the right thing for dinners in the country, however smart, where it should be replaced by a trilby, which was perfectly all right with a dinner-jacket.

For the first few moments after the little group had swept into the carriage, I could not even speak to Cottard, for he was completely breathless, not so much from having run in order not to miss the train as from astonishment at having caught it at the last second. He felt more than the joy of success, almost the hilarity of a merry prank. "Ah! that was a good one!" he said when he had recovered himself. "A minute later! 'Pon my soul, that's what they call arriving in the nick of time!" he added with a wink, intended not so much to inquire whether the expression was apt, for he now overflowed with confidence, but to express his self-satisfaction. At length he was able to introduce me to the other members of the little clan. I was dismayed to see that they were almost all in the dress which in Paris is called a "smoking." I had forgotten that the Verdurins were beginning to make tentative moves in the direction of fashionable ways, moves which, slowed down by the Dreyfus case, accelerated by the "new" music, they in fact denied, and would continue to deny until they were complete, like those military objectives which a general does not announce until he has reached them, so as not to appear defeated if he fails. Society for its part was quite prepared to go half-way to meet them. At the moment it had reached the point of regarding them as people to whose house nobody in Society went but who were not in the least perturbed by the fact. The Verdurin salon was understood to be a Temple of Music. It was there, people affirmed, that Vinteuil had found inspiration and encouragement. And although Vinteuil's sonata remained wholly unappreciated and almost unknown, his name, referred to as that of the greatest contemporary composer, enjoyed an extraordinary prestige. Finally, certain young men of the Faubourg having decided that they ought to be as well educated as the middle classes, three of them had studied music and among these Vinteuil's sonata enjoyed an enormous vogue. They would speak of it, on returning to their homes, to the intelligent mothers who had encouraged them to improve their minds. And, taking an interest in their sons' studies, these mothers would gaze with a certain respect at Mme Verdurin in her front box at concerts, following the music from the score. So far, this latent social success of the Verdurins had expressed itself in two facts only. In the first place, Mme Verdurin would say of the Princesse de Caprarola: "Ah! she's intelligent, that one, she's a charming woman. What I cannot endure are the imbeciles, the people who bore me—they drive me mad." Which would have made anybody at all perspicacious realise that the Princesse de Caprarola, a woman who moved in the highest society, had called upon Mme Verdurin. She had even mentioned the Verdurins' name in the course of a visit of condolence which she had paid to Mme Swann after the death of her husband, and had asked whether she knew them. "What name did you say?" Odette had asked with sudden wistfulness. "Verdurin? Oh, yes, of course," she had continued glumly, "I don't know them, or rather, I know them without really knowing them, they're people I used to meet with friends years ago, they're quite nice." When the Princesse de Caprarola had gone, Odette regretted not having told the bare truth. But the immediate falsehood was not the fruit of her calculations, but the revelation of her fears and her desires. She denied not what it would have been adroit to deny, but what she would have liked not to be the case, even if her interlocutor was bound to hear an hour later that it was indeed the case. A little later she had recovered her self-assurance, and would even anticipate questions by saying, so as not to appear to be afraid of them: "Mme Verdurin, why, I used to know her terribly well," with an affectation of humility, like a great lady who tells you that she has taken the tram. "There has been a great deal of talk about the Verdurins lately," Mme de Souvré would remark. Odette, with the smiling disdain of a duchess, would reply: "Yes, I do seem to have heard a lot about them lately. Every now and then there are new people like that who arrive in society," without reflecting that she herself was among the newest. "The Princesse de Caprarola has dined there," Mme de Souvré would continue. "Ah!" Odette would reply, accentuating her smile, "that doesn't surprise me. That sort of thing always begins with the Princesse de Caprarola, and then someone else follows suit, like Comtesse Molé." Odette, in saying this, appeared to be filled with a profound contempt for the two great ladies who made a habit of "house-warming" in recently established salons. One felt from her tone that the implication was that she, Odette, like Mme de Souvré, was not the sort of person to let herself in for that sort of thing.

After the admission that Mme Verdurin had made of the Princesse de Caprarola's intelligence, the second indication that the Verdurins were conscious of their future destiny was that (without, of course, their having formally requested it) they were most anxious that people should now come to dine with them in evening dress. M. Verdurin could now have been greeted without shame by his nephew, the one who was "a wash-out."

Among those who entered my carriage at Graincourt was Saniette, who long ago had been driven from the Verdurins' by his cousin Forcheville, but had since returned. His faults, from the social point of view, had originally been—notwithstanding his superior qualities—somewhat similar to Cottard's: shyness, anxiety to please, fruitless attempts to succeed in doing so. But if the course of life, by making Cottard assume (if not at the Verdurins', where, because of the influence that past associations exert over us when we find ourselves in familiar surroundings, he had remained more or less the same, at least in his practice, in his hospital work, and at the Academy of Medicine) an outer shell of coldness, disdain, gravity, that became more and more pronounced as he trotted out his puns to his indulgent students, had created a veritable gulf between the old Cottard and the new, the same defects had on the contrary become more extreme in Saniette the more he sought to correct them. Conscious that he was frequently boring, that people did not listen to him, instead of then slackening his pace as Cottard would have done, and forcing their attention by an air of authority, not only did he try to win forgiveness for the unduly serious turn of his conversation by adopting a playful tone, but he speeded up his delivery, rushed his remarks, used abbreviations in order to appear less long-winded, more familiar with the matters of which he spoke, and succeeded only, by making them unintelligible, in

appearing interminable. His self-assurance was not like that of Cottard, who so petrified his patients that when other people lauded his social affability they would reply: "He's a different man when he receives you in his consulting room, you with your face to the light, and he with his back to it, and those piercing eyes." It failed to make any effect, one felt that it cloaked an excessive shyness, that the merest trifle would be enough to dispel it. Saniette, whose friends had always told him that he was wanting in self-confidence, and who had indeed seen men whom he rightly considered greatly inferior to himself obtain with ease the successes that were denied to him, now never began a story without smiling at its drollery, fearing lest a serious air might make his hearers underestimate the value of his wares. Sometimes, taking on trust the humour which he himself appeared to see in what he was about to say, his audience would oblige him with a general silence. But the story would fall flat. A kind-hearted fellow-guest would sometimes give Saniette the private, almost secret encouragement of a smile of approbation, conveying it to him furtively, without attracting attention, as one slips a note into someone's hand. But nobody went so far as to assume the responsibility, to risk the public backing of an honest laugh. Long after the story was ended and had fallen flat, Saniette, crestfallen, would remain smiling to himself, as though relishing in it and for himself the delectation which he pretended to find adequate and which the others had not felt.

As for the sculptor Ski—so styled on account of the difficulty they found in pronouncing his Polish surname, and because he himself, since he had begun to move in a certain social sphere, affected not to wish to be associated with his perfectly respectable but slightly boring and very numerous relations—he had, at forty-five and distinctly ugly, a sort of boyishness, a dreamy wistfulness which was the result of his having been, until the age of ten, the most ravishing child prodigy imaginable, the darling of all the ladies. Mme Verdurin maintained that he was more of an artist than Elstir. Any resemblance that there may have been between them was, however, purely external. It was sufficient to make Elstir, who had met Ski once, feel for him the profound repulsion that is inspired in us not so much by the people who are completely different from us as by those who are less satisfactory versions of ourselves, in whom are displayed our less attractive qualities, the faults of which we have cured ourselves, unpleasantly reminding us of how we must have appeared to certain other people before we became what we now are. But Mme Verdurin thought that Ski had more temperament than Elstir because there was no art in which he did not have some aptitude, and she was convinced that he would have developed that aptitude into talent if he had been less indolent. This indolence seemed to the Mistress to be actually an additional gift, being the opposite of hard work which she regarded as the lot of people devoid of genius. Ski would paint anything you asked, on cuff-links or on lintels. He sang like a professional and played from memory, giving the piano the effect of an orchestra, less by his virtuosity than by his vamped basses which suggested the inability of the fingers to indicate that at a certain point the cornet entered, which in any case he would imitate with his lips. Searching for words when he spoke so as to convey an interesting impression, just as he would pause before banging out a chord with the exclamation "Ping!" to bring out the brass, he was regarded as being marvellously intelligent, but as a matter of fact his ideas boiled down to two or three, extremely limited. Bored with his reputation for whimsicality, he had taken it into his head to show that he was a practical, down-to-earth person, whence a triumphant affectation of fake precision, of fake common sense, aggravated by his having no memory and a fund of information that was always inaccurate. The movements of his head, his neck and his limbs would have been graceful if he had still been nine years old, with golden curls, a wide lace collar and red leather bootees. Having arrived at Graincourt station in the company of Cottard and Brichot with time to spare, he and Cottard had left Brichot in the waiting-room and had gone for a stroll. When Cottard proposed to turn back, Ski had replied: "But there's no hurry. It isn't the local train today, it's the departmental train." Delighted by the effect that this refinement of accuracy produced upon Cottard, he added, with reference to himself: "Yes, because Ski loves the arts, because he models in clay, people think he's not practical. Nobody knows this line better than I do." Nevertheless, when they had turned back towards the station, Cottard, all of a sudden catching sight of the smoke of the approaching train, had let out a bellow and exclaimed: "We shall have to run like the wind." And they had in fact arrived with not a moment to spare, the distinction between local and departmental trains having never existed except in the mind of Ski.

"But isn't the Princess on the train?" came in ringing tones from Brichot, whose huge spectacles, glittering like the reflectors that throat specialists attach to their foreheads to see into their patients' larynxes, seemed to have taken their life from the Professor's eyes, and, possibly because of the effort he made to adjust his sight to them, seemed themselves to be looking, even at the most trivial moments, with sustained attention and extraordinary fixity. Brichot's malady, as it gradually deprived him of his sight, had revealed to him the beauties of that sense, just as, frequently, we have to make up our minds to part with some object, to make a present of it for instance, in order to study it, regret it, admire it.

"No, no, the Princess went over to Maineville with some of Mme Verdurin's guests who were taking the Paris train. It isn't beyond the bounds of possibility that Mme Verdurin, who had some business at Saint-Mars, may be with her! In that case, she'll be coming with us, and we shall all travel together, which will be delightful. We shall have to keep our eyes skinned at Maineville and see what we shall see! Ah, well, never mind—we certainly came very near to missing the bus. When I saw the train I was flabbergasted. That's what you call arriving at the psychological moment. What if we'd missed the train and Mme Verdurin had seen the carriages come back without us? You can just picture it," added the doctor, who had not yet recovered from his excitement. "I must say we really are having quite a jaunt. Eh, Brichot, what have you to say about our little escapade?" inquired the doctor with a note of pride.



"Upon my soul," replied Brichot, "why, yes, if you'd found the train gone, that would have taken the gilt off the trumpets, as Villemain, our late professor of eloquence, would have said."

But I, engrossed from the very first by these people whom I did not know, was suddenly reminded of what Cottard had said to me in the ballroom of the little casino, and, as though it were possible for an invisible link to join an organ to the images of one's memory, the image of Albertine pressing her breasts against Andrée's brought a terrible pain to my heart. This pain did not last: the idea of Albertine's having relations with women seemed no longer possible since the occasion, forty-eight hours earlier, when the advances she had made to Saint-Loup had excited in me a new jealousy which had made me forget the old. I was innocent enough to believe that one taste necessarily excludes another.

At Harambouville, as the train was full, a farm labourer in a blue smock who had only a third-class ticket got into our compartment. The doctor, feeling that the Princess could not be allowed to travel with such a person, called a porter, showed a card which described him as medical officer to one of the big railway companies, and obliged the station-master to eject the intruder. This incident so pained and alarmed Saniette's timid spirit that, as soon as he saw it beginning, fearing already lest, in view of the crowd of peasants on the platform, it should assume the proportions of a popular uprising, he pretended to be suffering from a stomach-ache, and to avoid being accused of any share in the responsibility for the doctor's violence, rushed down the corridor pretending to be looking for what Cottard called the "waters." Failing to find it, he stood and gazed at the scenery from the other end of the "twister."

"If this is your first appearance at Mme Verdurin's, Monsieur," Brichot said to me, anxious to show off his talents before a newcomer, "you will find that there is no place where one feels more the *douceur de vivre*, to quote one of the inventors of dilettantism, of pococurantism, of all sorts of 'isms' that are in fashion among our little snobblings—I refer to M. le Prince de Talleyrand." For, when he spoke of these great noblemen of the past, he felt that it was witty and added "period colour" to prefix their titles with "Monsieur," and said "M. le Duc de La Rochefoucauld," "M. le Cardinal de Retz," referring to these from time to time also as "That *struggle for life* of Gondi," "that *Boulangist* de Marcillac." And he never failed, when referring to Montesquieu, to call him, with a smile, "Monsieur le Président Secondat de Montesquieu." An intelligent man of society would have been irritated by this pedantry, which reeked of the lecture-room. But in the perfect manners of the man of society there is a pedantry too, when speaking of a prince, which betrays a different caste, that in which one prefixes the name "William" with "the Emperor" and addresses a Royal Highness in the third person. "Ah, now, that is a man," Brichot continued, still referring to "Monsieur le Prince de Talleyrand," "to whom we take off our hats. He is an ancestor."

"It's a delightful circle," Cottard told me, "you'll find a little of everything, for Mme Verdurin is not exclusive—distinguished scholars like Brichot, the nobility, for example, Princess Sherbatoff, an aristocratic Russian lady, a friend of the Grand Duchess Eudoxie, who even sees her alone at hours when no one else is admitted."

As a matter of fact the Grand Duchess Eudoxie, not wishing Princess Sherbatoff, who for years past had been ostracised by everyone, to come to her house when there might be other people, allowed her to come only in the early morning, when Her Imperial Highness was not at home to any of those friends to whom it would have been as disagreeable to meet the Princess as it would have been awkward for the Princess to meet them. Since, for the last three years, as soon as she came away from the Grand Duchess, like a manicurist, Mme Sherbatoff would go to Mme Verdurin, who had just woken up, and stick to her for the rest of the day, one might say that the Princess's loyalty surpassed even that of Brichot, constant as he was at those Wednesdays, both in Paris, where he had the pleasure of fancying himself a sort of Chateaubriand at l'Abbaye-aux-Bois,<sup>10</sup> and in the country, where he saw himself becoming the equivalent of what the man whom he always referred to (with the knowing sarcasm of the man of letters) as "M. de Voltaire" must have been in the salon of Mme du Châtelet.

Her want of friends had enabled Princess Sherbatoff for some years past to display towards the Verdurins a fidelity which made her more than an ordinary member of the "faithful," the classic example of the breed, the ideal which Mme Verdurin had long thought unattainable and which now, in her later years, she at length found incarnate in this new feminine recruit. However keenly the Mistress might feel the pangs of jealousy, it was without precedent for the most assiduous of her faithful not to have "defected" at least once. The most stay-at-home yielded to the temptation to travel; the most continent fell from virtue; the most robust might catch influenza, the idlest be caught for his month's soldiering, the most indifferent go to close the eyes of a dying mother. And it was in vain that Mme Verdurin told them then, like the Roman Empress, that she was the sole general whom her legion must obey, or like Christ or the Kaiser, that he who loved his father or mother more than her and was not prepared to leave them and follow her was not worthy of her, that instead of wilting in bed or letting themselves be made fools of by whores they would do better to stay with her, their sole remedy and sole delight. But destiny, which is sometimes pleased to brighten the closing years of a life that stretches beyond the normal span, had brought Mme Verdurin in contact with the Princess Sherbatoff. Estranged from her family, an exile from her native land, knowing nobody but the Baroness Putbus and the Grand Duchess Eudoxie, to whose houses, because she herself had no desire to meet the friends of the former, and the latter no desire that her friends should meet the Princess, she went only in the early morning hours when Mme Verdurin was still asleep, never once, so far as she could remember, having been confined to her bed since she was twelve years old, when she had had the measles, having on the 31st of December replied to Mme Verdurin who, afraid of being left alone, had asked her whether she would not "shake down" there for the night, in spite of its being New Year's Eve: "Why, what is there to prevent me, any day of the year? Besides,

tomorrow is a day when one stays at home with one's family, and you are my family," living in a boarding-house and moving from it whenever the Verdurins moved, accompanying them on their holidays, the Princess had so completely exemplified to Mme Verdurin the line of Vigny:

You alone did seem to me that which one always seeks,

that the Lady President of the little circle, anxious to make sure of one of her "faithful" even after death, had made her promise that whichever of them survived the other should be buried by her side. In front of strangers—among whom we must always reckon the one to whom we lie the most because he is the one whose contempt would be most painful to us: ourselves—Princess Sherbatoff took care to represent her only three friendships—with the Grand Duchess, the Verdurins, and the Baroness Putbus—as the only ones, not which cataclysms beyond her control had allowed to emerge from the destruction of all the rest, but which a free choice had made her elect in preference to any other, and to which a taste for solitude and simplicity had made her confine herself. "I see *nobody* else," she would say, underlining the inflexible character of what appeared to be rather a rule that one imposes upon oneself than a necessity to which one submits. She would add: "I visit only three houses," as a dramatist who fears that it may not run to a fourth announces that there will be only three performances of his play. Whether or not M. and Mme Verdurin gave credence to this fiction, they had helped the Princess to instil it into the minds of the faithful. And they in turn were persuaded both that the Princess, among the thousands of invitations that were available to her, had chosen the Verdurins' alone, and that the Verdurins, deaf to the overtures of the entire aristocracy, had consented to make but a single exception, in favour of a great lady of more intelligence than the rest of her kind, the Princess Sherbatoff.

The Princess was very rich; she engaged for every first night a large box on the ground floor, to which, with Mme Verdurin's assent, she invited the faithful and nobody else. People would point out to one another this pale and enigmatic person who had grown old without turning white, turning red, rather, like certain tough and shrivelled hedgerow fruits. They admired both her influence and her humility, for, having always with her an Academician, Brichot, a famous scientist, Cottard, the leading pianist of the day, and at a later date M. de Charlus, yet she made a point of reserving the least prominent box in the theatre, sat at the back, paid no attention to the rest of the house, lived exclusively for the little group, who, shortly before the end of the performance, would withdraw in the wake of this strange sovereign, who was not without a certain shy, bewitching, faded beauty. But if Mme Sherbatoff did not look at the audience, if she stayed in the shadows, it was to try to forget that there existed a living world which she passionately desired and could not know; the coterie in a box was to her what is to certain animals their almost corpse-like immobility in the presence of danger. Nevertheless the thirst for novelty and for the curious which possesses society people made them pay even more attention perhaps to this mysterious stranger than to the celebrities in the front boxes to whom everybody paid a visit. They imagined that she must be different from the people they knew, that a marvellous intellect combined with a discerning bounty retained round about her that little circle of eminent men. The Princess was compelled, if you spoke to her about anyone, or introduced her to anyone, to feign an intense coldness, in order to keep up the fiction of her loathing of society. Nevertheless, with the support of Cottard or of Mme Verdurin, several new recruits succeeded in getting to know her and such was her excitement at making a fresh acquaintance that she forgot the fable of her deliberate isolation, and went to the wildest extremes to please the newcomer. If he was something of a nonentity, the rest would be astonished. "How strange that the Princess, who refuses to know anyone, should make an exception of such an uninteresting person." But these fertilising acquaintances were rare, and the Princess lived narrowly confined in the midst of the faithful.

Cottard said far more often: "I shall see him on Wednesday at the Verdurins'," than: "I shall see him on Tuesday at the Academy." He also spoke of the Wednesdays as of an equally important and inescapable occupation. But Cottard was one of those people, little sought-after, who make it as imperious a duty to obey an invitation as if such invitations were orders, like a military or judicial summons. It required a very important call to make him "fail" the Verdurins on a Wednesday, the importance depending moreover rather upon the rank of the patient than upon the gravity of his complaint. For Cottard, excellent fellow as he was, would forgo the delights of a Wednesday not for a workman who had had a stroke, but for a minister's cold. Even then he would say to his wife: "Make my apologies to Mme Verdurin. Tell her that I shall be coming later on. His Excellency really might have chosen some other day to catch a cold." One Wednesday, their old cook having cut open a vein in her arm, Cottard, already in his dinner-jacket to go to the Verdurins', had shrugged his shoulders when his wife had timidly inquired whether he could not bandage the wound: "Of course I can't, Léontine," he had groaned, "can't you see I've got my white waistcoat on?" So as not to annoy her husband, Mme Cottard had sent posthaste for the house surgeon. The latter, to save time, had taken a cab, with the result that, his carriage entering the courtyard just as Cottard's was emerging to take him to the Verdurins', five minutes had been wasted in manoeuvring backwards and forwards to let one another pass. Mme Cottard was worried that the house surgeon should see his chief in evening dress. Cottard sat cursing the delay, from remorse perhaps, and started off in a villainous temper which it took all the Wednesday's pleasures to dispel.

If one of Cottard's patients were to ask him: "Do you ever see the Guermantes?" it was with the utmost sincerity that the Professor would reply: "Perhaps not actually the Guermantes, I can't be certain. But I meet all those people at the house of some friends of mine. You must, of course, have heard of the Verdurins. They

know everybody. Besides, they at least aren't grand people who've come down in the world. They've got the goods, all right. It's generally estimated that Mme Verdurin is worth thirty-five million. Well, thirty-five million, that's quite a figure. And so she doesn't go in for half-measures. You mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes. I'll tell you the difference. Mme Verdurin is a great lady, the Duchesse de Guermantes is probably a pauper. You see the distinction, of course? In any case, whether the Guermantes go to Mme Verdurin's or not, she entertains all the very best people, the d'Sherbatoffs, the d'Forchevilles, *e tutti quanti*, people of the top flight, all the nobility of France and Navarre, with whom you would see me conversing as man to man. Of course, those sort of people are only too glad to meet the princes of science," he would add, with a smile of fatuous conceit, brought to his lips by his proud satisfaction not so much that the expression formerly reserved for men like Potain and Charcot should now be applicable to himself, as that he knew at last how to employ all these expressions that were sanctioned by usage, and, after a long course of swotting, had learned them by heart. And so, after mentioning to me Princess Sherbatoff as one of the people who went to Mme Verdurin's, Cottard added with a wink: "That gives you an idea of the style of the house, if you see what I mean?" He meant that it was the very height of fashion. Now, to entertain a Russian lady who knew nobody but the Grand Duchess Eudoxie meant very little. But Princess Sherbatoff might not have known even her, and it would in no way have diminished Cottard's estimate of the supreme elegance of the Verdurin salon or his joy at being invited there. The splendour with which the people whose houses we visit seem to us to be endowed is no more intrinsic than that of stage characters in dressing whom it is useless for a producer to spend hundreds and thousands of francs in purchasing authentic costumes and real jewels which will make no impression, when a great designer will procure a far more sumptuous impression by focusing a ray of light on a doublet of coarse cloth studded with glass spangles and on a paper cloak. A man may have spent his life among the great ones of the earth, who to him have been merely boring relatives or tedious acquaintances because a familiarity engendered in the cradle had stripped them of all glamour in his eyes. Yet on the other hand, such glamour need only, by some accident, have come to be attached to the most obscure people, for innumerable Cottards to be permanently dazzled by titled ladies whose drawing-rooms they imagined as the centres of aristocratic elegance, ladies who were not even what Mme de Villeparisis and her friends were (noble ladies fallen from grace, whom the aristocracy that had been brought up with them no longer visited); no, if the ladies whose friendship has been the pride of so many people were to be named in the memoirs of these people together with those whom they entertained, no one, Mme de Cambremer no more than Mme de Guermantes, would be able to identify them. But what of that! A Cottard has thus his baroness or his marquise, who is for him "the Baroness" or "the Marquise," as, in Marivaux, the baroness whose name is never mentioned and who for all one knows may never even have had one. A Cottard is all the more convinced that she epitomises the aristocracy—which has never heard of the lady—in that, the more dubious titles are, the more prominently coronets are displayed upon wine glasses, silver, note-paper and luggage. Many Cottards who have supposed that they were living in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain have perhaps had their imaginations more beguiled by feudal dreams than the men who really have lived among princes, just as, for the small shopkeeper who sometimes goes on a Sunday to look at buildings of the "olden days," it is often those of which every stone is of our own, the vaults of which have been painted blue and sprinkled with golden stars by pupils of Viollet-le-Duc, that provide the most potent sensation of the Middle Ages.

"The Princess will be at Maineville," Cottard went on. "She will be coming with us. But I shan't introduce you to her at once. It will be better to leave that to Mme Verdurin. Unless I find a loophole. Then you can rely on me to take the bull by the horns."

"What were you saying?" asked Saniette, as he rejoined us, pretending to have been taking the air.

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"What were you saying?" asked Saniette, as he rejoined us, pretending to have been taking the air.

"I was quoting to this gentleman," said Brichot, "a saying, which you will remember, of the man who, to my mind, is the first of the *fin-de-siècle* (of the eighteenth century, that is), by name Charles-Maurice, Abbé de Périgord. He began by promising to be an excellent journalist. But he took a wrong turning, by which I mean that he became a minister! Such scandals happen in life. A far from scrupulous politician to boot, who, with all the lofty contempt of a thoroughbred nobleman, did not hesitate to play both ends against the middle when he felt like it, and remained left of centre until his dying day."

At Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs we were joined by a glorious girl who, unfortunately, was not a member of the little group. I could not take my eyes off her magnolia skin, her dark eyes, the bold and admirable composition of her forms. After a moment she wanted to open a window, for it was hot in the compartment, and not wishing to ask leave of everybody, as I alone was without an overcoat she said to me in a quick, cool, cheerful voice: "Do you mind a little fresh air, Monsieur?" I would have liked to say to her: "Come with us to the Verdurins'" or "Give me your name and address." I answered: "No, fresh air doesn't bother me, Mademoiselle." Whereupon, without stirring from her seat: "Your friends don't object to smoke?" and she lit a cigarette. At the third station she sprang from the train. Next day, I inquired of Albertine who she could be. For, stupidly thinking that people could have but one sort of love, in my jealousy of Albertine's attitude towards Robert, I was reassured so far as women were concerned. Albertine told me, I believe quite sincerely, that she did not know. "I should so like to see her again," I exclaimed. "Don't worry, one always sees people again," replied Albertine. In this particular instance she was wrong; I never saw again, and never identified, the handsome girl with the cigarette. We shall see, moreover, why for a long time I ceased to look for her. But I never forgot her. I find myself at times, when I think of her, seized by a wild longing. But these recurrences of desire oblige us to reflect that if we wish to rediscover these girls with the same pleasure we must also return to the year which has since been followed by ten others in the course of which her bloom has faded. We can sometimes find a person again, but we cannot abolish time. And so on until the unforeseen day, gloomy as a winter night, when one no longer seeks that girl, or any other, when to find her would actually scare one. For one no longer feels that one has attractions enough to please, or strength enough to love. Not, of course, that one is in the strict sense of the word impotent. And as for loving, one would love more than ever. But one feels that it is too big an undertaking for the little strength one has left. Eternal rest has already interposed intervals during which one can neither go out nor even speak. Setting one's foot on the right step is an achievement, like bringing off a somersault. To be seen in such a state by a girl one loves, even if one has kept the features and all the golden locks of one's youth! One can no longer face the strain of keeping up with the young. Too bad if carnal desire increases instead of languishing! One procures for it a woman whom one need make no effort to please, who will share one's couch for one night only and whom one will never see again.

"Still no news, I suppose, of the violinist," said Cottard. For the event of the day in the little clan was the defection of Mme Verdurin's favourite violinist. The latter, who was doing his military service near Doncières, came three times a week to dine at La Raspelière, having a midnight pass. But two days ago, for the first time, the faithful had been unable to discover him on the train. It was assumed that he had missed it. But in vain had Mme Verdurin sent to meet the next train, and the next, and so on until the last, the carriage had returned empty.

"He's certain to have been put in the glasshouse," Cottard went on, "there's no other explanation of his desertion. Oh yes, in the Army, you know, with those fellows, it only needs a crusty sergeant-major."

"It will be all the more mortifying for Mme Verdurin," said Brichot, "if he defects again this evening, because our kind hostess has invited to dinner for the first time the neighbours from whom she rented La Raspelière, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer."

"This evening, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer!" exclaimed Cottard. "But I knew absolutely nothing about it. Naturally, I knew like everybody else that they would be coming one day, but I had no idea it was to be so soon. By Jove!" he went on, turning to me, "what did I tell you? The Princess Sherbatoff, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer." And, after repeating these names, lulling himself with their melody: "You see that we move in good company," he said to me. "No doubt about it, for your first appearance you've really struck lucky. It's going to be an exceptionally brilliant roomful." And, turning to Brichot, he went on: "The Mistress will be furious. It's time we got there to lend her a hand."

Ever since Mme Verdurin had been at La Raspelière she had pretended for the benefit of the faithful to be under the disagreeable obligation of inviting her landlords for one evening. By so doing she would obtain better terms next year, she explained, and was inviting them merely out of self-interest. But she affected to regard with such terror, to make such a bugbear of the idea of dining with people who did not belong to the little group, that she kept putting off the evil day. The prospect did indeed alarm her slightly for the reasons which she professed, albeit exaggerating them, if at the same time it enchanted her for reasons of snobbery which she preferred to keep to herself. She was therefore partly sincere, for she believed the little clan to be something so unique, one of those perfect entities which it takes centuries to produce, that she trembled at the thought of seeing these provincials, ignorant of the *Ring* and the *Meistersinger*, introduced into its midst, people who would be unable to play their part in the concert of general conversation and were capable of ruining one of those famous Wednesdays, masterpieces as incomparably fragile as those Venetian glasses which one false note is enough to shatter. "Besides, they're bound to be absolutely *anti*, and jingoistic," M. Verdurin had said. "Oh, as to that I don't really mind, we've heard quite enough about that business," Mme Verdurin had replied, for, though a sincere Dreyfusard, she would nevertheless have been glad to discover a

social counterpoise to the preponderant Dreyfusism of her salon. For Dreyfusism was triumphant politically but not socially. Labori, Reinach, Picquart, Zola were still, to people in society, more or less traitors, who could only keep them estranged from the little nucleus. And so, after this incursion into politics, Mme Verdurin was anxious to return to the world of art. Besides, were not d'Indy and Debussy on the "wrong" side in the Affair! "As far as the Affair goes, we have only to put them beside Brichot," she said (the Professor being the only one of the faithful who had sided with the General Staff, thus forfeiting a great deal of esteem in the eyes of Mme Verdurin). "There's no need to be eternally discussing the Dreyfus case. No, the fact of the matter is that the Cambremers bore me." As for the faithful, no less excited by their unavowed desire to meet the Cambremers than they were taken in by Mme Verdurin's affected reluctance to invite them, they returned, day after day, in conversation with her, to the base arguments which she herself produced in favour of the invitation, and tried to make them irresistible. "Make up your mind to it once and for all," Cottard repeated, "and you'll get a reduction of the rent, they'll pay the gardener, you'll have the use of the meadow. That will be well worth a boring evening. I'm thinking only of you," he added, though his heart had leapt once when, in Mme Verdurin's carriage, he had passed old Mme de Cambremer's on the road, and he felt humiliated in front of the railway employees when he found himself standing beside the Marquis at the station. For their part, the Cambremers, living much too far outside the social "swim" ever to suspect that certain ladies of fashion now spoke of Mme Verdurin with a certain respect, imagined that she was a person who could know none but Bohemians, was perhaps not even legally married, and so far as people of "birth" were concerned would never meet any but themselves. They had resigned themselves to the thought of dining with her only in order to be on good terms with a tenant who, they hoped, would return again for many seasons, especially since they had learned, during the previous month, that she had recently inherited all those millions. It was in silence and without any vulgar pleasantries that they prepared themselves for the fatal day. The faithful had given up hope of its ever coming, so often had Mme Verdurin already fixed in their hearing a date that was invariably postponed. These false alarms were intended not merely to make a show of the boredom that she felt at the thought of this dinner-party, but to keep in suspense those members of the little group who were staying in the neighbourhood and were sometimes inclined to default. Not that the Mistress guessed that the "great day" was as delightful a prospect to them as to herself, but in order that, having persuaded them that this dinner-party was for her the most terrible of chores, she might appeal to their devotedness. "You're not going to leave me all alone with those freaks! We must assemble in full force to stand the boredom. Naturally we shan't be able to talk about any of the things that interest us. It will be a Wednesday spoiled, but what is one to do!"

"Actually," Brichot observed for my benefit, "I fancy that Mme Verdurin, who is highly intelligent and takes infinite pains in the elaboration of her Wednesdays, was by no means anxious to entertain these squireens of ancient lineage but small wit. She could not bring herself to invite the dowager Marquise, but has resigned herself to having the son and daughter-in-law."

"Ah! we are to see the young Marquise de Cambremer?" said Cottard with a smile into which he felt called upon to introduce a tinge of lecherous gallantry, although he had no idea whether Mme de Cambremer was goodlooking or not. But the title of Marquise conjured up in his mind images of glamour and dalliance.

"Ah! I know her," said Ski, who had met her once when he was out for a drive with Mme Verdurin.

"Not in the biblical sense of the word, I trust," said the doctor, darting a sly glance through his eyeglass; this was one of his favourite pleasantries.

"She is intelligent," Ski informed me. "Naturally," he went on, seeing that I said nothing, and dwelling with a smile upon each word, "she is intelligent and at the same time she is not, she lacks education, she is frivolous, but she has an instinct for pretty things. She may say nothing, but she will never say anything silly. And besides, her colouring is charming. She would be fun to paint," he added, half shutting his eyes as though he saw her posing in front of him.

As my opinion of her was quite the opposite of what Ski was expressing with so many qualifications, I observed merely that she was the sister of a very distinguished engineer, M. Legrandin.

"There, you see, you are going to be introduced to a pretty woman," Brichot said to me, "and one never knows what may come of that. Cleopatra was not even a great lady, she was the little woman, the thoughtless, dreadful little woman of our Meilhac, and just think of the consequences, not only to that dupe Antony, but to the whole of the ancient world."

"I've already been introduced to Mme de Cambremer," I replied.

"Ah! In that case, you will find yourself on familiar ground."

"I shall be all the more delighted to meet her," I answered him, "because she has promised me a book by the former curé of Combray about the place-names of this region, and I shall be able to remind her of her promise. I'm interested in that priest, and also in etymologies."

"Don't put too much faith in the ones he gives," replied Brichot, "there's a copy of the book at La Raspelière, which I've glanced through casually without finding anything of any value; it's riddled with errors. Let me give you an example. The word *bricq* is found in a number of place-names in this neighbourhood. The worthy cleric had the distinctly eccentric idea that it comes from *briga*, a height, a fortified place. He finds it already in the Celtic tribes, Latobriges, Nemetobriges, and so forth, and traces it down to such names as Briand, Brion, and so forth. To confine ourselves to the region through which we have the pleasure of travelling with you at this moment, Bricquebosc, according to him, would mean the wood on the height, Bricqueville the habitation on the height, Bricquebec, where we shall be stopping presently before coming to Maineville, the height by the stream. Now it's not like that at all, since *bricq* is the old Norse word which means simply a bridge. Just as *fleur*, which Mme de Cambremer's protégé takes infinite pains to connect, in one place with the Scandinavian

words *floi, flo*, in another with the Irish words *ae* and *aer*, is on the contrary, beyond any doubt, the *fjord* of the Danes, and means harbour. Similarly, the excellent priest thinks that the station of Saint-Martin-le-Vêtu, which adjoins La Raspelière, means Saint-Martin-le-Vieux (*vetus*). It is unquestionable that the word *vieux* has played an important part in the toponymy of this region. *Vieux* comes as a rule from *vadum*, and means a ford, as at the place called les Vieux. It is what the English call *ford* (Oxford, Hereford). But, in this particular instance, Vêtu is derived not from *vetus*, but from *vastatus*, a place that is devastated and bare. You have, round about here, Sottevast, the *vast* of Setold, Brillevast, the *vast* of Berold. I am all the more certain of the curé's mistake in that Saint-Martin-le-Vêtu was formerly called Saint-Martin-du-Gast and even Saint-Martin-de-Terregate. Now the *v* and the *g* in these words are the same letter. We say *dévaster*, but also *gâcher*. *Jachères* and *gâtines*<sup>11</sup> (from the High German *wastinna*) have the same meaning: Terregate is therefore *terra vastata*. As for Saint-Mars, formerly (evil be to him who evil thinks) Saint-Merd, it is Saint-Medardus, which appears variously as Saint-Médard, Saint-Mard, Saint-Marc, CinqMars, and even Dammas. Nor must we forget that, quite close to here, places bearing the name Mars simply attest to a pagan origin (the god Mars) which has remained alive in this country but which the holy man refuses to recognise. The high places dedicated to the gods are especially frequent, such as the mount of Jupiter (Jeumont). Your curé declines to admit this, and yet, on the other hand, wherever Christianity has left traces, they escape him. He has gone as far afield as Loctudy, a barbarian name, according to him, whereas it is *Locus sancti Tudenii*; nor, in the name Sammercoles, has he divined *Sanctus Martialis*. Your curé," Brichot continued, seeing that I was interested, "derives the terminations *hon*, *home*, *holm*, from the word *holl* (*hullus*), a hill, whereas it comes from the Norse *holm*, an island, with which you are familiar in Stockholm, and which is so widespread throughout this region: la Houlme, Engohomme, Tahoume, Robehomme, Néhomme, Quettehou, and so forth."

These names reminded me of the day when Albertine had wished to go to Amfreville-la-Beugnot (from the name of two successive lords of the manor, Brichot told me), and had then suggested that we should dine together at Robehomme. "Isn't Néhomme," I asked, "somewhere near Carquethuit and Clitourps?"

"Precisely; Néhomme is the *holm*, the island or peninsula of the famous Viscount Nigel, whose name has survived also in Néville. The Carquethuit and Clitourps that you mention provide Mme de Cambremer's protégé with an occasion for further errors. Of course he realises that *carque* is a church, the *Kirche* of the Germans. You will remember Querqueville, Carquebut, not to mention Dunkerque. For there we should do better to stop and consider the famous word *dun*, which to the Celts meant high ground. And that you will find over the whole of France. Your abbé was hypnotised by Duneville. But in the Eure-et-Loir he would have found Châteaudun, Dunle-Roi in the Cher, Duneau in the Sarthe, Dun in the Ariège, Dune-les-Places in the Nièvre, and many others. This word *dun* leads him into a curious error with regard to Douville, where we shall be alighting, where we shall find Mme Verdurin's comfortable carriages awaiting us. Douville, in Latin *donvilla*, says he. And Douville does indeed lie at the foot of high hills. Your curé, who knows everything, feels all the same that he has made a blunder. And indeed he has found, in an old cartulary, the name *Domvilla*. Whereupon he retracts; Douville, according to him, is a fief belonging to the abbot, *domino abbati*, of Mont-Saint-Michel. He is delighted with the discovery, which is distinctly odd when one thinks of the scandalous life that, according to the capitulary of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, was led at Mont-Saint-Michel, though no more extraordinary than to picture the King of Denmark as suzerain of all this coast, where he encouraged the worship of Odin far more than that of Christ. On the other hand, the supposition that the *n* has been changed to *m* doesn't shock me, and requires less alteration than the perfectly correct Lyon, which also is derived from *Dun* (*Lugdunum*). But the fact is, the abbé is mistaken. Douville was never Donville, but Doville, *Eudonis villa*, the village of Eudes. Douville was formerly called Escalecliff, the steps up the cliff. About the year 1233, Eudes le Bouteiller, Lord of Escalecliff, set out for the Holy Land; on the eve of his departure he made over the church to the Abbey of Blanchelande. By an exchange of courtesies, the village took his name, whence we have Douville today. But I must add that toponymy, of which moreover I know little or nothing, is not an exact science; had we not this historical evidence, Douville might quite well come from Ouville, that is to say *les Eaux*, the Waters. The forms in *ai* (Aigues-Mortes) of *aqua* are constantly changed to *eu* or *ou*. Now there were, quite close to Douville, certain famous springs. You can imagine that the curé was only too glad to find Christian traces there, especially as this area seems to have been pretty hard to evangelise, since successive attempts were made by St Ursal, St Gofroi, St Barsanore, St Laurent of Brèvedent, who finally handed over the task to the monks of Beaubec. But as regards *tuit* the writer is mistaken; he sees it as a form of *toft*, a building, as in Cricquetot, Ectot, Yvetot, whereas it is the *thveit*, the assart or reclaimed land, as in Braquetuit, le Thuit, Regnetuit, and so forth. Similarly, if he recognises in Clitourps the Norman *thorp* which means village, he maintains that the first syllable of the word must come from *clivus*, a slope, whereas it comes from *cliff*, a precipice. But his biggest blunders are due not so much to his ignorance as to his prejudices. However good a Frenchman one is, there is no need to fly in the face of the evidence and take Saint-Laurent-en-Bray to be the famous Roman priest, when he is actually Saint Lawrence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin. But even more than his patriotic sentiments, your friend's religious bigotry leads him into outrageous errors. Thus you have not far from our hosts at La Raspelière two places called Montmartin, Montmartin-sur-Mer and Montmartin-en-Graignes. In the case of Graignes, the good curé is quite right, he has recognised that Graignes, in Latin *grania*, in Greek *krene*, means ponds, marshes; how many instances of Cresmays, Croen, Grenneville, Lengronne, could one not cite? But when he comes to Montmartin, your self-styled linguist positively insists that these must be parishes dedicated to St Martin. He bases his assertion on the fact that that saint is the patron of the two villages, but does not realise that he was only recognised as such subsequently; or rather he is blinded by his hatred of paganism; he refuses to see that we should say Mont-Saint-Martin as we say Mont-Saint-Michel if it

were a question of St Martin, whereas the name Montmartin refers in a far more pagan fashion to temples dedicated to the god Mars, temples of which, it is true, no other vestige remains, but which the undisputed existence in the neighbourhood of vast Roman camps would render more probable even without the name Montmartin, which removes all doubt. You see that the little book which you will find at La Raspelière is far from perfect."

I protested that at Combray the curé had often told us about interesting etymologies.

"He was probably better on his own ground. The move to Normandy must have made him lose his bearings."

"It didn't restore his health," I added, "for he came here with neurasthenia and went away again with rheumatism."

"Ah, his neurasthenia is to blame. He has lapsed from neurasthenia into philology, as my worthy master Poquelin would have said. Tell us, Cottard, do you suppose that neurasthenia can have a pernicious effect on philology, philology a soothing effect on neurasthenia, and the relief from neurasthenia lead to rheumatism?"

"Absolutely: rheumatism and neurasthenia are vicarious forms of neuro-arthritis. You may pass from one to the other by metastasis."

"The eminent professor," said Brichot, "expresses himself, God forgive me, in a French as highly infused with Latin and Greek as M. Purgon himself, of Molièresque memory! Help me, uncle, I mean our sainted Sarcey ..."<sup>12</sup>

But he was prevented from finishing his sentence for Cottard had leapt from his seat with a wild shout: "The devil!" he exclaimed on regaining his power of articulate speech, "we've passed Maineville (d'you hear?) and Renneville too." He had just noticed that the train was stopping at Saint-Mars-le-Vieux, where most of the passengers alighted. "They can't have run through without stopping. We must have failed to notice while we were talking about the Cambremers. Listen to me, Ski, wait a moment, I'm going to tell you something good" (Cottard had taken a fancy to this expression, in common use in certain medical circles). "The Princess must be on the train, she can't have seen us, and will have got into another compartment. Come along and find her. Let's hope this won't land us in the soup?"

And he led us all off in search of Princess Sherbatoff. He found her in the corner of an empty compartment, reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. She had long ago, from fear of rebuffs, acquired the habit of keeping her place, or remaining in her corner, in life as in trains, and of not offering her hand until the other person had greeted her. She went on reading as the faithful trooped into her carriage. I recognised her immediately; this woman who might have forfeited her social position but was nevertheless of exalted birth, who in any event was the pearl of a salon such as the Verdurins', was the lady whom, on the same train, I had put down two days earlier as possibly the keeper of a brothel. Her social personality, which had been so doubtful, became clear to me as soon as I learned her name, just as when, after racking our brains over a puzzle, we at length hit upon the word which clears up all the obscurity, and which, in the case of a person, is his name. To discover two days later who the person is with whom one has travelled in a train is a far more amusing surprise than to read in the next number of a magazine the clue to the problem set in the previous number. Big restaurants, casinos, local trains, are the family portrait galleries of these social enigmas.

"Princess, we must have missed you at Maineville! May we come and sit in your compartment?"

"Why, of course," said the Princess who, upon hearing Cottard address her, but only then, raised from her magazine a pair of eyes which, like the eyes of M. de Charlus, although gentler, saw perfectly well the people of whose presence she pretended to be unaware. Cottard, reflecting that the fact of my having been invited to meet the Cambremers was a sufficient recommendation, decided, after a momentary hesitation, to introduce me to the Princess, who bowed with great courtesy but appeared to be hearing my name for the first time.

"Confound it!" cried the Doctor, "my wife has forgotten to have the buttons on my white waistcoat changed. Ah, women! They never remember anything. Don't you ever marry, my boy," he said to me. And as this was one of the pleasantries which he considered appropriate when he had nothing else to say, he peeped out of the corner of his eye at the Princess and the rest of the faithful, who, because he was a professor and an Academician, smiled back at him, admiring his good humour and lack of arrogance.

The Princess informed us that the young violinist had been found. He had been confined to bed the day before by a sick headache, but was coming that evening and bringing with him a friend of his father whom he had met at Doncières. She had learned this from Mme Verdurin with whom she had lunched that morning, she told us in a rapid voice, rolling her *rs*, with her Russian accent, softly at the back of her throat, as though they were not *rs* but *ls*. "Ah! you lunched with her this morning," Cottard said to the Princess, but his eyes were on me, for the object of this remark was to show me on what intimate terms the Princess was with the Mistress. "You really are one of the faithful!"

"Yes, I love this little gloup, so intelligent, so agreeable, so simple, not snobbish or spiteful, and clever to their finger-tips."

"Devil take it! I must have lost my ticket, I can't find it anywhere," cried Cottard, without being unduly alarmed. He knew that at Douville, where a couple of landaus would be awaiting us, the collector would let him pass without a ticket, and would only touch his cap the more deferentially in order to provide an explanation for his leniency, which was that he had of course recognised Cottard as one of the Verdurins' regular guests. "They won't shove me in the lock-up for that," the Doctor concluded.

"You were saying, Monsieur," I inquired of Brichot, "that there used to be some famous waters near here. How do we know that?"

"The name of the next station is one of a multitude of proofs. It is called Fervaches."



"I don't understand what he's talking about," mumbled the Princess, as though she were saying to me out of kindness: "He's rather a bore, isn't he?"

"Why, Princess, Fervaches means hot springs. *Fervidae aquae*. But to return to the young violinist," Brichot went on, "I was quite forgetting, Cottard, to tell you the great news. Had you heard that our poor friend Dechambre, who used to be Mme Verdurin's favourite pianist, has just died? It's dreadful."

"He was still quite young," replied Cottard, "but he must have had some trouble with his liver, there must have been something sadly wrong in that quarter, he'd been looking very queer indeed for a long time past."

"But he wasn't as young as all that," said Brichot. "In the days when Elstir and Swann used to come to Mme Verdurin's, Dechambre had already made himself a reputation in Paris, and, what is remarkable, without having first received the baptism of success abroad. Ah! he was no follower of the Gospel according to St Barnum, that fellow."

"You must be mistaken, he couldn't have been going to Mme Verdurin's at that time, he was still in the nursery."

"But, unless my old memory plays me false, I was under the impression that Dechambre used to play Vinteuil's sonata for Swann when that clubman, being at odds with the aristocracy, had still no idea that he was one day to become the embourgeoised prince consort of our sainted Odette."

"That's impossible. Vinteuil's sonata wasn't played at Mme Verdurin's until long after Swann ceased to come there," said the Doctor, for he was one of those people who work very hard and think they remember a great many things which they imagine to be useful, but forget many others, a condition which enables them to go into ecstasies over the memories of people who have nothing else to do. "You're not doing justice to your learning, and yet you aren't suffering from softening of the brain," he added with a smile. Brichot agreed that he was mistaken.

The train stopped. We were at La Sogne. The name stirred my curiosity. "How I should like to know what all these names mean," I said to Cottard.

"Ask M. Brichot, he may know, perhaps."

"Why, La Sogne is la Cicogne, *Siconia*," replied Brichot, whom I was longing to interrogate about many other names.

Forgetting her attachment to her "corner," Mme Sherbatoff kindly offered to change places with me so that I might talk more easily with Brichot, whom I wanted to ask about other etymologies that interested me, and assured me that she did not mind in the least whether she travelled with her face to the engine, or her back to it, or standing, or anyhow. She remained on the defensive until she had discovered a newcomer's intentions, but as soon as she had realised that these were friendly, she would do everything in her power to oblige. At length the train stopped at the station of Douville-F  terne, which being more or less equidistant from the villages of F  terne and Douville, bore for this reason both their names. "Good grief!" exclaimed Dr Cottard when we came to the barrier where the tickets were collected, pretending to have only just discovered his loss, "I can't find my ticket, I must have lost it." But the collector, taking off his cap, assured him that it did not matter and smiled respectfully. The Princess (giving instructions to the coachman, as though she were a sort of lady-in-waiting to Mme Verdurin, who, because of the Cambremers, had not been able to come to the station, as, for that matter, she rarely did) took me, and also Brichot, with herself in one of the carriages. The Doctor, Saniette and Ski got into the other.

The driver, although quite young, was the Verdurins' head coachman, the only one who was strictly qualified for the post. He took them, in the day-time, on all their excursions, for he knew all the roads, and in the evening went down to meet the faithful and brought them back to the station later on. He was accompanied by extra helpers (whom he chose himself) if the necessity arose. He was an excellent fellow, sober and skilled, but with one of those melancholy faces on which a fixed stare indicates a person who will worry himself sick over the merest trifle and even harbour black thoughts. But at the moment he was quite happy, for he had managed to secure a place for his brother, another excellent young man, with the Verdurins. We began by driving through Douville. Grassy knolls ran down from the village to the sea, spreading out into broad pastures which were extraordinarily thick, lush and vivid in hue from saturation in moisture and salt. The islands and indentations of Rivebelle, much closer here than at Balbec, gave this part of the coast the appearance, novel to me, of a relief map. We passed several little bungalows, almost all of which were let to painters, turned into a track upon which some loose cattle, as frightened as were our horses, barred our way for ten minutes, and emerged upon the cliff road.

"But, by the immortal gods," Brichot suddenly asked, "to return to that poor Dechambre, do you suppose Mme Verdurin *knows*? Has anyone *told* her?"

Mme Verdurin, like most people who move in society, simply because she needed the society of other people, never thought of them again for a single day as soon as, being dead, they could no longer come to her Wednesdays, or her Saturdays, or drop in for dinner. And it could not be said of the little clan, akin in this respect to every other salon, that it was composed of more dead than living members, seeing that, as soon as you were dead, it was as though you had never existed. But, to avoid the tedium of having to talk about the deceased, and even suspend the dinners—an inconceivable thing for the Mistress—as a token of mourning, M. Verdurin used to pretend that the death of the faithful had such an effect on his wife that, in the interest of her health, the subject must never be mentioned to her. Moreover, and perhaps just because the death of other people seemed to him so conclusive and so vulgar an accident, the thought of his own death filled him with horror and he shunned any reflexion that might have any bearing on it. As for Brichot, since he was a



good-natured man and completely taken in by what M. Verdurin said about his wife, he dreaded for her sake the distress that such a bereavement must cause her.

"Yes, she *knew the worst* this morning," said the Princess, "it was impossible to *keep it from her*."

"Ye gods!" cried Brichot, "ah! it must have been a terrible blow, a friend of twenty-five years' standing. There was a man who was one of us."

"Of course, of course, but it can't be helped," said Cottard. "Such events are bound to be painful; but Mme Verdurin is a brave woman, she is even more cerebral than emotional."

"I don't altogether agree with the Doctor," said the Princess, whose rapid speech and garbled diction made her somehow appear at once sulky and mischievous. "Beneath a cold exterior, Mme Verdurin conceals treasures of sensibility. M. Verdurin told me that he had had great difficulty in preventing her from going to Paris for the funeral; he was obliged to let her think that it was all to be held in the country."

"The devil! She wanted to go to Paris, did she? Of course, I know that she has a heart, too much heart perhaps. Poor Dechambre! As Madame Verdurin remarked not two months ago: 'Compared with him, Planté, Paderewski, even Risler himself are nowhere!' Ah, he could say with better reason than that show-off Nero, who has managed to hoodwink even German scholarship: *Qualis artifex pereo!* But he at least, Dechambre, must have died in the fulfilment of his vocation, in the odour of Beethovenian devotion; and bravely, I have no doubt; he had every right, that interpreter of German music, to pass away while celebrating the *Missa Solemnis*. But at any rate he was the man to greet the Reaper with a trill, for that inspired performer would produce at times, from the Parisianised Champagne ancestry of which he came, the gallantry and swagger of a guardsman."

From the height we had now reached, the sea no longer appeared, as it did from Balbec, like an undulating range of hills, but on the contrary like the view, from a mountain-peak or from a road winding round its flank, of a blue-green glacier or a glittering plain situated at a lower level. The ripples of eddies and currents seemed to be fixed upon its surface, and to have traced there for ever their concentric circles; the enamelled face of the sea, imperceptibly changing colour, assumed towards the head of the bay, where an estuary opened, the blue whiteness of milk in which little black boats that did not move seemed entangled like flies. I felt that from nowhere could one discover a vaster prospect. But at each turn in the road a fresh expanse was added to it and when we arrived at the Douville toll-house, the spur of the cliff which until then had concealed from us half the bay receded, and all of a sudden I saw upon my left a gulf as profound as that which I had already had in front of me, but one that changed the proportions of the other and doubled its beauty. The air at this lofty point had a keenness and purity that intoxicated me. I adored the Verdurins; that they should have sent a carriage for us seemed to me a touching act of kindness. I should have liked to kiss the Princess. I told her that I had never seen anything so beautiful. She professed that she too loved this spot more than any other. But I could see that to her as to the Verdurins the thing that really mattered was not to gaze at the view like tourists, but to partake of good meals there, to entertain people whom they liked, to write letters, to read books, in short to live in these surroundings, passively allowing the beauty of the scene to soak into them rather than making it the object of their conscious attention.

After the toll-house, where the carriage had stopped for a moment at such a height above the sea that, as from a mountain-top, the sight of the blue gulf beneath almost made one dizzy, I opened the window; the sound, distinctly caught, of each wave breaking in turn had something sublime in its softness and clarity. Was it not like an index of measurement which, upsetting all our ordinary impressions, shows us that vertical distances may be compared with horizontal ones, contrary to the idea that our mind generally forms of them; and that, though they bring the sky nearer to us in this way, they are not great; that they are indeed less great for a sound which traverses them, as did the sound of those little waves, because the medium through which it has to pass is purer? And in fact if one drew back only a couple of yards behind the toll-house, one could no longer distinguish that sound of waves which six hundred feet of cliff had not robbed of its delicate, minute and soft precision. I thought to myself that my grandmother would have listened to it with the delight that she felt in all manifestations of nature or art that combine simplicity with grandeur. My exaltation was now at its height and raised everything round about me accordingly. It melted my heart that the Verdurins should have sent to meet us at the station. I said as much to the Princess, who seemed to think that I was greatly exaggerating so simple an act of courtesy. I know that she admitted subsequently to Cottard that she found me remarkably enthusiastic; he replied that I was too emotional, that I needed sedatives and ought to take up knitting. I pointed out to the Princess every tree, every little house smothered in its mantle of roses, I made her admire everything, I would have liked to take her in my arms and press her to my heart. She told me that she could see that I had a gift for painting, that I ought to take up sketching, that she was surprised that nobody had told me before. And she confessed that the country was indeed picturesque. We drove through the little village of Englesqueville perched on its hill—*Engleberti villa*, Brichot informed us. "But are you quite sure that this evening's dinner party will take place in spite of Dechambre's death, Princess?" he went on, without stopping to think that the arrival at the station of the carriage in which we were sitting was in itself an answer to his question.

"Yes," said the Princess, "M. Veldulin insisted that it should not be put off, precisely in order to keep his wife from *thinking*. And besides, after never failing for all these years to entertain on Wednesdays, such a change in her habits would have been bound to upset her. Her nerves are velly bad just now. M. Verdurin was particularly pleased that you were coming to dine this evening, because he knew that it would be a great distraction for Mme Verdurin," the Princess said to me, forgetting her pretence of having never heard my name before. "I think that it will be as well not to say *anything* in front of Mme Verdurin," she added.

"Ah! I'm glad you warned me," Brichot artlessly replied. "I shall pass on your advice to Cottard."

The carriage stopped for a moment. It moved on again, but the sound that the wheels had been making in the village street had ceased. We had turned into the drive of La Raspelière, where M. Verdurin stood waiting for us on the steps. "I did well to put on a dinner-jacket," he said, observing with pleasure that the faithful had put on theirs, "since I have such smart gentlemen in my party." And as I apologised for not having changed: "Why, that's quite all right. We're all friends here. I should be delighted to offer you one of my own dinner-jackets, but it wouldn't fit you."

The handclasp full of emotion which, by way of condolence at the death of the pianist, Brichot gave our host as he entered the hall of La Raspelière elicited no response from the latter. I told him how greatly I admired the scenery. "Ah! I'm delighted, and you've seen nothing yet; we must take you round. Why not come and spend a week or two here? The air is excellent."

Brichot was afraid that his handclasp had not been understood. "Ah! poor Dechambre!" he said, but in an undertone, in case Mme Verdurin was within earshot.

"It's dreadful," replied M. Verdurin cheerfully.

"So young," Brichot pursued the point.

Annoyed at being detained over these trifling matters, M. Verdurin replied hurriedly and with a high-pitched moan, not of grief but of irritated impatience: "Ah well, there we are, it's no use crying over spilt milk, talking about him won't bring him back to life, will it?" And, his civility returning with his joviality: "Come along, my dear Brichot, get your things off quickly. We have a bouillabaisse which mustn't be kept waiting. But, in heaven's name, don't start talking about Dechambre to Mme Verdurin. You know that she always hides her feelings, but she's quite morbidly sensitive. No, but I swear to you, when she heard that Dechambre was dead, she almost wept," said M. Verdurin in a tone of profound irony. Hearing him, one might have concluded that it implied a form of insanity to regret the death of a friend of thirty years' standing, and at the same time one gathered that the perpetual union of M. Verdurin and his wife did not preclude constant censure and frequent irritation on his part. "If you mention it to her, she'll go and make herself ill again. It's deplorable, three weeks after her bronchitis. When that happens, it's I who have to nurse her. You can understand that I've had more than enough of it. Grieve for Dechambre's fate in your heart as much as you like. Think of him, but don't speak about him. I was very fond of Dechambre, but you cannot blame me for being fonder still of my wife. Here's Cottard, now, you can ask him." And indeed he knew that a family doctor can do many little services, such as prescribing that one must not give way to grief.

The docile Cottard had said to the Mistress: "Upset yourself like that, and tomorrow you'll give *me* a temperature of 102," as he might have said to the cook: "Tomorrow you'll give me sweetbread." Medicine, when it fails to cure, busies itself with changing the sense of verbs and pronouns.

M. Verdurin was glad to find that Saniette, notwithstanding the snubs that he had had to endure two days earlier, had not deserted the little nucleus. And indeed Mme Verdurin and her husband had acquired, in their idleness, cruel instincts for which the great occasions, occurring too rarely, no longer sufficed. They had succeeded in effecting a breach between Odette and Swann, and between Brichot and his mistress. They would try it again with others, that was understood. But the opportunity did not present itself every day. Whereas, thanks to his quivering sensibility, his timorous and easily panicked shyness, Saniette provided them with a whipping-boy for every day in the year. And so, for fear of his defecting, they took care always to invite him with friendly and persuasive words, such as the senior boys at school or the old soldiers in a regiment address to a greenhorn whom they are anxious to cajole so that they may get him into their clutches with the sole object of ragging and bullying him when he can no longer escape.

"Whatever you do," Cottard reminded Brichot, not having heard what M. Verdurin had been saying, "mum's the word in front of Mme Verdurin."

"Have no fear, O Cottard, you are dealing with a sage, as Theocritus says. Besides, M. Verdurin is right, what is the use of lamentations?" Brichot added, for, though capable of assimilating verbal forms and the ideas which they suggested to him, but lacking subtlety, he had discerned and admired in M. Verdurin's remarks the most courageous stoicism. "All the same, it's a great talent that has gone from the world."

"What, are you still talking about Dechambre?" said M. Verdurin, who had gone on ahead of us, and, seeing that we were not following him, turned back. "Listen," he said to Brichot, "don't let's exaggerate. The fact of his being dead is no excuse for making him out a genius, which he was not. He played well, I admit, but the main thing was that he was in the right surroundings here; transplanted, he ceased to exist. My wife was infatuated with him and made his reputation. You know what she's like. I will go further: in the interest of his own reputation he died at the right moment, *à point*, as the lobsters, grilled according to Pampille's incomparable recipe, are going to be, I hope (unless you keep us standing here all night with your jeremiads in this kasbah exposed to all the winds of heaven). You don't seriously expect us all to die of hunger because Dechambre is dead, when for the last year he was obliged to practise scales before giving a concert, in order to recover for the moment, and for the moment only, the suppleness of his wrists. Besides, you're going to hear this evening, or at any rate to meet, for the rascal is too fond of deserting his art for the card-table after dinner, somebody who is a far greater artist than Dechambre, a youngster whom my wife has discovered" (as she had discovered Dechambre, and Paderewski, and the rest), "called Morel. The beggar hasn't arrived yet. I shall have to send a carriage down to meet the last train. He's coming with an old friend of his family whom he ran into, and who bores him to tears, but otherwise, so as not to get into trouble with his father, he would have been obliged to stay down at Doncières and keep him company: the Baron de Charlus."

The faithful entered the drawing-room. M. Verdurin, who had remained behind with me while I took off my things, took my arm by way of a joke, as one's host does at a dinner-party when there is no lady for one to take in. "Did you have a pleasant journey?" "Yes, M. Brichot told me things which interested me greatly," said I, thinking of the etymologies, and because I had heard that the Verdurins greatly admired Brichot. "I'm surprised to hear that he told you anything," said M. Verdurin, "he's such a retiring man, and talks so little about the things he knows." This compliment did not strike me as being very apt. "He seems charming," I remarked. "Exquisite, delightful, not an ounce of pedantry, such a light, fantastic touch, my wife adores him, and so do I!" replied M. Verdurin in an exaggerated tone, as though reciting a lesson. Only then did I grasp that what he had said to me about Brichot was ironical. And I wondered whether M. Verdurin, since those far-off days of which I had heard reports, had not shaken off his wife's tutelage.

The sculptor was greatly astonished to learn that the Verdurins were willing to have M. de Charlus in their house. Whereas in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where M. de Charlus was so well known, nobody ever referred to his morals (of which the majority had no suspicion and others remained doubtful, crediting him rather with intense but platonic friendships, with indiscretions, while the enlightened few carefully concealed them, shrugging their shoulders at any insinuation upon which some malicious Gallardon might venture), these morals, the nature of which was known to only a handful of intimates, were on the contrary denounced daily far from the circle in which he moved, just as, at times, the sound of artillery fire is audible only beyond an intervening zone of silence. Moreover, in those professional and artistic circles where he was regarded as the personification of inversion, his high social position and his noble origin were completely unknown, by a process analogous to that which, among the people of Romania, has brought it about that the name of Ronsard is known as that of a great nobleman, while his poetical work is unknown there. Furthermore, the Romanian estimate of Ronsard's nobility is founded upon an error. Similarly, if in the world of painters and actors M. de Charlus had such a bad reputation, this was due to their confusing him with a Comte Leblois de Charlus who was not even related to him (or, if so, the connexion was extremely remote), and who had been arrested, possibly by mistake, in the course of a notorious police raid. In short, all the stories related of our M. de Charlus referred to the other. Many professionals swore that they had had relations with M. de Charlus, and did so in good faith, believing that the false M. de Charlus was the true one, the false one possibly encouraging, partly from an affectation of nobility, partly to conceal his vice, a confusion which was for a long time prejudicial to the real one (the Baron we know), and afterwards, when he had begun to go down the hill, became a convenience, for it enabled him likewise to say: "It isn't me." And in the present instance it was not him to whom the rumours referred. Finally, what added even more to the falseness of the comments on a true fact (the Baron's taste) was the fact that he had had an intimate but perfectly pure friendship with an author who, in the theatrical world, had for some reason acquired a similar reputation which he in no way deserved. When they were seen together at a first night, people would say: "You see," just as it was supposed that the Duchesse de Guermantes had immoral relations with the Princesse de Parme—an indestructible legend, for it would have been dispelled only by a proximity to those two noble ladies to which the people who spread it would presumably never attain other than by staring at them through their glasses in the theatre and slandering them to the occupant of the next stall. From M. de Charlus's morals, the sculptor concluded all the more readily that the Baron's social position must be equally low, since he had no information whatsoever about the family to which M. de Charlus belonged, his title or his name. Just as Cottard imagined that everybody knew that the title of doctor of medicine meant nothing and the title of hospital consultant meant something, so people in society are mistaken when they suppose that everybody has the same idea of the social importance of their name as they themselves and the other people of their circle.

The Prince d'Agrigente was regarded as a flashy foreigner by a club servant to whom he owed twenty-five louis, and regained his importance only in the Faubourg Saint-Germain where he had three sisters who were duchesses, for it is not among humble people, in whose eyes he is of small account, but among smart people, who know who is who, that a nobleman can hope to make an impression. M. de Charlus, indeed, was to learn in the course of the evening that his host had only the most superficial notions about the most illustrious ducal families.

Convinced that the Verdurins were making a grave mistake in allowing an individual of tarnished reputation to be admitted to so "select" a household as theirs, the sculptor felt it his duty to take the Mistress aside. "You are entirely mistaken; besides, I never pay any attention to such tales, and even if it were true, I may be allowed to point out that it could hardly compromise me!" replied Mme Verdurin angrily, for, Morel being the principal feature of the Wednesdays, she was particularly anxious not to give him any offence. As for Cottard, he could not express an opinion, for he had asked leave to go upstairs for a moment to "do a little job" in the *buen retiro* and afterwards, in M. Verdurin's bedroom, to write an extremely urgent letter for a patient.

An eminent publisher from Paris who had come to call, expecting to be invited to stay to dinner, withdrew with savage abruptness, realising that he was not smart enough for the little clan. He was a tall, stout man, very dark, with a studious and somewhat trenchant look about him. He reminded one of an ebony paper-knife.

Mme Verdurin, who, to welcome us in her immense drawing-room, in which displays of grasses, poppies, field-flowers, picked only that morning, alternated with a similar theme painted in monochrome two centuries earlier by an artist of exquisite taste, had risen for a moment from a game of cards which she was playing with an old friend, begged us to excuse her for a minute or two until she finished her game while continuing to talk to us. What I told her about my impressions was not entirely pleasing to her. For one thing I was shocked to observe that she and her husband came indoors every day long before the hour of those sunsets which were considered so fine when seen from that cliff, and finer still from the terrace of La Raspelière, and which I

would have travelled miles to see. "Yes, it's incomparable," said Mme Verdurin carelessly, with a glance at the huge windows which gave the room a wall of glass. "Even though we have it in front of us all the time, we never grow tired of it," and she turned her attention back to her cards. But my very enthusiasm made me exacting. I complained of not being able to see from the drawing-room the rocks of Darnetal which Elstir had told me were quite lovely at that hour, when they reflected so many colours. "Ah! you can't see them from here, you'd have to go to the end of the gardens, to the 'view of the bay.' From the seat there, you can take in the whole panorama. But you can't go there by yourself, you'll lose your way. I can take you there, if you like," she added half-heartedly. "Come now, no," said her husband, "haven't you had enough of those rheumatic pains you had the other day? Do you want a new lot? He can come back and see the view of the bay another time." I did not insist, and realised that it was enough for the Verdurins to know that this sunset made its way into their drawing-room or dining-room, like a magnificent painting, like a priceless Japanese enamel, justifying the high rent they were paying for La Raspelière, furnished, without their having constantly to raise their eyes towards it; the important thing here for them was to live comfortably, to go for drives, to eat well, to talk, to entertain agreeable friends whom they provided with amusing games of billiards, good meals, merry tea-parties. I noticed, however, later on, how intelligently they had got to know the district, taking their guests for excursions as "novel" as the music to which they made them listen. The part which the flowers of La Raspelière, the paths along the edge of the sea, the old houses, the undiscovered churches, played in M. Verdurin's life was so great that those who saw him only in Paris and who themselves substituted urban luxuries for seaside and country life could barely understand the exalted idea that he himself had of his own life, or the importance that his pleasures gave him in his own eyes. This importance was further enhanced by the fact that the Verdurins were convinced that La Raspelière, which they hoped to purchase, was a property without its match in the world. This superiority which their self-esteem made them attribute to La Raspelière justified in their eyes my enthusiasm which, but for that, would have annoyed them slightly, because of the disappointments which it involved (like those which my first experience of Berma had once caused me) and which I frankly admitted to them.

"I hear the carriage coming back," the Mistress suddenly murmured. Let us here briefly remark that Mme Verdurin, quite apart from the inevitable changes due to increasing years, no longer resembled what she had been at the time when Swann and Odette used to listen to the little phrase in her house. Even when she heard it played, she was no longer obliged to assume the air of exhausted admiration which she used to assume then, for that had become her normal expression. Under the influence of the countless headaches which the music of Bach, Wagner, Vinteuil, Debussy had given her, Mme Verdurin's forehead had assumed enormous proportions, like limbs that become permanently deformed by rheumatism. Her temples, suggestive of a pair of burning, pain-stricken, milk-white spheres, in which Harmony endlessly revolved, flung back silvery locks on either side, and proclaimed, on the Mistress's behalf, without any need for her to say a word: "I know what is in store for me tonight." Her features no longer took the trouble to formulate, one after another, aesthetic impressions of undue violence, for they had themselves become as it were their permanent expression on a superbly ravaged face. This attitude of resignation to the ever-impending sufferings inflicted by the Beautiful, and the courage required to make her dress for dinner when she had barely recovered from the effects of the last sonata, caused Mme Verdurin, even when listening to the most heartrending music, to preserve a disdainfully impassive countenance, and even to hide herself to swallow her two spoonfuls of aspirin.

"Why, yes, here they are!" M. Verdurin exclaimed with relief on seeing the door open to admit Morel followed by M. de Charlus. The latter, to whom dining with the Verdurins meant not so much going into society as going into a place of ill repute, was as apprehensive as a schoolboy entering a brothel for the first time and showing the utmost deference towards its mistress. Hence the Baron's habitual desire to appear virile and cold was overshadowed (when he appeared in the open doorway) by those traditional ideas of politeness which are awakened as soon as shyness destroys an artificial pose and falls back on the resources of the subconscious. When it is a Charlus, whether he be noble or plebeian, who is stirred by such a sentiment of instinctive and atavistic politeness to strangers, it is always the spirit of a relative of the female sex, attendant like a goddess, or incarnate as a double, that undertakes to introduce him into a strange drawing-room and to mould his attitude until he comes face to face with his hostess. Thus a young painter, brought up by a godly, Protestant, female cousin, will enter a room, his trembling head to one side, his eyes raised to the ceiling, his hands clutching an invisible muff, the remembered shape of which and its real and tutelary presence will help the frightened artist to cross without agoraphobia the yawning abyss between the hall and the inner drawing-room. Thus it was that the pious relative whose memory is guiding him today used to enter a room years ago, and with so plaintive an air that one wondered what calamity she had come to announce until from her first words one realised, as now in the case of the painter, that she had come to pay an after-dinner call. By virtue of the same law, which ordains that life, in the interests of the still unfulfilled act, shall bring into play, utilise, adulterate, in a perpetual prostitution, the most respectable, sometimes the most sacred, occasionally only the most innocent legacies of the past, and albeit in this instance it engendered a different aspect, a nephew of Mme Cottard, who distressed his family by his effeminate ways and the company he kept, would always make a joyous entry as though he had a surprise in store for you or were going to inform you that he had been left a fortune, radiant with a happiness which it would have been futile to ask him to explain, it being due to his unconscious heredity and his misplaced sex. He walked on tiptoe, was no doubt himself astonished that he was not holding a cardcase, offered you his hand with a simper as he had seen his aunt do, and his only anxious look was directed at the mirror in which he seemed to wish to verify, although he was bare-headed, whether, as Mme Cottard had once inquired of Swann, his hat was askew. As for M. de Charlus,

whom the society in which he had lived furnished at this critical moment with different examples, with other arabesques of amiability, and especially with the maxim that one must in certain cases, for the benefit of people of humble rank, bring into play and make use of one's rarest graces, normally held in reserve, it was with a fluttering, mincing gait and the same sweep with which a skirt would have enlarged and impeded his waddling motion that he advanced upon Mme Verdurin with so flattered and honoured an air that one would have said that to be presented to her was for him a supreme favour. His face, bent slightly forward, on which satisfaction vied with decorum, was creased with tiny wrinkles of affability. One might have thought that it was Mme de Marsantes who was entering the room, so salient at that moment was the woman whom a mistake on the part of Nature had enshrined in the body of M. de Charlus. Of course the Baron had made every effort to conceal this mistake and to assume a masculine appearance. But no sooner had he succeeded than, having meanwhile retained the same tastes, he acquired from this habit of feeling like a woman a new feminine appearance, due not to heredity but to his own way of living. And as he had gradually come to regard even social questions from the feminine point of view, and that quite unconsciously, for it is not only by dint of lying to other people but also by lying to oneself that one ceases to be aware that one is lying, although he had called upon his body to manifest (at the moment of his entering the Verdurins' house) all the courtesy of a great nobleman, that body, which had so well grasped what M. de Charlus had ceased to understand, displayed, to such an extent that the Baron would have deserved the epithet *ladylike*, all the seductions of a great lady. Besides, can one entirely separate M. de Charlus's appearance from the fact that sons, who do not always take after their fathers, even without being invertes and even though seekers after women, may consummate upon their faces the profanation of their mothers? But let us not consider here a subject that deserves a chapter to itself: the Profanation of the Mother.

Although other reasons may have dictated this transformation of M. de Charlus, and purely physical ferments may have set his chemistry "working" and made his body gradually change into the category of women's bodies, nevertheless the change that we record here was of spiritual origin. By dint of imagining oneself to be ill one becomes ill, one grows thin, one is too weak to rise from one's bed, one suffers from nervous enteritis. By dint of thinking tenderly of men one becomes a woman, and an imaginary skirt hampers one's movements. The obsession, as in the other instance it can affect one's health, may in this instance alter one's sex.

Morel, who accompanied him, came up to greet me. From that first moment, owing to a twofold change that occurred in him, he made (and alas, I was not quick enough to take account of it!) a bad impression on me. And this is why. I have said that Morel, having risen above his father's menial status, was generally pleased to indulge in a contemptuous familiarity. He had spoken to me, on the day when he brought me the photographs, without once addressing me as Monsieur, treating me superciliously. What was my surprise at Mme Verdurin's to see him bow very low before me, and before me alone, and to hear, before he had even uttered a syllable to anyone else, words of infinite respect—words such as I thought could not possibly flow from his pen or fall from his lips—addressed to myself. I at once suspected that he had some favour to ask of me. Taking me aside a minute later: "Monsieur would be doing me a very great service," he said to me, going so far this time as to address me in the third person, "by keeping from Mme Verdurin and her guests the nature of the profession that my father practised in his uncle's household. It would be best to say that, in your family, he was the steward of estates so vast as to put him almost on a level with your parents." Morel's request annoyed me intensely, not because it obliged me to magnify his father's position, which was a matter of complete indifference to me, but by requiring me to exaggerate the apparent wealth of my own, which I felt to be absurd. But he appeared so wretched so pressing, that I could not refuse him. "No, before dinner," he said in an imploring tone, "Monsieur can easily find some excuse for taking Mme Verdurin aside." This was what I in fact did, trying to enhance to the best of my ability the glamour of Morel's father without unduly exaggerating the "style," the "worldly goods" of my own family. It went off very smoothly, despite the astonishment of Mme Verdurin, who had had a nodding acquaintance with my grandfather. And as she had no tact and hated family life (that dissolvent of the little nucleus), after telling me that she remembered seeing my great-grandfather long ago, and speaking to me of him as of somebody who was more or less an idiot who would have been incapable of understanding the little group and who, to use her expression, "was not one of us," she said to me: "Families are such a bore, one longs to get away from them"; and at once proceeded to tell me of a trait in my great-grandfather's character of which I was unaware, although I had suspected it at home (I had never known him, but he was much spoken of), his remarkable stinginess (in contrast to the somewhat lavish generosity of my great-uncle, the friend of the lady in pink and Morel's father's employer): "The fact that your grandparents had such a smart steward only goes to show that there are people of all complexions in a family. Your grandfather's father was so stingy that at the end of his life when he was almost gaga—between you and me, he was never anything very special, you make up for the lot of them—he could not bring himself to pay a penny for his ride on the omnibus. So that they were obliged to have him followed by somebody who paid his fare for him, and to let the old miser think that his friend M. de Persigny, the Cabinet Minister, had given him a permit to travel free on the omnibuses. But I'm delighted to hear that *our* Morel's father was so distinguished. I was under the impression that he had been a schoolmaster, but it doesn't matter, I must have misunderstood. In any case, it makes not the slightest difference, for I must tell you that here we appreciate only true worth, the personal contribution, what I call participation. Provided that a person is artistic, provided in a word that he is one of the confraternity, nothing else matters." The way in which Morel was one of the confraternity was—so far as I was able to discover—that he was sufficiently fond of both women and men to satisfy either sex with the fruits of his experience of the other—as we shall see later on. But what it is

essential to note here is that as soon as I had given him my word that I would speak on his behalf to Mme Verdurin, as soon, especially, as I had actually done so without any possibility of subsequent retraction, Morel's "respect" for myself vanished as though by magic, the formal language of respect melted away, and indeed for some time he avoided me, contriving to appear to despise me, so that if Mme Verdurin wanted me to give him a message, to ask him to play something, he would continue to talk to one of the faithful, then move on to another, changing his seat if I approached him. The others were obliged to tell him three or four times that I had spoken to him, after which he would reply, with an air of constraint, briefly—unless we were by ourselves. Then he was expansive and friendly, for there was a charming side to him. I concluded all the same from this first evening that his must be a vile nature, that he would not shrink from any act of servility if the need arose, and was incapable of gratitude. In which he resembled the majority of mankind. But inasmuch as I had inherited a strain of my grandmother's nature, and enjoyed the diversity of other people without expecting anything of them or resenting anything that they did, I overlooked his baseness, rejoiced in his gaiety when it was in evidence, and indeed in what I believe to have been a genuine affection on his part when, having run through the whole gamut of his false ideas of human nature, he realised (in fits and starts, for he had strange reversions to blind and primitive savagery) that my gentleness with him was disinterested, that my indulgence arose not from a want of perception but from what he called kindness; and above all I was enraptured by his art, through which, although it was little more than an admirable virtuosity, and although he was not, in the intellectual sense of the word, a real musician, I heard again or for the first time so much beautiful music. Moreover a manager (M. de Charlus, in whom I had not suspected these talents, although Mme de Guermantes, who had known him as a very different person in their younger days, asserted that he had composed a sonata for her, painted a fan, and so forth), a manager modest in regard to his true merits, extremely gifted, contrived to place this virtuosity at the service of a versatile artistic sense which increased it tenfold. Imagine a purely skilful performer in the Russian ballet, trained, taught, developed in all directions by M. Diaghilev.

I had just given Mme Verdurin the message with which Morel had entrusted me and was talking to M. de Charlus about Saint-Loup, when Cottard burst into the room announcing, as though the house were on fire, that the Cambremers had arrived. Mme Verdurin, not wishing to appear, in front of newcomers such as M. de Charlus (whom Cottard had not seen) and myself, to attach any great importance to the arrival of the Cambremers, did not move, made no response to the announcement of these tidings, and merely said to the Doctor, fanning herself gracefully and adopting the tone of a marquise in the Théâtre-Français: "The Baron has just been telling us ..." This was too much for Cottard. Less brightly than he would have done in the old days, for learning and high positions had slowed down his delivery, but nevertheless with the excitement which he recaptured at the Verdurins', he exclaimed: "A Baron! What Baron? Where's the Baron?" staring round the room with an astonishment that bordered on incredulity. With the affected indifference of a hostess when a servant has broken a valuable glass in front of her guests, and with the artificial, high-pitched tone of a Conservatoire prize-winner acting in a play by the younger Dumas, Mme Verdurin replied, pointing with her fan to Morel's patron: "Why, the Baron de Charlus, to whom let me introduce you ... M. le Professeur Cottard." Mme Verdurin was for that matter by no means sorry to have an opportunity of playing the leading lady. M. de Charlus proffered two fingers which the Professor clasped with the kindly smile of a "prince of science." But he stopped short upon seeing the Cambremers enter the room, while M. de Charlus led me into a corner to have a word with me, not without feeling my muscles, which is a German habit.

M. de Cambremer bore little resemblance to the old Marquise. As she was wont to remark tenderly, he took entirely "after his papa." To anyone who had only heard of him, or of letters written by him, brisk and suitably expressed, his personal appearance was startling. No doubt one grew accustomed to it. But his nose had chosen, in placing itself askew above his mouth, perhaps the only oblique line, among so many possible ones, that one would never have thought of tracing upon this face, and one that indicated a vulgar stupidity, aggravated still further by the proximity of a Norman complexion on cheeks that were like two red apples. It is possible that M. de Cambremer's eyes retained between their eyelids a trace of the sky of the Cotentin, so soft upon sunny days when the wayfarer amuses himself counting in their hundreds the shadows of the poplars drawn up by the roadside, but those eyelids, heavy, bleared and drooping, would have prevented the least flash of intelligence from escaping. And so, discouraged by the meagreness of that azure gaze, one returned to the big crooked nose. By a transposition of the senses, M. de Cambremer looked at you with his nose. This nose of his was not ugly; it was if anything too handsome, too bold, too proud of its own importance. Arched, polished, gleaming, brand-new, it was amply disposed to make up for the spiritual inadequacy of the eyes. Unfortunately, if the eyes are sometimes the organ through which our intelligence is revealed, the nose (whatever the intimate solidarity and the unsuspected repercussion of one feature on another), the nose is generally the organ in which stupidity is most readily displayed.

Although the propriety of the dark clothes which M. de Cambremer invariably wore, even in the morning, might well reassure those who were dazzled and exasperated by the insolent brightness of the seaside attire of people whom they did not know, it was none the less impossible to understand why the wife of the judge should have declared with an air of discernment and authority, as a person who knows far more than you about the high society of Alençon, that on seeing M. de Cambremer one immediately felt oneself, even before one knew who he was, in the presence of a man of supreme distinction, of a man of perfect breeding, a change from the sort of person one saw at Balbec, a man in short in whose company one could breathe freely. He was to her, asphyxiated by all those Balbec tourists who did not know her world, like a bottle of smelling salts. It seemed to me on the contrary that he was one of those people whom my grandmother would at once have set

down as "very common," and since she had no conception of snobbishness, she would no doubt have been stupefied that he could have succeeded in winning the hand of Mlle Legrandin, who must surely be difficult to please, having a brother who was "so well-bred." At best one might have said of M. de Cambremer's plebeian ugliness that it was to some extent redolent of the soil and had a hint of something very anciently local; one was reminded, on examining his faulty features, which one would have liked to correct, of those names of little Norman towns as to the etymology of which my friend the curé was mistaken because the peasants, mispronouncing or having misunderstood the Latin or Norman words that underlay them, have finally perpetuated in a barbarism to be found already in the cartularies, as Brichot would have said, a misinterpretation and a faulty pronunciation. Life in these little old towns may, for all that, be pleasant enough, and M. de Cambremer must have had his good points, for if it was in a mother's nature that the old Marquise should prefer her son to her daughter-in-law, on the other hand she who had other children, of whom two at least were not devoid of merit, was often heard to declare that the Marquis was, in her opinion, the best of the family. During the short time he had spent in the Army, his messmates, finding Cambremer too long a name to pronounce, had given him the nickname Cancan, implying a flow of gossip, which he had done nothing to deserve. He knew how to brighten a dinner-party to which he was invited by saying when the fish (even if it were putrescent) or the entrée came in: "I say, that looks a fine beast." And his wife, who had adopted on entering the family everything that she supposed to form part of their ethos, put herself on the level of her husband's friends and perhaps sought to please him like a mistress and as though she had been involved in his bachelor existence, by saying in a casual tone when she spoke of him to officers: "You shall see Cancan presently. Cancan has gone to Balbec, but he will be back this evening." She was furious at having compromised herself this evening by coming to the Verdurins' and had done so only in response to the entreaties of her mother-in-law and her husband, in the interests of a renewal of the lease. But, being less well-brought-up than they, she made no secret of the ulterior motive and for the last fortnight had been making fun of this dinner-party to her women friends. "You know we're going to dine with our tenants. That will be well worth an increased rent. As a matter of fact, I'm rather curious to see what they've done to our poor old Raspelière" (as though she had been born in the house, and would find there all her old family associations). "Our old keeper told me only yesterday that you wouldn't know the place. I can't bear to think of all that must be going on there. I'm sure we shall have to have the whole place disinfected before we move in again." She arrived haughty and morose, with the air of a great lady whose castle, owing to a state of war, is occupied by the enemy, but who nevertheless feels herself at home and makes a point of showing the conquerors that they are intruders. Mme de Cambremer could not see me at first for I was in a bay at the side of the room with M. de Charlus, who was telling me that he had heard from Morel that his father had been a "steward" in my family, and that he, Charlus, credited me with sufficient intelligence and magnanimity (a term common to himself and Swann) to forgo the shabby and ignoble pleasure which vulgar little idiots (I was warned) would not have failed, in my place, to give themselves by revealing to our hosts details which they might regard as demeaning. "The mere fact that I take an interest in him and extend my protection over him, gives him a pre-eminence and wipes out the past," the Baron concluded. As I listened to him and promised the silence which I would have kept even without the hope of being considered in return intelligent and magnanimous, I looked at Mme de Cambremer. And I had difficulty in recognising the melting, savoury morsel I had had beside me the other day at tea-time on the terrace at Balbec in the piece of Norman shortbread I now saw, hard as rock, in which the faithful would in vain have tried to insert their teeth. Irritated in advance by the good nature which her husband had inherited from his mother, and which would make him assume a flattered expression when the faithful were presented to him, but nevertheless anxious to perform her duty as a society woman, when Brichot was introduced to her she wanted to introduce him to her husband, as she had seen her more fashionable friends do, but, rage or pride prevailing over the desire to show her knowledge of the world, instead of saying, as she ought to have done, "Allow me to present my husband," she said: "I present you to my husband," holding aloft thus the banner of the Cambremers, but to no avail, for her husband bowed as low before Brichot as she had expected. But all Mme de Cambremer's ill humour vanished in an instant when her eye fell on M. de Charlus, whom she knew by sight. Never had she succeeded in obtaining an introduction, even at the time of her liaison with Swann. For as M. de Charlus always sided with the woman—with his sister-in-law against M. de Guermantes's mistresses, with Odette, at that time still unmarried, but an old flame of Swann's, against the new—he had, as a stern defender of morals and faithful protector of homes, given Odette—and kept—the promise that he would never allow himself to be introduced to Mme de Cambremer. She had certainly never imagined that it was at the Verdurins' that she was at length to meet this unapproachable person. M. de Cambremer knew that this was a great joy to her, so great that he himself was moved by it and gave his wife a look that implied: "You're glad you decided to come, aren't you?" He spoke in fact very little, knowing that he had married a superior woman. "Unworthy as I am," he would say at every moment, and readily quoted a fable of La Fontaine and one of Florian which seemed to him to apply to his ignorance and at the same time to enable him, beneath the outward form of a disdainful flattery, to show the men of science who were not members of the Jockey that one might be a sportsman and yet have read fables. The unfortunate thing was that he knew only two. And so they kept cropping up. Mme de Cambremer was no fool, but she had a number of extremely irritating habits. With her, the corruption of names had absolutely nothing to do with aristocratic disdain. She was not the person to say, like the Duchesse de Guermantes (whom the mere fact of her birth ought to have preserved even more than Mme de Cambremer from such an absurdity), with a pretence of not remembering the unfashionable name (although it is now that of one of the women whom it is most difficult to approach) of Julien de Monchâteau: "a little Madame ...

Pico della Mirandola.” No, when Mme de Cambremer said a name wrong it was out of kindness of heart, so as not to appear to know some damaging fact, and when, out of truthfulness, she admitted it, she tried to conceal it by distorting it. If, for instance, she was defending a woman, she would try to conceal, while determined not to lie to the person who had asked her to tell the truth, the fact that Madame So-and-so was at the moment the mistress of M. Sylvain Lévy, and would say: “No ... I know absolutely nothing about her, I believe that people used to accuse her of having inspired a passion in a gentleman whose name I don’t know, something like Cahn, Kohn, Kuhn; anyhow, I believe the gentleman has been dead for years and that there was never anything between them.” This is an analogous—but inverse—process to that adopted by liars who, in falsifying what they have done when giving an account of it to a mistress or merely to a friend, imagine that their listener will not immediately see that the crucial phrase (as with Cahn, Kohn, Kuhn) is interpolated, is of a different texture from the rest of the conversation, is false-bottomed.

Mme Verdurin whispered in her husband’s ear: “Shall I offer my arm to the Baron de Charlus? As you’ll have Mme de Cambremer on your right, we might divide the honours.” “No,” said M. Verdurin, “since the other is higher in rank” (meaning that M. de Cambremer was a marquis), “M. de Charlus is, after all, his inferior.” “Very well, I shall put him beside the Princess.” And Mme Verdurin introduced Mme Sherbatoff to M. de Charlus; each of them bowed in silence, with an air of knowing all about the other and of promising a mutual secrecy. M. Verdurin introduced me to M. de Cambremer. Before he had even begun to speak to me in his loud and slightly stammering voice, his tall figure and high complexion displayed in their oscillation the martial hesitation of a commanding officer who tries to put you at your ease and says: “I have heard about you, I shall see what can be done; your punishment shall be remitted; we don’t thirst for blood here; everything will be all right.” Then, as he shook my hand: “I believe you know my mother,” he said to me. The verb “believe” seemed to him appropriate to the discretion of a first meeting but not to imply any uncertainty, for he went on: “I have a note for you from her.” M. de Cambremer was childishly happy to revisit a place where he had lived for so long. “I’m at home again,” he said to Mme Verdurin, while his eyes marvelled at recognising the flowers painted on panels over the doors, and the marble busts on their high pedestals. He might, all the same, have felt somewhat at sea, for Mme Verdurin had brought with her a quantity of fine old things of her own. In this respect Mme Verdurin, while regarded by the Cambremers as having turned everything upside down, was not revolutionary but intelligently conservative, in a sense which they did not understand. They thus wrongly accused her of hating the old house and of degrading it by hanging plain cloth curtains instead of their rich plush, like an ignorant parish priest reproaching a diocesan architect for putting back in its place the old carved wood which the cleric had discarded and seen fit to replace with ornaments purchased in the Place Saint-Sulpice. Furthermore, a herb garden was beginning to take the place, in front of the house, of the flower-beds that were the pride not merely of the Cambremers but of their gardener. The latter, who regarded the Cambremers as his sole masters and groaned beneath the Verdurins’ yoke, as though the place were momentarily occupied by an invading army of roughneck soldiery, went in secret to unburden his grievances to its dispossessed mistress, complained bitterly of the contempt with which his araucarias, begonias, sempervivum and double dahlias were treated, and that they should dare in so grand a place to grow such common plants as camomile and maidenhair fern. Mme Verdurin sensed this silent opposition and had made up her mind, if she took a long lease of La Raspelière or even bought the place, to make one of her conditions the dismissal of the gardener, by whom his old mistress, on the contrary, set great store. He had worked for her for nothing when times were bad, and he adored her; but by that odd partitioning of opinion which we find among the people, whereby the most profound moral scorn is embedded in the most passionate admiration, which in turn overlaps old and undying grudges, he used often to say of Mme de Cambremer, who, caught by the invasion of ’70 in a house that she owned in the East of France, had been obliged to endure for a month the contact of the Germans: “What many people have against Madame la Marquise is that during the war she took the side of the Prussians and even had them to stay in her house. At any other time, I could understand it; but in wartime she shouldn’t have done it. It’s not right.” So that at one and the same time he was faithful to her unto death, venerated her for her kindness, and firmly believed that she had been guilty of treason. Mme Verdurin was annoyed that M. de Cambremer should claim to recognise La Raspelière so well. “You must notice a good many changes, all the same,” she replied. “For one thing there were those big bronze Barbedienne devils and some horrid little plush chairs which I packed off at once to the attic, though even that’s too good a place for them.” After this acerbic riposte to M. de Cambremer, she offered him her arm to go in to dinner. He hesitated for a moment, saying to himself: “I can’t really go in before M. de Charlus.” But assuming the other to be an old friend of the house, since he did not have the place of honour, he decided to take the arm that was offered him and told Mme Verdurin how proud he felt to be admitted into the cenacle (it was thus that he styled the little nucleus, not without a smile of self-congratulation at knowing the term). Cottard, who was seated next to M. de Charlus, beamed at him through his pince-nez, to make his acquaintance and to break the ice, with a series of winks far more insistent than they would have been in the old days, and not interrupted by fits of shyness. And these winning glances, enhanced by the smile that accompanied them, were no longer contained by the glass of his pince-nez but overflowed on all sides. The Baron, who was only too inclined to see people of his sort everywhere, had no doubt that Cottard was one of them and was making eyes at him. At once he turned on the Professor the cold shoulder of the invert, as contemptuous of those who are attracted by him as he is ardent in pursuit of those he finds attractive. Although everyone speaks mendaciously of the pleasure of being loved, which fate constantly withholds, it is undoubtedly a general law, the application of which is by no means confined to the Charluses of this world, that the person whom we do not love and who loves us seems to us insufferable. To such a person, to a



woman of whom we say not that she loves us but that she clings to us, we prefer the society of any other, no matter who, with neither her charm, nor her looks, nor her brains. She will recover these, in our estimation, only when she has ceased to love us. In this sense, we might regard the invitation aroused in an invert by a man he finds repellent who pursues him as simply the transposition, in a comical form, of this universal rule. But in his case it is much stronger. Hence, whereas the normal man seeks to conceal the irritation he feels, the invert is implacable in making it clear to the man who provokes it, as he would certainly not bring it home to a woman, M. de Charlus for instance to the Princesse de Guermantes, whose passion for him he found irksome but flattering. But when they see another man display a particular predilection towards them, then, whether because they fail to recognise that it is the same as their own, or because it is a painful reminder that this predilection, exalted by them as long as it is they themselves who feel it, is regarded as a vice, or from a desire to rehabilitate themselves by making a scene in circumstances in which it costs them nothing, or from a fear of being unmasked which suddenly overtakes them when desire no longer leads them blindfold from one imprudence to another, or from rage at being subjected, by the equivocal attitude of another person, to the injury which by their own attitude, if that other person attracted them, they would not hesitate to inflict on him, men who do not in the least mind following a young man for miles, never taking their eyes off him in the theatre even if he is with friends, thereby threatening to compromise him with them, may be heard to say, if a man who does not attract them merely looks at them, "Monsieur, what do you take me for?" (simply because he takes them for what they are) "I don't understand you, no, don't attempt to explain, you are quite mistaken," may proceed at a pinch from words to blows, and, to a person who knows the imprudent stranger, wax indignant: "What, you know this loathsome creature. The way he looks at one! ... A fine way to behave!" M. de Charlus did not go quite so far as this, but assumed the offended, glacial air adopted, when one appears to suspect them of being of easy virtue, by women who are not, and even more by women who are. Furthermore, the invert brought face to face with an invert sees not merely an displeasing image of himself which, being purely inanimate, could at the worst only injure his self-esteem, but a second self, living, active in the same field, capable therefore of injuring him in his loves. And so it is from an instinct of self-preservation that he will speak ill of the possible rival, whether to people who are able to do the latter some injury (nor does Invert No. 1 mind being thought a liar when he thus denounces Invert No. 2 in front of people who may know all about his own case), or to the young man whom he has "picked up," who is perhaps about to be snatched away from him and whom it is important to persuade that the very things which it is to his advantage to do with the speaker would be the bane of his life if he allowed himself to do them with the other person. To M. de Charlus, who was thinking perhaps of the wholly imaginary dangers in which the presence of this Cottard whose smile he misinterpreted might involve Morel, an invert who did not attract him was not merely a caricature of himself but also an obvious rival. A tradesman practising an uncommon trade who on his arrival in the provincial town where he intends to settle for life discovers that in the same square, directly opposite, the same trade is being carried on by a competitor, is no more discomfited than a Charlus who goes down to a quiet country spot to make love unobserved and, on the day of his arrival, catches sight of the local squire or the barber, whose aspect and manner leave no room for doubt. The tradesman often develops a hatred for his competitor; this hatred degenerates at times into melancholy, and, if there is the slightest suggestion of tainted heredity, one has seen in small towns the tradesman begin to show signs of insanity which is cured only by his being persuaded to "sell up" and move elsewhere. The invert's rage is even more obsessive. He has realised that from the very first instant the squire and the barber have coveted his young companion. Even though he repeats to him a hundred times a day that the barber and the squire are scoundrels whose company would bring disgrace on him, he is obliged, like Harpagon, to watch over his treasure, and gets up in the night to make sure that it is not being stolen. And it is this, no doubt, even more than desire, or the convenience of habits shared in common, and almost as much as that experience of oneself which is the only true experience, that makes one invert detect another with a rapidity and certainty that are almost infallible. He may be mistaken for a moment, but a rapid divination brings him back to the truth. Hence M. de Charlus's error was brief. His divine discernment showed him after the first minute that Cottard was not of his kind, and that he need fear his advances neither for himself, which would merely have annoyed him, nor for Morel, which would have seemed to him a more serious matter. He recovered his calm, and as he was still beneath the influence of the transit of Venus Androgyne, from time to time he smiled a faint smile at the Verdurins without taking the trouble to open his mouth, merely uncreasing a corner of his lips, and for an instant kindled a coquettish light in his eyes, he so obsessed with virility, exactly as his sister-in-law the Duchesse de Guermantes might have done.

"Do you shoot much, Monsieur?" said Mme Verdurin contemptuously to M. de Cambremer.

"Has Ski told you of the near shave we had today?" Cottard inquired of the Mistress.

"I shoot mostly in the forest of Chantepie," replied M. de Cambremer.

"No, I've told her nothing," said Ski.

"Does it deserve its name?" Brichot asked M. de Cambremer, after a glance at me from the corner of his eye, for he had promised me that he would introduce the topic of etymology, begging me at the same time to conceal from the Cambremers the scorn that he felt for the researches of the Combray priest.

"I'm afraid I must be very stupid, but I don't grasp your question," said M. de Cambremer.

"I mean: do many magpies sing in it?" replied Brichot.

Cottard meanwhile could not bear Mme Verdurin's not knowing that they had nearly missed the train.

"Out with it," Mme Cottard said to her husband encouragingly, "tell us about your odyssey."

"Well, it really is rather out of the ordinary," said the doctor, and repeated his narrative from the beginning. "When I saw that the train was in the station, I was dumbfounded. It was all Ski's fault. You're pretty eccentric with your information, my dear fellow! And there was Brichot waiting for us at the station!"

"I assumed," said the scholar, casting around him what he could still muster of a glance and smiling with his thin lips, "that if you had been detained at Graincourt, it would mean that you had encountered some peripatetic siren."

"Will you hold your tongue! What if my wife were to hear you?" said the Doctor. "This wife of mine, it is jealous."

"Ah! that Brichot," cried Ski, moved to traditional merriment by Brichot's spicy witticism, "he's always the same," although he had no reason to suppose that the worthy academic had ever been specially lecherous. And, to embellish these time-honoured words with the ritual gesture, he made as though he could not resist the desire to pinch Brichot's leg. "He never changes, the rascal," Ski went on, without stopping to think of the effect, at once sad and comic, that Brichot's semi-blindness gave to his words: "Always an eye for the ladies."

"You see," said M. de Cambremer, "what it is to meet a scholar. Here have I been shooting for fifteen years in the forest of Chantepie, and I've never even thought of what the name meant."

Mme de Cambremer cast a stern glance at her husband; she did not like him to humiliate himself thus before Brichot. She was even more displeased when, at every "ready-made" expression that Cancan employed, Cottard, who knew the ins and outs of them all, having himself laboriously acquired them, pointed out to the Marquis, who admitted his stupidity, that they meant nothing: "Why 'drink like a fish'? Do you suppose fish drink more than other creatures? You say: 'mind your p's and q's.' Why p's and q's in particular? Why 'easy as pie'? Why 'at sixes and sevens'? Why 'sow one's wild oats'?"

But at this, the defence of M. de Cambremer was taken up by Brichot, who explained the origin of each expression. Mme de Cambremer, however, was chiefly occupied in examining the changes the Verdurins had introduced at La Raspelière, so that she could criticise some and import others, or perhaps the same ones, to Féterne. "I wonder what that chandelier is that's hanging all askew. I hardly recognise my old Raspelière," she went on, with a familiarly aristocratic air, as she might have spoken of an old servant meaning not so much to indicate his age as to say that he had seen her in her cradle. And as she was a trifle bookish in her speech: "All the same," she added in an undertone, "I can't help feeling that if I were living in another person's house I should feel some compunction about altering everything like this."

"It's a pity you didn't come with them," said Mme Verdurin to M. de Charlus and Morel, hoping that M. de Charlus was now "enrolled" and would submit to the rule that they must all arrive by the same train. "You're sure that Chantepie means the singing magpie, Chochotte?" she went on, to show that, like the great hostess that she was, she could join in every conversation at once.

"Tell me something about this violinist," Mme de Cambremer said to me, "he interests me. I adore music, and it seems to me that I have heard of him before. Complete my education." She had heard that Morel had come with M. de Charlus and hoped, by getting the former to come to her house, to make friends with the latter. She added, however, so that I might not guess her reason for asking, "M. Brichot interests me too." For, although she was highly cultivated, just as certain persons who are prone to obesity eat hardly anything and take exercise all day long without ceasing to grow visibly fatter, so Mme de Cambremer might spend her time, especially at Féterne, delving into ever more recondite philosophy, ever more esoteric music, and yet she emerged from these studies only to hatch intrigues that would enable her to break with the middle-class friends of her girlhood and to form the connexions which she had originally supposed to be part of the social life of her "in-laws" and had since discovered to be far more exalted and remote. A philosopher who was not modern enough for her, Leibniz, has said that the way is long from the intellect to the heart. It was a journey that Mme de Cambremer had been no more capable of making than her brother. Abandoning the study of John Stuart Mill only for that of Lachelier, the less she believed in the reality of the external world, the more desperately she sought to establish herself in a good position in it before she died. In her passion for realism in art, no object seemed to her humble enough to serve as a model to painter or writer. A fashionable picture or novel would have made her sick; Tolstoy's moujiks, or Millet's peasants, were the extreme social boundary beyond which she did not allow the artist to pass. But to cross the boundary that limited her own social relations, to raise herself to an intimate acquaintance with duchesses, this was the goal of all her efforts, so ineffective had the spiritual treatment to which she subjected herself by the study of great masterpieces proved in overcoming the congenital and morbid snobbery that had developed in her. This snobbery had even succeeded in curing certain tendencies to avarice and adultery to which in her younger days she had been inclined, just as certain peculiar and permanent pathological conditions seem to render those who are subject to them immune to other maladies. I could not however refrain, as I listened to her, from admiring, though without deriving any pleasure therefrom, the refinement of her expressions. They were those that are employed in a given period by all the people of the same intellectual range, so that the refined expression provides at once, like the arc of a circle, the means to describe and limit the entire circumference. And so the effect of these expressions is that the people who employ them bore me immediately, because I feel that I already know them, but are generally regarded as superior persons, and have often been offered me as delightful and unappreciated dinner neighbours.

"You cannot fail to be aware, Madame, that many forest regions take their name from the animals that inhabit them. Next to the forest of Chantepie, you have the wood Chantereine."

"I don't know who the queen may be, but you're not very courteous to her," said M. de Cambremer.

"Take that, Chochotte," said Mme de Verdurin. "And otherwise, did you have a pleasant journey?"

"We encountered only vague specimens of humanity who thronged the train. But I must answer M. de Cambremer's question; *reine*, in this instance, is not the wife of a king, but a frog. It is the name that the frog has long retained in this district, as is shown by the station Renneville, which ought to be spelt Reineville."

"I say, that looks a fine beast," said M. de Cambremer to Mme Verdurin, pointing to a fish. (It was one of the compliments by means of which he considered that he paid his whack at a dinner-party, and gave an immediate return of hospitality. "There's no need to invite them back," he would often say, in speaking to his wife of one or other couple of their acquaintance: "They were delighted to have us. It was they who thanked me for coming.") "I may tell you, though, that I've been going to Renneville every day for years, and I've never seen any more frogs there than anywhere else. Madame de Cambremer brought over to these parts the curé of a parish where she owns a considerable property, who has very much the same turn of mind as yourself, it seems to me. He has written a book."

"I know, I've read it with immense interest," Brichot replied hypocritically.

The satisfaction that his pride received indirectly from this answer made M. de Cambremer laugh long and loud. "Ah, well, the author of, what shall I call it, this geography, this glossary, dwells at great length upon the name of a little place of which we were formerly, if I may say so, the lords, and which is called Pont-à-Couleuvre. Of course I am only an ignorant rustic compared with such a fountain of learning, but I have been to Pont-à-Couleuvre a thousand times if he's been there once, and devil take me if I ever saw one of those beastly snakes there—I say beastly in spite of the tribute the worthy La Fontaine pays them." (*The Man and the Snake* was one of his two fables.)

"You haven't seen any, and you saw straight," replied Brichot. "Undoubtedly, the writer you mention knows his subject through and through, he has written a remarkable book."

"He has indeed!" exclaimed Mme de Cambremer. "That book, there's no doubt about it, is a real work of scholarship."

"No doubt he consulted various cartularies (by which we mean the lists of benefices and cures of each diocese), which may have furnished him with the names of lay patrons and ecclesiastical collators. But there are other sources. One of the most learned of my friends has delved into them. He found that the place in question was named Pont-à-Quileuvre. This odd name encouraged him to carry his researches further, to a Latin text in which the bridge that your friend supposes to be infested with snakes is styled *Pons cui aperit*: a closed bridge that was opened only upon due payment."

"You were speaking of frogs. I, when I find myself among such learned folk, feel like the frog before the Areopagus" (this being his other fable), said Cancan who often indulged, with a hearty laugh, in this pleasantry thanks to which he imagined himself to be making at one and the same time, with a mixture of humility and aptness, a profession of ignorance and a display of learning.

Meanwhile Cottard, blocked on one side by M. de Charlus's silence, and driven to seek an outlet elsewhere, turned to me with one of those questions which impressed his patients when it hit the mark and showed them that he could put himself so to speak inside their bodies, and if on the other hand it missed the mark, enabled him to check certain theories, to widen his previous standpoints. "When you come to a relatively high altitude, such as this where we now are, do you find that the change increases your tendency to breathlessness?" he asked me with the certainty of either arousing admiration or enlarging his own knowledge.

M. de Cambremer heard the question and smiled. "I can't tell you how delighted I am to hear that you have fits of breathlessness," he flung at me across the table. He did not mean that it cheered him up, though in fact it did. For this worthy man could not hear any reference to another person's sufferings without a feeling of well-being and a spasm of hilarity which speedily gave place to the instinctive pity of a kind heart. But his words had another meaning which was indicated more precisely by the sentence that followed: "I'm delighted," he explained, "because my sister has them too." In short, he was delighted in the same way as if he had heard me mention as one of my friends a person who was constantly coming to their house. "What a small world!" was the reflexion which he formed mentally and which I saw written upon his smiling face when Cottard spoke to me of my attacks. And these began to establish themselves, from the evening of this dinner-party, as a sort of common acquaintance, after whom M. de Cambremer never failed to inquire, if only to hand on a report to his sister.

As I answered the questions with which his wife kept plying me about Morel, my thoughts returned to a conversation I had had with my mother that afternoon. Without attempting to dissuade me from going to the Verdurins' if there was a chance of my enjoying myself there, she had pointed out that it was a circle of which my grandfather would not have approved, which would have made him exclaim: "On guard!" Then she had gone on to say: "By the way, Judge Toureuil and his wife told me they had been to lunch with Mme Bontemps. They asked me no questions. But I seemed to gather from what was said that a marriage between you and Albertine would be the joy of her aunt's life. I think the real reason is that they are all extremely fond of you. At the same time the style in which they imagine that you would be able to keep her, the sort of connexions they more or less know that we have—all that is not, I fancy, entirely irrelevant, although it may be a minor consideration. I wouldn't have mentioned it to you myself, because I'm not keen on it, but as I imagine they'll mention it to you, I thought I'd get a word in first." "But you yourself, what do you think of her?" I asked my mother. "Well, I'm not the one who's going to marry her. You could certainly do a great deal better in terms of marriage. But I feel that your grandmother would not have liked me to influence you. As a matter of fact, I can't say what I think of Albertine; I don't think of her. All I can say to you is, like Madame de Sévigné: 'She has good qualities, or so I believe. But at this first stage I can praise her only by negatives. She is not this: she has not the Rennes accent. In time, I shall perhaps say: she is that.' And I shall always think well of her if she

can make you happy.” But by these very words which left it to me to decide my own happiness, my mother had plunged me into that state of doubt in which I had been plunged long ago when, my father having allowed me to go to *Phèdre* and, what was more, to take up writing as a career, I had suddenly felt myself burdened with too great a responsibility, the fear of distressing him, and that melancholy which we feel when we cease to obey orders which, from one day to another, keep the future hidden, and realise that we have at last begun to live in real earnest, as a grown-up person, the life, the only life that any of us has at his disposal.

Perhaps the best thing would be to wait a little longer, to begin by seeing Albertine as I had seen her in the past, so as to find out whether I really loved her. I might take her, as a diversion, to see the Verdurins, and this thought reminded me that I had come there myself that evening only to learn whether Mme Putbus was staying there or was expected. In any case, she was not dining with them.

“Speaking of your friend Saint-Loup,” said Mme de Cambremer, using an expression which betrayed more consistency in her train of thought than her remarks might have led one to suppose, for if she spoke to me about music she was thinking about the Guermantes, “you know that everybody is talking about his marriage to the niece of the Princesse de Guermantes. Though I may say that, for my part, all that society gossip concerns me not one whit.” I was seized by a fear that I might have spoken unfeelingly to Robert about the girl in question, a girl full of sham originality, whose mind was as mediocre as her temper was violent. Hardly ever do we hear anything that does not make us regret something we have said. I replied to Mme de Cambremer, truthfully as it happened, that I knew nothing about it, and that anyhow I thought that the girl seemed rather young to be engaged.

“That is perhaps why it’s not yet official. Anyhow there’s a lot of talk about it.”

“I ought to warn you,” Mme Verdurin observed drily to Mme de Cambremer, having heard her talking to me about Morel and supposing, when she had lowered her voice to speak of Saint-Loup’s engagement, that Morel was still under discussion. “You needn’t expect any light music here. In matters of art, you know, the faithful who come to my Wednesdays, my children as I call them, are all fearfully advanced,” she added with an air of terrified pride. “I say to them sometimes: My dear people, you move too fast for your Mistress, and she’s not exactly notorious for being afraid of daring innovations. Every year it goes a little further; I can see the day coming when they will have no more use for Wagner or d’Indy.”

“But it’s splendid to be advanced, one can never be advanced enough,” said Mme de Cambremer, scrutinising every corner of the dining-room as she spoke, trying to identify the things that her mother-in-law had left there and those that Mme Verdurin had brought with her, and to catch the latter red-handed in an error of taste. At the same time she tried to get me to talk of the subject that interested her most, M. de Charlus. She thought it touching that he should offer his patronage to a violinist: “He seems intelligent.”

“Yes, his mind is extremely active for a man of his age,” I replied.

“Age? But he doesn’t seem at all old, look, the hair is still young.” (For, during the last three or four years, the word hair had been used with the article by one of those unknown persons who launch the literary fashions, and everybody at the same radius from the centre as Mme de Cambremer would say “the hair,” not without an affected smile. At the present day, people still say “the hair,” but from an excessive use of the article the pronoun will be born again.)<sup>13</sup> “What interests me most about M. de Charlus,” she went on, “is that one can feel that he is naturally gifted. I may tell you that I attach little importance to knowledge. I’m not interested in what’s learnt.”

These words were not incompatible with Mme de Cambremer’s own particular quality, which was precisely imitated and acquired. But it so happened that one of the things one was required to know at that moment was that knowledge is nothing, and is not worth a straw when compared with originality. Mme de Cambremer had learned, with everything else, that one ought not to learn anything. “That is why,” she explained to me, “Brichot, who has an interesting side to him, for I’m not one to despise a certain lively erudition, interests me far less.”

But Brichot, at that moment, was occupied with one thing only: hearing people talk about music, he trembled lest the subject should remind Mme Verdurin of the death of Dechambre. He wanted to say something that would avert that harrowing memory. M. de Cambremer provided him with an opportunity with the question: “You mean to say that wooded places always take their names from animals?”

“Not so,” replied Brichot, happy to display his learning before so many strangers, among whom, I had told him, he would be certain to interest one at least. “We have only to consider how often, even in the names of people, a tree is preserved, like a fern in a seam of coal. One of our eminent Senators is called M. de Saulces de Freycinet, which means, if I’m not mistaken, a spot planted with willow and ash, *salix et fraxinetum*; his nephew M. de Selves combines more trees still, since he is named de Selves, *sylva*.”

Saniette was delighted to see the conversation take so animated a turn. Since Brichot was talking all the time, he himself could preserve a silence which would save him from being the butt of M. and Mme Verdurin’s wit. And growing even more sensitive in his joy and relief, he had been touched when he heard M. Verdurin, notwithstanding the formality of so grand a dinner-party, tell the butler to put a jug of water in front of him since he never drank anything else. (The generals responsible for the death of most soldiers insist upon their being well fed.) Moreover, Mme Verdurin had actually smiled at him once. Decidedly, they were kind people. He was not going to be tortured any more.

At this moment the meal was interrupted by one of the party whom I have forgotten to mention, an eminent Norwegian philosopher who spoke French very well but very slowly, for the twofold reason that, in the first place, having learned the language only recently and not wishing to make mistakes (though he did make a few), he referred each word to a sort of mental dictionary, and secondly, being a metaphysician, he always

thought of what he intended to say while he was saying it, which, even in a Frenchman, is a cause of slowness. For the rest, he was a delightful person, although similar in appearance to many other people, save in one respect. This man who was so slow in his diction (there was an interval of silence after every word) developed a startling rapidity in escaping from the room as soon as he had said good-bye. His haste made one suppose, the first time one saw it, that he was suffering from colic or some even more urgent need.

"My dear—colleague," he said to Brichot, after deliberating in his mind whether colleague was the correct term, "I have a sort of—desire to know whether there are other trees in the—nomenclature of your beautiful French—Latin—Norman tongue. Madame" (he meant Mme Verdurin, although he dared not look at her) "has told me that you know everything. Is not this precisely the moment?"

"No, it's the moment for eating," interrupted Mme Verdurin, who saw the dinner becoming interminable.

"Very well," the Scandinavian replied, bowing his head over his plate with a resigned and sorrowful smile. "But I must point out to Madame that if I have permitted myself this questionnaire—pardon me, this question—it is because I have to return tomorrow to Paris to dine at the Tour d'Argent or at the Hôtel Meurice. My French—confrère—M. Boutroux is to address us there about certain séances of spiritualism—pardon me, certain spirituous evocations—which he has verified."

"The Tour d'Argent is not nearly as good as they make out," said Mme Verdurin sourly. "In fact, I've had some disgusting dinners there."

"But am I mistaken, is not the food that one consumes at Madame's table an example of the finest French cookery?"

"Well, it's not positively bad," replied Mme Verdurin, mollified. "And if you come next Wednesday, it will be better."

"But I am leaving on Monday for Algiers, and from there I am going to the Cape. And when I am at the Cape of Good Hope, I shall no longer be able to meet my illustrious colleague—pardon me, I shall no longer be able to meet my confrère."

And he set to work obediently, after offering these retrospective apologies, to devour his food at a headlong pace. But Brichot was only too delighted to be able to furnish other vegetable etymologies, and replied, so greatly interesting the Norwegian that he again stopped eating, but with a sign to the servants that they might remove his full plate and go on to the next course.

"One of the Immortals," said Brichot, "is named Houssaye, or a place planted with holly-trees; in the name of a brilliant diplomat, d'Ormesson, you will find the elm, the *ulmus* beloved of Virgil, which gave its name to the town of Ulm; in the names of his colleagues, M. de la Boulaye, the birch (*bouleau*), M. d'Aunay, the alder (*aune*), M. de Bussière, the box-tree (*buis*), M. Albaret, the sapwood (*aubier*)" (I made a mental note that I must tell this to Céleste), "M. de Cholet, the cabbage (*chou*), and the apple-tree (*pommier*) in the name of M. de la Pommeraye, whose lectures we used to attend, do you remember, Saniette, in the days when the worthy Porel had been sent to the furthest ends of the earth, as Proconsul in Odéonia?"

On hearing the name Saniette on Brichot's lips, M. Verdurin glanced at his wife and at Cottard with an ironical smile which disconcerted their timid guest.

"You said that Cholet was derived from *chou*," I remarked to Brichot. "Does the name of a station I passed before reaching Doncières, Saint-Frichoux, also come from *chou*?"

"No, Saint-Frichoux is *Sanctus Fructuosus*, as *Sanctus Ferreolus* gave rise to Saint-Fargeau, but that's not Norman in the least."

"He knows too much, he's boring us," the Princess gurgled softly.

"There are so many other names that interest me, but I can't ask you everything at once." And turning to Cottard, "Is Madame Putbus here?" I asked him.

"No, thank heaven," replied Mme Verdurin, who had overheard my question, "I've managed to divert her holiday plans towards Venice, so we are rid of her for this year."

"I shall myself be entitled presently to two trees," said M. de Charlus, "for I have more or less taken a little house between Saint-Martin-du-Chêne and Saint-Pierredes-Ifs."

"But that's quite close to here. I hope you'll come over often with Charlie Morel. You have only to come to an arrangement with our little group about the trains, you're just a stone's throw from Doncières," said Mme Verdurin, who hated people not coming by the same train and at the hours when she sent carriages to meet them. She knew how stiff the climb was to La Raspelière, even by the zigzag path behind Féterne which was half an hour longer; she was afraid that those of her guests who came on their own might not find carriages to take them, or even, having in reality stayed away, might plead the excuse that they had not found a carriage at Douville-Féterne, and had not felt strong enough to make so stiff a climb on foot. To this invitation M. de Charlus responded with a silent nod.

"I bet he's an awkward customer, he's got a very starchy look," the Doctor whispered to Ski, for, having remained very unassuming in spite of a surface-dressing of arrogance, he made no attempt to conceal the fact that Charlus was snubbing him. "He's obviously unaware that at all the fashionable spas, and even in Paris, in all the clinics, the physicians, who naturally regard me as the 'big boss,' make it a point of honour to introduce me to all the noblemen present, not that they need to be asked twice. It makes my stay at the spas quite enjoyable," he added lightly. "Indeed at Doncières the medical officer of the regiment, who is the doctor who attends the Colonel, invited me to lunch to meet him, saying that I was fully entitled to dine with the General. And that general is a Monsieur *de* something. I don't know whether his title-deeds are more or less ancient than those of this Baron."

"Don't you worry about him, his is a very humble coronet," replied Ski in an undertone, and he added something indistinct including a word of which I caught only the last syllable, *-ast*, being engaged in listening to what Brichot was saying to M. de Charlus.

"No, as to that, I'm sorry to have to tell you, you have probably one tree only, for if Saint-Martin-du-Chêne is obviously *Sanctus Martinus juxta quercum*, on the other hand the word *if* [yew] may be simply the root *ave*, *eve*, which means moist, as in Aveyron, Lodève, Yvette, and which you see survive in our kitchen sinks (*évier*s). It is the word *eau* which in Breton is represented by *ster*, Stermaria, Sterlaer, Sterbouest, Ster-en-Dreuchen."

I did not hear the rest, for whatever the pleasure I might feel on hearing again the name Stermaria, I could not help listening to Cottard, near whom I was seated, as he murmured to Ski: "Really! I didn't know that. So he's a gentleman who knows how to cope in life. He's one of the happy band, is he? And yet he hasn't got rings of fat round his eyes. I shall have to watch out for my feet under the table or he might take a fancy to me. But I'm not at all surprised. I'm used to seeing noblemen in the showers in their birthday suits, they're all more or less degenerates. I don't talk to them, because after all I'm in an official position and it might do me harm. But they know quite well who I am."

Saniette, who had been scared by Brichot's interpellation, was beginning to breathe again, like a man who is afraid of storms when he finds that the lightning has not been followed by any sound of thunder, when he heard M. Verdurin interrogate him, fastening upon him a stare which did not let go of the poor man until he had finished speaking, so as to disconcert him from the start and prevent him from recovering his composure. "But you never told us that you went to those *matinées* at the Odéon, Saniette?"

Trembling like a recruit before a bullying sergeant, Saniette replied, making his reply as exiguous as possible, so that it might have a better chance of escaping the blow: "Only once, to the *Chercheuse*."

"What's that he says?" shouted M. Verdurin, with an air of disgust and fury combined, knitting his brows as though he needed all his concentration to grasp something unintelligible. "It's impossible to understand what you say. What have you got in your mouth?" inquired M. Verdurin, growing more and more furious, and alluding to Saniette's speech defect.

"Poor Saniette, I won't have him made unhappy," said Mme Verdurin in a tone of false pity, so as to leave no one in doubt as to her husband's rudeness.

"I was at the Ch ... Che ..."

"Che, che, do try to speak distinctly," said M. Verdurin, "I can't understand a word you say."

Almost without exception, the faithful burst out laughing, looking like a group of cannibals in whom the sight of a wounded white man has aroused the thirst for blood. For the instinct of imitation and absence of courage govern society and the mob alike. And we all of us laugh at a person whom we see being made fun of, though it does not prevent us from venerating him ten years later in a circle where he is admired. It is in the same fashion that the populace banishes or acclaims its kings.

"Come, now, it's not his fault," said Mme Verdurin.

"It's not mine either, people ought not to dine out if they can't speak properly."

"I was at the *Chercheuse d'Esprit* by Favart."

"What! It's the *Chercheuse d'Esprit* that you call the *Chercheuse*? Why, that's marvellous! I might have gone on trying for a hundred years without guessing it," cried M. Verdurin, who nevertheless would have decided immediately that you were not literary, were not artistic, were not "one of us," if he had heard you quote the full title of certain works. For instance, one was expected to say the *Malade*, the *Bourgeois*, and anyone who added *imaginaire* or *gentilhomme* would have shown that he did not "belong," just as in a drawing-room a person proves that he is not in society by saying "M. de Montesquiou-Fezensac" instead of "M. de Montesquiou."

"But it isn't so extraordinary," said Saniette, breathless with emotion but smiling, although he was in no smiling mood.

Mme Verdurin could not contain herself: "Oh yes it is!" she exclaimed with a snigger. "You may be quite sure that nobody would ever have guessed that you meant the *Chercheuse d'Esprit*."

M. Verdurin went on in a gentler tone, addressing both Saniette and Brichot: "It's not a bad play, actually, the *Chercheuse d'Esprit*."

Uttered in a serious tone, this simple remark, in which no trace of malice was to be detected, did Saniette as much good and aroused in him as much gratitude as a compliment. He was unable to utter a single word and preserved a happy silence. Brichot was more loquacious. "It's true," he replied to M. Verdurin, "and if it could be passed off as the work of some Sarmatian or Scandinavian author, we might put it forward as a candidate for the vacant post of masterpiece. But, be it said without any disrespect to the shade of the gentle Favart, he had not the Ibsenian temperament." (Immediately he blushed to the roots of his hair, remembering the Norwegian philosopher, who looked unhappy because he was trying in vain to discover what vegetable the *buis* might be that Brichot had cited a little earlier in connexion with the name Bussière.) "However, now that Porel's satrapy is filled by a functionary who is a Tolstoyan of rigorous observance, it may come to pass that we shall witness *Anna Karenina* or *Resurrection* beneath the Odéonian architrave."

"I know the portrait of Favart to which you allude," said M. de Charlus. "I have seen a very fine print of it at the Comtesse Molé's."

This name made a great impression upon Mme Verdurin. "Oh! so you go to Mme de Molé's!" she exclaimed. She supposed that people said "the Comtesse Molé," "Madame Molé," simply as an abbreviation, as she heard people say "the Rohans" or in contempt, as she herself said, "Madame La Trémoille." She had no doubt that the Comtesse Molé, who knew the Queen of Greece and the Princesse de Caprarola, must have as much right as anybody to the particle, and for once in a way had decided to bestow it upon so brilliant a personage, and

one who had been extremely civil to herself. And so, to make it clear that she had spoken thus on purpose and did not grudge the Comtesse her “de,” she went on: “But I had no idea that you knew Madame de Molé!” as though it was doubly extraordinary, both that M. de Charlus should know the lady and that Mme Verdurin should not know that he knew her. Now society, or at least the people to whom M. de Charlus gave that name, forms a relatively homogeneous and closed whole. And whereas it is understandable that in the disparate vastness of the middle classes a barrister should say to somebody who knows one of his schoolfriends: “But how in the world do you come to know him?”, to be surprised at a Frenchman’s knowing the meaning of the word *temple* or *forest* would be hardly more extraordinary than to wonder at the accidents that might have brought together M. de Charlus and the Comtesse Molé. Moreover, even if such an acquaintance had not followed quite naturally from the laws that govern society, even if it had been fortuitous, how could there be anything strange in the fact that Mme Verdurin did not know of it, since she was meeting M. de Charlus for the first time, and his relations with Mme Molé were far from being the only thing she did not know about him, for in fact she knew nothing.

“Who was in this *Chercheuse d’Esprit*, my good Saniette?” asked M. Verdurin. Although he felt that the storm had passed, the old archivist hesitated before answering.

“There you go,” said Mme Verdurin, “you frighten him, you make fun of everything he says, and then you expect him to answer. Come along, tell us who was in it, and you shall have some galantine to take home,” said Mme Verdurin, making a cruel allusion to the penury into which Saniette had plunged himself by trying to rescue the family of a friend.

“I can remember only that it was Mme Samary who played the Zerbina,” said Saniette.

“The Zerbina? What in the world is that?” M. Verdurin shouted, as though the house were on fire.

“It’s one of the stock types in the old repertory, see *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, as who should say the Braggart, the Pedant.”

“Ah, the pedant, that’s you. The Zerbina! No, really the man’s cracked,” exclaimed M. Verdurin. (Mme Verdurin looked at her guests and laughed as though to apologise for Saniette.) “The Zerbina, he imagines that everybody will know at once what it means. You’re like M. de Longepierre, the stupidest man I know, who said to us quite familiarly the other day ‘the Banat.’ Nobody had any idea what he meant. Finally we were informed that it was a province of Serbia.”

To put an end to Saniette’s torture, which hurt me more than it hurt him, I asked Brichot if he knew what the word Balbec meant. “Balbec is probably a corruption of Dalbec,” he told me. “One would have to consult the charters of the Kings of England, suzerains of Normandy, for Balbec was a dependency of the barony of Dover, for which reason it was often styled Balbec d’Outre-Mer, Balbec-en-Terre. But the barony of Dover itself came under the bishopric of Bayeux, and, notwithstanding the rights that were temporarily enjoyed over the abbey by the Templars, from the time of Louis d’Harcourt, Patriarch of Jerusalem and Bishop of Bayeux, it was the bishops of that diocese who appointed to the benefice of Balbec. So it was explained to me by the incumbent of Douville, a bald, eloquent, fanciful man and a devotee of the table, who lives by the rule of Brillat-Savarin, and who expounded to me in somewhat sibylline terms a loose pedagogy, while he fed me upon some admirable fried potatoes.”

While Brichot smiled to show how witty it was to juxtapose such disparate matters and to employ an ironically lofty diction in treating of commonplace things, Saniette was trying to find a loophole for some witticism which would raise him from the abyss into which he had fallen. The witticism was what was known as a “more or less,” but it had changed its form, for there is an evolution in puns as in literary styles, an epidemic that disappears is replaced by another, and so forth. At one time the typical “more or less” was the “height of ...” But this was out of date, no one used it any more, except for Cottard who might still say, on occasion, in the middle of a game of piquet: “Do you know what is the height of absentmindedness? It’s to think that the Edict of [*l’édit de*] Nantes was an Englishwoman.” These “heights” had been replaced by nicknames. In reality it was still the old “more or less,” but, as the nickname was in fashion, people did not notice. Unfortunately for Saniette, when these “more or lesses” were not his own, and as a rule were unknown to the little nucleus, he produced them so timidly that, in spite of the laugh with which he followed them up to indicate their humorous nature, nobody saw the point. And if on the other hand the joke was his own, as he had generally hit upon it in conversation with one of the faithful, and the latter had repeated it, appropriating the authorship, the joke was in that case known, but not as being Saniette’s. And so when he slipped in one of these it was recognised, but, because he was its author, he was accused of plagiarism.

“Thus,” Brichot continued, “*bec*, in Norman, is a stream; there is the Abbey of Bec, Mobec, the stream from the marsh (*mor* or *mer* meant a marsh, as in Morville, or in Bricquemar, Alvimare, Cambremer), Bricquebec, the stream from the high ground, coming from *briga*, a fortified place, as in Bricqueville, Bricquebosc, le Bric, Briand, or from *brice*, bridge, which is the same as *Brücke* in German (Innsbruck), and as the English *bridge* which ends so many place-names (Cambridge, for instance). You have moreover in Normandy many other instances of *bec*: Caudebec, Bolbec, le Robec, le Bec-Hellouin, Becquerel. It’s the Norman form of the German *Bach*, Offenbach, Anspach; Varaguebec, from the old word *varaigne*, equivalent to *warren*, means protected woods or ponds. As for *dal*,” Brichot went on, “it is a form of *Thal*, a valley: Darnetal, Rosendal, and indeed, close to Louviers, Becdal. The river that has given its name to Balbec is, by the way, charming. Seen from a *falaise* (*Fels* in German, in fact not far from here, standing on a height, you have the picturesque town of Falaise), it runs close under the spires of the church, which is actually a long way from it, and seems to be reflecting them.”

"I can well believe it," said I, "it's an effect that Elstir is very fond of. I've seen several sketches of it in his studio."

"Elstir! You know Tiche?" cried Mme Verdurin. "But do you know that we used to be the closest friends. Thank heaven, I never see him now. No, but ask Cottard or Brichot, he used to have his place laid at my table, he came every day. Now, there's a man of whom you can say that it did him no good to leave our little nucleus. I shall show you presently some flowers he painted for me; you'll see the difference from the things he's doing now, which I don't care for at all, not at all! Why, I got him to do a portrait of Cottard, not to mention all the sketches he did of me."

"And he gave the Professor purple hair," said Mme Cottard, forgetting that at the time her husband had not been even a Fellow of the College. "Would you say that my husband had purple hair, Monsieur?"

"Never mind!" said Mme Verdurin, raising her chin with an air of contempt for Mme Cottard and of admiration for the man of whom she was speaking, "it was the work of a bold colourist, a fine painter. Whereas," she added, turning again to me, "I don't know whether you call it painting, all those outlandish great compositions, those hideous contraptions he exhibits now that he has given up coming to me. I call it daubing, it's all so hackneyed, and besides, it lacks relief and personality. There are bits of everybody in it."

"He has revived the grace of the eighteenth century, but in a modern form," Saniette burst out, fortified and emboldened by my friendliness, "but I prefer Helleu."

"There's not the slightest connexion with Helleu," said Mme Verdurin.

"Yes, yes, it's hotted-up eighteenth century. He's a steam Watteau," and he began to laugh.<sup>14</sup>

"Old, old as the hills. I've had that served up to me for years," said M. Verdurin, to whom indeed Ski had once repeated the remark, but as his own invention. "It's unfortunate that when once in a way you say something quite amusing and make it intelligible, it isn't your own."

"I'm sorry about it," Mme Verdurin went on, "because he was really gifted, he has wasted a very remarkable painterly talent. Ah, if only he'd stayed with us! Why, he would have become the greatest landscape painter of our day. And it was a woman who dragged him down so low! Not that that surprises me, for he was an attractive enough man, but common. At bottom, he was a mediocrity. I may tell you that I felt it at once. Really, he never interested me. I was quite fond of him, that was all. For one thing, he was so dirty! Tell me now, do *you* like people who never wash?"

"What is this prettily coloured thing that we're eating?" asked Ski.

"It's called strawberry mousse," said Mme Verdurin.

"But it's ex-qui-site. You ought to open bottles of Château-Margaux, Château-Lafite, port wine."

"I can't tell you how he amuses me, he never drinks anything but water," said Mme Verdurin, seeking to cloak with her delight at this flight of fancy her alarm at the thought of such extravagance.

"But not to drink," Ski went on. "You shall fill all our glasses, and they will bring in marvellous peaches, huge nectarines; there, against the sunset, it will be as luscious as a beautiful Veronese."

"It would cost almost as much," M. Verdurin murmured.

"But take away those cheeses with their hideous colour," said Ski, trying to snatch the plate from in front of his host, who defended his gruyère with all his might.

"You can see why I don't miss Elstir," Mme Verdurin said to me, "this one is far more gifted. Elstir is simply hard work, the man who can't tear himself away from his painting when he feels like it. He's the good pupil, the exam fiend. Ski, now, only follows his own fancy. You'll see him light a cigarette in the middle of dinner."

"By the way, I can't think why you wouldn't invite his wife," said Cottard, "he would be with us still."

"Will you mind what you're saying, please. I don't open my doors to trollops, Monsieur le Professeur," said Mme Verdurin, who had, on the contrary, done everything in her power to make Elstir return, even with his wife. But before they were married she had tried to separate them, had told Elstir that the woman he loved was stupid, dirty, immoral, a thief. For once in a way she had failed to effect a breach. It was with the Verdurin salon that Elstir had broken; and he was glad of it, as converts bless the illness or misfortune that has caused them to withdraw from the world and has shown them the way of salvation.

"He really is magnificent, the Professor," she said. "Why not declare outright that I keep a disorderly house. Anyone would think you didn't know what Madame Elstir was. I'd sooner have the lowest streetwalker at my table! Oh no, I'm not stooping to that! But in any case it would have been stupid of me to overlook the wife when the husband no longer interests me—he's out of date, he can't even draw."

"It's extraordinary in a man of his intelligence," said Cottard.

"Oh, no!" replied Mme Verdurin, "even at the time when he had talent—for he did have talent, the wretch, and to spare—what was tiresome about him was that he hadn't a spark of intelligence."

In order to form this opinion, Mme Verdurin had not waited for their quarrel, or until she had ceased to care for his painting. The fact was that, even at the time when he formed part of the little group, it sometimes happened that Elstir would spend whole days in the company of some woman whom, rightly or wrongly, Mme Verdurin considered a goose, and this, in her opinion, was not the conduct of an intelligent man. "No," she observed judiciously, "I consider that his wife and he are made for one another. Heaven knows, there isn't a more boring creature on the face of the earth, and I should go mad if I had to spend a couple of hours with her. But people say that he finds her very intelligent. There's no use denying it, our Tiche was *extremely stupid*. I've seen him bowled over by women you can't conceive, amiable idiots we'd never have allowed into our little clan. Well, he used to write to them, and argue with them, he, Elstir! That doesn't prevent his having charming qualities, oh, charming, and deliciously absurd, naturally." For Mme Verdurin was convinced that men who are truly remarkable are capable of all sorts of follies. A false idea in which there is nevertheless a



grain of truth. Certainly, people's "follies" are insupportable. But a want of balance which we discover only in course of time is the consequence of the entering into a human brain of refinements for which it is not normally adapted. So that the oddities of charming people exasperate us, but there are few if any charming people who are not, at the same time, odd. "There, I shall be able to show you his flowers now," she said to me, seeing that her husband was making signals to her to rise. And she took M. de Cambremer's arm again. M. Verdurin wanted to apologise for this to M. de Charlus, as soon as he had got rid of Mme de Cambremer, and to give him his reasons, chiefly for the pleasure of discussing these social distinctions with a man of title, momentarily the inferior of those who assigned to him the place to which they considered him entitled. But first of all he was anxious to make it clear to M. de Charlus that intellectually he esteemed him too highly to suppose that he could pay any attention to these trivialities.

"Forgive my mentioning these trifles," he began, "for I can well imagine how little importance you attach to them. Middle-class minds take them seriously, but the others, the artists, the people who are really *of our sort*, don't give a rap for them. Now, from the first words we exchanged, I realised that you were *one of us!*" M. de Charlus, who attached a very different meaning to this expression, gave a start. After the Doctor's oglings, his host's insulting frankness took his breath away. "Don't protest, my dear sir, you are *one of us*, it's as clear as daylight," M. Verdurin went on. "Mind you, I don't know whether you practise any of the arts, but that's not necessary. Nor is it always sufficient. Dechambre, who has just died, played exquisitely, with the most vigorous execution, but he wasn't *one of us*, you felt at once that he wasn't. Brichot isn't *one of us*. Morel is, my wife is, I can feel that you are ..."

"What were you going to say to me?" interrupted M. de Charlus, who was beginning to feel reassured as to M. Verdurin's meaning, but preferred that he should not utter these equivocal remarks quite so loud.

"Only that we put you on the left," replied M. Verdurin.

M. de Charlus, with a tolerant, genial, insolent smile, replied: "Why, that's not of the slightest importance, *here!*" And he gave a little laugh that was all his own—a laugh that came down to him probably from some Bavarian or Lorraine grandmother, who herself had inherited it, in identical form, from an ancestress, so that it had tinkled now, unchanged, for a good many centuries in little old-fashioned European courts, and one could appreciate its precious quality, like that of certain old musical instruments that have become very rare. There are times when, to paint a complete portrait of someone, we should have to add a phonetic imitation to our verbal description, and our portrait of the figure that M. de Charlus presented is liable to remain incomplete in the absence of that little laugh, so delicate, so light, just as certain works of Bach are never accurately rendered because our orchestras lack those small, high trumpets, with a sound so entirely their own, for which the composer wrote this or that part.

"But," explained M. Verdurin, hurt, "we did it on purpose. I attach no importance whatever to titles of nobility," he went on, with that contemptuous smile which I have seen so many people I have known, unlike my grandmother and my mother, assume when they speak of something they do not possess to those who will thereby, they imagine, be prevented from using it to show their superiority over them. "But you see, since we happened to have M. de Cambremer here, and he's a marquis, while you're only a baron ..."

"Pardon me," M. de Charlus haughtily replied to the astonished Verdurin, "I am also Duke of Brabant, Squire of Montargis, Prince of Oléron, of Carency, of Viareggio and of the Dunes. However, it's not of the slightest importance. Please don't distress yourself," he concluded, resuming his delicate smile which blossomed at these final words: "I could see at a glance that you were out of your depth."

Mme Verdurin came across to me to show me Elstir's flowers. If the act of going out to dinner, to which I had grown so indifferent, by taking the form, which entirely revived it, of a journey along the coast followed by an ascent in a carriage to a point six hundred feet above the sea, had produced in me a sort of intoxication, this feeling had not been dispelled at La Raspelière. "Just look at this, now," said the Mistress, showing me some huge and splendid roses by Elstir, whose unctuous scarlet and frothy whiteness stood out, however, with almost too creamy a relief from the flower-stand on which they were arranged. "Do you suppose he would still have the touch to achieve that? Don't you call that striking? And what marvellous texture! One longs to finger it. I can't tell you what fun it was to watch him painting them. One could feel that he was interested in trying to get just that effect." And the Mistress's gaze rested musingly on this present from the artist which epitomised not merely his great talent but their long friendship which survived only in these mementoes of it that he had bequeathed to her; behind the flowers that long ago he had picked for her, she seemed to see the shapely hand that had painted them, in the course of a morning, in their freshness, so that, they on the table, it leaning against the back of a chair in the dining-room, had been able to meet face to face at the Mistress's lunch-party, the still-living roses and their almost lifelike portrait. "Almost" only, for Elstir was unable to look at a flower without first transplanting it to that inner garden in which we are obliged always to remain. He had shown in this water-colour the appearance of the roses which he had seen, and which, but for him, no one would ever have known; so that one might say that they were a new variety with which this painter, like a skilful horticulturist, had enriched the rose family. "From the day he left the little nucleus, he was finished. It seems my dinners made him waste his time, that I hindered the development of his *genius*," she said in a tone of irony. "As if the society of a woman like myself could fail to be beneficial to an artist!" she exclaimed with a burst of pride.

Close beside us, M. de Cambremer, who was already seated, seeing that M. de Charlus was standing, made as though to rise and offer him his chair. This offer may have arisen, in the Marquis's mind, from nothing more than a vague wish to be polite. M. de Charlus preferred to attach to it the sense of a duty which the simple squire knew that he owed to a prince, and felt that he could not establish his right to this precedence better

than by declining it. And so he exclaimed: "Good gracious me! Please! The idea!" The astutely vehement tone of this protest had in itself something typically "Guermentes" which became even more evident in the imperious, supererogatory and familiar gesture with which he brought both his hands down, as though to force him to remain seated, upon the shoulders of M. de Cambremer who had not risen: "Come, come, my dear fellow," the Baron insisted, "that would be the last straw! There's really no need! In these days we keep that for Princes of the Blood."

I made no more impression on the Cambremers than on Mme Verdurin by my enthusiasm for their house. For the beauties they pointed out to me left me cold, whilst I was carried away by confused reminiscences; at times I even confessed to them my disappointment at not finding something correspond to what its name had made me imagine. I enraged Mme de Cambremer by telling her that I had supposed the place to be more rustic. On the other hand I broke off in an ecstasy to sniff the fragrance of a breeze that crept in through the chink of the door. "I see you like draughts," they said to me. My praise of a piece of green lustre plugging a broken pane met with no greater success: "How frightful!" exclaimed the Marquise. The climax came when I said: "My greatest joy was when I arrived. When I heard my footsteps echoing in the gallery, I felt I had walked into some village *mairie*, with a map of the district on the wall." This time, Mme de Cambremer resolutely turned her back on me.

"You didn't find the arrangement too bad?" her husband asked her with the same compassionate anxiety with which he would have inquired how his wife had stood some painful ceremony. "They have some fine things."

But since malice, when the hard and fast rules of a sure taste do not confine it within reasonable limits, finds fault with everything in the persons or in the houses of the people who have supplanted you, "Yes, but they are not in the right places," replied Mme de Cambremer. "Besides, are they really as fine as all that?"

"You noticed," said M. de Cambremer, with a melancholy that was tempered with a note of firmness, "there are some Jouy hangings that are worn away, some quite threadbare things in this drawing-room!"

"And that piece of stuff with its huge roses, like a peasant woman's quilt," said Mme de Cambremer, whose entirely spurious culture was confined exclusively to idealist philosophy, Impressionist painting and Debussy's music. And, so as not to criticise merely in the name of luxury but in that of taste: "And they've put up draught-curtains! Such bad form! But what do you expect? These people simply don't know, where could they possibly have learned? They must be retired tradespeople. It's really not bad for them."

"I thought the chandeliers good," said the Marquis, though it was not evident why he should make an exception of the chandeliers, in the same way as, inevitably, whenever anyone spoke of a church, whether it was the Cathedral of Chartres, or of Rheims, or of Amiens, or the church at Balbec, what he would always make a point of mentioning as admirable would be: "the organ-case, the pulpit and the misericords."

"As for the garden, don't speak about it," said Mme de Cambremer. "It's sheer butchery. Those paths running all lopsided."

I took the opportunity while Mme Verdurin was serving coffee to go and glance over the letter which M. de Cambremer had brought me and in which his mother invited me to dinner. With that faint trace of ink, the handwriting revealed an individuality which in the future I should be able to recognise among a thousand, without any more need to have recourse to the hypothesis of special pens than to suppose that rare and mysteriously blended colours are necessary to enable a painter to express his original vision. Indeed a paralytic, stricken with agraphia after a stroke and reduced to looking at the script as at a drawing without being able to read it, would have gathered that the dowager Mme de Cambremer belonged to an old family in which the zealous cultivation of literature and the arts had brought a breath of fresh air to its aristocratic traditions. He would have guessed also the period in which the Marquise had learned simultaneously to write and to play Chopin's music. It was the time when well-bred people observed the rule of affability and what was called the rule of the three adjectives. Mme de Cambremer combined both rules. One laudatory adjective was not enough for her, she followed it (after a little dash) with a second, then (after another dash) with a third. But, what was peculiar to her was that, in defiance of the literary and social aim which she set herself, the sequence of the three epithets assumed in Mme de Cambremer's letters the aspect not of a progression but of a diminuendo. Mme de Cambremer told me, in this first letter, that she had seen Saint-Loup and had appreciated more than ever his "unique—rare—real" qualities, that he was coming to them again with one of his friends (the one who was in love with her daughter-in-law), and that if I cared to come, with or without them, to dine at Féterne she would be "delighted—happy—pleased." Perhaps it was because her desire to be amiable outran the fertility of her imagination and the riches of her vocabulary that the lady, while determined to utter three exclamations, was incapable of making the second and third anything more than feeble echoes of the first. Had there only been a fourth adjective, nothing would have remained of the initial amiability. Finally, with a certain refined simplicity which cannot have failed to produce a considerable impression upon her family and indeed her circle of acquaintance, Mme de Cambremer had acquired the habit of substituting for the word "sincere" (which might in time begin to ring false) the word "true." And to show that it was indeed by sincerity that she was impelled, she broke the conventional rule that would have placed the adjective "true" before its noun, and planted it boldly after. Her letters ended with: "*Croyez à mon amitié vraie*"; "*Croyez à ma sympathie vraie*." Unfortunately, this had become so stereotyped a formula that the affectation of frankness was more suggestive of a polite fiction than the time-honoured formulas to whose meaning one no longer gives a thought.

I was, however, hindered from reading her letter by the confused hubbub of conversation over which rang out the louder accents of M. de Charlus, who, still on the same topic, was saying to M. de Cambremer: "You

reminded me, when you offered me your chair, of a gentleman from whom I received a letter this morning addressed 'To His Highness the Baron de Charlus,' and beginning: 'Monseigneur.' <sup>15</sup>

"To be sure, your correspondent was exaggerating a bit," replied M. de Cambremer, giving way to a discreet show of mirth.

M. de Charlus had provoked this, but he did not partake in it. "Well, if it comes to that, my dear fellow," he said, "I may tell you that, heraldically speaking, he was entirely in the right. I'm not making a personal issue of it, you understand. I'm speaking of it as though it were someone else. But one has to face the facts, history is history, there's nothing we can do about it and it's not for us to rewrite it. I need not cite the case of the Emperor William, who at Kiel invariably addressed me as 'Monseigneur.' I have heard it said that he gave the same title to all the dukes of France, which is improper, but is perhaps simply a delicate attention aimed over our heads at France herself."

"More delicate, perhaps, than sincere," said M. de Cambremer.

"Ah! there I must differ from you. Mind you, speaking personally, a gentleman of the lowest rank such as that Hohenzollern, a Protestant to boot, and one who has usurped the throne of my cousin the King of Hanover, can be no favourite of mine," added M. de Charlus, with whom the annexation of Hanover seemed to rankle more than that of Alsace-Lorraine. "But I believe the penchant that the Emperor feels for us to be profoundly sincere. Fools will tell you that he is a stage emperor. He is on the contrary marvellously intelligent; it's true that he knows nothing about painting, and has forced Herr Tschudi to withdraw the Elstirs from the public galleries. But Louis XIV did not appreciate the Dutch masters, he had the same fondness for pomp and circumstance, and yet he was, when all is said, a great monarch. Besides, William II has armed his country from the military and naval point of view in a way that Louis XIV failed to do, and I hope that his reign will never know the reverses that darkened the closing days of him who is tritely styled the Sun King. The Republic committed a grave error, to my mind, in spurning the overtures of the Hohenzollern, or responding to them only in dribblets. He is very well aware of it himself and says, with that gift of expression that is his: 'What I want is a handclasp, not a raised hat.' As a man, he is vile; he abandoned, betrayed, repudiated his best friends, in circumstances in which his silence was as deplorable as theirs was noble," continued M. de Charlus, who was irresistibly drawn by his own tendencies to the Eulenburg affair, <sup>16</sup> and remembered what one of the most highly placed of the accused had said to him: "How the Emperor must have relied upon our delicacy to have dared to allow such a trial! But he was not mistaken in trusting to our discretion. We would have gone to the scaffold with our lips sealed." "All that, however, has nothing to do with what I was trying to explain, which is that, in Germany, mediatised princes like ourselves are *Durchlaucht*, and in France our rank of Highness was publicly recognised. Saint-Simon claims that we acquired it improperly, in which he is entirely mistaken. The reason that he gives, namely that Louis XIV forbade us to style him the Most Christian King and ordered us to call him simply the King, proves merely that we held our title from him, and not that we did not have the rank of prince. Otherwise, it would have had to be withheld from the Duc de Lorraine and God knows how many others. Besides, several of our titles come from the House of Lorraine through Thérèse d'Espinoy, my great-grandmother, who was the daughter of the Squire de Commercy."

Observing that Morel was listening, M. de Charlus proceeded to develop the reasons for his claim. "I have pointed out to my brother that it is not in the third part of the Gotha, but in the second, not to say the first, that the account of our family ought to be included," he said, without stopping to think that Morel did not know what the "Gotha" was. "But that is his affair, he is the head of our house, and so long as he raises no objection and allows the matter to pass, I can only shut my eyes."

"I found M. Brichot most interesting," I said to Mme Verdurin as she joined me, and I slipped Mme de Cambremer's letter into my pocket.

"He has a cultured mind and is an excellent man," she replied coldly. "Of course what he lacks is originality and taste, and he has a fearsome memory. They used to say of the 'forebears' of the people we have here this evening, the émigrés, that they had forgotten nothing. But they had at least the excuse," she said, borrowing one of Swann's epigrams, "that they had learned nothing. Whereas Brichot knows everything, and hurls chunks of dictionary at our heads during dinner. I'm sure there's nothing you don't know now about the names of all the towns and villages."

While Mme Verdurin was speaking, it occurred to me that I had intended to ask her something, but I could not remember what it was.

"I'm sure you are talking about Brichot," said Ski. "Eh, Chantepie, and Freycinet, he didn't spare you anything. I was watching you, little Mistress."

"Oh yes, I saw you, I nearly burst."

I could not say today what Mme Verdurin was wearing that evening. Perhaps even at the time I was no more able to, for I do not have an observant mind. But feeling that her dress was not unambitious, I said to her something polite and even admiring. She was like almost all women, who imagine that a compliment that is paid to them is a literal statement of the truth, a judgment impartially, irresistibly pronounced as though it referred to a work of art that has no connexion with a person. And so it was with an earnestness which made me blush for my own hypocrisy that she replied with the proud and artless question that is habitual in such circumstances: "Do you like it?"

"You're talking about Chantepie, I'm sure," said M. Verdurin as he came towards us.

I had been alone, as I thought of my strip of green lustre and of a scent of wood, in failing to notice that, while he enumerated these etymological derivations, Brichot had been provoking derision. And since the

impressions that for me gave things their value were of the sort which other people either do not feel or unthinkingly reject as insignificant, and which consequently (had I managed to communicate them) would have been misunderstood or else scorned, they were entirely useless to me and had the additional drawback of making me appear stupid in the eyes of Mme Verdurin who saw that I had "swallowed" Brichot, as I had already appeared stupid to Mme de Guermantes because I had enjoyed myself at Mme d'Arpajon's. With Brichot, however, there was another reason. I was not one of the little clan. And in every clan, whether it be social, political, or literary, one contracts a perverse facility for discovering in a conversation, in an official speech, in a story, in a sonnet, everything that the plain reader would never have dreamed of finding there. How often have I found myself, after reading with a certain excitement a tale skilfully told by a fluent and slightly old-fashioned Academician, on the point of saying to Bloch or to Mme de Guermantes: "How charming this is!" when before I had opened my mouth they exclaimed, each in a different language: "If you want to be really amused, read a story by So-and-so. Human stupidity has never sunk to greater depths." Bloch's scorn derived mainly from the fact that certain effects of style, pleasing enough in themselves, were slightly faded; that of Mme de Guermantes from the notion that the story seemed to prove the direct opposite of what the author meant, for reasons of fact which she had the ingenuity to deduce but which would never have occurred to me. I was no less surprised to discover the irony that underlay the Verdurins' apparent friendliness for Brichot than to hear some days later, at Féterne, the Cambremers say to me, on hearing my enthusiastic praise of La Raspelière: "You can't be sincere, after what they've done to it." It is true that they admitted that the china was good. Like the shocking draught-curtains, it had escaped my notice. "Anyhow, when you go back to Balbec, you'll now know what Balbec means," said M. Verdurin sarcastically. It was precisely the things Brichot had taught me that interested me. As for what was called his wit, it was exactly the same as had at one time been so highly appreciated by the little clan. He talked with the same irritating fluency, but his words no longer struck a chord, having to overcome a hostile silence or disagreeable echoes; what had changed was not what he said but the acoustics of the room and the attitude of his audience. "Take care," Mme Verdurin murmured, pointing to Brichot. The latter, whose hearing remained keener than his vision, darted at the Mistress a short-sighted and philosophical glance which he hastily withdrew. If his outward eyes had deteriorated, those of his mind had on the contrary begun to take a larger view of things. He saw how little was to be expected of human affection, and had resigned himself to the fact. Undoubtedly the discovery pained him. It may happen that even the man who on one evening only, in a circle where he is usually greeted with pleasure, realises that the others have found him too frivolous or too pedantic or too clumsy or too cavalier, or whatever it may be, returns home miserable. Often it is a difference of opinion, or of approach, that has made him appear to other people absurd or old-fashioned. Often he is perfectly well aware that those others are inferior to himself. He could easily dissect the sophistries with which he has been tacitly condemned, and is tempted to pay a call, to write a letter: on second thoughts, he does nothing, and awaits the invitation for the following week. Sometimes, too, these falls from grace, instead of ending with the evening, last for months. Arising from the instability of social judgments, they increase that instability further. For the man who knows that Mme X despises him, feeling that he is respected at Mme Y's, pronounces her far superior to the other and migrates to her salon. This, however, is not the proper place to describe those men, superior to the life of society but lacking the capacity to realise themselves outside it, glad to be invited, embittered at being underrated, discovering annually the defects of the hostess to whom they have been offering incense and the genius of the other whom they have never properly appreciated, ready to return to the old love when they have experienced the drawbacks to be found equally in the new, and when they have begun to forget those of the old. We may judge by such temporary falls from grace of the chagrin that Brichot felt at this one, which he knew to be final. He was not unaware that Mme Verdurin sometimes laughed at him publicly, even at his infirmities, and knowing how little was to be expected of human affection, he continued nevertheless to regard the Mistress as his best friend. But, from the blush that crept over the scholar's face, Mme Verdurin realised that he had heard her, and made up her mind to be kind to him for the rest of the evening. I could not help remarking to her that she had not been very kind to Saniette. "What! Not kind to him! Why, he adores us, you've no idea what we are to him. My husband is sometimes a little irritated by his stupidity, and you must admit with some reason, but when that happens why doesn't he hit back instead of cringing like a whipped dog? It's so unmanly. I can't bear it. That doesn't mean that I don't always try to calm my husband, because if he went too far, all that would happen would be that Saniette would stay away; and I don't want that because I may tell you that he hasn't a penny in the world, he needs his dinners. But after all, if he takes offence, he can stay away, it's nothing to do with me. When you rely on other people you should try not to be such an idiot."

"The Duchy of Aumale was in our family for years before passing to the House of France," M. de Charlus was explaining to M. de Cambremer in front of a flabber-gasted Morel, for whose benefit the whole dissertation was intended, if it was not actually addressed to him. "We took precedence over all foreign princes; I could give you a hundred examples. The Princesse de Croy having attempted, at the burial of Monsieur, to fall on her knees after my great-great-grandmother, the latter reminded her sharply that she had no right to the hassock, made the officer on duty remove it, and reported the matter to the King, who ordered Mme de Croy to call upon Mme de Guermantes and offer her apologies. The Duc de Bourgogne having come to us with ushers with raised batons, we obtained the King's authority to have them lowered. I know it is not good form to speak of the merits of one's own family. But it is well known that our people were always to the fore in the hour of danger. Our battle-cry, after we abandoned that of the Dukes of Brabant, was *Passavant!* So that it is not unjust on the whole that this right to be everywhere the first, which we had established for so

many centuries in war, should afterwards have been granted to us at Court. And, to be sure, it was always acknowledged there. I may give you a further instance, that of the Princess of Baden. As she had so far forgotten herself as to attempt to challenge the precedence of that same Duchesse de Guermantes of whom I was speaking just now, and had attempted to go in first to the King's presence by taking advantage of a momentary hesitation which my ancestress may perhaps have shown (although there was no reason for it), the King called out: 'Come in, cousin, come in; Mme de Baden knows very well what her duty is to you.' And it was as Duchesse de Guermantes that she held this rank, albeit she was of no mean family herself, since she was through her mother niece to the Queen of Poland, the Queen of Hungary, the Elector Palatine, the Prince of Savoy-Carignano and the Elector of Hanover, afterwards King of England."

"*Maecenas atavis edite regibus!*" said Brichot, addressing M. de Charlus, who acknowledged the compliment with a slight nod.

"What did you say?" Mme Verdurin asked Brichot, anxious to make amends to him for her earlier words.

"I was referring, Heaven forgive me, to a dandy who was the flower of the nobility" (Mme Verdurin winced) "about the time of Augustus" (Mme Verdurin, reassured by the remoteness in time of this nobility, assumed a more serene expression), "to a friend of Virgil and Horace who carried their sycophancy to the extent of proclaiming to his face his more than aristocratic, his royal descent. In a word, I was referring to Maecenas, a bookworm who was the friend of Horace, Virgil, Augustus. I am sure that M. de Charlus knows all about Maecenas."

With a gracious sidelong glance at Mme Verdurin, because he had heard her make a rendezvous with Morel for the day after next and was afraid that she might not invite him also, "I should say," said M. de Charlus, "that Maecenas was more or less the Verdurin of antiquity."

Mme Verdurin could not altogether suppress a smile of self-satisfaction. She went over to Morel. "He's nice, your father's friend," she said to him. "One can see that he's an educated man, and well bred. He will get on well in our little nucleus. Where does he live in Paris?"

Morel preserved a haughty silence and merely proposed a game of cards. Mme Verdurin demanded a little violin music first. To the general astonishment, M. de Charlus, who never spoke of his own considerable gifts, accompanied, in the purest style, the closing passage (uneasy, tormented, Schumannesque, but, for all that, earlier than Franck's sonata) of the sonata for piano and violin by Fauré. I felt that he would provide Morel, marvellously endowed as to tone and virtuosity, with just those qualities that he lacked, culture and style. But I thought with curiosity of this combination in a single person of a physical blemish and a spiritual gift. M. de Charlus was not very different from his brother, the Duc de Guermantes. Indeed, a moment ago (though this was rare), he had spoken as bad a French as his brother. He having reproached me (doubtless in order that I might speak in glowing terms of Morel to Mme Verdurin) with never coming to see him, and I having pleaded discretion, he had replied: "But, since it is I who ask, there's no one but me who could possibly take huff." This might have been said by the Duc de Guermantes. M. de Charlus was only a Guermantes when all was said. But it had sufficed that nature should have upset the balance of his nervous system enough to make him prefer, to the woman that his brother the Duke would have chosen, one of Virgil's shepherds or Plato's disciples, and at once qualities unknown to the Duc de Guermantes and often combined with this lack of equilibrium had made M. de Charlus an exquisite pianist, an amateur painter who was not devoid of taste, and an eloquent talker. Who would ever have detected that the rapid, nervous, charming style with which M. de Charlus played the Schumannesque passage of Fauré's sonata had its equivalent—one dare not say its cause—in elements entirely physical, in the Baron's nervous weaknesses? We shall explain later on what we mean by nervous weaknesses, and why it is that a Greek of the time of Socrates, a Roman of the time of Augustus, might be what we know them to have been and yet remain absolutely normal, not men-women such as we see around us today. Just as he had real artistic aptitudes which had never come to fruition, so M. de Charlus, far more than the Duke, had loved their mother and loved his own wife, and indeed, years afterwards, if anyone spoke of them to him, would shed tears, but superficial tears, like the perspiration of an over-stout man, whose forehead will glisten with sweat at the slightest exertion. With this difference, that to the latter one says: "How hot you are," whereas one pretends not to notice other people's tears. One, that is to say, society; for simple people are as distressed by the sight of tears as if a sob were more serious than a haemorrhage. Thanks to the habit of lying, his sorrow after the death of his wife did not debar M. de Charlus from a life which was not in conformity with it. Indeed later on, he was ignominious enough to let it be known that, during the funeral ceremony, he had found an opportunity of asking the acolyte for his name and address. And it may have been true.

When the piece came to an end, I ventured to ask for some Franck, which appeared to cause Mme de Cambremer such acute pain that I did not insist. "You can't admire that sort of thing," she said to me. Instead she asked for Debussy's *Fêtes*, which made her exclaim: "Ah! how sublime!" from the first note. But Morel discovered that he could remember only the opening bars, and in a spirit of mischief, without any intention to deceive, began a March by Meyerbeer. Unfortunately, as he left little interval and made no announcement, everybody supposed that he was still playing Debussy, and continued to exclaim "Sublime!" Morel, by revealing that the composer was that not of *Pelléas* but of *Robert le Diable*, created a certain chill. Mme de Cambremer had scarcely time to feel it for herself, for she had just discovered a volume of Scarlatti and had flung herself upon it with an hysterical shriek. "Oh! play this, look, this piece, it's divine," she cried. And yet, of this composer long despised but recently promoted to the highest honours, what she had selected in her feverish impatience was one of those infernal pieces which have so often kept us from sleeping, while a

merciless pupil repeats them ad infinitum on the next floor. But Morel had had enough music, and as he insisted upon cards, M. de Charlus, to be able to join in, proposed a game of whist.

"He was telling the Boss just now that he's a prince," said Ski to Mme Verdurin, "but it's not true, they're quite a humble family of architects."

"I want to know what it was you were saying about Maecenas. It interests me, don't you know!" Mme Verdurin repeated to Brichot, with an affability that carried him off his feet. And so, in order to shine in the Mistress's eyes, and possibly in mine: "Why, to tell you the truth, Madame, Maecenas interests me chiefly because he is the earliest apostle of note of that oriental god who numbers more followers in France today than Brahma, than Christ himself, the all-powerful god, Dun Gifa Hoot." Mme Verdurin was no longer content, on these occasions, with burying her head in her hands. She would descend with the suddenness of the insects called ephemerids upon Princess Sherbatoff; were the latter within reach the Mistress would cling to her shoulder, dig her nails into it, and hide her face against it for a few moments like a child playing hide and seek. Concealed by this protecting screen, she was understood to be laughing until she cried, but could as well have been thinking of nothing at all as the people who, while saying a longish prayer, take the wise precaution of burying their faces in their hands. Mme Verdurin imitated them when she listened to Beethoven quartets, in order at the same time to show that she regarded them as a prayer and not to let it be seen that she was asleep. "I speak quite seriously, Madame," said Brichot. "Too numerous, I consider, today are the persons who spend their time gazing at their navels as though they were the hub of the universe. As a matter of doctrine, I have no objection to offer to any Nirvana which will dissolve us in the great Whole (which, like Munich and Oxford, is considerably nearer to Paris than Asnières or Bois-Colombes), but it is unworthy either of a true Frenchman, or of a true European even, when the Japanese are possibly at the gates of our Byzantium, that socialised anti-militarists should be gravely discussing the cardinal virtues of free verse." Mme Verdurin felt that she might dispense with the Princess's mangled shoulder, and allowed her face to become once more visible, not without pretending to wipe her eyes and gasping two or three times for breath. But Brichot was determined that I should have my share in the entertainment, and having learned, from those oral examinations which he conducted like nobody else, that the best way to flatter the young is to lecture them, to make them feel important, to make them regard you as a reactionary: "I have no wish to blaspheme against the Gods of Youth," he said, with that furtive glance at myself which an orator turns upon a member of his audience when he mentions him by name, "I have no wish to be damned as a heretic and renegade in the Mallarméan chapel in which our new friend, like all the young men of his age, must have served the esoteric mass, at least as an acolyte, and have shown himself deliquescent or Rosicrucian. But really, we have seen more than enough of these intellectuals worshipping art with a capital A, who, when they can no longer intoxicate themselves upon Zola, inject themselves with Verlaine. Having become etheromaniacs out of Baudelairean devotion, they would no longer be capable of the virile effort which the country may one day or another demand of them, anaesthetised as they are by the great literary neurosis in the heated, enervating atmosphere, heavy with unwholesome vapours, of a symbolism of the opium den."

Incapable of feigning the slightest admiration for Brichot's inept and motley tirade, I turned to Ski and assured him that he was entirely mistaken as to the family to which M. de Charlus belonged; he replied that he was certain of his facts, and added that I myself had said that his real name was Gandin, Le Gandin. "I told you," was my answer, "that Mme de Cambremer was the sister of an engineer called M. Legrandin. I never said a word to you about M. de Charlus. There is about as much connexion between him and Mme de Cambremer as between the Great Condé and Racine."

"Ah! I thought there was," said Ski lightly, with no more apology for his mistake than he had made a few hours earlier for the mistake that had nearly made his party miss the train.

"Do you intend to remain long on this coast?" Mme Verdurin asked M. de Charlus, in whom she foresaw an addition to the faithful and trembled lest he should be returning too soon to Paris.

"Goodness me, one never knows," replied M. de Charlus in a nasal drawl. "I should like to stay until the end of September."

"You are quite right," said Mme Verdurin; "that's when we get splendid storms at sea."

"To tell you the truth, that is not what would influence me. I have for some time past unduly neglected the Archangel Michael, my patron saint, and I should like to make amends to him by staying for his feast, on the 29th of September, at the Abbey on the Mount."

"You take an interest in all that sort of thing?" asked Mme Verdurin, who might perhaps have succeeded in hushing the voice of her outraged anti-clericalism had she not been afraid that so long an expedition might make the violinist and the Baron "defect" for forty-eight hours.

"You are perhaps afflicted with intermittent deafness," M. de Charlus replied insolently. "I have told you that Saint Michael is one of my glorious patrons." Then, smiling with a benevolent ecstasy, his eyes gazing into the distance, his voice reinforced by an exaltation which seemed now to be not merely aesthetic but religious: "It is so beautiful at the Offertory when Michael stands erect by the altar, in a white robe, swinging a golden censer heaped so high with perfumes that the fragrance of them mounts up to God."

"We might go there in a party," suggested Mme Verdurin, notwithstanding her horror of the clergy.

"At that moment, when the Offertory begins," went on M. de Charlus who, for other reasons but in the same manner as good speakers in Parliament, never replied to an interruption and would pretend not to have heard it, "it would be wonderful to see our young friend Palestrinising and even performing an aria by Bach. The worthy Abbot, too, would be wild with joy, and it is the greatest homage, at least the greatest public homage,

that I can pay to my patron saint. What an edification for the faithful! We must mention it presently to the young Angelico of music, himself a warrior like Saint Michael."

Saniette, summoned to make a fourth, declared that he did not know how to play whist. And Cottard, seeing that there was not much time left before the train, embarked at once on a game of écarté with Morel. M. Verdurin was furious, and bore down with a terrible expression upon Saniette: "Is there nothing you know how to play?" he shouted, furious at being deprived of the opportunity for a game of whist, and delighted to have found one for insulting the ex-archivist. The latter, terror-stricken, did his best to look clever: "Yes, I can play the piano," he said. Cottard and Morel were seated face to face. "Your deal," said Cottard. "Suppose we go nearer to the card-table," M. de Charlus, worried by the sight of Morel in Cottard's company, suggested to M. de Cambremer. "It's quite as interesting as those questions of etiquette which in these days have ceased to count for very much. The only kings that we have left, in France at least, are the kings in packs of cards, who seem to me to be positively swarming in the hand of our young virtuoso," he added a moment later, from an admiration for Morel which extended to his way of playing cards, to flatter him also, and finally to account for his suddenly leaning over the young violinist's shoulder. "I-ee trrump," said Cottard, putting on a vile foreign accent; his children would burst out laughing, like his students and the house surgeon, whenever the Master, even by the bedside of a serious case, uttered one of his hackneyed witticisms with the impassive expression of an epileptic. "I don't know what to play," said Morel, seeking advice from M. de Cambremer. "Just as you please, you're bound to lose, whatever you play, it's all the same (*c'est égal*)." "Galli-Marié?" said the Doctor with a benign and knowing glance at M. de Cambremer. "She was what we call a true diva, she was a dream, a Carmen such as we shall never see again. She was wedded to the part. I used to enjoy too listening to Ingalli-Marié."

The Marquis rose, and with that contemptuous vulgarity of well-born people who do not realise that they are insulting their host by appearing uncertain whether they ought to associate with his guests, and plead English habits as an excuse for a disdainful expression, asked: "Who is that gentleman playing cards? What does he do for a living? What does he *sell*? I rather like to know who I'm with, so as not to make friends with any Tom, Dick or Harry. But I didn't catch his name when you did me the honour of introducing me to him." If M. Verdurin, on the strength of these last words, had indeed introduced M. de Cambremer to his fellow-guests, the other would have been greatly annoyed. But, knowing that it was the opposite procedure that had been observed, he thought it gracious to assume a genial and modest air, without risk to himself. The pride that M. Verdurin took in his intimacy with Cottard had gone on increasing ever since the Doctor had become an eminent professor. But it no longer found expression in the same ingenuous form as of old. Then, when Cottard was scarcely known to the public, if you spoke to M. Verdurin of his wife's facial neuralgia, "There is nothing to be done," he would say, with the naïve complacency of people who assume that anyone whom they know must be famous, and that everybody knows the name of their daughter's singing-teacher. "If she had an ordinary doctor, one might look for a second opinion, but when that doctor is called Cottard" (a name which he pronounced as though it were Bouchard or Charcot) "one simply has to bow to the inevitable." Adopting a reverse procedure, knowing that M. de Cambremer must certainly have heard of the famous Professor Cottard, M. Verdurin assumed an artless air. "He's our family doctor, a worthy soul whom we adore and who would bend over backwards for our sakes; he's not a doctor, he's a friend. I don't suppose you have ever heard of him or that his name would convey anything to you, but in any case to us it's the name of a very good man, of a very dear friend, Cottard." This name, murmured in a modest tone, surprised M. de Cambremer who supposed that his host was referring to someone else. "Cottard? You don't mean Professor Cottard?" At that moment one heard the voice of the said Professor who, at an awkward point in the game, was saying as he looked at his cards: "This is where Greek meets Greek." "Why, yes, to be sure, he is a professor," said M. Verdurin. "What! Professor Cottard! You're sure you're not mistaken! You're certain it's the same man! The one who lives in the Rue du Bac!" "Yes, his address is 43, Rue du Bac. You know him?" "But everybody knows Professor Cottard. He's a leading light. It's as though you asked me if I knew Bouffe de Saint-Blaise or Courtois-Suffit. I could see when I heard him speak that he was not an ordinary person. That's why I took the liberty of asking you." "Well then, what shall I play, trumps?" asked Cottard. Then abruptly, with a vulgarity which would have been irritating even in heroic circumstances, as when a soldier uses a coarse expression to convey his contempt for death, but became doubly stupid in the safe pastime of a game of cards, Cottard, deciding to play a trump, assumed a sombre, death-defying air and flung down his card as though it were his life, with the exclamation: "There it is, and be damned to it!" It was not the right card to play, but he had a consolation. In a deep armchair in the middle of the room, Mme Cottard, yielding to the effect, which she always found irresistible, of a good dinner, had succumbed after vain efforts to the vast if gentle slumbers that were overpowering her. In vain did she sit up now and then, and smile, either in self-mockery or from fear of leaving unanswered some polite remark that might have been addressed to her, she sank back, in spite of herself, into the clutches of the implacable and delicious malady. More than the noise, what awakened her thus, for an instant only, was the glance (which, in her wifely affection, she could see even when her eyes were shut, and anticipated, for the same scene occurred every evening and haunted her dreams like the thought of the hour at which one will have to rise), the glance with which the Professor drew the attention of those present to his wife's slumbers. To begin with, he merely looked at her and smiled, for if as a doctor he disapproved of this habit of falling asleep after dinner (or at least gave this scientific reason for getting angry later on, though it is not certain whether it was a determining reason, so many and diverse were the views that he held on the subject), as an all-powerful and teasing husband he was delighted to be able to make fun of his

wife, to half-waken her only at first, so that she might fall asleep again and he have the pleasure of waking her anew.

By this time, Mme Cottard was sound asleep. "Now then, Léontine, you're snoring," the Professor called to her. "I'm listening to Mme Swann, my dear," Mme Cottard replied faintly, and dropped back into her lethargy. "It's absolute madness," exclaimed Cottard, "she'll be telling us presently that she wasn't asleep. She's like the patients who come to a consultation and insist that they never sleep at all." "They imagine it, perhaps," said M. de Cambremer with a laugh. But the doctor enjoyed contradicting no less than teasing, and would on no account allow a layman to talk medicine to him. "One doesn't imagine that one can't sleep," he promulgated in a dogmatic tone. "Ah!" replied the Marquis with a respectful bow, such as Cottard at one time would have made. "It's easy to see," Cottard went on, "that you've never administered, as I have, as much as two grains of trional without succeeding in provoking somnolence." "Quite so, quite so," replied the Marquis, laughing with a superior air, "I've never taken trional, or any of those drugs which soon cease to have any effect but ruin your stomach. When a man has been out shooting all night, like me, in the forest of Chantepie, I can assure you he doesn't need any trional to make him sleep." "It's only fools who say that," replied the Professor. "Trional frequently has a remarkable effect on the tonicity of the nerves. You mention trional, have you any idea what it is?" "Well ... I've heard people say that it's a drug to make one sleep." "You're not answering my question," replied the Professor, who, thrice weekly, at the Faculty, sat on the board of examiners. "I'm not asking you whether it makes you sleep or not, but what it is. Can you tell me what percentage it contains of amyl and ethyl?" "No," replied M. de Cambremer, abashed. "I prefer a good glass of old brandy or even 345 Port." "Which are ten times as toxic," the Professor interrupted. "As for trional," M. de Cambremer ventured, "my wife goes in for all that sort of thing, you'd better talk to her about it." "She probably knows as much about it as you do. In any case, if your wife takes trional to make her sleep, you can see that mine has no need of it. Come along, Léontine, wake up, you'll get stiff. Did you ever see me fall asleep after dinner? What will you be like when you're sixty, if you fall asleep now like an old woman? You'll get fat, you're arresting your circulation. She doesn't even hear what I'm saying." "They're bad for one's health, these little naps after dinner, aren't they, Doctor?" said M. de Cambremer, seeking to rehabilitate himself with Cottard. "After a heavy meal one ought to take exercise." "Stuff and nonsense!" replied the Doctor. "Identical quantities of food have been taken from the stomach of a dog that has lain quiet and from the stomach of a dog that has been running about, and it's in the former that digestion has been found to be more advanced." "Then it's sleep that interrupts the digestion." "That depends whether you mean oesophagic digestion, stomachic digestion or intestinal digestion. It's pointless giving you explanations which you wouldn't understand since you've never studied medicine. Now then, Léontine, quick march, it's time we were going." This was not true, for the Doctor was merely going to continue his game, but he hoped thus to cut short in a more drastic fashion the slumbers of the deaf mute to whom he had been addressing without a word of response the most learned exhortations. Either because a determination to remain awake survived in Mme Cottard, even in her sleep, or because the armchair offered no support to her head, it was jerked mechanically from left to right and up and down in the empty air, like a lifeless object, and Mme Cottard, with her nodding poll, appeared now to be listening to music, now to be in her death-throes. Where her husband's increasingly vehement admonitions failed of their effect, her sense of her own stupidity proved successful: "My bath is nice and hot," she murmured. "But the feathers on the dictionary ..." she exclaimed, sitting up. "Oh, good gracious, what a fool I am! Whatever have I been saying? I was thinking about my hat, and I'm sure I said something silly. In another minute I would have dozed off. It's that wretched fire." Everybody laughed, for there was no fire in the room.

"You're making fun of me," said Mme Cottard, herself laughing, and raising her hand to her forehead with the light touch of a hypnotist and the deftness of a woman putting her hair straight, to erase the last traces of sleep, "I must offer my humble apologies to dear Mme Verdurin and get the truth from her." But her smile at once grew mournful, for the Professor, who knew that his wife sought to please him and trembled lest she fail to do so, had shouted at her: "Look at yourself in the mirror. You're as red as if you had an eruption of acne. You look just like an old peasant."

"You know, he's charming," said Mme Verdurin, "he has such a delightfully sardonic good nature. And then, he snatched my husband from the jaws of death when the whole medical profession had given him up. He spent three nights by his bedside, without ever lying down. And so for me, you know," she went on in a grave and almost menacing tone, raising her hand to the twin spheres, shrouded in white tresses, of her musical temples, and as though we had threatened to assault the Doctor, "Cottard is sacred! He could ask me for anything in the world! As it is, I don't call him Doctor Cottard, I call him Doctor God! And even in saying that I'm slandering him, for this God does everything in his power to remedy some of the disasters for which the other is responsible."

"Play a trump," M. de Charlus said to Morel with a delighted air.

"A trump, here goes," said the violinist.

"You ought to have declared your king first," said M. de Charlus, "you're not paying attention to the game, but how well you play!"

"I have the king," said Morel.

"He's a fine man," replied the Professor.

"What's that thing up there with the sticks?" asked Mme Verdurin, drawing M. de Cambremer's attention to a superb escutcheon carved over the mantelpiece. "Are they your *arms*?" she added with sarcastic scorn.

"No, they're not ours," replied M. de Cambremer. "We bear *barry of five, embattled counterembattled or and gules, as many trefoils countercharged*. No, those are the arms of the Arrachepels, who were not of our stock, but



from whom we inherited the house, and nobody of our line has ever made any changes here." ("That's one in the eye for her," muttered Mme de Cambremer.) "The Arrachepels (formerly Pelvilains, we are told) bore *or five piles coupée in base gules*. When they allied themselves with the Féterne family, their blazon changed, but remained *cantoné within twenty cross crosslets fitchée in base or, a dexter canton ermine*. My great-grandmother was a d'Arrachepel or de Rachepel, whichever you like, for both forms are found in the old charters," continued M. de Cambremer, blushing deeply, for only then did the idea for which his wife had given him credit occur to him, and he was afraid that Mme Verdurin might have applied to herself words which had in no way been aimed at her. "History relates that in the eleventh century the first Arrachepel, Macé, known as Pelvilain, showed a special aptitude, in siege warfare, in tearing up piles. Whence the nickname Arrachepel under which he was ennobled, and the piles which you see persisting through the centuries in their arms. These are the piles which, to render fortifications more impregnable, used to be driven, bedded, if you will pardon the expression, into the ground in front of them, and fastened together laterally. They are what you quite rightly called sticks, though they had nothing to do with the floating sticks of our good La Fontaine. For they were supposed to render a stronghold impregnable. Of course, with our modern artillery, they make one smile. But you must bear in mind that I'm speaking of the eleventh century."

"Yes, it's not exactly up-to-date," said Mme Verdurin, "but the little campanile has character."

"You have," said Cottard, "the luck of a fiddlededee," a word which he regularly repeated to avoid using Molière's.<sup>17</sup> "Do you know why the king of diamonds was invalidated out of the army?"

"I shouldn't mind being in his shoes," said Morel, who was bored with military service.

"Oh! how unpatriotic!" exclaimed M. de Charlus, who could not refrain from pinching the violinist's ear.

"You don't know why the king of diamonds was invalidated out of the army?" Cottard pursued, determined to make his joke, "it's because he has only one eye."

"You're up against it, Doctor," said M. de Cambremer, to show Cottard that he knew who he was.

"This young man is astonishing," M. de Charlus interrupted naïvely, pointing to Morel. "He plays like a god."

This observation did not find favour with the Doctor, who replied: "Wait and see. He who laughs last laughs longest."

"Queen, ace," Morel announced triumphantly, for fortune was favouring him.

The Doctor bowed his head as though powerless to deny this good fortune, and admitted, spellbound: "That's beautiful."

"We're so pleased to have met M. de Charlus," said Mme de Cambremer to Mme Verdurin.

"Had you never met him before? He's rather nice, most unusual, very much *of a period*" (she would have found it difficult to say which), replied Mme Verdurin with the complacent smile of a connoisseur, a judge and a hostess.

Mme de Cambremer asked me if I was coming to Féterne with Saint-Loup. I could not suppress a cry of admiration when I saw the moon hanging like an orange lantern beneath the vault of oaks that led away from the house. "That's nothing," said Mme Verdurin. "Presently, when the moon has risen higher and the valley is lit up, it will be a thousand times more beautiful. That's something you haven't got at Féterne!" she added scornfully to Mme de Cambremer, who did not know how to answer, not wishing to disparage her property, especially in front of the tenants.

"Are you staying much longer in the neighbourhood, Madame?" M. de Cambremer asked Mme Cottard, an inquiry that might be interpreted as a vague intention to invite her, but which dispensed him for the moment from making any more precise commitment. "Oh, certainly, Monsieur, I regard this annual exodus as most important for the children. Say what you like, they need fresh air. I may be rather primitive on this point but I believe that no cure is as good for children as healthy air—even if someone should give me a mathematical proof to the contrary. Their little faces are already completely changed. The doctors wanted to send me to Vichy; but it's too stuffy there, and I can look after my stomach when those big boys of mine have grown a little bigger. Besides, the Professor, with all the examining he has to do, has always got his shoulder to the wheel, and the heat tires him dreadfully. I feel that a man needs a thorough rest after he has been on the go all the year like that. Whatever happens we shall stay another month at least."

"Ah! in that case we shall meet again."

"In any case I shall be obliged to stay here as my husband has to go on a visit to Savoy, and won't be finally settled here for another fortnight."

"I like the view of the valley even more than the sea view," Mme Verdurin went on. "You're going to have a splendid night for your journey."

"We ought really to find out whether the carriages are ready, if you are absolutely determined to go back to Balbec tonight," M. Verdurin said to me, "for I see no necessity for it myself. We could drive you over tomorrow morning. It's certain to be fine. The roads are excellent."

I said that it was impossible. "But in any case it isn't time to go yet," the Mistress protested. "Leave them alone, they have heaps of time. A lot of good it will do them to arrive at the station with an hour to wait. They're far better off here. And you, my young Mozart," she said to Morel, not venturing to address M. de Charlus directly, "won't you stay the night? We have some nice rooms overlooking the sea."

"No, he can't," M. de Charlus replied on behalf of the absorbed card-player who had not heard. "He has a pass until midnight only. He must go back to bed like a good little boy, obedient and well-behaved," he added in a smug, affected, insistent voice, as though he found a sadistic pleasure in employing this chaste comparison and also in letting his voice dwell, in passing, upon something that concerned Morel, in touching him, if not with his hand, with words that seemed to be tactile.

From the sermon that Brichot had addressed to me, M. de Cambremer had concluded that I was a Dreyfusard. As he himself was as anti-Dreyfusard as possible, out of courtesy to a foe he began to sing me the praises of a Jewish colonel who had always been very decent to a cousin of the Chevreignys and had secured for him the promotion he deserved. "And my cousin's opinions were the exact opposite," said M. de Cambremer. He omitted to mention what those opinions were, but I sensed that they were as antiquated and misshapen as his own face, opinions which a few families in certain small towns must long have entertained. "Well, you know, I call that really fine!" was M. de Cambremer's conclusion. It is true that he was hardly employing the word "fine" in the aesthetic sense in which his wife or his mother would have applied it to different works of art. M. de Cambremer often made use of this term, when for instance he was congratulating a delicate person who had put on a little weight. "What, you've gained half a stone in two months? I say, that's really fine!"

Refreshments were set out on a table. Mme Verdurin invited the gentlemen to go and choose whatever drink they preferred. M. de Charlus went and drank his glass and at once returned to a seat by the card-table from which he did not stir. Mme Verdurin asked him: "Did you have some of my orangeade?" Whereupon M. de Charlus, with a gracious smile, in a crystalline tone which he rarely adopted, and with endless simperings and wriggings of the hips, replied: "No, I preferred its neighbour, which is strawberry-juice, I think. It's delicious." It is curious that a certain category of secret impulses has as an external consequence a way of speaking or gesticulating which reveals them. If a man believes or disbelieves in the Virgin Birth, or in the innocence of Dreyfus, or in a plurality of worlds, and wishes to keep his opinion to himself, you will find nothing in his voice or in his gait that will betray his thoughts. But on hearing M. de Charlus say, in that shrill voice and with that smile and those gestures, "No, I preferred its neighbour, the strawberry-juice," one could say: "Ah, he likes the stronger sex," with the same certainty as enables a judge to sentence a criminal who has not confessed, or a doctor a patient suffering from general paralysis who himself is perhaps unaware of his malady but has made some mistake in pronunciation from which it can be deduced that he will be dead in three years. Perhaps the people who deduce, from a man's way of saying: "No, I preferred its neighbour, the strawberry-juice," a love of the kind called unnatural, have no need of any such scientific knowledge. But that is because here there is a more direct relation between the revealing sign and the secret. Without saying so to oneself in so many words, one feels that it is a gentle, smiling lady who is answering and who appears affected because she is pretending to be a man and one is not accustomed to seeing men put on such airs. And it is perhaps more gracious to think that a certain number of angelic women have long been included by mistake in the masculine sex where, feeling exiled, ineffectually flapping their wings towards men in whom they inspire a physical repulsion, they know how to arrange a drawing-room, to compose "interiors." M. de Charlus was not in the least perturbed that Mme Verdurin should be standing, and remained ensconced in his armchair so as to be nearer to Morel. "Don't you think it criminal," said Mme Verdurin to the Baron, "that that creature who might be enchanting us with his violin should be sitting there at a card-table. When one can play the violin like that!" "He plays cards well, he does everything well, he's so intelligent," said M. de Charlus, keeping his eye on the game, so as to be able to advise Morel. This was not his only reason, however, for not rising from his chair for Mme Verdurin. With the singular amalgam that he had made of his social conceptions at once as a great nobleman and as an artlover, instead of being courteous in the same way as a man of his world would have been, he invented as it were tableaux-vivants for himself after Saint-Simon; and at that moment he was amusing himself by impersonating the Maréchal d'Huxelles, who interested him from other aspects also, and of whom it is said that he was so arrogant as to remain seated, with an air of indolence, before all the most distinguished persons at Court.

"By the way, Charlus," said Mme Verdurin, who was beginning to grow familiar, "you don't know of any penniless old nobleman in your Faubourg who would come to me as porter?" "Why, yes ... why, yes," replied M. de Charlus with a genial smile, "but I don't advise it." "Why not?" "I should be afraid for your sake that the more elegant visitors would go no further than the lodge." This was the first skirmish between them. Mme Verdurin barely noticed it. There were to be others, alas, in Paris. M. de Charlus remained glued to his chair. He could not, moreover, restrain a faint smile on seeing how his favourite maxims as to aristocratic prestige and bourgeois cowardice were confirmed by the so easily won submission of Mme Verdurin. The Mistress appeared not at all surprised by the Baron's posture, and if she left him it was only because she had been perturbed by seeing me taken up by M. de Cambremer. But first of all, she wished to clear up the mystery of M. de Charlus's relations with Comtesse Molé. "You told me that you knew Mme de Molé. Does that mean you go there?" she asked, giving to the words "go there" the sense of being received there, of having received permission from the lady to go and call on her. M. de Charlus replied with an inflexion of disdain, an affectation of precision and in a sing-song tone: "Yes, sometimes." This "sometimes" inspired doubts in Mme Verdurin, who asked: "Have you ever met the Duc de Guermantes there?" "Ah! that I don't remember." "Oh!" said Mme Verdurin, "you don't know the Duc de Guermantes?" "And how could I not know him?" replied M. de Charlus, his lips curving in a smile. This smile was ironical; but as the Baron was afraid of letting a gold tooth be seen, he checked it with a reverse movement of his lips, so that the resulting sinuosity was that of a smile of benevolence. "Why do you say: 'How could I not know him?'" "Because he is my brother," said M. de Charlus carelessly, leaving Mme Verdurin plunged in stupefaction and uncertain whether her guest was making fun of her, was a natural son, or a son by another marriage. The idea that the brother of the Duc de Guermantes might be called Baron de Charlus never entered her head. She bore down upon me. "I heard M. de Cambremer invite you to dinner just now. It has nothing to do with me, you understand. But for your own sake, I very much hope you won't go. For one thing, the place is infested with bores. Oh, if you like dining

with provincial counts and marquises whom nobody knows, you'll have all you could wish." "I think I shall be obliged to go there once or twice. I'm not altogether free, however, for I have a young cousin whom I can't leave by herself" (I felt that this fictitious kinship made it easier for me to take Albertine about), "but in the case of the Cambremers, as I've already introduced her to them ..." "You shall do just as you please. One thing I can tell you: it's extremely unhealthy; when you've caught pneumonia, or a nice little chronic rheumatism, what good will that do you?" "But isn't the place itself very pretty?" "Mmmmyesss ... If you like. Frankly, I must confess that I'd far sooner have the view from here over this valley. In any case, I wouldn't have taken the other house if they'd paid us because the sea air is fatal to M. Verdurin. If your cousin is at all delicate ... But you yourself are delicate, I believe ... you have fits of breathlessness. Very well! You shall see. Go there once, and you won't sleep for a week after it; but it's not my business." And regardless of the inconsistency with what had gone before, she went on: "If it would amuse you to see the house, which is not bad, pretty is too strong a word, still it's amusing with its old moat and its old drawbridge, as I shall have to sacrifice myself and dine there once, very well, come that day, I shall try to bring all my little circle, then it will be quite nice. The day after tomorrow we're going to Harambouvillle in the carriage. It's a magnificent drive, and the cider is delicious. Come with us. You, Brichot, you shall come too. And you too, Ski. It will make a party which, as a matter of fact, my husband must have arranged already. I don't know whom all he has invited. Monsieur de Charlus, are you one of them?"

The Baron, who had not heard the whole speech and did not know that she was talking of an excursion to Harambouvillle, gave a start. "A strange question," he murmured in a sardonic tone that nettled Mme Verdurin. "Anyhow," she said to me, "before you dine with the Cambremers, why not bring your cousin here? Does she like conversation, and intelligent people? Is she agreeable? Yes, very well then. Bring her with you. The Cambremers aren't the only people in the world. I can understand their being glad to invite her, they must find it difficult to get anyone. Here she will have plenty of fresh air, and lots of clever men. In any case, I'm counting on you not to fail me next Wednesday. I heard you were having a tea-party at Rivebelle with your cousin, and M. de Charlus, and I forget who else. You should arrange to bring the whole lot on here, it would be nice if you all came in a body. It's the easiest thing in the world to get here, and the roads are charming; if you like I can send down for you. I can't imagine what you find attractive in Rivebelle, it's infested with mosquitoes. Perhaps you're thinking of the reputation of the local pancakes. My cook makes them far better. I'll give you some Norman pancakes, the real article, and shortbread; just let me show you. Ah! if you want the sort of filth they give you at Rivebelle, you won't get it from me, I don't poison my guests, Monsieur, and even if I wished to, my cook would refuse to make such unspeakable muck and would give in his notice. Those pancakes you get down there, you can't tell what they're made of. I knew a poor girl who got peritonitis from them, which carried her off in three days. She was only seventeen. It was sad for her poor mother," added Mme Verdurin with a mournful air beneath the spheres of her temples charged with experience and suffering. "However, go and have tea at Rivebelle if you enjoy being fleeced and flinging money out of the window. But one thing I beg of you—it's a confidential mission I'm entrusting you with—on the stroke of six bring all your party here, don't allow them to go straggling away by themselves. You can bring whom you please. I wouldn't say that to everybody. But I'm sure your friends are nice, I can see at once that we understand one another. Apart from the little nucleus, there are some very agreeable people coming next Wednesday, as it happens. You don't know little Mme de Longpont? She's charming, and so witty, not in the least snobbish, you'll find you'll like her immensely. And she's going to bring a whole troupe of friends too," Mme Verdurin added to show me that this was the right thing to do and encourage me by the other's example. "We shall see which of you has most influence and brings most people, Barbe de Longpont or you. And then I believe somebody's going to bring Bergotte," she added vaguely, this attendance of a celebrity being rendered far from likely by a paragraph which had appeared in the papers that morning to the effect that the great writer's health was causing grave anxiety. "Anyhow, you'll see that it will be one of my most successful Wednesdays. I don't want to have any boring women. You mustn't judge by this evening, which has been a complete failure. Don't try to be polite, you can't have been more bored than I was, I myself thought it was deadly. It won't always be like tonight, you know! I'm not thinking of the Cambremers, who are impossible, but I've known society people who were supposed to be agreeable, and compared with my little nucleus they didn't exist. I heard you say that you thought Swann clever. I must say, to my mind it's greatly exaggerated, but without even speaking of the character of the man, which I've always found fundamentally antipathetic, sly, underhand, I often had him to dinner on Wednesdays. Well, you can ask the others, even compared with Brichot, who is far from being a genius, who's a good secondary schoolmaster whom I got into the Institute all the same, Swann was simply nowhere. He was so dull!" And as I expressed a contrary opinion: "It's the truth. I don't want to say a word against him since he was your friend, indeed he was very fond of you, he spoke to me about you in the most charming way, but ask the others here if he ever said anything interesting at our dinners. That, after all, is the test. Well, I don't know why it was, but Swann, in my house, never seemed to come off, one got nothing out of him. And yet the little he had he picked up here." I assured her that he was highly intelligent. "No, you only thought that because you didn't know him as long as I did. Really, one got to the end of him very soon. I was always bored to death by him." (Translation: "He went to the La Trémoilles and the Guermantes and knew that I didn't.") "And I can put up with anything except being bored. That I cannot stand!" Her horror of boredom was now the reason upon which Mme Verdurin relied to explain the composition of the little group. She did not yet entertain duchesses because she was incapable of enduring boredom, just as she was incapable of going for a cruise because of sea-sickness. I thought to myself that what Mme Verdurin said was not entirely false, and, whereas the Guermantes would have declared Brichot to be the stupidest man they had ever met, I

remained uncertain whether he was not in reality superior, if not to Swann himself, at least to the people endowed with the wit of the Guermantes who would have had the good taste to avoid and the delicacy to blush at his pedantic pleasantries; I asked myself the question as though the nature of intelligence might be to some extent clarified by the answer that I might give, and with the earnestness of a Christian influenced by Port-Royal when he considers the problem of Grace.

"You'll see," Mme Verdurin continued, "when one has society people together with people of real intelligence, people of our set, that's where one has to see them—the wittiest society man in the kingdom of the blind is only one-eyed here. Besides, he paralyses the others, who don't feel at home any longer. So much so that I'm inclined to wonder whether, instead of attempting mixtures that spoil everything, I shan't start special evenings confined to the bores so as to have the full benefit of my little nucleus. However: you're coming again with your cousin. That's settled. Good. At any rate you'll get something to eat here, the pair of you. Fêterne is starvation corner. Oh, by the way, if you like rats, go there at once, you'll get as many as you want. And they'll keep you there as long as you're prepared to stay. Why, you'll die of hunger. When I go there, I shall dine before I start. To make it a bit gayer, you must come here first. We shall have a good high tea, and supper when we get back. Do you like apple-tarts? Yes, very well then, our chef makes the best in the world. You see I was quite right when I said you were made to live here. So come and stay. There's far more room here than you'd think. I don't mention it, so as not to let myself in for bores. You might bring your cousin to stay. She would get a change of air from Balbec. With the air here, I maintain that I can cure incurables. My word, I've cured some, and not only this time. For I've stayed near here before—a place I discovered and got for a mere song, and which had a lot more character than their Raspelière. I can show it to you if we go for a drive together. But I admit that even here the air is really invigorating. Still, I don't want to say too much about it, or the whole of Paris would begin to take a fancy to my little corner. That's always been my luck. Anyhow, give your cousin my message. We'll put you in two nice rooms looking over the valley. You ought to see it in the morning, with the sun shining through the mist! By the way, who is this Robert de Saint-Loup you were speaking of?" she said anxiously, for she had heard that I was to pay him a visit at Doncières, and was afraid that he might make me defect. "Why not bring him here instead, if he's not a bore. I've heard of him from Morel; I fancy he's one of his greatest friends," she added, lying in her teeth, for Saint-Loup and Morel were not even aware of one another's existence. But having heard that Saint-Loup knew M. de Charlus, she supposed that it was through the violinist, and wished to appear in the know. "He's not taking up medicine, by any chance, or literature? You know, if you want any help about examinations, Cottard can do anything, and I make what use of him I please. As for the Academy later on—for I suppose he's not old enough yet—I have several votes in my pocket. Your friend would find himself on friendly soil here, and it might amuse him perhaps to see over the house. Doncières isn't much fun. Anyhow, do just as you please, whatever suits you best," she concluded, without insisting, so as not to appear to be trying to know people of noble birth, and because she always maintained that the system by which she governed the faithful, to wit despotism, was named liberty. "Why, what's the matter with you," she said, at the sight of M. Verdurin who, gesticulating impatiently, was making for the wooden terrace that ran along the side of the drawing-room above the valley, like a man who is bursting with rage and needs fresh air. "Has Saniette been irritating you again? But since you know what an idiot he is, you must resign yourself and not work yourself up into such a state ... I hate it when he gets like this," she said to me, "because it's bad for him, it sends the blood to his head. But I must say that one would need the patience of an angel at times to put up with Saniette, and one must always remember that it's an act of charity to have him in the house. For my part I must admit that he's so gloriously silly that I can't help enjoying him. I dare say you heard what he said after dinner: 'I can't play whist, but I can play the piano.' Isn't it superb? It's positively colossal, and incidentally quite untrue, for he's incapable of doing either. But my husband, beneath his rough exterior, is very sensitive, very kind-hearted, and Saniette's self-centred way of always thinking about the effect he's going to make drives him crazy ... Come, dear, calm down, you know Cottard told you that it was bad for your liver. And I'm the one who'll have to bear the brunt of it all. Tomorrow Saniette will come back and have his little fit of hysterics. Poor man, he's very ill. But still, that's no reason why he should kill other people. And then, even at moments when he's really suffering, when one would like to comfort him, his silliness hardens one's heart. He's really too stupid. You ought to tell him quite politely that these scenes make you both ill, and he'd better not come back, and since that's what he's most afraid of, it will have a calming effect on his nerves," Mme Verdurin concluded.

The sea was only just discernible from the windows on the right. But those on the other side revealed the valley, now shrouded in a snowy cloak of moonlight. From time to time one heard the voices of Morel and Cottard. "Have you any trumps?" "Yes." "From what I saw, 'pon my soul ..." said M. de Cambremer to Morel, in answer to his question, for he had seen that the Doctor's hand was full of trumps. "Here comes the lady of diamonds," said the Doctor. "Zat iss trump, you know? My trick. But there isn't a Sorbonne any longer," said the Doctor to M. de Cambremer, "there's only the University of Paris." M. de Cambremer confessed that he did not see the point of this remark. "I thought you were talking about the Sorbonne," continued the Doctor. "I understood you to say: Sorbonne my soul," he added, with a wink, to show that this was a pun. "Just wait a moment," he said, pointing to his opponent, "I have a Trafalgar in store for him." And the prospect must have been excellent for the Doctor, for in his joy his shoulders began to shake voluptuously with laughter, a motion which in his family, in the "genus" Cottard, was an almost zoological sign of satisfaction. In the previous generation the movement used to be accompanied by that of rubbing the hands together as though one were soaping them. Cottard himself had originally employed both forms of mimicry simultaneously, but one fine day, nobody ever knew by whose intervention, wifely or perhaps professional, the rubbing of the hands had disappeared. The Doctor, even at dominoes, when he forced his opponent into a corner and made him take the double six, which was to him the keenest of pleasures, contented himself with the shoulder-shake. And when—which was as seldom as possible—he went down to his native village for a few days and met his first cousin who was still at the hand-rubbing stage, he would say to Mme Cottard on his return: "I thought poor René very common." "Have you any little dears?" he said, turning to Morel. "No? Then I play this old David." "Then



lesson indirectly, or to distinguish themselves from them. But no doubt women of greater social prestige than Mme de Cambremer told her, or gave her indirectly to understand, that this was not the correct pronunciation, and that what she regarded as a sign of originality was a solecism which would make people think her little conversant with the usages of society, for shortly afterwards Mme de Cambremer was again saying "Saint-Lou," and her admirer similarly ceased to hold out, either because she had admonished him, or because he had noticed that she no longer sounded the final consonant and had said to himself that if a woman of such distinction, energy and ambition had yielded, it must have been on good grounds. The worst of her admirers was her husband, Mme de Cambremer loved to tease other people in a way that was often highly impertinent. As soon as she began to attack me, or anyone else, in this fashion, M. de Cambremer would start watching her victim with a laugh. As the Marquis had a squint—a blemish which gives an impression of intended wit to the mirth even of imbeciles—the effect of this laughter was to bring a segment of pupil into the otherwise complete whiteness of his eye. Thus does a sudden rift bring a patch of blue into an otherwise clouded sky. His monocle moreover protected, like the glass over a valuable picture, this delicate operation. As for the actual intention of his laughter, it was hard to say whether it was friendly: "Ah! you rascal, you're a lucky man and no mistake! You've won the favour of a woman with a very pretty wit." Or vicious: "Well then, I hope you'll learn your lesson when you've swallowed all those insults." Or obliging: "I'm here, you know. I take it with a laugh because it's all pure fun, but I shan't let you be ill-treated." Or cruelly conniving: "I don't need to add my little pinch of salt, but you can see I'm enjoying all the snubs she's handing out to you. I'm laughing myself silly, because I approve, and I'm her husband. So if you should take it into your head to answer back, you'd have me to deal with, young fellow. First of all I'd fetch you a couple of monumental clouts, and then we should go and cross swords in the forest of Chantepie."

Whatever the correct interpretation of the husband's merriment, the wife's whimsical banter soon came to an end. Whereupon M. de Cambremer ceased to laugh, the temporary pupil vanished, and as one had forgotten for a minute or two to expect an entirely white eyeball, it gave this ruddy Norman an air at once anaemic and ecstatic, as though the Marquis had just undergone an operation, or were imploring heaven, through his monocle, for a martyr's crown.

### *Chapter Thirteen*

I was dropping with sleep. I was taken up to my floor not by the lift-boy but by the squinting page, who to make conversation informed me that his sister was still with the gentleman who was so rich, and that once, when she had taken it into her head to return home instead of sticking to her business, her gentleman friend had paid a visit to the mother of the squinting page and of the other more fortunate children, who had very soon made the silly creature return to her protection. "You know, sir, she's a fine lady, my sister is. She plays the piano, she talks Spanish. And, you'd never believe it of the sister of the humble employee who's taking you up in the lift, but she denies herself nothing; Madame has a maid to herself, and she'll have her own carriage one day, I shouldn't wonder. She's very pretty, if you could see her, a bit too high and mighty, but well, you can understand that. She's full of fun. She never leaves a hotel without relieving herself first in a wardrobe or a drawer, just to leave a little keepsake with the chambermaid who'll have to clean up. Sometimes she does it in a cab, and after she's paid her fare, she'll hide behind a tree, and she doesn't half laugh when the cabby finds he's got to clean his cab after her. My father had another stroke of luck when he found my young brother this Indian prince he used to know long ago. It's not the same style of thing, of course. But it's a superb position. If it wasn't for the travelling, it would be a dream. I'm the only one still on the shelf. But you never know. We're a lucky family; perhaps one day I shall be President of the Republic. But I'm keeping you babbling" (I had not uttered a single word and was beginning to fall asleep as I listened to the flow of his). "Good night, sir. Oh! thank you, sir. If everybody had as kind a heart as you, there wouldn't be any poor people left. But, as my sister says, 'there must always be poor people so that now that I'm rich I can shit on them.' You'll pardon the expression. Good night, sir."

Perhaps every night we accept the risk of experiencing, while we are asleep, sufferings which we regard as null and void because they will be felt in the course of a sleep which we suppose to be unconscious. And indeed on these evenings when I came back late from La Raspelière I was very sleepy. But after the weather turned cold I could not get to sleep at once, for the fire lighted up the room as though there were a lamp burning in it. Only it was nothing more than a brief blaze, and—like a lamp too, or like the daylight when night falls—its too bright light was not long in fading; and I entered the realm of sleep, which is like a second dwelling into which we move for that one purpose. It has noises of its own and we are sometimes violently awakened by the sound of bells, perfectly heard by our ears, although nobody has rung. It has its servants, its special visitors who call to take us out, so that we are ready to get up when we are compelled to realise, by our almost immediate transmigration into the other dwelling, our waking one, that the room is empty, that nobody has called. The race that inhabits it, like that of our first human ancestors, is androgynous. A man in it appears a moment later in the form of a woman. Things in it show a tendency to turn into men, men into friends and enemies. The time that elapses for the sleeper, during these spells of slumber, is absolutely different from the time in which the life of the waking man is passed. Sometimes its course is far more rapid—a quarter of an hour seems a day—at other times far longer—we think we have taken only a short nap, when we have slept through the day. Then, in the chariot of sleep, we descend into depths in which memory can no longer keep up with it, and on the brink of which the mind has been obliged to retrace its steps.

The horses of sleep, like those of the sun, move at so steady a pace, in an atmosphere in which there is no longer any resistance, that it requires some little meteorite extraneous to ourselves (hurled from the azure by what Unknown?) to strike our regular sleep (which otherwise would have no reason to stop, and would continue with a similar motion world without end) and to make it swing sharply round, return towards reality, travel without pause, traverse the regions bordering on life—whose sounds the sleeper will presently hear, still vague but already perceptible even if distorted—and come to earth suddenly at the point of awakening. Then from those profound slumbers we awake in a dawn, not knowing who we are, being nobody, newly born, ready for anything, the brain emptied of that past which was life until then. And perhaps it is more wonderful still when our landing at the waking-point is abrupt and the thoughts of our sleep, hidden by a cloak of oblivion, have no time to return to us gradually, before sleep ceases. Then, from the black storm through which we seem to have passed (but we do not even say *we*), we emerge prostrate, without a thought, a *we* that is void of content. What hammer-blow has the person or thing that is lying there received to make it unconscious of everything, stupefied until the moment when memory, flooding back, restores to it consciousness or personality? However, for both these kinds of awakening, we must avoid falling asleep, even into a deep sleep, under the law of habit. For everything that habit ensnares in her nets, she watches closely; we must escape her, take our sleep at a moment when we thought we were doing something quite other than sleeping, take, in a word, a sleep that does not dwell under the tutelage of foresight, in the company, albeit latent, of reflexion.

At all events, in these awakenings which I have just described, and which I experienced as a rule when I had been dining overnight at La Raspelière, everything occurred as though by this process, and I can testify to it, I, the strange human who, while he waits for death to release him, lives behind closed shutters, knows nothing of the world, sits motionless as an owl, and like that bird can only see things at all clearly in the darkness. Everything occurs as though by this process, but perhaps only a wac of cotton-wool has prevented the sleeper from taking in the internal dialogue of memories and the incessant verbiage of sleep. For (and this may be equally manifest in the other, vaster, more mysterious, more astral system) at the moment of his entering the



waking state, the sleeper hears a voice inside him saying: "Will you come to this dinner tonight, my dear friend, it would be so nice?" and thinks: "Yes, how nice it would be, I shall go"; then, growing wider awake, he suddenly remembers: "My grandmother has only a few weeks to live, so the doctor assures us." He rings, he weeps at the thought that it will not be, as in the past, his grandmother, his dying grandmother, but an indifferent valet that will come in answer to his summons. Moreover, when sleep bore him so far away from the world inhabited by memory and thought, through an ether in which he was alone, more than alone, without even the companionship of self-perception, he was outside the range of time and its measurements. But now the valet is in the room, and he dares not ask him the time, for he does not know whether he has slept, for how many hours he has slept (he wonders whether it should not be how many days, with such a weary body, such a rested mind, such a homesick heart has he returned, as from a journey too distant not to have taken a long time).

One can of course maintain that there is but one time, for the futile reason that it is by looking at the clock that one established as being merely a quarter of an hour what one had supposed a day. But at the moment of establishing this, one is precisely a man awake, immersed in the time of waking men, having deserted the other time. Perhaps indeed more than another time: another life. We do not include the pleasures we enjoy in sleep in the inventory of the pleasures we have experienced in the course of our existence. To take only the most grossly sensual of them all, which of us, on waking, has not felt a certain irritation at having experienced in his sleep a pleasure which, if he is anxious not to tire himself, he is not, once he is awake, at liberty to repeat indefinitely during that day. It seems a positive waste. We have had pleasure in another life which is not ours. If we enter up in a budget the pains and pleasures of dreams (which generally vanish soon enough after our waking), it is not in the current account of our everyday life.

Two times, I have said; perhaps there is only one after all, not that the time of the waking man has any validity for the sleeper, but perhaps because the other life, the life in which he sleeps, is not—in its profounder aspect—included in the category of time. I came to this conclusion when, after those dinner-parties at La Raspelière, I used to sleep so thoroughly. For this reason: I was beginning to despair, on waking, when I found that, after I had rung the bell ten times, the valet did not appear. At the eleventh ring he came. It was only the first after all. The other ten had been mere adumbrations, in my sleep which still hung about me, of the ring that I had been meaning to give. My numbed hands had never even moved. Now, on those mornings (and it is this that makes me think that sleep is perhaps independent of the law of time) my effort to wake up consisted chiefly in an effort to bring the obscure, undefined mass of the sleep in which I had just been living into the framework of time. It is no easy task; sleep, which does not know whether we have slept for two hours or two days, cannot provide us with any point of reference. And if we do not find one outside, not being able to re-enter time, we fall asleep again, for five minutes which seem to us three hours.

I have always said—and have proved by experience—that the most powerful soporific is sleep itself. After having slept profoundly for two hours, having fought with so many giants, and formed so many lifelong friendships, it is far more difficult to awake than after taking several grammes of veronal. And so, reasoning from one thing to the other, I was surprised to hear from the Norwegian philosopher, who had it from M. Boutroux, "my eminent colleague—pardon me, confrère," what M. Bergson thought of the peculiar effects upon the memory of soporific drugs. "Naturally," M. Bergson had said to M. Boutroux, according to the Norwegian philosopher, "soporifics taken from time to time in moderate doses have no effect upon that solid memory of our everyday life which is so firmly established within us. But there are other forms of memory, loftier but also more unstable. One of my colleagues lectures on ancient history. He tells me that if, overnight, he has taken a sleeping pill, he has great difficulty, during his lecture, in recalling the Greek quotations that he requires. The doctor who recommended these tablets assured him that they had no effect on the memory. 'That is perhaps because you do not have to quote Greek,' the historian answered, not without a note of sarcastic pride."

I cannot say whether this conversation between M. Bergson and M. Boutroux is accurately reported. The Norwegian philosopher, albeit so profound and so lucid, so passionately attentive, may have misunderstood. Personally, my own experience has produced the opposite results. The moments of forgetfulness that come to us in the morning after we have taken certain narcotics have a resemblance that is only partial, though disturbing, to the oblivion that reigns during a night of natural and deep sleep. Now what I find myself forgetting in either case is not some line of Baudelaire, which on the contrary keeps sounding in my ear "like a dulcimer," nor some concept of one of the philosophers above-named; it is—if I am asleep—the actual reality of the ordinary things that surround me, my non-perception of which makes me an idiot; it is—if I am awakened and go out after an artificial slumber—not the system of Porphyry or Plotinus, which I can discuss as fluently as on any other day, but the answer that I have promised to give to an invitation, the memory of which has been replaced by a pure blank. The lofty thought remains in its place; what the soporific has put out of action is the power to act in little things, in everything that demands exertion in order to recapture at the right moment, to grasp some memory of everyday life. In spite of all that may be said about survival after the destruction of the brain, I observe that each alteration of the brain is a partial death. We possess all our memories, but not the faculty of recalling them, said, echoing M. Bergson, the eminent Norwegian philosopher whose speech I have made no attempt to imitate in order not to slow things down even more. But not the faculty of recalling them. What, then, is a memory which we do not recall? Or, indeed, let us go further. We do not recall our memories of the last thirty years; but we are wholly steeped in them; why then stop short at thirty years, why not extend this previous life back to before our birth? If I do not know a whole section of the memories that are behind me, if they are invisible to me, if I do not have the faculty of calling them to me,

how do I know whether in that mass that is unknown to me there may not be some that extend back much further than my human existence? If I can have in me and round me so many memories which I do not remember, this oblivion (a *de facto* oblivion, at least, since I have not the faculty of seeing anything) may extend over a life which I have lived in the body of another man, even on another planet. A common oblivion obliterates everything. But what, in that case, is the meaning of that immortality of the soul the reality of which the Norwegian philosopher affirmed? The being that I shall be after death has no more reason to remember the man I have been since my birth than the latter to remember what I was before it.

The valet came in. I did not mention to him that I had rung several times, for I was beginning to realise that hitherto I had only dreamed that I was ringing. I was alarmed nevertheless by the thought that this dream had had the clarity of consciousness. By the same token, might consciousness have the unreality of a dream?

Instead I asked him who it was that had been ringing so often during the night. He told me: "Nobody," and could prove his statement, for the bell-board would have registered any ring. And yet I could hear the repeated, almost furious peals which were still echoing in my ears and were to remain perceptible for several days. It is, however, unusual for sleep thus to project into our waking life memories that do not perish with it. We can count these meteorites. If it is an idea that sleep has forged, it soon breaks up into tenuous, irrecoverable fragments. But, in this instance, sleep had fashioned sounds. More material and simpler, they lasted longer.

I was astonished to hear from the valet how relatively early it was. I felt none the less rested. It is light sleeps that have a long duration, because, being an intermediate state between waking and sleeping, preserving a somewhat faded but constant impression of the former, they require infinitely more time to make us feel rested than a deep sleep, which may be short. I felt entirely relaxed for another reason. If remembering that we have tired ourselves is enough to make us feel our tiredness, saying to oneself "I've rested" is enough to create rest. Now I had been dreaming that M. de Charlus was a hundred and ten years old, and had just boxed the ears of his own mother, Mme Verdurin, because she had paid five billion francs for a bunch of violets; I was thus assured of having slept profoundly, had dreamed back to front what had been in my thoughts overnight and all the possibilities of life at the moment; this was enough to make me feel entirely rested.

I should greatly have astonished my mother, who could not understand M. de Charlus's assiduity in visiting the Verdurins, had I told her who (on the very day on which Albertine's toque had been ordered, without a word about it to her, in order that it might come as a surprise) M. de Charlus had brought to dine in a private room at the Grand Hotel, Balbec. His guest was none other than the footman of a lady who was a cousin of the Cambremers. This footman was very smartly dressed, and, as he crossed the hall with the Baron, "looked the man of fashion," as Saint-Loup would have said, in the eyes of the visitors. Indeed, the young page-boys, the Levites who were swarming down the temple steps at that moment because it was the time when they came on duty, paid no attention to the two newcomers, one of whom, M. de Charlus, kept his eyes lowered to show that he was paying little if any to them. He appeared to be trying to carve his way through their midst. "Thrive then, dear hope of a sacred nation," he said, recalling a passage from Racine, and applying to it a wholly different meaning. "Pardon?" asked the footman, who was not well up in the classics. M. de Charlus made no reply, for he took a certain pride in never answering questions and in walking straight ahead as though there were no other visitors in the hotel and no one else existed in the world except himself, Baron de Charlus. But, having continued to quote the speech of Josabeth: "Come, then, my daughters," he felt a revulsion and did not, like her, add: "Bid them approach," for these young people had not yet reached the age at which sex is completely developed and which appealed to M. de Charlus.

Moreover, if he had written to Mme de Chevreigny's footman, because he had had no doubt of his docility, he had expected someone more virile. On seeing him, he found him more effeminate than he would have liked. He told him that he had been expecting someone else, for he knew by sight another of Mme de Chevreigny's footmen, whom he had noticed upon the box of her carriage. This was an extremely rustic type of peasant, the very opposite of the present footman, who, regarding his mincing ways as a mark of his superiority and never doubting that it was these man-of-fashion airs that had captivated M. de Charlus, could not even guess whom the Baron meant. "But there's nobody else except one you can't have had your eye on—he's hideous, just like a great peasant." And at the thought that it was perhaps this lout whom the Baron had seen, he felt wounded in his self-esteem. The Baron guessed this, and, widening his quest, "But I haven't made a vow to know only Mme de Chevreigny's people," he said. "Surely there are plenty of fellows in one house or another here, or in Paris, since you're going back there soon, that you could introduce to me?" "Oh, no!" replied the footman, "I never associate with anyone of my own class. I only speak to them on duty. But there's one very nice person I could introduce you to." "Who?" asked the Baron. "The Prince de Guermantes." M. de Charlus was vexed at being offered only a man so advanced in years, one moreover to whom he had no need to apply to a footman for an introduction. And so he declined the offer curtly, and, refusing to be put off by the menial's social pretensions, began to explain to him again what he wanted, the style, the type, a jockey, for instance, and so on. Fearing lest the notary, who went past at that moment, might have heard him, he thought it cunning to show that he was speaking of anything in the world rather than what his hearer might suspect, and said with emphasis and in ringing tones, but as though he were simply continuing his conversation: "Yes, in spite of my age, I still retain a passion for collecting, a passion for pretty things. I will do anything to secure an old bronze, an early chandelier. I adore the Beautiful."

But to make clear to the footman the change of subject he had so rapidly executed, M. de Charlus laid such stress upon each word, and furthermore, in order to be heard by the notary, he shouted his words so loud, that this charade would have been enough to betray what it concealed to ears more alert than those of the

legal gentleman. The latter suspected nothing, any more than did any of the other residents in the hotel, all of whom saw a fashionable foreigner in the footman so smartly attired. On the other hand, if the men of the world were deceived and took him for a distinguished American, no sooner did he appear before the servants than he was spotted by them, as one convict recognises another, indeed scented afar off, as certain animals scent one another. The waiters raised their eyebrows. Aimé cast a suspicious glance. The wine waiter, shrugging his shoulders, uttered behind his hand (because he thought it polite) a disobliging remark which everybody heard.

And even our old Françoise, whose sight was failing and who arrived at the foot of the staircase at that moment on her way to dine in the guests' servants' hall, raised her head, recognised a servant where the hotel guests never suspected one—as the old nurse Euryclea recognises Ulysses long before the suitors seated at the banquet—and seeing M. de Charlus arm in arm with him, assumed an appalled expression, as though all of a sudden slanders which she had heard repeated and had not believed had acquired a distressing verisimilitude in her eyes. She never spoke to me, or to anyone else, of this incident, but it must have caused a considerable commotion in her brain, for afterwards, whenever in Paris she happened to see “Julien,” to whom until then she had been so greatly attached, she still treated him with politeness, but with a politeness that had cooled and was always tempered with a strong dose of reserve. This same incident, however, led someone else to confide in me: this was Aimé. When I passed M. de Charlus, the latter, not having expected to meet me, raised his hand and called out “Good evening” with the indifference—outwardly, at least—of a great nobleman who thinks he can do anything he likes and considers it shrewder not to appear to be hiding anything. Aimé, who at that moment was watching him with a suspicious eye and saw that I greeted the compardon of the person in whom he was certain that he detected a servant, asked me that same evening who he was.

For, for some time past, Aimé had shown a fondness for chatting, or rather, as he himself put it, doubtless in order to emphasise the (to him) philosophical character of these chats, “discussing” with me. And as I often said to him that it distressed me that he should have to stand beside the table while I ate instead of being able to sit down and share my meal, he declared that he had never seen a guest show such “sound reasoning.” He was chatting at that moment to two waiters. They had greeted me, I did not know why; their faces were unfamiliar, although their conversation reverberated with echoes that were not entirely new to me. Aimé was scolding them both because of their matrimonial engagements, of which he disapproved. He appealed to me, and I said that I could not have any opinion on the matter since I did not know them. They reminded me of their names, and said that they had often waited upon me at Rivebelle. But one had let his moustache grow, the other had shaved his off and had had his head cropped; and for this reason, although it was the same head as before that rested upon the shoulders of each of them (and not a different head as in the faulty restorations of Notre-Dame), it had remained almost as invisible to me as those objects which escape the most minute search and are actually staring everybody in the face where nobody notices them, on the mantelpiece. As soon as I knew their names, I recognised exactly the uncertain music of their voices because I saw once more the old faces which determined it. “They want to get married and they haven’t even learned English!” Aimé said to me, overlooking the fact that I was little versed in the ways of the hotel trade, and could not be aware that if one does not know foreign languages one cannot be certain of getting a job.

Assuming that Aimé would have no difficulty in finding out that the newcomer was M. de Charlus, and indeed convinced that he must remember him, having waited on him in the dining-room when the Baron had come to see Mme de Villeparisis during my former visit to Balbec, I told him his name. Not only did Aimé not remember the Baron de Charlus, but the name appeared to make a profound impression on him. He told me that he would look next day in his room for a letter which I might perhaps be able to explain to him. I was all the more astonished because M. de Charlus, when he had wished to give me one of Bergotte’s books at Balbec the first year, had specially asked for Aimé, whom he must have recognised later on in that Paris restaurant where I had had lunch with Saint-Loup and his mistress and where M. de Charlus had come to spy on us. It is true that Aimé had not been able to execute these commissions in person, being on the former occasion in bed, and on the latter engaged in serving. I had nevertheless grave doubts as to his sincerity when he claimed not to know M. de Charlus. For one thing, he must have been to the Baron’s liking. Like all the floor waiters of the Balbec hotel, like several of the Prince de Guermantes’s footmen, Aimé belonged to a race more ancient than that of the Prince, and therefore more noble. When one asked for a private room, one thought at first that one was alone. But presently, in the pantry, one caught sight of a sculptural waiter, of that ruddy Etruscan kind of which Aimé was the epitome, slightly aged by excessive consumption of champagne and seeing the inevitable hour for mineral water approach. Not all the guests asked them merely to wait upon them. The underlings, who were young, scrupulous, and in a hurry, having mistresses waiting for them outside, made off. Hence Aimé reproached them with not being serious. He had every right to do so. He himself was certainly serious. He had a wife and children, and was ambitious on their behalf. And so he never repulsed the advances made to him by a strange lady or gentleman, even if it meant his staying all night. For business must come first. He was so much of the type that might attract M. de Charlus that I suspected him of falsehood when he told me that he did not know him. I was wrong. The page had been perfectly truthful when he told the Baron that Aimé (who had given him a dressing-down for it next day) had gone to bed (or gone out), and on the other occasion was busy serving. But imagination outreaches reality. And the pageboy’s embarrassment had probably aroused in M. de Charlus doubts as to the sincerity of his excuses, doubts that had wounded feelings on his part of which Aimé had no suspicion. We have seen moreover that Saint-Loup had prevented Aimé from going out to the carriage and that M. de Charlus, who had managed somehow or other to discover the head waiter’s new address, had suffered a further disappointment. Aimé, who had not noticed him, felt an

astonishment that may be imagined when, on the evening of that very day on which I had had lunch with Saint-Loup and his mistress, he received a letter sealed with the Guermantes arms from which I shall quote a few passages here as an example of unilateral insanity in an intelligent man addressing a sensible idiot.

"Monsieur, I have been unsuccessful, notwithstanding efforts that would astonish many who have sought in vain to be received and greeted by me, in persuading you to listen to certain explanations which you have not asked of me but which I have felt it to be incumbent upon my dignity and your own to offer you. I propose therefore to write down here what it would have been simpler to say to you in person. I make no secret of the fact that, the first time I set eyes upon you at Balbec, I found your face frankly antipathetic." Here followed reflexions on the resemblance—remarked only on the following day—to a deceased friend to whom M. de Charlus had been deeply attached. "For a moment I had the idea that you might, without in any way encroaching upon the demands of your profession, come to see me and, by joining me in the card games with which his gaiety used to dispel my gloom, give me the illusion that he was not dead. Whatever the nature of the more or less fatuous suppositions which you probably formed, suppositions more within the mental range of a servant (who does not even deserve the name of servant since he has declined to serve) than the comprehension of so lofty a sentiment, you no doubt thought to give yourself an air of importance, ignoring who I was and what I was, by sending word to me, when I asked you to fetch me a book, that you were in bed; but it is a mistake to imagine that impolite behaviour ever adds to charm, a quality in which in any case you are entirely lacking. I should have ended matters there had I not by chance had occasion to speak to you the following day. Your resemblance to my poor friend was so pronounced, banishing even the intolerable protuberance of your too prominent chin, that I realised that it was the deceased who at that moment was lending you his own kindly expression so as to permit you to regain your hold over me and to prevent you from missing the unique opportunity that was being offered you. Indeed, although I have no wish, since there is no longer any object and it is unlikely that I shall meet you again in this life, to introduce coarse questions of material interest, I should have been only too glad to obey the prayer of my dead friend (for I believe in the Communion of Saints and in their desire to intervene in the destiny of the living), that I should treat you as I used to treat him, who had his carriage and his servants, and to whom it was quite natural that I should consecrate the greater part of my fortune since I loved him as a father loves his son. You have decided otherwise. To my request that you should fetch me a book you sent the reply that you were obliged to go out. And this morning when I sent to ask you to come to my carriage, you then, if I may so speak without blasphemy, denied me for the third time. You will forgive me for not enclosing in this envelope the lavish gratuity which I intended to give you at Balbec and to which it would be too painful for me to restrict myself in dealing with a person with whom I had thought for a moment of sharing all that I possess. At the very most you could spare me the trouble of coming to your restaurant to make a fourth futile overture to which my patience will not extend." (Here M. de Charlus gave his address, stated the hours at which he would be at home, etc.) "Farewell, Monsieur. Since I assume that, resembling so strongly the friend whom I have lost, you cannot be entirely stupid, otherwise physiognomy would be a false science, I am convinced that if, one day, you think of this incident again, it will not be without a feeling of some regret and remorse. For my part, believe me, I am quite sincere in saying that I retain no bitterness. I should have preferred that we should part with a less unpleasant memory than this third futile approach. It will soon be forgotten. We are like those vessels which you must often have seen at Balbec, which have crossed one another's paths for a moment; it might have been to the advantage of each of them to stop; but one of them has decided otherwise; presently they will no longer even see one another on the horizon, and their meeting is a thing out of mind; but before this final parting, each of them salutes the other, and so at this point, Monsieur, wishing you all good fortune, does the Baron de Charlus."

Aimé had not even read this letter to the end, being able to make nothing of it and suspecting a hoax. When I had explained to him who the Baron was, he appeared to be lost in thought and to be feeling the regret that M. de Charlus had anticipated. I would not be prepared to swear that he might not at that moment have written a letter of apology to a man who gave carriages to his friends. But in the interval M. de Charlus had made Morel's acquaintance. At most, his relations with Morel being possibly platonic, M. de Charlus occasionally sought to spend an evening in company such as that in which I had just met him in the hall. But he was no longer able to divert from Morel the violent feelings which, unfettered a few years earlier, had been only too ready to fasten themselves upon Aimé and had dictated the letter which had embarrassed me for its writer's sake when the head waiter showed me it. It was, because of the anti-social nature of M. de Charlus's love, a more striking example of the insensible, sweeping force of those currents of passion by which the lover, like a swimmer, is very soon carried out of sight of land. No doubt the love of a normal man may also, when the lover through the successive fabrications of his desires, regrets, disappointments, plans, constructs a whole novel about a woman whom he does not know, cause the two legs of the compass to gape at a fairly considerable angle. All the same, such an angle was singularly widened by the character of a passion which is not generally shared and by the difference in social position between M. de Charlus and Aimé.

Every day I went out with Albertine. She had decided to take up painting again and had chosen as the subject of her first attempts the church of Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise which nobody ever visited and very few had even heard of, which was difficult to get directions to, impossible to find without being guided, and laborious to reach in its isolation, more than half an hour from Epreville station, after one had long left behind one the last houses of the village of Quetteholme. As to the name Epreville, I found that the curé's book and Brichot's information were at variance. According to one, Epreville was the ancient Sprevilla; the other derived the

name from Aprivilla. On our first visit we took a little train in the opposite direction from Féterne, that is to say towards Grattevast. But we were in the dog days and it had been a terrible strain to leave immediately after lunch. I should have preferred not to set out so early; the luminous and burning air provoked thoughts of indolence and cool retreats. It filled my mother's room and mine, according to their exposure, at varying temperatures, like rooms in a Turkish bath. Mamma's bathroom, festooned by the sun with a dazzling, Moorish whiteness, appeared to be sunk at the bottom of a well, because of the four plastered walls on which it looked out, while far above, in the square gap, the sky, whose fleecy white waves could be seen gliding past, one above the other, seemed (because of the longing that one felt) like a tank filled with blue water and reserved for ablutions, either built on a terrace or seen upside down in a mirror fixed to the window. Notwithstanding this scorching temperature, we had taken the one o'clock train. But Albertine had been very hot in the carriage, hotter still in the long walk across country, and I was afraid of her catching cold when afterwards she had to sit still in that damp hollow where the sun's rays did not penetrate. However, having realised as long ago as our first visits to Elstir that she would appreciate not merely luxury but even a certain degree of comfort of which her want of money deprived her, I had made arrangements with a Balbec livery stable for a carriage to be sent to fetch us every day. To escape from the heat we took the road through the forest of Chantepie. The invisibility of the innumerable birds, some of them sea-birds, that conversed with one another from the trees on either side of us, gave the same impression of repose as one has when one shuts one's eyes. By Albertine's side, clasped in her arms in the depths of the carriage, I listened to these Oceanides. And when by chance I caught sight of one of these musicians as he flitted from one leaf to the shelter of another, there was so little apparent connexion between him and his songs that I could not believe that I was seeing their cause in that tiny body, fluttering, humble, startled and unseeing. The carriage could not take us all the way to the church. I stopped it when we had passed through Quetteholme and bade Albertine good-bye. For she had alarmed me by saying to me of this church as of other monuments and of certain pictures: "What a pleasure it would be to see it with you!" This pleasure was one that I did not feel myself capable of giving her. I felt it myself in front of beautiful things only if I was alone or pretended to be alone and did not speak. But since she had hoped to be able, thanks to me, to experience artistic sensations that cannot be communicated thus, I thought it more prudent to say that I must leave her, that I would come back to fetch her at the end of the day, but that in the meantime I must go back with the carriage to pay a call on Mme Verdurin or on the Cambremers, or even spend an hour with Mamma at Balbec, but never further afield. To begin with, that is to say. For, Albertine having once said to me petulantly: "It's a bore that nature has arranged things so badly and put Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise in one direction, La Raspelière in another, so that you're imprisoned for the whole day in the spot you've chosen," as soon as the toque and veil had come I ordered, to my eventual undoing, a motor-car from Saint-Fargeau (*Sanctus Ferreolus*, according to the curé's book). Albertine, whom I had kept in ignorance and who had come to call for me, was surprised when she heard in front of the hotel the purr of the engine, delighted when she learned that this motor was for ourselves. I took her upstairs to my room for a moment. She jumped for joy. "Are we going to pay a call on the Verdurins?" "Yes, but you'd better not go dressed like that since you'll have your motor-car. Here, you'll look better in these." And I brought out the toque and veil which I had hidden. "They're for me? Oh! you are an angel," she cried, throwing her arms round my neck. Aimé, who met us on the stairs, proud of Albertine's smart attire and of our means of transport, for these vehicles were still comparatively rare at Balbec, could not resist the pleasure of coming downstairs behind us. Albertine, anxious to display herself in her new garments, asked me to have the hood raised; we could lower it later on when we wished to be more private. "Now then," said Aimé to the driver, with whom he was not acquainted and who had not stirred, "don't you (*tu*) hear, you're to raise the hood?" For Aimé, sophisticated as a result of hotel life, in which moreover he had won his way to exalted rank, was not as shy as the cab driver to whom Françoise was a "lady"; despite the absence of any formal introduction, plebeians whom he had never seen before he addressed as *tu*, though it was hard to say whether this was aristocratic disdain on his part or democratic fraternity. "I'm engaged," replied the chauffeur, who did not know me by sight. "I'm ordered for Mlle Simonet. I can't take this gentleman." Aimé burst out laughing: "Why, you great bumpkin," he said to the driver, whom he at once convinced, "this is Mlle Simonet, and Monsieur, who wants you to open the roof of your car, is the person who has engaged you." And since, although personally he had no great liking for Albertine, Aimé was for my sake proud of her get-up, he whispered to the chauffeur: "Don't get the chance of driving a princess like that every day, do you?" On this first occasion I was unable to go to La Raspelière alone as I did on other days, while Albertine painted; she wanted to come there with me. Although she realised that it would be possible to stop here and there on our way, she could not believe that we could start by going to Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise, that is to say in another direction, and then make an excursion which seemed to be reserved for a different day. She learned on the contrary from the driver that nothing could be easier than to go to Saint-Jean, which he could do in twenty minutes, and that we might stay there if we chose for hours, or go on much further, for from Quetteholme to La Raspelière would not take more than thirty-five minutes. We realised this as soon as the vehicle, starting off, covered in one bound twenty paces of an excellent horse. Distances are only the relation of space to time and vary with it. We express the difficulty that we have in getting to a place in a system of miles or kilometres which becomes false as soon as that difficulty decreases. Art is modified by it also, since a village which seemed to be in a different world from some other village becomes its neighbour in a landscape whose dimensions are altered. In any case, to learn that there may perhaps exist a universe in which two and two make five and a straight line is not the shortest distance between two points would have astonished Albertine far less than to hear the driver say that it was easy to go in a single afternoon to Saint-

Jean and La Raspelière. Douville and Quetteholme, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux and Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, Gourville and Balbec-le-Vieux, Tourville and Féterne, prisoners hitherto as hermetically confined in the cells of distinct days as long ago were Méséglise and Guermantes, upon which the same eyes could not gaze in the course of a single afternoon, delivered now by the giant with the seven-league boots, clustered around our tea-time with their towers and steeples and their old gardens which the neighbouring wood sprang back to reveal.

Coming to the foot of the cliff road, the car climbed effortlessly, with a continuous sound like that of a knife being ground, while the sea, falling away, widened beneath us. The old rustic houses of Montsurvent came rushing towards us, clasping to their bosoms vine or rose-bush; the firs of La Raspelière, more agitated than when the evening breeze was rising, ran in every direction to escape from us, and a new servant whom I had never seen before came to open the door for us on the terrace while the gardener's son, betraying a precocious bent, gazed intently at the engine. As it was not a Monday we did not know whether we should find Mme Verdurin, for except on that day, when she had guests, it was unsafe to call upon her without warning. No doubt she was "in principle" at home, but this expression, which Mme Swann employed at the time when she too was seeking to form her little clan and attract customers without herself moving (even though she often did not get her money's worth) and which she mistranslated into "on principle," meant no more than "as a general rule," that is to say with frequent exceptions. For not only did Mme Verdurin like going out, but she carried her duties as a hostess to extreme lengths, and when she had had people to lunch, immediately after the coffee, liqueurs and cigarettes (notwithstanding the first somnolent effects of heat and digestion in which they would have preferred to watch through the leafy boughs of the terrace the Jersey packet sailing across the enamelled sea), the programme included a series of excursions in the course of which her guests, forced into carriages, were conveyed willy-nilly to look at one or other of the beauty spots that abound in the neighbourhood of Douville. This second part of the entertainment was, as it happened (once the effort to get up and climb into a carriage had been made), no less satisfying than the other to the guests, already conditioned by the succulent dishes, the vintage wines or sparkling cider to be easily intoxicated by the purity of the breeze and the magnificence of the sights. Mme Verdurin used to show these to visitors rather as though they were annexes (more or less detached) of her property, which you could not help going to see if you came to lunch with her and which conversely you would never have known had you not been entertained by the Mistress. This claim to arrogate to herself the exclusive right over the local sights, as over Morel's and formerly Dechambre's playing, and to compel the landscapes to form part of the little clan, was not in fact as absurd as it appears at first sight. Mme Verdurin deplored not only the lack of taste which in her opinion the Cambremers showed in the furnishing of La Raspelière and the arrangement of the garden, but also the excursions they made, with or without their guests, in the surrounding countryside. Just as, according to her, La Raspelière was only beginning to become what it should always have been now that it was the asylum of the little clan, so she insisted that the Cambremers, perpetually exploring in their barouche, along the railway line, by the shore, the one ugly road in the district, had been living in the place all their lives but did not know it. There was a grain of truth in this assertion. From force of habit, lack of imagination, want of interest in a country which seemed hackneyed because it was so near, the Cambremers when they left their home went always to the same places and by the same roads. To be sure, they laughed heartily at the Verdurins' pretensions to teach them about their own countryside. But if they were driven into a corner they and even their coachman would have been incapable of taking us to the splendid, more or less secret places to which M. Verdurin brought us, now breaking through the fence of a private but deserted property into which other people would not have thought it possible to venture, now leaving the carriage to follow a path which was not wide enough for wheeled traffic, but in either case with the certain recompense of a marvellous view. It must also be said that the garden at La Raspelière was in a sense a compendium of all the excursions to be made in a radius of many miles—in the first place because of its commanding position, overlooking on one side the valley, on the other the sea, and also because, on one and the same side, the seaward side for instance, clearings had been made through the trees in such a way that from one point you embraced one horizon, from another a different one. There was at each of these vantage points a bench; you went and sat down in turn upon the bench from which there was the view of Balbec, or Parville, or Douville. Even to command a single direction, one bench would have been placed more or less on the edge of the cliff, another set back. From the latter you had a foreground of verdure and a horizon which seemed already the vastest imaginable, but which became infinitely larger if, continuing along a little path, you went to the next bench from which you embraced the whole amphitheatre of the sea. There you could catch distinctly the sound of the waves, which did not penetrate to the more secluded parts of the garden, where the sea was still visible but no longer audible. These resting-places were known by the occupants of La Raspelière by the name of "views." And indeed they assembled round the château the finest views of the neighbouring villages, beaches or forests, seen greatly diminished by distance, as Hadrian collected in his villa reduced models of the most famous monuments of different regions. The name that followed the word "view" was not necessarily that of a place on the coast, but often that of the opposite shore of the bay which you could make out, standing out in a certain relief notwithstanding the extent of the panorama. Just as you took a book from M. Verdurin's library to go and read for an hour at the "view of Balbec," so if the sky was clear the liqueurs would be served at the "view of Rivebelle," on condition however that the wind was not too strong, for, in spite of the trees planted on either side, the air up there was keen.

To revert to the afternoon drives which Mme Verdurin used to organise, if on her return she found the cards of some social butterfly "on a visit to the coast," the Mistress would pretend to be overjoyed but was actually broken-hearted at having missed his visit and (albeit people at this date came only to "see the house"

or to make the acquaintance for a day of a woman whose artistic salon was famous but outside the pale in Paris) would at once get M. Verdurin to invite him to dine on the following Wednesday. As the tourist was often obliged to leave before that day, or was afraid to be out late, Mme Verdurin had arranged that on Mondays she was always to be found at tea-time. These tea-parties were not at all large, and I had known more brilliant gatherings of the sort in Paris, at the Princesse de Guermantes's, at Mme de Galliffet's or Mme d'Arpajon's. But this was not Paris, and the charm of the setting enhanced, in my eyes, not merely the pleasantness of the occasion but the merits of the visitors. A meeting with some society person, which in Paris would have given me no pleasure but which at La Raspelière, whither he or she had come from a distance via Féterne or the forest of Chantepie, changed in character and importance, became an agreeable incident. Sometimes it was a person whom I knew quite well and would not have gone a yard to meet at the Swanns'. But his name had a different reverberation on this cliff, like the name of an actor one has constantly seen in the theatre printed in a different colour on a poster for some special gala performance, where his fame is suddenly heightened by the unexpectedness of the context. As in the country people behave without ceremony, the social celebrity often took it upon himself to bring the friends with whom he was staying, murmuring to Mme Verdurin by way of excuse that he could not leave them behind as he was living in their house; to his hosts on the other hand he pretended to be offering as a sort of courtesy this diversion, in a monotonous seaside life, of being taken to a centre of wit and intellect, of visiting a magnificent mansion and of having an excellent tea. This composed at once an assembly of several persons of semi-distinction; and if a little slice of garden with a few trees, which would seem paltry in the country, acquires an extraordinary charm in the Avenue Gabriel or the Rue de Monceau, where only multi-millionaires can afford such a luxury, conversely noblemen who would be background figures at a Parisian reception were shown to full advantage on a Monday afternoon at La Raspelière. No sooner did they sit down at the table covered with a cloth embroidered in red, beneath the painted panels, to partake of pancakes, Norman puff pastry, trifles, boat-shaped tartlets filled with cherries like coral beads, cabinet puddings, than these guests were subjected, by the proximity of the great bowl of azure upon which the window opened and which you could not help seeing at the same time as them, to a profound alteration, a transmutation which changed them into something more precious than before. What was more, even before you set eyes on them, when you came on a Monday to Mme Verdurin's, people who in Paris would scarcely turn their jaded heads to look at the string of elegant carriages stationed outside a great house, felt their hearts throb at the sight of the two or three shabby dog-carts drawn up in front of La Raspelière, beneath the tall firs. No doubt this was because the rustic setting was different, and social impressions thanks to this transposition regained a certain freshness. It was also because the broken-down carriage that one hired to pay a call upon Mme Verdurin conjured up a pleasant drive and a costly bargain struck with a coachman who had demanded "so much" for the whole day. But the slight stir of curiosity with regard to fresh arrivals whom it was still impossible to distinguish arose also from the fact that everyone wondered, "Who can this be?"—a question which it was difficult to answer, when one did not know who might have come down to spend a week with the Cambremers or elsewhere, but which people always enjoy putting to themselves in rustic, solitary environments where a meeting with a human being whom one has not seen for a long time, or an introduction to somebody one does not know, ceases to be the tedious affair that it is in the life of Paris, and forms a delicious break in the empty monotony of lives that are too isolated, in which even the arrival of the mail becomes a pleasure. And on the day on which we arrived by motorcar at La Raspelière, as it was not Monday, M. and Mme Verdurin must have been devoured by that craving to see people which attacks both men and women and inspires a longing to throw himself out of the window in the patient who has been shut up away from his family and friends in an isolation clinic. For the new and more swift-footed servant, who had already made himself familiar with these expressions, having replied that "if Madame hasn't gone out she must be at the view of Douville," and that he would go and look for her, came back immediately to tell us that she was coming to welcome us. We found her slightly dishevelled, for she had come from the flower-beds, the poultry-yard and the kitchen garden, where she had gone to feed her peacocks and hens, to look for eggs, to gather fruit and flowers to "make her table-runner," which would recall her garden path in miniature, but would confer on the table the distinction of making it support the burden of only such things as were useful and good to eat; for round those other presents from the garden—the pears, the whipped eggs—rose the tall stems of bugloss, carnations, roses and coreopsis, between which one saw, as between blossoming boundary posts, the ships out at sea moving slowly across the glazed windows. From the astonishment which M. and Mme Verdurin, interrupted while arranging their flowers to receive the visitors who had been announced, showed upon finding that these visitors were merely Albertine and myself, it was easy to see that the new servant, full of zeal but not yet familiar with my name, had repeated it wrongly and that Mme Verdurin, hearing the names of guests whom she did not know, had nevertheless bidden him let them in, in her need of seeing somebody, no matter whom. And the new servant stood contemplating this spectacle from the door in order to learn what part we played in the household. Then he made off at a loping run, for he had entered upon his duties only the day before. When Albertine had quite finished displaying her toque and veil to the Verdurins, she gave me a warning look to remind me that we had not too much time left for what we meant to do. Mme Verdurin begged us to stay to tea, but we refused, when all of a sudden a suggestion was mooted which would have made an end of all the pleasures that I had promised myself from my drive with Albertine: the Mistress, unable to face the thought of leaving us, or perhaps of letting slip a new diversion, decided to accompany us. Accustomed for years past to the experience that similar offers on her part were not well received, and being probably uncertain whether this offer would find favour with us, she concealed beneath an excessive assurance the timidity that she felt in

making it to us and, without even appearing to suppose that there could be any doubt as to our answer, asked us no question but said to her husband, referring to Albertine and myself, as though she were conferring a favour on us: "I shall see them home myself." At the same time there hovered over her lips a smile that did not strictly belong to them, a smile which I had already seen on the faces of certain people when they said to Bergotte with a knowing air: "I've bought your book, it's not bad," one of those collective, universal smiles which, when they feel the need of them—as one makes use of railways and removal vans—individuals borrow, except a few who are extremely refined, like Swann or M. de Charlus, on whose lips I never saw that smile appear. From that moment my visit was ruined. I pretended not to have understood. A moment later it became evident that M. Verdurin was to be of the party. "But it will be too far for M. Verdurin," I objected. "Not at all," replied Mme Verdurin with a condescending, cheerful air, "he says it will amuse him immensely to go with you young people over a road he has travelled so many times; if necessary, he will sit beside the driver, that doesn't frighten him, and we shall come back quietly by the train like good spouses. Look at him, he's quite delighted." She seemed to be speaking of an aged and famous painter full of good nature, who, younger than the youngest, takes a delight in daubing pictures to amuse his grandchildren. What added to my gloom was that Albertine seemed not to share it and to find some amusement in the thought of dashing all over the countryside with the Verdurins. As for myself, the pleasure that I had been looking forward to enjoying with her was so imperious that I refused to allow the Mistress to spoil it; I made up lies which were justified by Mme Verdurin's irritating threats but which Albertine unfortunately contradicted. "But we have a call to make," I said. "What call?" asked Albertine. "I'll explain to you later, there's no getting out of it." "Very well, we can wait outside," said Mme Verdurin, resigned to anything. At the last minute my anguish at being deprived of a happiness for which I had so longed gave me the courage to be impolite. I refused point-blank, whispering in Mme Verdurin's ear that because of some trouble which had befallen Albertine and about which she wished to consult me, it was absolutely essential that I should be alone with her. The Mistress looked furious: "All right, we shan't come," she said to me in a voice trembling with rage. I felt her to be so angry that, so as to appear to be giving way a little: "But we might perhaps ..." I began. "No," she replied, more furious than ever, "when I say no, I mean no." I supposed that I had irrevocably offended her, but she called us back at the door to urge us not to "let her down" on the following Wednesday, and not to come with that contraption, which was dangerous at night, but by the train with the little group, and she stopped the car, which was already moving downhill through the park, because the footman had forgotten to put in the back the slice of tart and the short-bread which she had had wrapped up for us. We set off again, escorted for a moment by the little houses that came running to meet us with their flowers. The face of the countryside seemed to us entirely changed, for in the topographical image that we form in our minds of separate places the notion of space is far from being the most important factor. We have said that the notion of time segregates them even further. It is not the only factor either. Certain places which we see always in isolation seem to us to have no common measure with the rest, to be almost outside the world, like those people whom we have known in exceptional periods of our life, in the army or during our childhood, and whom we do not connect with anything. During my first stay at Balbec there was a hill which Mme de Villeparisis liked to take us up because from it you saw only the sea and the woods, and which was called Beaumont. As the road that she took to approach it, and preferred to other routes because of its old trees, went uphill all the way, her carriage was obliged to go at a crawling pace and took a very long time. When we reached the top we used to get down, walk for a while, get back into the carriage, and return by the same road, without seeing a single village, a single country house. I knew that Beaumont was something very special, very remote, very high, but I had no idea of the direction in which it was to be found, having never taken the Beaumont road to go anywhere else; besides, it took a very long time to get there in a carriage. It was obviously in the same department (or in the same province) as Balbec, but was situated for me on another plane, enjoyed a special privilege of extraterritoriality. But the motor-car respects no mystery, and, having passed through Incarville, whose houses still danced before my eyes, as we were going down the by-road that leads to Parville (*Patemi villa*), catching sight of the sea from a natural terrace over which we were passing, I asked the name of the place, and before the chauffeur had time to reply recognised Beaumont, close by which I passed thus without knowing it whenever I took the little train, for it was within two minutes of Parville. Like an officer in my regiment who might have struck me as someone special, too kindly and unassuming to be a nobleman, or altogether too remote and mysterious to be merely a nobleman, and whom I then might have discovered to be the brother-in-law or the cousin of people with whom I often dined, so Beaumont, suddenly linked with places from which I supposed it to be so distinct, lost its mystery and took its place in the district, making me think with terror that Madame Bovary and the Sanseverina might perhaps have seemed to me to be like ordinary people, had I met them elsewhere than in the closed atmosphere of a novel. It may be thought that my love of enchanted journeys by train ought to have kept me from sharing Albertine's wonder at the motor-car which takes even an invalid wherever he wishes to go and prevents one from thinking—as I had done hitherto—of the actual site as the individual mark, the irreplaceable essence of irremovable beauties. And doubtless this site was not, for the motor-car, as it had formerly been for the railway train when I came from Paris to Balbec, a goal exempt from the contingencies of ordinary life, almost ideal at the moment of departure and remaining so at the moment of arrival in that great dwelling where nobody lives and which bears only the name of the town, the station, with its promise at last of accessibility to the place of which it is, as it were, the materialisation. No, the motor-car did not convey us thus by magic into a town which we saw at first as the collectivity summed up in its name, and with the illusions of a spectator in a theatre. It took us backstage into the streets, stopped to ask an inhabitant the way. But, as compensation for so homely a mode of progress,



there are the gropings of the chauffeur himself, uncertain of his way and going back over his tracks; the "general post" of the perspective which sets a castle dancing about with a hill, a church and the sea, while one draws nearer to it however much it tries to huddle beneath its age-old foliage; those ever-narrowing circles described by the motor-car round a spellbound town which darts off in every direction to escape, and which finally it swoops straight down upon in the depths of the valley where it lies prone on the ground; so that this site, this unique point, which on the one hand the motor-car seems to have stripped of the mystery of express trains, on the other hand it gives us the impression of discovering, of pinpointing for ourselves as with a compass, and helps us to feel with a more lovingly exploring hand, with a more delicate precision, the true geometry, the beautiful proportions of the earth.

What unfortunately I did not know at that moment and did not learn until more than two years later was that one of the chauffeur's customers was M. de Charlus, and that Morel, instructed to pay him and keeping part of the money for himself (making the chauffeur triple and quintuple the mileage), had become very friendly with him (while pretending not to know him in front of other people) and made use of his car for long journeys. If I had known this at the time, and that the confidence which the Verdurins were presently to feel in this chauffeur came, unknown to them perhaps, from that source, many of the sorrows of my life in Paris in the following year, much of my trouble over Albertine, would have been avoided; but I had not the slightest suspicion of it. In themselves, M. de Charlus's excursions by motor-car with Morel were of no direct interest to me. They were confined as a rule to a lunch or dinner in some restaurant along the coast where M. de Charlus was taken for an old and penniless servant and Morel, whose duty it was to pay the bill, for a too kind-hearted gentleman. I report the conversation at one of these meals, which may give an idea of the others. It was in a restaurant of elongated shape at Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu.

"Can't you get them to remove this thing?" M. de Charlus asked Morel, as though appealing to an intermediary without having to address the staff directly. "This thing" was a vase containing three withered roses with which a well-meaning head waiter had seen fit to decorate the table.

"Yes ..." said Morel, embarrassed. "Don't you like roses?"

"My request ought on the contrary to prove that I do like them, since there are no roses here" (Morel appeared surprised) "but as a matter of fact I do not care much for them. I am rather susceptible to names; and whenever a rose is at all beautiful, one learns that it is called Baronne de Rothschild or Maréchale Niel, which casts a chill. Do you like names? Have you found pretty titles for your little concert numbers?"

"There is one that's called *Poème triste*."

"That's hideous," replied M. de Charlus in a shrill voice that rang out like a slap in the face. "But I ordered champagne," he said to the head waiter, who had supposed he was obeying the order by placing by the diners two glasses of sparkling liquid.

"Yes, sir."

"Take away that filth, which has no connexion with the worst champagne in the world. It is the emetic known as cup, which consists, as a rule, of three rotten strawberries swimming in a mixture of vinegar and soda-water ... Yes," he went on, turning again to Morel, "you don't seem to know what a title is. And even in the interpretation of the things you play best, you seem not to be aware of the mediumistic side."

"What's that you say?" asked Morel, who, not having understood one word of what the Baron had said, was afraid that he might be missing something of importance, such as an invitation to lunch. M. de Charlus not having deigned to consider "What's that you say?" as a question, Morel in consequence received no answer, and thought it best to change the subject and give the conversation a sensual turn.

"I say, look at the little blonde selling the flowers you don't like; I bet she's got a little girlfriend. And the old woman dining at the table at the end, too."

"But how do you know all that?" asked M. de Charlus, amazed at Morel's intuition.

"Oh! I can spot them in an instant. If we walked together through a crowd, you'd see that I never make a mistake." And anyone looking at Morel at that moment, with his girlish air enshrined in his masculine beauty, would have understood the obscure divination which marked him out to certain women no less than them to him. He was anxious to supplant Jupien, vaguely desirous of adding to his regular salary the income which, he supposed, the tailor derived from the Baron. "And with gigolos I'm surer still. I could save you from making mistakes. They'll be having the fair at Balbec soon. We'll find lots of things there. And in Paris too, you'll see, you'll have a fine time." But the inherited caution of a servant made him give a different turn to the sentence on which he had already embarked. So that M. de Charlus supposed that he was still referring to girls. "Do you know," said Morel, anxious to excite the Baron's senses in a fashion which he considered less compromising for himself (although it was actually more immoral), "what I'd like would be to find a girl who was absolutely pure, make her fall in love with me, and take her virginity."

M. de Charlus could not refrain from pinching Morel's ear affectionately, but added ingenuously: "What good would that do you? If you took her maidenhead, you would be obliged to marry her."

"Marry her?" cried Morel, feeling that the Baron must be tipsy, or else giving no thought to the sort of man, more scrupulous in reality than he supposed, to whom he was speaking. "Marry her? No fear! I'd promise, but once the little operation was performed, I'd ditch her that very evening."

M. de Charlus was in the habit, when a fiction was capable of causing him a momentary sensual pleasure, of giving it his support and then withdrawing it a few minutes later, when his pleasure was at an end. "Would you really do that?" he said to Morel with a laugh, squeezing him more tightly still.

"Wouldn't I half!" said Morel, seeing that he was not displeasing the Baron by continuing to expound to him what was indeed one of his desires.

"It's dangerous," said M. de Charlus.

"I should have my kit packed and ready, and buzz off without leaving an address."

"And what about me?" asked M. de Charlus.

"I should take you with me, of course," Morel made haste to add, never having thought of what would become of the Baron, who was the least of his worries. "I say, there's a kid I should love to try that game on, she's a little seamstress who keeps a shop in M. le Duc's house."

"Jupien's girl," the Baron exclaimed as the wine-waiter entered the room. "Oh! never," he added, whether because the presence of a third person had cooled him down, or because even in this sort of black mass in which he took pleasure in defiling the most sacred things, he could not bring himself to allow the mention of people to whom he was bound by ties of friendship. "Jupien is a good man, and the child is charming. It would be terrible to cause them distress."

Morel felt that he had gone too far and was silent, but his eyes continued to gaze into space at the girl for whose benefit he had once begged me to address him as "*cher maître*" and from whom he had ordered a waistcoat. An industrious worker, the child had not taken any holiday, but I learned afterwards that while the violinist was in the neighbourhood of Balbec she never ceased to think of his handsome face, ennobled by the fact that having seen Morel in my company she had taken him for a "gentleman."

"I never heard Chopin play," said the Baron, "and yet I might have done so. I took lessons from Stamati, but he forbade me to go and hear the Master of the Nocturnes at my aunt Chimay's."

"That was damned silly of him," exclaimed Morel.

"On the contrary," M. de Charlus retorted warmly, in a shrill voice. "It was a proof of his intelligence. He had realised that I was a 'natural' and that I would succumb to Chopin's influence. It's of no importance, since I gave up music when I was quite young, and everything else, for that matter. Besides, one can more or less imagine him," he added in a slow, nasal, drawling voice, "there are still people who did hear him, who can give you an idea. However, Chopin was only an excuse to come back to the mediumistic aspect which you are neglecting."

The reader will observe that, after an interpolation of common parlance, M. de Charlus had suddenly become once more as precious and haughty in his speech as he normally was. The idea of Morel's "ditching" without compunction a girl whom he had outraged had enabled him to enjoy an abrupt and consummate pleasure. From that moment his sensual appetites were satisfied for a time and the sadist (a true medium, he) who had for a few moments taken the place of M. de Charlus had fled, handing over to the real M. de Charlus, full of artistic refinement, sensibility and kindness. "You were playing the other day the piano transcription of the Fifteenth Quartet, which in itself is absurd because nothing could be less pianistic. It is meant for people whose ears are offended by the overtaut strings of the glorious Deaf One. Whereas it is precisely that almost sour mysticism that is divine. In any case you played it very badly and altered all the *tempi*. You ought to play it as though you were composing it: the young Morel, afflicted with a momentary deafness and with a non-existent genius, stands motionless for an instant; then, seized by the divine frenzy, he plays, he composes the opening bars; after which, exhausted by this trance-like effort, he collapses, letting his pretty forelock drop to please Mme Verdurin, and, moreover, giving himself time to restore the prodigious quantity of grey matter which he has drawn upon for the Pythian objectivation; then, having regained his strength, seized by a fresh and overmastering inspiration, he flings himself upon the sublime, imperishable phrase which the virtuoso of Berlin" (we suppose M. de Charlus to have meant Mendelssohn) "was to imitate unceasingly. It is in this, the only truly dynamic and transcendent fashion, that I shall make you play in Paris."

When M. de Charlus gave him advice of this sort, Morel was far more alarmed than when he saw the head waiter remove his spurned roses and "cup," for he wondered anxiously what effect it would create at his classes. But he was unable to dwell upon these reflexions, for M. de Charlus said to him imperiously: "Ask the head waiter if he has a Bon Chrétien."

"A good Christian, I don't understand."

"Can't you see we've reached the dessert. It's a pear. You may be sure Mme de Cambremer has them in her garden, for the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, whose double she is, had them. M. Thibaudier sends them to her and she says: 'Here is a Bon Chrétien which is worth tasting.'"

"No, I didn't know."

"I can see that you know nothing. If you have never even read Molière ... Oh, well, since you are no more capable of ordering food than of anything else, just ask for a pear which happens to be grown in this neighbourhood, the Louise-Bonne d'Avranches."

"The what?"

"Wait a minute, since you're so stupid, I shall ask him myself for others, which I prefer. Waiter, have you any Doyenné des Comices? Charlie, you must read the exquisite passage written about that pear by the Duchesse Emilie de Clermont-Tonnerre."

"No, sir, I haven't."

"Have you any Triomphe de Jodoigne?"

"No, sir."

"Any Virginie-Baltet? Or Passe-Colmar? No? Very well, since you've nothing, we may as well go. The Duchesse d'Angoulême is not in season yet. Come along, Charlie."

Unfortunately for M. de Charlus, his lack of common sense, and perhaps, too, the probable chastity of his relations with Morel, made him go out of his way at this period to shower upon the violinist strange bounties which the other was incapable of understanding, and to which his nature, impulsive in its own way, but mean

and ungrateful, could respond only by an ever-increasing coldness or violence which plunged M. de Charlus—formerly so proud, now quite timid—into fits of genuine despair. We shall see how, in the smallest matters, Morel, who now fancied himself an infinitely more important M. de Charlus, completely misunderstood, by taking them literally, the Baron's arrogant teachings with regard to the aristocracy. Let us for the moment simply say, while Albertine waits for me at Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise, that if there was one thing which Morel set above the nobility (and this was in itself fairly noble, especially in a person whose pleasure was to pursue little girls—on the sly—with the chauffeur), it was his artistic reputation and what the others might think of him in the violin class. No doubt it was an ugly trait in his character that, because he felt M. de Charlus to be entirely devoted to him, he appeared to disown him, to make fun of him, in the same way as, once I had promised not to reveal the secret of his father's position with my great-uncle, he treated me with contempt. But on the other hand his name as that of a qualified artist, Morel, appeared to him superior to a "name." And when M. de Charlus, in his dreams of platonic affection, wanted to make him adopt one of his family titles, Morel stoutly refused.

When Albertine thought it more sensible to remain at Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise and paint, I would take the car, and it was not merely to Gourville and Féterne, but to Saint-Mars-le-Vieux and as far as Criquepot that I was able to penetrate before returning to fetch her. While pretending to be occupied with something else besides her, and to be obliged to forsake her for other pleasures, I thought only of her. As often as not I went no further than the great plain which overlooks Gourville, and as it resembles slightly the plain that begins above Combray, in the direction of Méséglise, even at a considerable distance from Albertine I had the joy of thinking that, even if my eyes could not reach her, the powerful, soft sea breeze that was flowing past me, carrying further than they, must sweep down, with nothing to arrest it, as far as Quetteholme, until it stirred the branches of the trees that bury Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise in their foliage, caressing my beloved's face, and thus create a double link between us in this retreat indefinitely enlarged but free of dangers, as in those games in which two children find themselves momentarily out of sight and earshot of one another, and yet while far apart remain together. I returned by those roads from which there is a view of the sea, and where in the past, before it appeared among the branches, I used to shut my eyes to reflect that what I was about to see was indeed the plaintive ancestress of the earth, pursuing, as in the days when no living creature yet existed, her insane and immemorial agitation. Now, these roads were simply the means of rejoining Albertine; when I recognised them, completely unchanged, knowing how far they would run in a straight line, where they would turn, I remembered that I had followed them while thinking of Mlle de Stermaria, and also that this impatience to be back with Albertine was the same feeling as I had had when I walked the streets along which Mme de Guermantes might pass; they assumed for me the profound monotony, the moral significance of a sort of ruled line that my character must follow. It was natural, and yet it was not without importance; they reminded me that it was my fate to pursue only phantoms, creatures whose reality existed to a great extent in my imagination; for there are people—and this had been my case since youth—for whom all the things that have a fixed value, assessable by others, fortune, success, high positions, do not count; what they must have is phantoms. They sacrifice all the rest, devote all their efforts, make everything else subservient to the pursuit of some phantom. But this soon fades away; then they run after another only to return later on to the first. It was not the first time that I had gone in quest of Albertine, the girl I had seen that first year silhouetted against the sea. Other women, it is true, had been interposed between the Albertine whom I had first loved and the one whom I rarely left now; other women, notably the Duchesse de Guermantes. But, the reader will say, why torment yourself so much with regard to Gilberte, why take such trouble over Mme de Guermantes, if, having become the friend of the latter, it is with the sole result of thinking no more of her, but only of Albertine? Swann, before his death, might have answered the question, he who had been a connoisseur of phantoms. Of phantoms pursued, forgotten, sought anew, sometimes for a single meeting, in order to establish contact with an unreal life which at once faded away, these Balbec roads were full. When I reflected that their trees—pear-trees, apple-trees, tamarisks—would outlive me, I seemed to be receiving from them a silent counsel to set myself to work at last, before the hour of eternal rest had yet struck.

I got out of the car at Quetteholme, ran down the sunken lane, crossed the brook by a plank and found Albertine painting in front of the church, all pinnacles, thorny and red, blossoming like a rose bush. The tympanum alone was smooth; and the smiling surface of the stone was abloom with angels who continued, before the twentieth-century couple that we were, to celebrate, taper in hand, the ceremonies of the thirteenth. It was they that Albertine was endeavouring to portray on her prepared canvas, and, imitating Elstir, she painted in sweeping brush-strokes, trying to obey the noble rhythm which, the master had told her, made those angels so different from all others that he knew. Then she collected her things. Leaning upon one another we walked back up the sunken path, leaving the little church, as quiet as though it had never seen us, to listen to the perpetual murmur of the brook. Presently the car set off, taking us home by a different way. We passed Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse. Over its church, half new, half restored, the setting sun spread its patina, as fine as that of the centuries. Through it the great bas-reliefs seemed to be visible only beneath a fluid layer, half liquid, half luminous; the Blessed Virgin, St Elizabeth, St Joachim still swam in the impalpable tide, almost detached, at the surface of the water or the sunlight. Rising up in a warm haze, the innumerable modern statues towered on their pillars half-way up the golden webs of sunset. In front of the church a tall cypress seemed to be standing in a sort of consecrated enclosure. We got out of the car to look, and strolled around for a while. No less than of her limbs, Albertine was directly conscious of her toque of leghorn straw and of the silken veil (which were for her no less a source of sensations of well-being), and derived from them, as we walked round the church, a different sort of impetus, expressed by a lethargic contentment in

which I found a certain charm. This veil and toque were but a recent, adventitious part of her, but a part that was already dear to me, as I followed its trail with my eyes, past the cypress, in the evening air. She herself could not see it, but guessed that the effect was pleasing, for she smiled at me, harmonising the poise of her head with the headgear that rounded it off. "I don't like it, it's restored," she said to me, pointing to the church and remembering what Elstir had said to her about the priceless, inimitable beauty of old stone. Albertine could tell a restoration at a glance. One could not help but marvel at the sureness of the taste she had already acquired in architecture, as contrasted with the deplorable taste she still retained in music. I cared no more than Elstir for this church; it was with no pleasure to myself that its sunlit front had come and posed before my eyes, and I had got out of the car to examine it only to oblige Albertine. And yet I felt that the great impressionist had contradicted himself; why exalt this fetish of objective architectural value, and not take into account the transfiguration of the church by the sunset? "No, definitely not," said Albertine, "I don't like it. But I like its name *orgueilleuse*. But what I must remember to ask Brichot is why Saint-Mars is called *le Vêtu*. We shall be going there the next time, shan't we?" she said, gazing at me out of her black eyes over which her toque was pulled down like the little "polo" of old. Her veil floated behind her. I got back into the car with her, happy in the thought that we should be going next day to Saint-Mars, where, in this blazing weather when one could think only of the delights of bathing, the two ancient steeples, salmon-pink, with their diamond-shaped tiles, slightly inflected and as it were palpitating, looked like a pair of old, sharp-snouted fish, moss-grown and coated with scales, which without seeming to move were rising in a blue, transparent water. On leaving Marcouville, we took a short cut by turning off at a crossroads where there was a farm. Sometimes Albertine made the car stop there and asked me to go alone and get some Calvados or cider for her to drink in the car. Although I was assured that it was not effervescent it proceeded to drench us from head to foot. We sat pressed close together. The people of the farm could scarcely see Albertine in the closed car as I handed them back their bottles; and we would drive off again as though to continue that lovers' existence which they might suppose us to lead, and in which this halt for refreshment had been only an insignificant moment—a supposition that would have appeared only too plausible if they had seen us after Albertine had drunk her bottle of cider; for she seemed then positively unable to endure the existence of a gap between herself and me which as a rule did not trouble her; beneath her linen skirt her legs were pressed against mine, and she brought her face closer too, the cheeks pallid now and warm, with a touch of red on the cheekbones, and something ardent and faded about them such as one sees in girls from the working-class suburbs. At such moments, her voice changed almost as quickly as her personality; she forsook her own to adopt another that was hoarse, brazen, almost dissolute. Night began to fall. What a delight to feel her leaning against me, with her toque and her veil, reminding me that it is always thus, seated side by side, that we find couples who are in love! I was perhaps in love with Albertine, but I did not dare to let her see my love, so that, if it existed in me, it could only be like an abstract truth, of no value until it had been tested by experience; as it was, it seemed to me unrealisable and outside the plane of life. As for my jealousy, it urged me to leave Albertine as little as possible, although I knew that it would not be completely cured until I had parted from her for ever. I could even feel it in her presence, but would then take care that the circumstances which had aroused it should not be repeated. Once, for example, on a fine morning, we went to lunch at Rivebelle. The great glazed doors of the dining-room and of the hall shaped like a corridor in which tea was served stood open on the same level as the sun-gilt lawns of which the vast restaurant seemed to form a part. The waiter with the pink face and black hair that writhed like flames was flying from end to end of that vast expanse less swiftly than in the past, for he was no longer an assistant but was now in charge of a row of tables; nevertheless, because of his natural briskness, he was to be glimpsed, now here now there—sometimes at a distance, in the dining-room, sometimes nearby, but out of doors serving customers who preferred to eat in the garden—like successive statues of a young god running, some in the interior, incidentally well-lighted, of a dwelling that extended on to green lawns, others beneath the trees, in the bright radiance of open-air life. For a moment he was close by us. Albertine replied absent-mindedly to what I had just said to her. She was gazing at him with rounded eyes. For a minute or two I felt that one may be close to the person one loves and yet not have her with one. They had the appearance of being engaged in a mysterious private conversation, rendered mute by my presence, which might have been the sequel to meetings in the past of which I knew nothing, or merely to a glance that he had given her—at which I was the *terzo incomodo* from whom their secret must be kept. Even when, peremptorily called away by his boss, he had finally left us, Albertine while continuing her meal seemed to be regarding the restaurant and its gardens merely as a lighted running-track, on which the swift-foot god with the black hair appeared here and there amid the varied scenery. For a moment I wondered whether she was not about to rise up and follow him, leaving me alone at my table. But in the days that followed I began to forget for ever this painful impression, for I had decided never to return to Rivebelle, and had extracted a promise from Albertine, who assured me that she had never been there before, that she would never go there again. And I denied that the nimble-footed waiter had had eyes only for her, so that she should not believe that my company had deprived her of a pleasure. It did happen now and again that I would revisit Rivebelle, but alone, and there to drink too much, as I had done in the past. As I drained a final glass I gazed at a rosette painted on the white wall, and focused on it the pleasure that I felt. It alone in the world had any existence for me; I pursued it, touched it and lost it by turns with my wavering glance, and felt indifferent to the future, contenting myself with my rosette like a butterfly circling about another, stationary butterfly with which it is about to end its life in an act of supreme consummation.

It would perhaps have been a peculiarly opportune moment for giving up a woman whom no very recent or very keen suffering obliged me to ask for the balm against a malady which those who have caused it possess. I

was calmed by these very outings, which, even if I considered them at the time merely as a foretaste of a morrow which itself, notwithstanding the longing with which it filled me, would not be different from today, had the charm of having been torn from the places which Albertine had frequented hitherto and where I had not been with her, at her aunt's or with her girlfriends—the charm not of a positive joy but simply of the assuagement of an anxiety, and yet extremely potent. For at an interval of a few days, when my thoughts turned to the farm outside which we had sat drinking cider, or simply to the stroll we had taken round Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, remembering that Albertine had been walking by my side in her toque, the sense of her presence added of a sudden so strong a healing virtue to the indifferent image of the modern church that at the moment when the sunlit façade came thus of its own accord to pose before me in memory, it was like a great soothing compress laid upon my heart. I would drop Albertine at Parville, but only to join her again in the evening and lie stretched out by her side, in the darkness, upon the beach. True, I did not see her every day, yet I could say to myself: “If she were to give an account of how she spent her time, her life, it would still be me who played the largest part in it”; and we spent together long hours on end which brought into my days so sweet an intoxication that even when, at Parville, she jumped from the car which I was to send to fetch her an hour later, I felt no more alone in it than if before leaving me she had strewn it with flowers. I could have dispensed with seeing her every day; I was happy when I left her, and I knew that the calming effect of that happiness might last for several days. But at that moment I would hear Albertine as she left me say to her aunt or to a girlfriend: “Tomorrow at eight-thirty, then. We mustn't be late, the others will be ready at a quarter past.” The conversation of a woman one loves is like the ground above a dangerous subterranean stretch of water; one senses constantly beneath the words the presence, the penetrating chill of an invisible pool; one perceives here and there its treacherous seepage, but the water itself remains hidden. The moment I heard these words of Albertine's my calm was destroyed. I wanted to ask her to let me see her the following morning, so as to prevent her from going to this mysterious rendezvous at half past eight which had been mentioned in my presence only in veiled terms. She would no doubt have begun by obeying me, while regretting that she had to give up her plans; in time she would have discovered my permanent need to upset them; I should have become the person from whom one hides things. And yet it is probable that these gatherings from which I was excluded amounted to very little, and that it was perhaps from the fear that I might find one or other of the participants vulgar or boring that I was not invited to them. Unfortunately this life so closely involved with Albertine's had an effect not only upon myself; to me it brought calm; to my mother it caused anxieties, her confession of which destroyed my calm. Once, as I entered the hotel happy in my own mind, resolved to terminate some day or other an existence the end of which I imagined to depend upon my own volition, my mother said to me, hearing me send a message to the chauffeur to go and fetch Albertine: “How you do spend money!” (Françoise in her simple and expressive language used to say with greater force: “That's the way the money goes.”) “Try,” Mamma went on, “not to become like Charles de Sévigné, of whom his mother said: ‘His hand is a crucible in which gold melts.’ Besides, I do really think you've gone about with Albertine quite enough. I assure you you're overdoing it, even to her it may seem ridiculous. I was delighted that you'd found some sort of distraction, and I'm not asking you never to see her again, but simply that it should be possible to meet one of you without the other.”

My life with Albertine, a life devoid of keen pleasures—that is to say of keen pleasures that I could feel—that life which I intended to change at any moment, choosing a moment of calm, became suddenly necessary to me once more when, by these words of Mamma's, it seemed to be threatened. I told my mother that her words would delay for perhaps two months the decision for which they asked, which otherwise I would have reached before the end of that week. In order not to sadden me, Mamma laughed at this instantaneous effect of her advice, and promised not to raise the subject again so as not to prevent the rebirth of my good intention. But, since my grandmother's death, whenever Mamma gave way to mirth, the incipient laugh would be cut short and would end in an almost heartbroken expression of sorrow, whether from remorse at having been able for an instant to forget, or else from the recrudescence which this brief moment of forgetfulness had brought to her painful obsession. But to the thoughts aroused in her by the memory of my grandmother, a memory that was rooted in my mother's mind, I felt that on this occasion there were added others relating to myself, to what my mother dreaded as the sequel of my intimacy with Albertine; an intimacy which she dared not, however, hinder in view of what I had just told her. But she did not appear convinced that I was not mistaken. She remembered all the years in which my grandmother and she had refrained from speaking to me about my work and the need for a healthier way of life which, I used to say, the agitation into which their exhortations threw me alone prevented me from beginning, and which, notwithstanding their obedient silence, I had failed to pursue.

After dinner the car would bring Albertine back; there was still a glimmer of daylight; the air was less warm, but after a scorching day we both dreamed of delicious coolness; then to our fevered eyes the narrow slip of moon would appear at first (as on the evening when I had gone to the Princesse de Guermantes's and Albertine had telephoned me) like the delicate rind, then like the cool section of a fruit which an invisible knife was beginning to peel in the sky. Sometimes it was I who would go to fetch my beloved, a little later in that case; she would be waiting for me under the arcade of the market at Maineville. At first I could not make her out; I would begin to fear that she might not be coming, that she had misunderstood me. Then I would see her, in her white blouse with blue spots, spring into the car by my side with the light bound of a young animal rather than a girl. And it was like a dog too that she would begin to caress me interminably. When night had completely fallen and, as the manager of the hotel remarked to me, the sky was all “studied” with stars, if we did not go for a drive in the forest with a bottle of champagne, then, heedless of the late strollers

on the faintly lighted esplanade, who in any case could not have seen anything a yard away on the dark sand, we would stretch out in the shelter of the dunes; that same body whose suppleness contained all the feminine, marine and sportive grace of the girls whom I had seen that first time against the horizon of the waves, I held pressed against my own, beneath the same rug, by the edge of the motionless sea divided by a tremulous path of light; and we listened to it with the same untiring pleasure, whether it held back its breath, suspended for so long that one thought the reflux would never come, or whether at last it gasped out at our feet the long-awaited murmur. Finally I would take Albertine back to Parville. When we reached her house, we were obliged to break off our kisses for fear that someone might see us; not wishing to go to bed, she would return with me to Balbec, from whence I would take her back for the last time to Parville; the chauffeurs of those early days of the motor-car were people who went to bed at all hours. And indeed I would return to Balbec only with the first dews of morning, alone this time, but still surrounded with the presence of my beloved, gorged with an inexhaustible provision of kisses. On my table I would find a telegram or a postcard. Albertine again! She had written them at Quetteholme when I had gone off by myself in the car, to tell me that she was thinking of me. I would re-read them as I got into bed. Then, above the curtains, I would glimpse the bright streak of the daylight and would say to myself that we must be in love with one another after all, since we had spent the night in one another's arms. When, next morning, I caught sight of Albertine on the front, I was so afraid of her telling me that she was not free that day, and could not accede to my request that we should go out together, that I would delay it for as long as possible. I would be all the more uneasy since she had a cold, preoccupied air; people were passing whom she knew; doubtless she had made plans for the afternoon from which I was excluded. I would gaze at her, I would gaze at that rosy face of Albertine's, tantalising me with the enigma of her intentions, the unknown decision which was to create the happiness or misery of my afternoon. It was a whole state of soul, a whole future existence that had assumed before my eyes the allegorical and fateful form of a girl. And when at last I made up my mind, when, with the most indifferent air that I could muster, I asked: "Are we going out together now, and again this evening?" and she replied: "With the greatest pleasure," then the sudden replacement, in the rosy face, of my long uneasiness by a delicious sense of ease would make even more precious to me those forms to which I was perpetually indebted for the sense of well-being and relief that we feel after a storm has broken. I repeated to myself: "How sweet she is, what an adorable creature!" in an excitement less fertile than that caused by intoxication, scarcely more profound than that of friendship, but far superior to that of social life. We would cancel our order for the car only on the days when there was a dinner-party at the Verdurins' and on those when, Albertine not being free to go out with me, I took the opportunity to inform anybody who wished to see me that I should be remaining at Balbec. I gave Saint-Loup permission to come on these days, but on these days only. For on one occasion when he had arrived unexpectedly, I had preferred to forgo the pleasure of seeing Albertine rather than run the risk of his meeting her, than endanger the state of happy calm in which I had dwelt for some time and see my jealousy revive. And my mind had not been set at rest until after Saint-Loup had gone. Therefore he made it a rule, regretfully but scrupulously observed, never to come to Balbec unless summoned there by me. In the past, when I thought with longing of the hours that Mme de Guermantes spent in his company, how I had valued the privilege of seeing him! People never cease to change place in relation to ourselves. In the imperceptible but eternal march of the world, we regard them as motionless, in a moment of vision too brief for us to perceive the motion that is sweeping them on. But we have only to select in our memory two pictures taken of them at different moments, close enough together however for them not to have altered in themselves—perceptibly, that is to say—and the difference between the two pictures is a measure of the displacement that they have undergone in relation to us. Robert alarmed me dreadfully by speaking to me of the Verdurins, for I was afraid that he might ask me to take him there, which would have been enough, because of the jealousy I should constantly feel, to spoil all the pleasure that I found in going there with Albertine. But fortunately he assured me that, on the contrary, the one thing he desired above all others was not to know them. "No," he said to me, "I find that sort of clerical atmosphere maddening." I did not at first understand the application of the adjective "clerical" to the Verdurins, but the sequel to his remark clarified his meaning, betraying his concessions to those fashions in words which one is often astonished to see adopted by intelligent men. "I mean the sort of circles," he said, "where people form a tribe, a religious order, a chapel. You aren't going to tell me that they're not a little sect; they're all honey to the people who belong, no words bad enough for those who don't. The question is not, as for Hamlet, to be or not to be, but to belong or not to belong. You belong, my uncle Charlus belongs. But I can't help it, I've never gone in for that sort of thing, it isn't my fault."

I need hardly say that the rule I had imposed upon Saint-Loup, never to come and see me unless I had expressly invited him, I promulgated no less strictly in the case of the various persons with whom I had gradually made friends at La Raspelière, Féterne, Montsurvent, and elsewhere; and when I saw from the hotel the smoke of the three o'clock train which, in the anfractuosity of the cliffs of Parville, left a stationary plume which long remained clinging to the flank of the green slopes, I had no doubts as to the identity of the visitor who was coming to tea with me and was still, like a classical deity, concealed from me beneath that little cloud. I am obliged to confess that this person whose visit I had authorised in advance was hardly ever Saniette, and I have often reproached myself for this omission. But Saniette's own consciousness of being a bore (even more so, naturally, when he came to pay a call than when he told a story) had the effect that, although he was more learned, more intelligent and better than most people, it seemed impossible to feel in his company, not only any pleasure, but anything save an almost intolerable irritation which spoiled one's whole afternoon. Probably, if Saniette had frankly admitted this boredom which he was afraid of causing, one

would not have dreaded his visits. Boredom is one of the least of the evils that we have to endure, and his boringness existed perhaps only in the imagination of other people, or had been inoculated into him by some process of suggestion which had taken hold on his agreeable modesty. But he was so anxious not to let it be seen that he was not sought after that he dared not propose himself. Certainly he was right not to behave like the people who are so glad to be able to raise their hats in a public place that, not having seen you for years and catching sight of you in a box at the theatre with smart people whom they do not know, they give you a furtive but resounding good-evening on the pretext of the pleasure and delight they have felt on seeing you, on realising that you are going about again, that you are looking well, etc. But Saniette went to the other extreme. He might, at Mme Verdurin's or in the little train, have told me that he would have great pleasure in coming to see me at Balbec were he not afraid of disturbing me. Such a suggestion would not have alarmed me. On the contrary, he offered nothing, but, with a tortured expression on his face and a stare as indestructible as a fired enamel, into the composition of which, however, there entered, together with a passionate desire to see one—unless he found someone else who was more entertaining—the determination not to let this desire be manifest, would say to me with a casual air: "You don't happen to know what you will be doing in the next few days, because I shall probably be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Balbec? Not that it makes the slightest difference, I just thought I'd ask." This casual air deceived nobody, and the reverse signs whereby we express our feelings by their opposites are so clearly legible that one asks oneself how there can still be people who say, for instance: "I have so many invitations that I don't know which way to turn" to conceal the fact that they have been invited nowhere. But what was more, this casual air, probably on account of the dubious elements that had gone to form it, gave you, what the fear of boredom or a frank admission of the desire to see you would never have done, the sort of discomfort, of repulsion, which in the category of relations of simple social courtesy is the equivalent of what, in amatory relations, is provoked by the lover's disguised offer, to a lady who does not return his love, to see her next day, while protesting that he does not greatly care—or not even that offer but an attitude of sham coldness. There emanated at once from Saniette's person an indefinable aura which made you answer him in the tenderest of tones: "No, unfortunately, this week, I must explain to you ..." And I allowed to call upon me instead people who were a long way his inferiors but whose eyes were not filled with melancholy or their mouths twisted with bitter regret as his were at the thought of all the visits which he longed, while saying nothing about them, to pay to various people. Unfortunately, Saniette rarely failed to meet in the "crawler" the guest who was coming to see me, if indeed the latter had not said to me at the Verdurins': "Don't forget I'm coming to see you on Thursday," the very day on which I had just told Saniette that I should not be at home. So that he came in the end to imagine life as filled with entertainments arranged behind his back, if not actually at his expense. On the other hand, as none of us is ever all of a piece, this most discreet of men was morbidly tactless and indiscreet. On the one occasion on which he happened to come and see me uninvited, a letter, I forget from whom, had been left lying on my table. After the first few minutes, I saw that he was paying only the vaguest attention to what I was saying. The letter, of whose provenance he knew absolutely nothing, fascinated him and at any moment I expected his glittering eyeballs to detach themselves from their sockets and fly to the letter, insignificant in itself, which his curiosity had magnetised. He was like a bird irresistibly drawn towards a snake. Finally he could restrain himself no longer. He began by altering its position, as though he were tidying up my room; then, this not sufficing him, he picked it up, turned it over, turned it back again, as though mechanically. Another form of his tactlessness was that once he had fastened himself on to you he could not tear himself away. As I was feeling unwell that day, I asked him to go back by the next train, in half an hour's time. He did not doubt that I was feeling unwell, but replied: "I shall stay for an hour and a quarter, and then I shall go." Since then I have regretted that I did not tell him to come and see me whenever I was free. Who knows? Possibly I might have exorcised his ill fate, and other people would have invited him for whom he would immediately have deserted me, so that my invitations would have had the twofold advantage of restoring him to happiness and ridding me of his company.

On the days following those on which I had been "at home," I naturally did not expect any visitors and the motor-car would come again to fetch Albertine and me. And when we returned, Aimé, on the lowest step of the hotel, could not help looking, with passionate, curious, greedy eyes, to see what tip I was giving the chauffeur. However tightly I enclosed my coin or note in my clenched fist, Aimé's gaze tore my fingers apart. He would turn his head away a moment later, for he was discreet and well-mannered, and indeed was himself content with relatively modest remuneration. But the money that another person received aroused in him an irrepressible curiosity and made his mouth water. During these brief moments, he had the attentive, feverish air of a boy reading a Jules Verne novel, or of a diner seated at a neighbouring table in a restaurant who, seeing the waiter carving you a pheasant to which he himself either cannot or will not treat himself, abandons for an instant his serious thoughts to fasten upon the bird eyes lit with a smile of love and longing.

Thus, day after day, these excursions in the motor-car followed one another. But once, as I was going up to my room, the lift-boy said to me: "That gentleman has been, he gave me a message for you." The lift-boy uttered these words in a hoarse croak, coughing and expectorating in my face. "I haven't half got a cold!" he went on, as though I were incapable of perceiving this for myself. "The doctor says it's whooping-cough," and he began once more to cough and expectorate over me. "Don't tire yourself trying to talk," I said to him with an air of kindly concern, which was feigned. I was afraid of catching the whooping-cough which, with my tendency to choking spasms, would have been a serious matter for me. But he made it a point of honour, like a virtuoso who refuses to go sick, to go on talking and spitting all the time. "No, it doesn't matter," he said ("Perhaps not to you," I thought, "but to me it does"). "Besides, I shall be returning to Paris soon" ("So much

the better, provided he doesn't give it to me first"). "They say Paris is very superb," he went on. "It must be even more superb than here or Monte-Carlo, although some of the pages and some of the guests, in fact even head waiters who've been to Monte-Carlo for the season have often told me that Paris was not so superb as Monte-Carlo. Perhaps they were being stupid, you've got to have your wits about you to be a head waiter—taking all the orders, reserving tables, you need quite a brain. I've heard it said that it's even tougher than writing plays and books."

We had almost reached my landing when the lift-boy carried me down again to the ground floor because he found that the button was not working properly, and in a moment he had put it right. I told him that I would prefer to walk upstairs, by which I meant, without putting it in so many words, that I preferred not to catch whooping-cough. But with a cordial and contagious burst of coughing the boy thrust me back into the lift. "There's no danger now, I've fixed the button." Seeing that he was still talking incessantly, and preferring to learn the name of my visitor and the message that he had left rather than the comparative beauties of Balbec, Paris, and Monte-Carlo, I said to him (as one might say to a tenor who is wearying one with Benjamin Godard, "Won't you sing me some Debussy?") "But who is the person who called to see me?" "It's the gentleman you went out with yesterday. I'll go and fetch his card, it's with my porter." As, the day before, I had dropped Robert de Saint-Loup at Doncières station before going to meet Albertine, I supposed that the lift-boy was referring to him, but it was the chauffeur. And by describing him in the words: "The gentleman you went out with," he taught me at the same time that a working man is just as much a gentleman as a man about town. A lesson in the use of words only. For in point of fact I had never made any distinction between the classes. And if, on hearing a chauffeur called a gentleman, I had felt the same astonishment as Count X who had only held that rank for a week and who, when I said "the Countess looks tired," turned his head round to see who I was talking about, it was simply because I was unaccustomed to that particular usage; I had never made any distinction between working people, the middle classes and the nobility, and I should have been equally ready to make any of them my friends. With a certain preference for working people, and after them for the nobility, not because I liked them better but because I knew that one could expect greater courtesy from them towards working people than one finds among the middle classes, either because the nobility are less disdainful or else because they are naturally polite to anybody, as beautiful women are glad to bestow a smile which they know will be joyfully welcomed. I cannot however pretend that this habit that I had of putting people of humble station on a level with people in society, even if it was quite understood by the latter, was always entirely pleasing to my mother. Not that, humanly speaking, she made the slightest distinction between one person and another, and if Françoise was ever in sorrow or in pain she was comforted and tended by Mamma with the same devotion as her best friend. But my mother was too much my grandfather's daughter not to accept, in social matters, the rule of caste. People at Combray might have kind hearts and sensitive natures, might have adopted the noblest theories of human equality, yet my mother, when a footman showed signs of forgetting his place, began to say "you" and gradually slipped out of the habit of addressing me in the third person, was moved by these presumptions to the same wrath that breaks out in Saint-Simon's *Memoirs* whenever a nobleman who is not entitled to it seizes a pretext for assuming officially the style of "Highness," or for not paying dukes the deference he owes to them and is gradually beginning to lay aside. There was a "Combray spirit" so deep-rooted that it would take centuries of natural kindness (my mother's was boundless) and egalitarian conviction to succeed in dissolving it. I cannot swear that in my mother certain particles of this spirit had not remained insoluble. She would have been as reluctant to shake hands with a footman as she was ready to give him ten francs (which for that matter gave him far more pleasure). To her, whether she admitted it or not, masters were masters and servants were the people who fed in the kitchen. When she saw the driver of a motor-car dining with me in the restaurant, she was not altogether pleased, and said to me: "It seems to me you might have a more suitable friend than a mechanic," as she might have said, had it been a question of my marriage: "You might have found somebody better than that." This particular chauffeur (fortunately I never dreamed of inviting him to dinner) had come to tell me that the motor-car company which had sent him to Balbec for the season had ordered him to return to Paris on the following day. This excuse, especially as the chauffeur was charming and expressed himself so simply that one would always have taken anything he said for gospel, seemed to us to be most probably true. It was only half so. There was as a matter of fact no more work for him at Balbec. And in any case the company, being only half convinced of the veracity of the young evangelist, bowed over his wheel of consecration, was anxious that he should return to Paris as soon as possible. And indeed if the young apostle wrought a miracle in multiplying his mileage when he was calculating it for M. de Charlus, when, on the other hand, it was a matter of rendering his account to the company, he divided what he had earned by six. In consequence of which the company, coming to the conclusion either that nobody wanted a car now at Balbec, which, so late in the season, was not improbable, or that it was being robbed, decided that, upon either hypothesis, the best thing was to recall him to Paris, not that there was very much work for him there. What the chauffeur wished was to avoid, if possible, the dead season. I have said—though I was unaware of this at the time, and the knowledge of it would have saved me much unhappiness—that he was on very friendly terms with Morel, although they showed no sign even of knowing each other in front of other people. From the day on which he was recalled, without knowing as yet that he had a means of avoiding departure, we were obliged to content ourselves for our excursions with hiring a carriage, or sometimes, as an amusement for Albertine and because she was fond of riding, a pair of saddle-horses. The carriages were unsatisfactory. "What a rattle-trap," Albertine would say. I would, in any case, often have preferred to be alone in it. Without being ready to fix a date, I longed to put an end to this existence which I blamed for making me renounce not so much work as pleasure. It sometimes happened too,



however, that the habits which bound me were suddenly abolished, generally when some former self, full of the desire to live an exhilarating life, momentarily took the place of my present self. I felt this longing to escape especially strongly one day when, having left Albertine at her aunt's, I had gone on horseback to call on the Verdurins and had taken an unfrequented path through the woods the beauty of which they had extolled to me. Hugging the contours of the cliff, it alternately climbed and then, hemmed in by dense woods on either side, dived into wild gorges. For a moment the barren rocks by which I was surrounded, and the sea that was visible through their jagged gaps, swam before my eyes like fragments of another universe: I had recognised the mountainous and marine landscape which Elstir had made the scene of those two admirable water-colours, "Poet meeting a Muse" and "Young Man meeting a Centaur," which I had seen at the Duchesse de Guermantes's. The memory of them transported the place in which I now found myself so far outside the world of today that I should not have been surprised if, like the young man of the prehistoric age that Elstir had painted, I had come upon a mythological personage in the course of my ride. Suddenly, my horse reared; he had heard a strange sound; it was all I could do to hold him and remain in the saddle; then I raised my tear-filled eyes in the direction from which the sound seemed to come and saw, not two hundred feet above my head, against the sun, between two great wings of flashing metal which were bearing him aloft, a creature whose indistinct face appeared to me to resemble that of a man. I was as deeply moved as an ancient Greek on seeing for the first time a demi-god. I wept—for I had been ready to weep the moment I realised that the sound came from above my head (aeroplanes were still rare in those days), at the thought that what I was going to see for the first time was an aeroplane. Then, just as when in a newspaper one senses that one is coming to a moving passage, the mere sight of the machine was enough to make me burst into tears. Meanwhile the airman seemed to be uncertain of his course; I felt that there lay open before him—before me, had not habit made me a prisoner—all the routes in space, in life itself; he flew on, let himself glide for a few moments over the sea, then quickly making up his mind, seeming to yield to some attraction that was the reverse of gravity, as though returning to his native element, with a slight adjustment of his golden wings he headed straight up into the sky.

To return to the subject of the chauffeur, he demanded of Morel that the Verdurins should not merely replace their break by a motor-car (which, given their generosity towards the faithful, was comparatively easy), but, what was more difficult, replace their head coachman, the sensitive young man with the tendency to black thoughts, by himself, the chauffeur. This change was carried out in a few days by the following device. Morel had begun by seeing that the coachman was robbed of everything that he needed for harnessing up. One day it was the bit that was missing, another day the curb. At other times it was the cushion of his box-seat that had vanished, or his whip, his rug, the martingale, the sponge, the chamois-leather. He always managed to borrow what he required from a neighbour, but he was late in bringing round the carriage, which put him in M. Verdurin's bad books and plunged him into a state of melancholy and gloom. The chauffeur, who was in a hurry to take his place, told Morel that he would have to return to Paris. It was time to do something drastic. Morel persuaded M. Verdurin's servants that the young coachman had declared that he would lay an ambush for the lot of them, boasting that he could take on all six of them at once, and told them that they could not let this pass. He himself did not want to get involved, but he was warning them so that they might forestall the coachman. It was agreed that while M. and Mme Verdurin and their guests were out walking the servants should set about the young man in the stables. Although it merely provided the opportunity for what was to happen, I may mention the fact—because the people concerned interested me later on—that the Verdurins had a friend staying with them that day whom they had promised to take for a walk before his departure, which was fixed for that same evening.

What surprised me greatly when we started off for our walk was that Morel, who was coming with us and was to play his violin under the trees, said to me: "Listen, I have a sore arm, and I don't want to say anything about it to Mme Verdurin, but you might ask her to send for one of her footmen, Howsler for instance, to carry my things."

"I think someone else would be more suitable," I replied. "He will be wanted here for dinner."

A look of anger flitted across Morel's face. "No, I'm not going to entrust my violin to any Tom, Dick or Harry."

I realised later on his reason for this choice. Howsler was the beloved brother of the young coachman, and, if he had been left at home, might have gone to his rescue. During our walk, dropping his voice so that the elder Howsler should not overhear: "What a good fellow he is," said Morel. "So is his brother, for that matter. If he hadn't that fatal habit of drinking ..."

"Did you say drinking?" said Mme Verdurin, turning pale at the idea of having a coachman who drank.

"You've never noticed it? I always say to myself it's a miracle that he's never had an accident while he's been driving you."

"Does he drive anyone else, then?"

"You can easily see how many spills he's had, his face today is a mass of bruises. I don't know how he's escaped being killed, he's broken his shafts."

"I haven't seen him today," said Mme Verdurin, trembling at the thought of what might have happened to her, "you appal me."

She tried to cut short the walk so as to return at once, but Morel chose an air by Bach with endless variations to keep her away from the house. As soon as we got back she went to the stable, saw the new shafts and Howsler streaming with blood. She was on the point of telling him without more ado that she did not require a coachman any longer, and of paying him his wages, but of his own accord, not wishing to accuse his

fellow-servants, to whose animosity he attributed retrospectively the theft of all his saddlery, and seeing that further patience would only end in his being left for dead on the ground, he asked leave to go at once, which settled matters. The chauffeur began his duties next day and, later on, Mme Verdurin (who had been obliged to engage another) was so well satisfied with him that she recommended him to me warmly as a man of the utmost reliability. I, knowing nothing of all this, engaged him by the day in Paris. But I am anticipating events; I shall come to all this when I reach the story of Albertine. At the present moment we are at La Raspelière, where I have just come to dine for the first time with my beloved, and M. de Charlus with Morel, the alleged son of a "steward" who drew a fixed salary of thirty thousand francs annually, kept his own carriage, and had any number of subordinate officials, gardeners, bailiffs and farmers at his beck and call. But, since I have so far anticipated, I do not wish to leave the reader under the impression that Morel was entirely wicked. He was, rather, a mass of contradictions, capable on certain days of genuine kindness.

I was naturally greatly surprised to hear that the coachman had been dismissed, and even more surprised when I recognised his successor as the chauffeur who had been driving Albertine and myself in his car. But he poured out to me a complicated story, according to which he was supposed to have been summoned back to Paris, whence an order had come for him to go to the Verdurins, and I did not doubt his word for an instant. The coachman's dismissal was the cause of Morel's talking to me for a few minutes, to express his regret at the departure of that worthy fellow. In fact, even apart from the moments when I was alone and he literally bounded towards me beaming with joy, Morel, seeing that everybody made much of me at La Raspelière and feeling that he was deliberately cutting himself off from the society of a person who was no danger to him, since he had made me burn my boats and had removed all possibility of my treating him patronisingly (something which in any case I had never dreamed of doing), ceased to hold aloof from me. I attributed his change of attitude to the influence of M. de Charlus, which as a matter of fact did make him in certain respects less blinkered, more artistic, but in others, when he applied literally the grandiloquent, insincere, and moreover transient formulas of his master, made him stupider than ever. That M. de Charlus might have said something to him was as a matter of fact the only thing that occurred to me. How could I have guessed then what I was told afterwards (and was never certain of its truth, Andrée's assertions about anything that concerned Albertine, especially later on, having always seemed to me to be highly dubious, for, as we have already seen, she did not genuinely like her and was jealous of her), something which in any event, even if it was true, was remarkably well concealed from me by both of them: that Albertine was on the best of terms with Morel? The new attitude which, about the time of the coachman's dismissal, Morel adopted with regard to myself, enabled me to revise my opinion of him. I retained the ugly impression of his character which had been suggested by the servility which this young man had shown me when he needed me, followed, as soon as the favour had been done, by a scornful aloofness which he took to the point of seeming not to notice me. To this one had to add the evidence of his venal relations with M. de Charlus, and also of his gratuitously brutish impulses, the non-gratification of which (when it occurred) or the complications that they involved, were the cause of his sorrows; but his character was not so uniformly vile and was full of contradictions. He resembled an old book of the Middle Ages, full of mistakes, of absurd traditions, of obscenities; he was extraordinarily composite. I had supposed at first that his art, in which he was really a past master, had endowed him with qualities that went beyond the virtuosity of the mere performer. Once, when I spoke of my wish to start work, "Work, and you will achieve fame," he said to me. "Who said that?" I inquired. "Fontanes, to Chateaubriand." He also knew certain love letters of Napoleon. Good, I thought to myself, he's well-read. But this remark, which he had read God knows where, was evidently the only one that he knew in the whole of ancient or modern literature, for he repeated it to me every evening. Another, which he quoted even more frequently to prevent me from breathing a word about him to anybody, was the following, which he considered equally literary, whereas it is more or less meaningless, or at any rate makes no kind of sense except perhaps to a mystery-loving servant: "Beware of the wary." In fact, if one went from this stupid maxim to Fontanes's remark to Chateaubriand, one would have covered a whole stretch, varied but less contradictory than it might seem, of Morel's character. This youth who, provided there was money to be made by it, would have done anything in the world, and without remorse—perhaps not without an odd sort of vexation, amounting to nervous agitation, to which however the name remorse could not for a moment be applied—who would, had it been to his advantage, have plunged whole families into misery or even into mourning, this youth who put money above everything else, not merely above kindness, but above the most natural feelings of common humanity, this same youth nevertheless put above money his diploma as first-prize winner at the Conservatoire and the risk of anything being said to his discredit in the flute or counterpoint class. Hence his most violent rages, his most sombre and unjustifiable fits of ill-temper arose from what he himself (generalising doubtless from certain particular cases in which he had met with malevolent people) called universal treachery. He flattered himself on eluding it by never speaking about anyone, by keeping his cards close to his chest, by distrusting everybody. (Alas for me, in view of what was to happen after my return to Paris, his distrust had not "held" in the case of the Balbec chauffeur, in whom he had doubtless recognised a peer, that is to say, contrary to his maxim, a wary person in the proper sense of the word, a wary person who remains obstinately silent in front of decent people and at once comes to an understanding with a blackguard.) It seemed to him—and he was not absolutely wrong—that his distrust would enable him always to save his bacon, to come through the most dangerous adventures unscathed, without anyone at the Conservatoire being able to suggest anything against him, let alone to prove it. He would work, become famous, would perhaps one day, with his respectability still intact, be examiner in the violin on the board of that great and glorious Conservatoire.

But it is perhaps crediting Morel's brain with too much logic to attempt to disentangle all these contradictions. His nature was really like a sheet of paper that has been folded so often in every direction that it is impossible to straighten it out. He seemed to have quite lofty principles, and in a magnificent hand, marred by the most elementary mistakes in spelling, spent hours writing to his brother to point out that he had behaved badly to his sisters, that he was their elder, their natural support, and to his sisters that they had shown a want of respect for himself.

Presently, as summer came to an end, when one got out of the train at Douville, the sun, blurred by the prevailing mist, had ceased to be more than a red blotch in a sky that was uniformly mauve. To the great peace which descends at dusk over these lush, saline meadows, and which had tempted a large number of Parisians, painters mostly, to spend their holidays at Douville, was added a humidity which made them seek shelter early in their little bungalows. In several of these the lamp was already lit. Only a few cows remained out of doors gazing at the sea and lowing, while others, more interested in humanity, turned their attention towards our carriages. A single painter who had set up his easel on a slight eminence was striving to render that great calm, that hushed luminosity. Perhaps the cattle would serve him unconsciously and benevolently as models, for their contemplative air and their solitary presence, when the human beings had withdrawn, contributed in their own way to the powerful impression of repose that evening diffuses. And, a few weeks later, the transposition was no less agreeable when, as autumn advanced, the days became really short, and we were obliged to make our journey in the dark. If I had been out in the afternoon, I had to go back to change at the latest by five o'clock, when at this season the round, red sun had already sunk half-way down the slanting mirror which formerly I had detested, and, like Greek fire, was setting the sea alight in the glass fronts of all my book-cases. Some incantatory gesture having resuscitated, as I put on my dinner-jacket, the alert and frivolous self that was mine when I used to go with Saint-Loup to dine at Rivebelle and on the evening when I had thought to take Mlle de Stermaria to dine on the island in the Bois, I began unconsciously to hum the same tune as I had hummed then; and it was only when I realised this that by the song I recognised the sporadic singer, who indeed knew no other tune. The first time I had sung it, I was beginning to fall in love with Albertine, but I imagined that I would never get to know her. Later, in Paris, it was when I had ceased to love her and some days after I had enjoyed her for the first time. Now it was when I loved her again and was on the point of going out to dinner with her, to the great regret of the manager who believed that I would end up living at La Raspelière altogether and deserting his hotel, and assured me that he had heard that fever was prevalent in that neighbourhood, due to the marshes of the Bec and their "stagnated" water. I was delighted by the multiplicity in which I saw my life thus spread over three planes; and besides, when one becomes for an instant one's former self, that is to say different from what one has been for some time past, one's sensibility, being no longer dulled by habit, receives from the slightest stimulus vivid impressions which make everything that has preceded them fade into insignificance, impressions to which, because of their intensity, we attach ourselves with the momentary enthusiasm of a drunkard. It was already dark when we got into the omnibus or carriage which was to take us to the station to catch the little train. And in the hall the judge would say to us: "Ah! so you're off to La Raspelière! Good God, she has a nerve, your Mme Verdurin, making you travel an hour by train in the dark, simply to dine with her. And then having to set out again at ten o'clock at night with a wind blowing like the very devil. It's easy to see that you have nothing better to do," he added, rubbing his hands together. No doubt he spoke thus from annoyance at not having been invited, and also from the self-satisfaction felt by "busy" men—however idiotic their business—at "not having time" to do what you are doing.

It is of course justifiable for the man who draws up reports, adds up figures, answers business letters, follows the movements of the stock exchange, to feel an agreeable sense of superiority when he says to you with a sneer: "It's all very well for you; you having nothing better to do." But he would be no less contemptuous, would be even more so (for dining out is a thing that the busy man does also), were your recreation writing *Hamlet* or merely reading it. Wherein busy men show a lack of forethought. For the disinterested culture which seems to them a comic pastime of idle people when they find them engaged in it is, they ought to reflect, the same as that which, in their own profession, brings to the fore men who may not be better judges or administrators than themselves but before whose rapid advancement they bow their heads, saying: "It appears he's extremely well-read, a most distinguished individual." But above all the judge was oblivious of the fact that what pleased me about these dinners at La Raspelière was that, as he himself said quite rightly, though as a criticism, they "represented a real journey," a journey whose charm appeared to me all the more intense in that it was not an end in itself and one did not look to find pleasure in it—this being reserved for the gathering for which we were bound and which could not fail to be greatly modified by all the atmosphere that surrounded it. Night would already have fallen now when I exchanged the warmth of the hotel—the hotel that had become my home—for the railway carriage into which I climbed with Albertine, in which a glimmer of lamplight on the window showed, at certain halts of the wheezy little train, that we had arrived at a station. So that there should be no risk of Cottard's missing us, and not having heard the name of the station being called, I would open the door, but what burst into the carriage was not any of the faithful, but the wind, the rain and the cold. In the darkness I could make out fields and hear the sea; we were in the open country. Before we joined the little nucleus, Albertine would examine herself in a little mirror, extracted from a gold vanity case which she carried about with her. The fact was that on our first visit, Mme Verdurin having taken her upstairs to her dressing-room so that she might tidy up before dinner, I had felt, amid the profound calm in which I had been living for some time, a slight stir of uneasiness and jealousy at being

obliged to part from Albertine at the foot of the stairs, and had become so anxious while I was alone in the drawing-room among the little clan, wondering what she could be doing, that I had telegraphed the next day, after finding out from M. de Charlus what the correct thing was at the moment, to order from Cartier's a vanity case which was the joy of Albertine's life and also of mine. It was for me a guarantee of peace of mind, and also of my mistress's solicitude. For she had evidently seen that I did not like her to be parted from me at Mme Verdurin's and arranged to do all the titivation necessary before dinner in the train.

Among Mme Verdurin's regular guests, and reckoned the most faithful of them all, M. de Charlus had now figured for some months. Regularly, thrice weekly, the passengers sitting in the waiting-rooms or standing on the platform at Doncières-Ouest used to see this stout gentleman go by, with his grey hair, his black moustaches, his lips reddened with a salve less noticeable at the end of the season than in summer when the daylight made it look more garish and the heat liquefied it. As he made his way towards the little train, he could not refrain (simply from force of habit, as a connoisseur, since he now had a sentiment which kept him chaste or at least, for most of the time, faithful) from casting a furtive glance, at once inquisitorial and timorous, at the labourers, the soldiers, the young men in tennis clothes, after which he immediately let his eyelids droop over his half-shut eyes with the unctuousness of an ecclesiastic engaged in telling his beads, and with the modesty of a bride vowed to the one love of her life or of a well-brought-up young girl. The faithful were all the more convinced that he had not seen them, since he got into a different compartment from theirs (as Princess Sherbatoff often did too), like a man who does not know whether you will be pleased or not to be seen with him and who leaves you the option of coming and joining him if you choose. This option had not been taken, at first, by the Doctor, who had advised us to leave him by himself in his compartment. Making a virtue of his natural hesitancy now that he occupied a great position in the medical world, it was with a smile, a toss of the head, and a glance over his pince-nez at Ski, that he said in a whisper, either from malice or in the hope of eliciting the views of his companions in a roundabout way: "You see, if I was on my own, a bachelor ... but because of my wife I wonder whether I ought to allow him to travel with us after what you told me." "What's that you're saying?" asked Mme Cottard. "Nothing, it doesn't concern you, it's not meant for women to hear," the Doctor replied with a wink, and with a majestic self-satisfaction which steered a middle course between the impassive expression he maintained in front of his pupils and patients and the uneasiness that used in the past to accompany his shafts of wit at the Verdurins', and went on talking *sotto voce*. Mme Cottard picked up only the words "a member of the confraternity" and "*tapette*,"<sup>18</sup> and as in the Doctor's vocabulary the former expression denoted the Jewish race and the latter a wagging tongue, Mme Cottard concluded that M. de Charlus must be a garrulous Jew. She could not understand why they should cold-shoulder the Baron for that reason, and felt it her duty as the senior lady of the clan to insist that he should not be left alone; and so we proceeded in a body to M. de Charlus's compartment, led by Cottard who was still perplexed. From the corner in which he was reading a volume of Balzac, M. de Charlus observed this indecision; and yet he had not raised his eyes. But just as deaf-mutes detect, from a movement of air imperceptible to other people, that someone has approached behind them, so the Baron, to apprise him of people's coldness towards him, had a veritable sensory hyperacuity. This, as it habitually does in every sphere, had engendered in M. de Charlus imaginary sufferings. Like those neuropaths who, feeling a slight lowering of the temperature, and deducing therefrom that there must be a window open on the floor above, fly into a rage and start sneezing, M. de Charlus, if a person appeared preoccupied in his presence, concluded that somebody had repeated to that person a remark that he had made about him. But there was no need even for the other person to have an absent-minded, or a sombre, or a smiling air; he would invent them. On the other hand, cordiality easily concealed from him the slanders of which he had not heard. Having detected Cottard's initial hesitation, while he held out his hand to the rest of the faithful when they were at a convenient distance (greatly to their surprise, for they did not think that they had yet been observed by the reader's lowered eyes), for Cottard he contented himself with a forward inclination of his whole person which he at once sharply retracted, without taking in his own gloved hand the hand which the Doctor had held out to him.

"We felt we simply must come and keep you company, Monsieur," Mme Cottard said kindly to the Baron, "and not leave you alone like this in your little corner. It is a great pleasure to us."

"I am greatly honoured," the Baron intoned, bowing coldly.

"I was so pleased to hear that you have definitely chosen this neighbourhood to set up your taber ..."

She was going to say "tabernacle" but it occurred to her that the word was Hebraic and discourteous to a Jew who might see some innuendo in it. And so she pulled herself up in order to choose another of the expressions that were familiar to her, that is to say a ceremonious expression: "to set up, I should say, your *penates*." (It is true that these deities do not appertain to the Christian religion either, but to one which has been dead for so long that it no longer claims any devotees whose feelings one need be afraid of hurting.) "We, unfortunately, what with term beginning, and the Doctor's hospital duties, can never take up residence for very long in one place." And glancing down at a cardboard box: "You see too how we poor women are less fortunate than the sterner sex; even to go such a short distance as to our friends the Verdurins', we are obliged to take a whole heap of impedimenta."

I meanwhile was examining the Baron's volume of Balzac. It was not a paper-covered copy, picked up on a bookstall, like the volume of Bergotte which he had lent me at our first meeting. It was a book from his own library, and as such bore the device: "I belong to the Baron de Charlus," for which was substituted at times, to show the studious tastes of the Guermantes: "*In proeliis non semper*," or yet another motto: "*Non sine labore*." But we shall see these presently replaced by others, in an attempt to please Morel.

Mme Cottard, after a moment or two, hit upon a subject which she felt to be of more personal interest to the Baron. "I don't know whether you agree with me, Monsieur," she said to him presently, "but I am very broad-minded, and in my opinion there is a great deal of good in all religions as long as people practise them sincerely. I am not one of the people who get hydrophobia at the sight of a ... Protestant."

"I was taught that mine is the true religion," replied M. de Charlus.

"He's a fanatic," thought Mme Cottard. "Swann, until towards the end, was more tolerant; it's true that he was a convert."

Now the Baron, on the contrary, was not only a Christian, as we know, but endued with a mediaeval piety. For him, as for sculptors of the thirteenth century, the Christian Church was, in the living sense of the word, peopled with a swarm of beings whom he believed to be entirely real: prophets, apostles, angels, holy personages of every sort, surrounding the incarnate Word, his mother and her spouse, the Eternal Father, all the martyrs and doctors of the Church, as they may be seen in high relief thronging the porches or lining the naves of cathedrals. Out of all these M. de Charlus had chosen as his patrons and intercessors the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, with whom he discoursed regularly so that they might convey his prayers to the Eternal Father before whose throne they stand. And so Mme Cottard's mistake amused me greatly.

To leave the religious sphere, let us note that the Doctor, who had come to Paris with the meagre equipment of a peasant mother's advice, and had then been absorbed in the almost purely material studies to which those who seek to advance in a medical career are obliged to devote themselves for a great many years, had never cultivated his mind; he had acquired increasing authority but no experience; he took the word "honoured" in its literal sense and was at once flattered by it because he was vain, and distressed because he had a kind heart. "That poor de Charlus," he said to his wife that evening, "he made me feel sorry for him when he said he was honoured to travel with us. One feels, poor devil, that he knows nobody, that he has to humble himself."

But soon, without any need to be guided by the charitable Mme Cottard, the faithful had succeeded in overcoming the qualms which they had all more or less felt at first on finding themselves in the company of M. de Charlus. No doubt in his presence they were incessantly reminded of Ski's revelations, and conscious of the sexual abnormality embodied in their travelling companion. But this abnormality itself had a sort of attraction for them. It gave to the Baron's conversation, remarkable in itself but in ways which they could scarcely appreciate, a savour which, they felt, made the most interesting conversation, even Brichot's, appear slightly insipid in comparison. From the very outset, moreover, they had been pleased to admit that he was intelligent. "Genius is sometimes akin to madness," the Doctor declared, and when the Princess, athirst for knowledge, questioned him further, said not another word, this axiom being all that he knew about genius and in any case seeming to him less demonstrable than everything relating to typhoid and arthritis. And as he had become proud and remained ill-bred: "No questions, Princess, do not interrogate me, I'm at the seaside for a rest. Besides, you wouldn't understand, you know nothing about medicine." And the Princess apologised and held her peace, deciding that Cottard was a charming man and realising that celebrities were not always approachable. In this initial period, then, they had ended by finding M. de Charlus intelligent in spite of his vice (or what is generally so named). Now it was, quite unconsciously, because of that vice that they found him more intelligent than others. The simplest maxims to which, adroitly provoked by the sculptor or the scholar, M. de Charlus gave utterance concerning love, jealousy, beauty, because of the strange, secret, refined and monstrous experience on which they were based, assumed for the faithful that charm of unfamiliarity with which a psychology analogous to that which our own dramatic literature has offered us from time immemorial is clothed in a Russian or Japanese play performed by native actors. They might still venture, when he was not listening, upon a malicious witticism at his expense. "Oh!" the sculptor would whisper, seeing a young railwayman with the sweeping eyelashes of a dancing gift at whom M. de Charlus could not help staring, "if the Baron begins making eyes at the conductor, we shall never get there, the train will start going backwards. Just look at the way he's staring at him: this isn't a puffer-train but a poofte-train." But when all was said, if M. de Charlus did not appear, they were almost disappointed to be travelling only with people who were just like everybody else, and not to have with them this painted, paunchy, tightly-buttoned personage, reminiscent of a box of exotic and dubious origin exhaling a curious odour of fruits the mere thought of tasting which would turn the stomach. From this point of view, the faithful of the masculine sex enjoyed a keener satisfaction in the short stage of the journey between Saint-Martin-du-Chêne, where M. de Charlus got in, and Doncières, the station at which Morel joined the party. For so long as the violinist was not there (and provided that the ladies and Albertine, keeping to themselves so as not to inhibit the conversation, were out of hearing), M. de Charlus made no attempt to appear to be avoiding certain subjects and did not hesitate to speak of "what it is customary to call immoral practices." Albertine could not hamper him, for she was always with the ladies, like a well-brought-up girl who does not wish her presence to restrict the freedom of grown-up conversation. And I was quite resigned to not having her by my side, on condition however that she remained in the same coach. For though I no longer felt any jealousy and scarcely any love for her, and never thought about what she might be doing on the days when I did not see her, on the other hand, when I was there, a mere partition which might at a pinch be concealing a betrayal was intolerable to me, and if she withdrew with the ladies to the next compartment, a moment later, unable to remain in my seat any longer, at the risk of offending whoever might be talking, Brichot, Cottard or Charlus, to whom I could not explain the reason for my flight, I would get up, leave them without ceremony, and, to make certain that nothing abnormal was happening, go next door. And until we came to Doncières M. de Charlus without any fear of shocking his audience, would speak sometimes in the plainest terms of practices which, he declared, for his own part he

did not consider either good or bad. He did this from cunning, to show his broad-mindedness, convinced as he was that his own morals aroused no suspicion in the minds of the faithful. He was well aware that there did exist in the world several persons who were, to use an expression which became habitual with him later on, "in the know" about himself. But he imagined that these persons were not more than three or four, and that none of them was at that moment on the Normandy coast. This illusion may appear surprising in so shrewd and so suspicious a man. Even in the case of those whom he believed to be more or less informed, he deluded himself that it was in the vaguest way, and hoped, by telling them this or that fact about someone, to clear the person in question from all suspicion on the part of a listener who out of politeness pretended to accept his statements. Even in my case, while he was aware of what I knew or guessed about him, he imagined that my conviction, which he believed to be of far longer standing than it actually was, was quite general, and that it was sufficient for him to deny this or that detail to be believed, whereas on the contrary, if a knowledge of the whole always precedes a knowledge of the details, it makes investigation of the latter infinitely easier and, having destroyed his cloak of invisibility, no longer allows the dissembler to hide whatever he chooses. Certainly when M. de Charlus, invited to a dinner-party by one of the faithful or a friend of one of the faithful, adopted the most devious means to introduce Morel's name among ten others which he mentioned, he never imagined that for the reasons, always different, which he gave for the pleasure or convenience he would find that evening in being invited with him, his hosts, while appearing to believe him implicitly, would substitute a single and invariable reason, of which he supposed them to be ignorant, namely that he was in love with him. Similarly, Mme Verdurin, seeming always entirely to acknowledge the motives, half-artistic, half-humanitarian, which M. de Charlus gave her for the interest that he took in Morel, never ceased to thank the Baron warmly for his touching kindness, as she called it, towards the violinist. Yet how astonished M. de Charlus would have been if, one day when Morel and he were delayed and had not come by the train, he had heard the Mistress say: "We're all here now except the young ladies"! The Baron would have been all the more amazed in that, scarcely stirring from La Raspelière, he played the part there of a family chaplain, a stage priest, and would sometimes (when Morel had 48 hours' leave) sleep there for two nights in succession. Mme Verdurin would then give them adjoining rooms, and, to put them at their ease, would say: "If you want to have a little music, don't worry about us. The walls are as thick as a fortress, you have nobody else on your floor, and my husband sleeps like a log." On such days M. de Charlus would relieve the Princess of the duty of going to meet newcomers at the station, apologising for Mme Verdurin's absence on the grounds of a state of health which he described so vividly that the guests entered the drawing-room with solemn faces and uttered cries of astonishment on finding the Mistress up and doing and dressed for the evening.

For M. de Charlus had for the moment become for Mme Verdurin the faithfulest of the faithful, a second Princess Sherbatoff. Of his position in society she was not nearly so certain as of that of the Princess, imagining that if the latter cared to see no one outside the little nucleus it was out of contempt for other people and preference for it. As this pretence was precisely the Verdurins' own, they treating as bores everyone to whose society they were not admitted, it is incredible that the Mistress can have believed the Princess to have an iron-willed loathing for everything fashionable. But she stuck to her guns and was convinced that in the case of the Princess too it was in all sincerity and from a love of things intellectual that she avoided the company of bores. The latter were, as it happened, diminishing in numbers from the Verdurins' point of view. Life by the seaside exempted an introduction from the consequences for the future which might have been feared in Paris. Brilliant men who had come down to Balbec without their wives (which made everything much easier) made overtures to La Raspelière and, from being bores, became delightful. This was the case with the Prince de Guermantes, whom the absence of his Princess would not, however, have decided to go as a "grass widower" to the Verdurins' had not the magnet of Dreyfusism been so powerful as to carry him at one stroke up the steep ascent to La Raspelière, unfortunately on a day when the Mistress was not at home. Mme Verdurin as it happened was not certain that he and M. de Charlus moved in the same world. The Baron had indeed said that the Duc de Guermantes was his brother, but this was perhaps the untruthful boast of an adventurer. However elegant he had shown himself to be, however amiable, however "faithful" to the Verdurins, the Mistress still almost hesitated to invite him to meet the Prince de Guermantes. She consulted Ski and Brichot: "The Baron and the Prince de Guermantes, will they be all right together?"

"Good gracious, Madame, as to one of the two I think I can safely say ..."

"One of the two—what good is that to me?" Mme Verdurin had retorted crossly. "I asked you whether they would get on all right together."

"Ah! Madame, that sort of thing is very difficult to know."

Mme Verdurin had been impelled by no malice. She was certain of the Baron's proclivities, but when she expressed herself in these terms she had not for a moment been thinking about them, but had merely wished to know whether she could invite the Prince and M. de Charlus on the same evening without their clashing. She had no malevolent intention when she employed these ready-made expressions which are popular in artistic "little clans." To make the most of M. de Guermantes, she proposed to take him in the afternoon, after her lunch-party, to a charity entertainment at which sailors from the neighbourhood would give a representation of a ship setting sail. But, not having time to attend to everything, she delegated her duties to the faithfulest of the faithful, the Baron. "You understand, I don't want them to hang about like mussels on a rock, they must keep coming and going, and we must see them clearing the decks or whatever it's called. Since you're always going down to the harbour at Balbec-Plage, you can easily arrange a dress rehearsal without tiring yourself. You must know far better than I do, M. de Charlus, how to get round young sailors ... But we

really are giving ourselves a lot of trouble for M. de Guermantes. Perhaps he's only one of those idiots from the Jockey Club. Oh! heavens, I'm running down the Jockey Club, and I seem to remember that you're one of them. Eh, Baron, you don't answer me, are you one of them? You don't want to come out with us? Look, here's a book that has just come which I think you'll find interesting. It's by Roujon. The title is attractive: *Among Men*."

For my part, I was all the more pleased that M. de Charlus often took the place of Princess Sherbatoff inasmuch as I was thoroughly in her bad books, for a reason that was at once trivial and profound. One day when I was in the little train being as attentive as ever to Princess Sherbatoff, I saw Mme de Villeparisis get in. She had, I knew, come down to spend some weeks with the Princesse de Luxembourg, but, chained to the daily necessity of seeing Albertine, I had never replied to the repeated invitations of the Marquise and her royal hostess. I felt remorse at the sight of my grandmother's friend, and, purely from a sense of duty (without deserting Princess Sherbatoff), sat talking to her for some time. I was, as it happened, entirely unaware that Mme de Villeparisis knew perfectly well who my companion was but did not wish to acknowledge her. At the next station, Mme de Villeparisis left the train, and indeed I reproached myself for not having helped her on to the platform. I resumed my seat by the side of the Princess. But it was as though (a cataclysm frequent among people who are socially insecure and afraid that one may have heard something to their discredit and hence may despise them) the curtain had risen upon a new scene. Buried in her *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Mme Sherbatoff could scarcely bring herself to reply to my questions and finally told me that I was giving her a headache. I had not the faintest idea of the nature of my crime. When I bade the Princess good-bye, the customary smile did not light up her face, her chin drooped in a curt acknowledgement, she did not even offer me her hand, and she never spoke to me again. But she must have spoken—though I have no idea what she said—to the Verdurins; for as soon as I asked them whether I ought not to make some polite gesture to Princess Sherbatoff, they replied in chorus: "No! No! No! Absolutely not! She doesn't care for polite speeches." They did not say this in order to cause bad blood between us, but she had succeeded in persuading them that she was unmoved by civilities, impervious to the vanities of this world. One needs to have seen the politician who is reckoned the most unbending, the most intransigent, the most unapproachable, now that he is in office; one needs to have seen him at the time of his eclipse, humbly soliciting, with a bright, ingratiating smile, the haughty greeting of some second-rate journalist; one needs to have seen the transformation of Cottard (whom his new patients regarded as a ramrod), and to know what disappointments in love, what rebuffs to snobbery were the basis of the apparent pride, the universally acknowledged anti-snobbery of Princess Sherbatoff, in order to grasp that the rule among the human race—a rule that naturally admits of exceptions—is that the reputedly hard are the weak whom nobody wanted, and that the strong, caring little whether they are wanted or not, have alone that gentleness which the vulgar herd mistakes for weakness.

Besides, I ought not to judge Princess Sherbatoff severely. Her case is so common! One day, at the funeral of a Guermantes, a distinguished man who was standing next to me drew my attention to a tall, slender individual with handsome features. "Of all the Guermantes," my neighbour informed me, "that one is the most strange and remarkable. He is the Duke's brother." I replied imprudently that he was mistaken, that the gentleman in question, who was in no way related to the Guermantes, was named Fournier-Sarlovèze. The distinguished man turned his back on me and has never even looked at me since.

An eminent musician, a member of the *Institut*, occupying a high official position, who was acquainted with Ski, came to Harambouvill, where he had a niece, and appeared at one of the Verdurins' Wednesdays. M. de Charlus was especially polite to him (at Morel's request), principally in order that on his return to Paris the Academician would allow him to attend various private concerts, rehearsals and so forth at which the violinist would be playing. The Academician, who was flattered, and was moreover a charming man, promised to do so and kept his promise. The Baron was deeply touched by all the kindness and courtesy which this important personage (who, for his own part, was exclusively and passionately a lover of women) showed him, all the facilities that he procured for him to see Morel in those official premises from which outsiders are excluded, all the opportunities which the celebrated artist secured for the young virtuoso to perform, to get himself known, by naming him in preference to others of equal talent for private recitals which were likely to make a special stir. But M. de Charlus never suspected that he owed the maestro all the more gratitude in that the latter, doubly deserving, or alternatively guilty twice over, was fully aware of the relations between the young violinist and his noble patron. He abetted them, certainly not out of any sympathy for them since he was incapable of understanding any other love than the love of women, which had inspired the whole of his music, but from moral indifference, a kindness and readiness to oblige characteristic of his profession, social affability, and snobbery. He had so little doubt as to the character of those relations that, at his first dinner at La Raspelière, he had inquired of Ski, speaking of M. de Charlus and Morel as he might have spoken of a man and his mistress: "Have they been long together?" But, too much the man of the world to let the parties concerned see that he knew, prepared, should any gossip arise among Morel's fellow-students, to rebuke them and to reassure Morel by saying to him in a fatherly tone: "One hears that sort of thing about everybody nowadays," he continued to overwhelm the Baron with civilities which the latter thought charming, but quite natural, being incapable of suspecting the eminent maestro of so much vice or of so much virtue. For nobody was ever base enough to repeat to M. de Charlus the things that were said behind his back, and the jokes about Morel. And yet this simple situation is enough to show that even that thing which is universally decried, which no one would dream of defending—gossip—has itself, whether it is aimed at ourselves and thus becomes especially disagreeable to us, or whether it tells us something about a third person of which we were unaware, a certain psychological value. It prevents the mind from falling asleep over the factitious view which

it has of what it imagines things to be and which is actually no more than their outward appearance. It turns this appearance inside out with the magic dexterity of an idealist philosopher and rapidly presents to our gaze an unsuspected corner of the reverse side of the fabric. Could M. de Charlus ever have imagined these words spoken by a certain tender relative: "How on earth can you suppose that Mémé is in love with me? You forget that I'm a woman!" And yet she was genuinely, deeply attached to M. de Charlus. Why then need we be surprised that in the case of the Verdurins, on whose affection and goodwill he had no reason to rely, the remarks which they made behind his back (and they did not, as we shall see, confine themselves to remarks) should have been so different from what he imagined them to be, that is to say no more than a reflexion of the remarks that he heard when he was present? These latter alone decorated with affectionate inscriptions the little ideal bower to which M. de Charlus retired at times to dream, when he introduced his imagination for a moment into the idea that the Verdurins had of him. Its atmosphere was so congenial, so cordial, the repose it offered so comforting, that when M. de Charlus, before going to sleep, had withdrawn to it for a momentary relaxation from his worries, he never emerged from it without a smile. But, for each one of us, a bower of this sort is double: opposite the one which we imagine to be unique, there is the other which is normally invisible to us, the real one, symmetrical with the one we know, but very different, whose decoration, in which we should recognise nothing of what we expected to see, would horrify us as though it were composed of the odious symbols of an unsuspected hostility. What a shock it would have been for M. de Charlus if he had found his way into one of these hostile bowers, thanks to some piece of scandal, as though by one of those service staircases where obscene graffiti are scribbled outside the back doors of flats by unpaid tradesmen or dismissed servants! But, just as we do not possess that sense of direction with which certain birds are endowed, so we lack the sense of our own visibility as we lack that of distances, imagining as quite close to us the interested attention of people who on the contrary never give us a thought, and not suspecting that we are at that same moment the sole preoccupation of others. Thus M. de Charlus lived in a fool's paradise like the fish that thinks that the water in which it is swimming extends beyond the glass wall of its aquarium which mirrors it, while it does not see close beside it in the shadow the amused stroller who is watching its gyrations, or the all-powerful keeper who, at the unforeseen and fatal moment, postponed for the present in the case of the Baron (for whom the keeper, in Paris, will be Mme Verdurin), will extract it without compunction from the environment in which it was happily living to fling it into another. Moreover, the races of mankind, insofar as they are no more than collections of individuals, may furnish us with examples more extensive, but identical in each of their parts, of this profound, obstinate and disconcerting blindness. Up to the present, if it was responsible for the fact that M. de Charlus addressed to the little clan remarks of a futile subtlety or of an audacity which made his listeners smile to themselves, it had not yet caused him, nor was it to cause him, at Balbec, any serious inconvenience. A trace of albumin, of sugar, of cardiac arrhythmia, does not prevent life from continuing normally for the man who is not even aware of it, while the physician alone sees in it a prophecy of catastrophes in store. At present the Baron's predilection for Morel—whether platonic or not—merely led him to say spontaneously in Morel's absence that he thought him very good-looking, assuming that this would be interpreted quite innocently, and thereby acting like a clever man who, when summoned to testify before a court of law, will not be afraid to enter into details which are apparently to his disadvantage but for that very reason are more natural and less vulgar than the conventional protestations of a stage culprit. With the same freedom, always between Saint-Martin-du-Chêne and Doncières-Ouest—or conversely on the return journey—M. de Charlus would readily speak of people who had, it appeared, very peculiar ways, and would even add: "But after all, although I say peculiar, I don't really know why, for there's nothing so very peculiar about it," to prove to himself how thoroughly at his ease he was with his audience. And so indeed he was, provided that it was he who retained the initiative and knew that the gallery was mute and smiling, disarmed by credulity or good manners.

When M. de Charlus was not speaking of his admiration for Morel's beauty as though it had no connexion with a proclivity known as a vice, he would discuss that vice, but as though he himself were in no way addicted to it. Sometimes indeed he did not hesitate to call it by its name. When after examining the fine binding of his volume of Balzac, I asked him which was his favourite novel in the *Comédie humaine*, he replied, his thoughts irresistibly attracted towards an obsession: "Impossible to choose between tiny miniatures like the *Curé de Tours* and the *Femme abandonnée*, or the great frescoes like the series of the *Illusions perdues*. What! you've never read *Les Illusions perdues*? It's so beautiful—the scene where Carlos Herrera asks the name of the château he is driving past, and it turns out to be Rastignac, the home of the young man he used to love; and then the abbé falling into a reverie which Swann once called, and very aptly, the *Tristesse d'Olympio* of pederasty. And the death of Lucien! I forget who the man of taste was who, when he was asked what event in his life had grieved him most, replied: 'The death of Lucien de Rubempré in *Splendeurs et Misères*.' "

"I know that Balzac is all the rage this year, as pessimism was last," Brichtot interrupted. "But, at the risk of giving pain to hearts that are smitten with the Balzacian fever, without laying any claim, God forbid, to the role of policeman of letters, and drawing up a list of offences against the laws of grammar, I must confess that the copious improviser whose alarming lucubrations you appear to me singularly to overrate has always struck me as being an insufficiently meticulous scribe. I have read these *Illusions perdues* of which you speak, Baron, flagellating myself to attain to the fervour of an initiate, and I confess in all simplicity of heart that those serial instalments of sentimental balderdash, composed in double or triple Dutch—*Esther heureuse*, *Où mènent les mauvais chemins*, *À, combien l'amour revient aux vieillards*—have always had the effect on me of the mysteries of Rocambole, exalted by an inexplicable preference to the precarious position of a masterpiece."



"You say that because you know nothing of life," said the Baron, doubly irritated, for he felt that Brichot would not understand either his aesthetic reasons or the other kind.

"I quite realise," replied Brichot, "that, to speak like Master François Rabelais, you mean that I am *moult sorbonagre, sorbonicole et sorboniforme*. And yet, just as much as any of our friends here, I like a book to give an impression of sincerity and real life, I am not one of those clerks ..."

"The *quart d'heure de Rabelais*," <sup>19</sup> Dr Cottard broke in, with an air no longer of uncertainty but of confidence in his own wit.

"... who take a vow of literature following the rule of the Abbaye-aux-Bois under the obedience of M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand, Grand Master of humbug, according to the strict rule of the humanists. M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand ..."

"Chateaubriand *aux potatoes*?" put in Dr Cottard.

"He is the patron saint of the brotherhood," continued Brichot, ignoring the Doctor's joke, while the latter, alarmed by the scholar's phrase, glanced anxiously at M. de Charlus. Brichot had seemed wanting in tact to Cottard, whose pun meanwhile had brought a subtle smile to the lips of Princess Sherbatoff: "With the Professor, the mordant irony of the complete sceptic never forfeits its rights," she said kindly, to show that Cottard's "quip" had not passed unperceived by herself.

"The sage is of necessity sceptical," replied the Doctor. "What do I know? *Gn thi seauton*, said Socrates. He was quite right, excess in anything is a mistake. But I am dumbfounded when I think that those words have sufficed to keep Socrates's name alive all this time. What does his philosophy amount to? Very little when all is said. When one thinks that Charcot and others have done work that is a thousand times more remarkable and is at least based on something, on the suppression of the pupillary reflex as a syndrome of general paralysis, and that they are almost forgotten. After all, Socrates was nothing out of the common. Those people had nothing better to do than spend all their time strolling about and splitting hairs. Like Jesus Christ: 'Love one another!' it's all very pretty."

"My dear," Mme Cottard implored.

"Naturally my wife protests, women are all neurotic."

"But, my dear Doctor, I'm not neurotic," murmured Mme Cottard.

"What, she's not neurotic! When her son is ill, she develops all the symptoms of insomnia. Still, I quite admit that Socrates, and all the rest of them, are necessary for a superior culture, to acquire the talent of exposition. I always quote his *gn thi seauton* to my students at the beginning of the course. Old Bouchard, when he heard of it, congratulated me."

"I am not an upholder of form for form's sake, any more than I am inclined to treasure millionaire rhymes in poetry," Brichot went on. "But all the same, the not very human *Comédie humaine* is all too egregiously the antithesis of those works in which the art exceeds the matter, as that holy terror Ovid says. And it is permissible to prefer a middle way, which leads to the presbytery of Meudon or the hermitage of Ferney, equidistant from the Valléeaux-Loups, in which René arrogantly performed the duties of a merciless pontificate, and from Les Jardies, where Honoré de Balzac, harried by the bailiffs, never ceased voiding upon paper, like a zealous apostle of gibberish, to please a Polish lady."

"Chateaubriand is far more alive than you say, and Balzac is, after all, a great writer," replied M. de Charlus, still too much impregnated with Swann's tastes not to be irritated by Brichot, "and Balzac was acquainted even with those passions which the rest of the world ignores, or studies only to castigate them. Without referring again to the immortal *Illusions perdues*, stories like *Sarrazine*, *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, *Une passion dans le désert*, even the distinctly enigmatic *Fausse Maîtresse*, can be adduced in support of my argument. When I spoke of this 'extra-natural' aspect of Balzac to Swann, he said to me: 'You are of the same opinion as Taine.' I never had the honour of knowing Monsieur Taine," M. de Charlus continued (with that irritating habit of inserting an otiose "Monsieur" to which people in society are addicted, as though they imagine that by styling a great writer "Monsieur" they are doing him an honour, perhaps keeping him at his proper distance, and making it quite clear that they do not know him personally), "I never knew Monsieur Taine, but I felt myself greatly honoured by being of the same opinion as he."

Nevertheless, in spite of these ridiculous social affectations, M. de Charlus was extremely intelligent, and it is probable that if some remote marriage had established a connexion between his family and that of Balzac, he would have felt (no less than Balzac himself, for that matter) a satisfaction on which he would yet have been unable to resist preening himself as on a praiseworthy sign of condescension.

Occasionally, at the station after Saint-Martin-du-Chêne, some young men would get into the train. M. de Charlus could not refrain from looking at them, but as he cut short and concealed the attention that he paid them, he gave the impression of hiding a secret that was even more personal than the real one; it was as though he knew them, and betrayed the knowledge in spite of himself, after having accepted the sacrifice, before turning again to us, like children who, in consequence of a quarrel between parents, have been forbidden to speak to certain of their schoolfellows, but who when they meet them cannot forbear to raise their heads before lowering them again beneath the menacing gaze of their tutor.

At the word borrowed from the Greek with which M. de Charlus, in speaking of Balzac, had followed his allusion to *Tristesse d'Olympio* in connexion with *Splendeurs et Misères*, Ski, Brichot and Cottard had glanced at one another with a smile perhaps not so much ironical as tinged with that satisfaction which people at a dinner-party would show who had succeeded in making Dreyfus talk about his own case, or the Empress Eugénie about her reign. They were hoping to press him a little further upon this subject, but we were already at Doncières, where Morel joined us. In his presence, M. de Charlus kept a careful guard over his conversation

and, when Ski tried to bring it back to the love of Carlos Herrera for Lucien de Rubempré, the Baron assumed the vexed, mysterious, and finally (seeing that nobody was listening to him) severe and judicial air of a father who hears a man saying something indecent in front of his daughter. Ski having shown some determination to pursue the subject, M. de Charlus, his eyes starting out of his head, raised his voice and with a meaningful glance at Albertine—who in fact could not hear what we were saying, being engaged in conversation with Mme Cottard and Princess Sherbatoff—and the hint of a double meaning of someone who wishes to teach ill-bred people a lesson, said: “I think it’s high time we began to talk of subjects that might interest this young lady.” But I realised that, for him, the young lady was not Albertine but Morel, and he confirmed, later on, the accuracy of my interpretation by the expressions he employed when he begged that there might be no more such conversations in front of Morel. “You know,” he said to me, speaking of the violinist, “he’s not at all what you might suppose, he’s a very decent boy who has always been very serious and well-behaved.” One sensed from these words that M. de Charlus regarded sexual inversion as a danger as menacing to young men as prostitution is to women, and that if he employed the epithet “serious” of Morel it was in the sense that it has when applied to a young shop-girl.

Then Brichtot, to change the subject, asked me whether I intended to remain much longer at Incarville. Although I had pointed out to him more than once that I was staying not at Incarville but at Balbec, he always repeated the mistake, for it was by the name of Incarville or Balbec-Incarville that he referred to this section of the coast. One often finds people speaking thus about the same things as oneself by a slightly different name. A certain lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain used invariably to ask me, when she meant to refer to the Duchesse de Guermantes, whether I had seen Zénaïde lately, or Oriane-Zénaïde, so that at first I did not understand her. Probably there had been a time when, some relative of Mme de Guermantes being named Oriane, she herself, to avoid confusion, had been known as Oriane-Zénaïde. Perhaps, too, there had originally been a station only at Incarville, from which one went on by carriage to Balbec.

“Why, what have you been talking about?” said Albertine, astonished at the solemn, paternal tone which M. de Charlus had suddenly adopted.

“About Balzac,” the Baron hastily replied, “and you are wearing this evening the very same costume as the Princesse de Cadignan, not the first, which she wears at the dinner-party, but the second.”

This coincidence was due to the fact that, in choosing Albertine’s clothes, I drew my inspiration from the taste that she had acquired thanks to Elstir, who had a liking for the sort of sobriety that might have been called British had it not been tempered with a softness that was purely French. As a rule the clothes he preferred offered to the eye a harmonious combination of grey tones, like the dress of Diane de Cadignan. M. de Charlus was almost the only person capable of appreciating Albertine’s clothes at their true value; his eye detected at a glance what constituted their rarity, their worth; he would never have mistaken one material for another, and could always recognise the maker. But he preferred—in women—a little more brightness and colour than Elstir would allow. And so, that evening, Albertine glanced at me with a half-smiling, half-apprehensive expression, wrinkling her little pink cat’s nose. Meeting over her skirt of grey crêpe de chine, her jacket of grey cheviot did indeed give the impression that she was dressed entirely in grey. But, signing to me to help her, because her puffed sleeves needed to be smoothed down or pulled up for her to get into or out of her jacket, she took it off, and as these sleeves were of a Scottish plaid in soft colours, pink, pale blue, dull green, pigeon’s breast, the effect was as though in a grey sky a rainbow had suddenly appeared. And she wondered whether this would find favour with M. de Charlus.

“Ah!” he exclaimed in delight, “now we have a ray, a prism of colour. I offer you my sincerest compliments.”

“But it’s this gentleman who has earned them,” Albertine replied politely, pointing to myself, for she liked to show off what she had received from me.

“It’s only the women who don’t know how to dress that are afraid of colours,” went on M. de Charlus. “One can be brilliant without vulgarity and soft without being dull. Besides, you have not the same reasons as Mme de Cadignan for wishing to appear detached from life, for that was the idea which she wished to instil into d’Arthez with her grey gown.”

Albertine, who was interested in this mute language of clothes, questioned M. de Charlus about the Princesse de Cadignan. "Oh! it's such a delightful story," said the Baron in a dreamy tone. "I know the little garden in which Diane de Cadignan used to stroll with Mme d'Espard. It belongs to one of my cousins."

"All this talk about his cousin's garden," Brichot murmured to Cottard, "may, like his pedigree, be of some importance to this worthy Baron. But what interest can it have for us who are not privileged to walk in it, do not know the lady, and possess no titles of nobility?" For Brichot had no idea that one might be interested in a dress and in a garden as works of art, and that it was as though in the pages of Balzac that M. de Charlus saw Mme de Cadignan's garden paths in his mind's eye. The Baron went on: "But you know her," he said to me, speaking of this cousin, and flatteringly addressing himself to me as to a person who, exiled amid the little clan, was to him, if not a citizen of his world, at any rate a frequenter of it. "Anyhow you must have seen her at Mme de Villeparisis's."

"Is that the Marquise de Villeparisis who owns the château at Baucieux?" asked Brichot, captivated.

"Yes, do you know her?" inquired M. de Charlus dryly.

"No, not at all," replied Brichot, "but our colleague Norpois spends part of his holidays every year at Baucieux. I have had occasion to write to him there."

I told Morel, thinking to interest him, that M. de Norpois was a friend of my father. But not by the slightest flicker of his features did he show that he had heard me, so little did he think of my parents, so far short did they fall in his estimation of what my great-uncle had been, who had employed Morel's father as his valet, and who moreover, being fond of "cutting a dash," unlike the rest of the family, had left a golden memory among his servants.

"It appears that Mme de Villeparisis is a superior woman," Brichot went on, "but I have never been allowed to judge of that for myself, nor for that matter has any of my colleagues. For Norpois, who is the soul of courtesy and affability at the *Institut*, has never introduced any of us to the Marquise. I know of no one who has been received by her except our friend Thureau-Dangin, who had an old family connexion with her, and also Gaston Boissier, whom she was anxious to meet because of a study of his that particularly interested her. He dined with her once and came back quite enthralled by her charm. Mme Boissier, however, was not invited."

At the sound of these names, Morel melted into a smile. "Ah! Thureau-Dangin," he said to me with an air of interest as great as had been his indifference when he heard me speak of the Marquis de Norpois and my father. "Thureau-Dangin; why he and your uncle were as thick as thieves. Whenever a lady wanted a front seat for a reception at the Academy, your uncle would say: 'I shall write to Thureau-Dangin.' And of course he got it at once, because you can imagine that M. Thureau-Dangin would never have dared refuse your uncle anything, because he'd soon have got his own back. I'm amused to hear the name Boissier, too, because that was where your uncle ordered all the presents he used to give the ladies at New Year. I know all about it, because I knew the person he used to send for them." He did indeed know him, for it was his father. Some of these affectionate allusions by Morel to my uncle's memory were prompted by the fact that we did not intend to remain permanently in the Hôtel Guermantes, where we had taken an apartment only on account of my grandmother. From time to time there would be talk of a possible move. Now, to understand the advice that Charles Morel gave me in this connexion, the reader must know that my great-uncle had lived, in his day, at 40bis Boulevard Malesherbes. The consequence was that, in the family, as we often went to visit my uncle Adolphe until the fatal day when I caused a breach between my parents and him by telling them the story of the lady in pink, instead of saying "at your uncle's" we used to say "at 40bis." Some cousins of Mamma's used to say to her in the most natural tone: "Ah! so we can't expect you on Sunday since you're dining at 40bis." If I were going to call on some relations, I would be warned to go first of all "to 40bis," in order that my uncle might not be offended by my not having begun my round with him. He was the owner of the house and was very particular as to the choice of his tenants, all of whom either were or became his personal friends. Colonel the Baron de Vetry used to look in every day and smoke a cigar with him in the hope of making him consent to repairs. The carriage entrance was always kept shut. If my uncle caught sight of some washing or a rug hanging from one of the window-sills he would storm in and have it removed in less time than the police would take to do so nowadays. All the same, he did let part of the house, reserving for himself only two floors and the stables. In spite of this, knowing that he was pleased when people praised the excellent upkeep of the house, we used always to extol the comfort of the "little mansion" as though my uncle had been its sole occupant, and he encouraged the pretence, without issuing the formal contradiction that might have been expected. The "little mansion" was certainly comfortable (my uncle having installed in it all the most recent inventions). But it was in no way out of the ordinary. Only my uncle, while referring with false modesty to "my little hovel," was convinced, or at any rate had instilled into his valet, the valet's wife, the coachman, the cook, the idea that there was no place in Paris to compare, for comfort, luxury, and general attractiveness, with the little mansion. Charles Morel had grown up in this belief. He had not outgrown it. And so, even on days when he was not talking to me, if in the train I mentioned the possibility of our moving, at once he would smile at me and say with a knowing wink: "Ah! What you want is something in the style of 40bis! That's a place that would suit you down to the ground! Your uncle knew what he was about. I'm quite sure that in the whole of Paris there's nothing to compare with 40bis."

The melancholy air which M. de Charlus had assumed in speaking of the Princesse de Cadignan left me in no doubt that the tale in question had not reminded him only of the little garden of a cousin to whom he was not particularly attached. He became lost in thought, and as though he were talking to himself: "*The Secrets of the Princesse de Cadignan!*" he exclaimed, "what a masterpiece! How profound, how heartrending the evil

reputation of Diane, who is afraid that the man she loves may hear of it. What an eternal truth, and more universal than it might appear! How far-reaching it is!" He uttered these words with a sadness in which one nevertheless felt that he found a certain charm. Certainly M. de Charlus, unaware to what extent precisely his proclivities were or were not known, had been trembling for some time past at the thought that when he returned to Paris and was seen there in Morel's company, the latter's family might intervene and so his future happiness be jeopardised. This eventuality had probably not appeared to him hitherto except as something profoundly disagreeable and painful. But the Baron was an artist to his fingertips. And now that he had suddenly begun to identify his own situation with that described by Balzac, he took refuge, as it were, in the story, and for the calamity which was perhaps in store for him and which he certainly feared, he had the consolation of finding in his own anxiety what Swann and also Saint-Loup would have called something "very Balzacian." This identification of himself with the Princesse de Cadignan had been made easier for M. de Charlus by virtue of the mental transposition which was becoming habitual with him and of which he had already given several examples. It sufficed, moreover, to make the mere conversion of a woman, as the beloved object, into a young man immediately set in motion around him the whole sequence of social complications which develop round a normal love affair. When, for some reason or other, a change in the calendar or in time-tables is introduced once and for all, if we make the year begin a few weeks later, or if we make midnight strike a quarter of an hour earlier, since the days will still consist of twenty-four hours and the months of thirty days, everything that depends upon the measure of time will remain unaltered. Everything can have been changed without causing any disturbance, since the ratio between the figures is still the same. So it is with lives which adopt "Central European time" or the Eastern calendar. It would even seem that the gratification a man derives from keeping an actress played a part in this liaison. When, after their first meeting, M. de Charlus had made inquiries as to Morel's background, he had of course learned that he was of humble extraction, but a *demi-mondaine* with whom we are in love does not forfeit our esteem because she is the child of poor parents. On the other hand, the well-known musicians to whom he had addressed his inquiries had answered him, not even from any personal motive, like the friends who, when introducing Swann to Odette, had described her to him as more difficult and more sought after than she actually was, but simply in the stereotyped manner of men in a prominent position overpraising a beginner: "Ah, yes, a great talent, a remarkable reputation considering that he's still young, highly esteemed by the experts, will go far." And, with the habit which people who are innocent of inversion have of speaking of masculine beauty: "Besides, he's charming to watch when he plays; he looks better than anyone at a concert, with his pretty hair and distinguished poses; he has an exquisite head, in fact he's the very picture of a violinist." And so M. de Charlus, in any case over-excited by Morel, who did not fail to let him know how many propositions had been addressed to him, was flattered to take him home with him, to make a little dovecot for him to which he would often return. For during the rest of the time he wished him to be free, since this was essential to his career, which M. de Charlus wanted him to continue, however much money he had to give him, either because of the thoroughly "Guermantes" idea that a man must do something, that talent is the sole criterion of merit, and that nobility or money are simply the nought that multiplies a value, or because he was afraid lest, having nothing to do and remaining perpetually in his company, the violinist might grow bored. Moreover he did not wish to deprive himself of the pleasure which he felt, at certain grand concerts, in saying to himself: "The person they are applauding at this moment is coming home with me tonight." Elegant people, when they are in love, and whatever the nature of their love, exercise their vanity in ways that can destroy the previous advantages in which their vanity would have found satisfaction.

Morel, feeling that I bore him no malice, that I was sincerely attached to M. de Charlus and that I was at the same time absolutely indifferent physically to both of them, ended by displaying the same warm feelings towards me as a courtesan who knows that you do not desire her and that her lover has in you a sincere friend who will not try to turn him against her. Not only did he speak to me exactly as Rachel, Saint-Loup's mistress, had spoken to me long ago, but what was more, to judge by what M. de Charlus reported to me, he said to him about me in my absence the same things that Rachel used to say about me to Robert. Indeed M. de Charlus said to me: "He likes you very much," as Robert had said: "She likes you very much." And like the nephew on behalf of his mistress, so it was on Morel's behalf that the uncle often invited me to come and dine with them. There were, moreover, just as many storms between them as there had been between Robert and Rachel. To be sure, after Charlie (Morel) had left us, M. de Charlus never stopped singing his praises, repeating—something by which he felt flattered—that the violinist was so kind to him. But it was evident nevertheless that often Charlie, even in front of all the faithful, looked irritated instead of always appearing happy and submissive as the Baron would have wished. This irritation became so extreme in course of time, in consequence of the weakness which led M. de Charlus to forgive Morel his want of politeness, that the violinist made no attempt to conceal it, or even deliberately affected it. I have seen M. de Charlus, on entering a railway carriage in which Morel was sitting with some of his fellow-soldiers, greeted by the musician with a shrug of the shoulders, accompanied by a wink in the direction of his comrades. Or else he would pretend to be asleep, as though this intrusion bored him beyond words. Or he would begin to cough, and the others would laugh, derisively mimicking the affected speech of men like M. de Charlus, and draw Charlie into a corner from which he would eventually return, as though forced to do so, to sit by M. de Charlus, whose heart was pierced by all these cruelties. It is inconceivable how he can have put up with them; and these ever-varied forms of suffering posed the problem of happiness in fresh terms for M. de Charlus, compelled him not only to demand more, but to desire something else, the previous combination being vitiated by a hideous memory. And yet, painful as these scenes came to be, it must be acknowledged that in the early days the genius of the

Frenchman of the people instinctively invested Morel with charming forms of simplicity, of apparent candour, even of an independent pride which seemed to be inspired by disinterestedness. This was not the case, but the advantage of this attitude was all the more on Morel's side in that, whereas the person who is in love is continually forced to return to the charge, to go one better, it is on the other hand easy for the person who is not in love to proceed along a straight line, inflexible and dignified. It existed by virtue of the privilege of heredity in the face—so open—of this Morel whose heart was so tightly shut, that face endued with the neo-Hellenic grace which blooms in the basilicas of Champagne. Notwithstanding his affectation of pride, often when he caught sight of M. de Charlus at a moment when he was not expecting to see him, he would be embarrassed by the presence of the little clan, would blush and lower his eyes, to the delight of the Baron, who read a whole novel into it. It was simply a sign of irritation and shame. The former sometimes expressed itself openly; for, calm and severely proper as Morel's attitude generally was, it was not infrequently belied. At times, indeed, at something which the Baron said to him, Morel would burst out in the harshest tones with an insolent retort which shocked everybody. M. de Charlus would lower his head with a sorrowful air, would make no reply, and with that faculty which doting fathers possess of believing that the coldness and rudeness of their children has passed unnoticed, would continue undeterred to sing the violinist's praises. M. de Charlus was not always so submissive, but as a rule his attempts at rebellion proved abortive, principally because, having lived among society people, in calculating the reactions that he might provoke he made allowance for the baser instincts, whether congenital or acquired; whereas, instead of these, he encountered in Morel a plebeian tendency to momentary indifference. Unfortunately for M. de Charlus, he did not understand that, for Morel, everything else gave precedence when the Conservatoire and his good reputation at the Conservatoire (but this, which was to be a more serious matter, did not arise for the moment) were in question. Thus, for instance, people of the middle class will readily change their surnames out of vanity, and noblemen for personal advantage. To the young violinist, on the contrary, the name Morel was inseparably linked with his first prize for the violin, and so impossible to alter. M. de Charlus would have liked Morel to owe everything to him, including his name. Reflecting that Morel's Christian name was Charles, which resembled Charlus, and that the house where they usually met was called les Charmes, he sought to persuade Morel that, a pretty name that is agreeable to pronounce being half the battle in establishing an artistic reputation, the virtuoso ought without hesitation to take the name Charmel, a discreet allusion to the scene of their assignations. Morel shrugged his shoulders. As a conclusive argument, M. de Charlus was unfortunately inspired to add that he had a valet of that name. He succeeded only in arousing the furious indignation of the young man. "There was a time when my ancestors were proud of the tire of chamberlain or butler to the King," said the Baron. "There was also a time," replied Morel haughtily, "when my ancestors cut off your ancestors' heads." M. de Charlus would have been greatly surprised had he been capable of realising that, having resigned himself, failing "Charmel," to adopting Morel and conferring on him one of the titles of the Guermantes family which were at his disposal—but which circumstances, as we shall see, did not permit him to offer the violinist—he would have met with a refusal on the latter's part on the grounds of the artistic reputation attached to the name Morel, and of the things that would be said about him at his classes. So far above the Faubourg Saint-Germain did he place the Rue Bergère and its Conservatoire! M. de Charlus was obliged to content himself with having symbolical rings made for Morel, bearing the antique device: *PLUS ULTRA CARLVS*. Certainly, in the face of an adversary of a sort with which he was unfamiliar, M. de Charlus ought to have changed his tactics. But which of us is capable of that? Moreover, if M. de Charlus made blunders, Morel was not guiltless of them either. Far more than the actual circumstance which brought about the rupture between them, what was destined, temporarily at least (but the temporary turned out to be permanent), to be his downfall with M. de Charlus was that his nature included not only the baseness which made him obsequious in the face of harshness and respond with insolence to kindness. Running parallel with this innate baseness, there was in him a complicated neurasthenia of ill breeding, which, springing up on every occasion when he was in the wrong or was becoming a nuisance, meant that at the very moment when he needed all his niceness, all his gentleness, all his gaiety to disarm the Baron, he became sombre and aggressive, tried to provoke discussions on matters where he knew that the other did not agree with him, and maintained his own hostile attitude with a weakness of argument and a peremptory violence which enhanced that weakness. For, very soon running short of arguments, he invented fresh ones as he went along, in which he displayed the full extent of his ignorance and stupidity. These were barely noticeable when he was in a friendly mood and sought only to please. On the other hand, nothing else was visible in his black moods, when, from being inoffensive, they became odious. Whereupon M. de Charlus felt that he could endure no more and that his only hope lay in a brighter morrow, while Morel, forgetting that the Baron was keeping him in the lap of luxury, would give an ironical smile of condescending pity, and say: "I've never taken anything from anybody. Which means that there's nobody to whom I owe a single word of thanks."

In the meantime, as though he were dealing with a man of the world, M. de Charlus continued to give vent to his rage, whether genuine or feigned, but in either case ineffective. It was not always so, however. Thus one day (which in fact came after this initial period) when the Baron was returning with Charlie and myself from a lunch-party at the Verdurins' expecting to spend the rest of the afternoon and evening with the violinist at Doncières, the latter's dismissal of him, as soon as we left the train, with: "No, I've an engagement," caused M. de Charlus so keen a disappointment that, although he tried to put a brave face on it, I saw the tears trickling down and melting the make-up on his eyelashes as he stood dazed beside the carriage door. Such was his grief that, as Albertine and I intended to spend the rest of the day at Doncières, I whispered to her that I would prefer not to leave M. de Charlus by himself, as he seemed for some reason or other upset. The dear girl

readily assented. I then asked M. de Charlus if he would like me to accompany him for a little. He also assented, but did not want to put my "cousin" to any trouble. I took a certain fond pleasure (doubtless for the last time, since I had made up my mind to break with her) in saying to her gently, as though she were my wife: "Go back home by yourself, I shall see you this evening," and in hearing her, as a wife might, give me permission to do as I thought fit and authorise me, if M. de Charlus, of whom she was fond, needed my company, to place myself at his disposal. We proceeded, the Baron and I, he waddling obesely, his jesuitical eyes downcast, and I following him, to a café where we ordered some beer. I felt M. de Charlus's eyes anxiously absorbed in some plan. Suddenly he called for paper and ink, and began to write at an astonishing speed. While he covered sheet after sheet, his eyes glittered with furious day-dreams.

When he had written eight pages: "May I ask you to do me a great service?" he said to me. "You will excuse my sealing this note. But I must. You will take a carriage, a car if you can find one, to get there as quickly as possible. You are certain to find Morel in his quarters, where he has gone to change. Poor boy, he tried to bluster a little when we parted, but you may be sure that his heart is heavier than mine. You will give him this note, and, if he asks you where you saw me, you will tell him that you stopped at Doncières (which, for that matter, is the truth) to see Robert, which is not quite the truth perhaps, but that you met me with a person whom you do not know, that I seemed to be extremely angry, that you thought you heard something about sending seconds (I am in fact fighting a duel tomorrow). Whatever you do, don't say that I'm asking for him, don't make any effort to bring him here, but if he wishes to come with you, don't prevent him from doing so. Go, my boy, it is for his own good, you may be the means of averting a great tragedy. While you are away, I shall write to my seconds. I have prevented you from spending the afternoon with your cousin. I hope that she will bear me no ill will for that, indeed I am sure of it. For hers is a noble soul, and I know that she is one of those rare persons who are capable of rising to the grandeur of an occasion. You must thank her on my behalf. I am personally indebted to her, and I am glad that it should be so."

I was extremely sorry for M. de Charlus; it seemed to me that Charlie might have prevented this duel, of which he was perhaps the cause, and I was revolted, if that were the case, that he should have gone off with such indifference, instead of staying to help his protector. My indignation was even greater when, on reaching the house in which Morel lodged, I recognised the voice of the violinist, who, feeling the need to give vent to his cheerfulness, was singing boisterously: "Some Sunday morning, when the slog is over!" If poor M. de Charlus, who wished me to believe, and doubtless himself believed, that Morel's heart was heavy, had heard him at that moment!

Charlie began to dance with joy when he caught sight of me. "Hallo, old boy! (excuse me addressing you like that; in this blasted military life one picks up bad habits), what a stroke of luck seeing you! I have nothing to do all evening. Do let's spend it together. We can stay here if you like, or take a boat if you prefer that, or we can have some music, it's all the same to me."

I told him that I was obliged to dine at Balbec, and he seemed anxious that I should invite him to dine there also, but I had no desire to do so.

"But if you're in such a hurry, why have you come here?"

"I've brought you a note from M. de Charlus."

At this name all his gaiety vanished; his face tensed.

"What! he can't leave me alone even here. I'm nothing but a slave. Old boy, be a sport. I'm not going to open his letter. Tell him you couldn't find me."

"Wouldn't it be better to open it? I suspect it's something serious."

"Not on your life. You've no idea what lies, what infernal tricks that old scoundrel gets up to. It's a dodge to make me go and see him. Well, I'm not going. I want to spend the evening in peace."

"But isn't there going to be a duel tomorrow?" I asked him, having assumed that he was in the know.

"A duel?" he repeated with an air of stupefaction, "I never heard a word about it. Anyhow, I don't give a damn—the dirty old beast can go and get himself done in if he likes. But wait a minute, this is interesting, I'd better look at his letter after all. You can tell him you left it here for me, in case I should come in."

While Morel was speaking, I looked with amazement at the beautiful books which M. de Charlus had given him and which littered his room. The violinist having refused to accept those labelled: "I belong to the Baron" etc., a device which he felt to be insulting to himself, as a mark of vassalage, the Baron, with the sentimental ingenuity in which his ill-starred love abounded, had substituted others, borrowed from his ancestors, but ordered from the binder according to the circumstances of a melancholy friendship. Sometimes they were terse and confident, as *Spes mea* or *Exspectata non eludet*; sometimes merely resigned, as *J'attendrai*. Others were gallant: *Mesmes plaisir du mestre*, or counselled chastity, such as that borrowed from the family of Simiane, sprinkled with azure towers and fleurs-de-lis, and given a fresh meaning: *Sustentant lilia turres*. Others, finally, were despairing, and made an appointment in heaven with him who had spurned the donor upon earth: *Manet ultima coelo*; and (finding the grapes which he had failed to reach too sour, pretending not to have sought what he had not secured) M. de Charlus said in yet another: *Non mortale quod opto*. But I had no time to examine them all.

If M. de Charlus, in dashing this letter down upon paper, had seemed to be carried away by the daemon that was inspiring his flying pen, as soon as Morel had broken the seal (a leopard between two roses gules, with the motto: *Atavis et armis*) he began to read the letter as feverishly as M. de Charlus had written it, and over those pages covered at breakneck speed his eye ran no less swiftly than the Baron's pen. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "this is the last straw! But where am I to find him? Heaven only knows where he is now." I suggested that if he made haste he might still find him perhaps at a tavern where he had ordered beer as a

restorative. "I don't know whether I shall be coming back," he said to his landlady, and added to himself, "it will depend on how things turn out." A few minutes later we reached the café. I noticed M. de Charlus's expression at the moment when he caught sight of me. It was as though, seeing that I had not returned unaccompanied, he could breathe again, had been restored to life. Being in a mood not to be deprived of Morel's company that evening, he had pretended to have been informed that two officers of the regiment had spoken ill of him in connexion with the violinist and that he was going to send his seconds to call upon them. Morel had foreseen the scandal—his life in the regiment made impossible—and had come at once. In doing which he had not been altogether wrong. For to make his lie more plausible, M. de Charlus had already written to two friends (one was Cottard) asking them to be his seconds. And if the violinist had not appeared, we may be certain that, mad as he was (and in order to change his sorrow into rage), M. de Charlus would have sent them with a challenge to some officer or other with whom it would have been a relief to him to fight. In the meantime M. de Charlus, remembering that he came of a race that was of purer blood than the House of France, told himself that it was really very good of him to make such a fuss about the son of a butler whose employer he would not have condescended to know. Furthermore, if he now enjoyed almost exclusively the society of riff-raff, the latter's profoundly ingrained habit of not replying to letters, of failing to keep appointments without warning you beforehand or apologising afterwards, caused him such agitation and distress when, as was often the case, his heart was involved, and the rest of the time such irritation, inconvenience and anger, that he would sometimes begin to miss the endless letters over the most trifling matters and the scrupulous punctuality of ambassadors and princes who, even if he was, alas, indifferent to their charms, gave him at any rate some sort of peace of mind. Accustomed to Morel's ways, and knowing how little hold he had over him, how incapable he was of insinuating himself into a life in which vulgar friendships consecrated by habit occupied too much space and time to leave a spare hour for a forsaken, touchy, and vainly imploring nobleman, M. de Charlus was so convinced that the musician would not come, was so afraid of having lost him for ever by going too far, that he could barely repress a cry of joy when he saw him appear. But, feeling himself the victor, he was determined to dictate the terms of peace and to extract from them such advantages as he might.

"What are you doing here?" he said to him. "And you?" he added, looking at me, "I told you, whatever you did, not to bring him back with you."

"He didn't want to bring me," said Morel, turning upon M. de Charlus, in the artlessness of his coquetry, a conventionally mournful and languorously old-fashioned gaze which he doubtless thought irresistible, and looking as though he wanted to kiss the Baron and to burst into tears. "It was I who insisted on coming in spite of him. I come, in the name of our friendship, to implore you on my bended knees not to commit this rash act."

M. de Charlus was wild with joy. The reaction was almost too much for his nerves; he managed, however, to control them.

"The friendship which you somewhat inopportunistically invoke," he replied curtly, "ought, on the contrary, to make you give me your approval when I decide that I cannot allow the impertinences of a fool to pass unheeded. Besides, even if I chose to yield to the entreaties of an affection which I have known better inspired, I should no longer be in a position to do so, since my letters to my seconds have been dispatched and I have no doubt of their acceptance. You have always behaved towards me like a young idiot and, instead of priding yourself, as you had every right to do, upon the predilection which I had shown for you, instead of making known to the rabble of sergeants or servants among whom the law of military service compels you to live, what a source of incomparable pride a friendship such as mine was to you, you have sought to apologise for it, almost to make an idiotic merit of not being grateful enough. I know that in so doing," he went on, in order not to let it appear how deeply certain scenes had humiliated him, "you are guilty merely of having let yourself be carried away by the jealousy of others. But how is it that at your age you are childish enough (and ill-bred enough) not to have seen at once that your election by myself and all the advantages that must accrue from it were bound to excite jealousies, that all your comrades, while inciting you to quarrel with me, were plotting to take your place? I did not think it advisable to warn you of the letters I have received in that connexion from all those in whom you place most trust. I scorn the overtures of those flunkeys as I scorn their ineffectual mockery. The only person for whom I care is yourself, since I am fond of you, but affection has its limits and you ought to have guessed as much."

Harsh as the word flunkey might sound in the ears of Morel, whose father had been one, but precisely because his father had been one, the explanation of all social misadventures by "jealousy," an explanation simplistic and absurd but indestructible, which in a certain social class never fails to "work" as infallibly as the old tricks of the stage with a theatre audience or the threat of the clerical peril in a parliamentary assembly, found credence with him almost as strongly as with Françoise or with Mme de Guermantes's servants, for whom jealousy was the sole cause of the misfortunes that beset humanity. He had no doubt that his comrades had tried to oust him from his position and was all the more wretched at the thought of this disastrous albeit imaginary duel.

"Oh, how dreadful," exclaimed Charlie. "I shall never be able to hold up my head again. But oughtn't they to see you before they go and call upon this officer?"

"I don't know. I imagine so. I've sent word to one of them that I shall be here all evening, and I shall give him his instructions."

"I hope that before he comes I can make you listen to reason. Allow me at least to stay with you," Morel pleaded tenderly.

It was all that M. de Charlus wanted. He did not however yield at once.

"You would do wrong to apply in this case the proverbial 'spare the rod and spoil the child,' for you were the child in question, and I do not intend to spare the rod, even after our quarrel, for those who have basely sought to do you injury. Until now, in response to their inquisitive insinuations, when they dared to ask me how a man like myself could associate with a gigolo of your sort, sprung from the gutter, I have answered only in the words of the motto of my La Rochefoucauld cousins: 'It is my pleasure.' I have indeed pointed out to you more than once that this pleasure was capable of becoming my chiefest pleasure, without there resulting from your arbitrary elevation any debasement of myself." And in an impulse of almost insane pride he exclaimed, raising his arms in the air: "*Tantus ab uno splendor!* To condescend is not to descend," he added in a calmer tone, after this delirious outburst of pride and joy. "I hope at least that my two adversaries, notwithstanding their inferior rank, are of a blood that I can shed without reproach. I have made certain discreet inquiries in that direction which have reassured me. If you retained a shred of gratitude towards me, you ought on the contrary to be proud to see that for your sake I am reviving the bellicose humour of my ancestors, saying like them, in the event of a fatal outcome, now that I have learned what a little rascal you are: 'Death to me is life.' "

And M. de Charlus said this sincerely, not only because of his love for Morel, but because a pugnacious instinct which he quaintly supposed to have come down to him from his ancestors filled him with such joy at the thought of fighting that he would now have regretted having to abandon this duel which he had originally concocted with the sole object of bringing Morel to heel. He had never engaged in any affair of the sort without at once preening himself on his valour and identifying himself with the illustrious Constable de Guermantes, whereas in the case of anyone else this same action of taking the field would appear to him to be of the utmost triviality.

"I am sure it will be a splendid sight," he said to us in all sincerity, dwelling upon each word. "To see Sarah Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*, what is that but cack? Mounet-Sully in *Oedipus*, cack! At the most it assumes a certain pallid transfiguration when it is performed in the Arena of Nîmes. But what is it compared to that unimaginable spectacle, the lineal descendant of the Constable engaged in battle?" And at the mere thought of it M. de Charlus, unable to contain himself for joy, began to make passes in the air reminiscent of Molière, causing us to move our glasses prudently out of the way, and to fear that, when the swords crossed, not only the combatants but the doctor and seconds would at once be wounded. "What a tempting spectacle it would be for a painter. You who know Monsieur Elstir," he said to me, "you ought to bring him." I replied that he was not in the neighbourhood. M. de Charlus suggested that he might be summoned by telegraph. "Oh, I'm only saying it for his sake," he added in response to my silence. "It is always interesting for a master—and in my opinion he is one—to record such instances of ethnic reviviscence. And they occur perhaps once in a century."

But if M. de Charlus was enchanted at the thought of a duel which he had meant at first to be entirely fictitious, Morel was thinking with terror of the stories which, thanks to the stir that this duel would cause, might be peddled around from the regimental band all the way to the holy of holies in the Rue Bergère. Seeing in his mind's eye the "class" fully informed, he became more and more insistent with M. de Charlus, who continued to gesticulate before the intoxicating idea of a duel. He begged the Baron to allow him not to leave him until two days later, the supposed day of the duel, so that he might keep him within sight and try to make him listen to the voice of reason. So tender a proposal overcame M. de Charlus's final hesitations. He promised to try to find a way out, and to postpone his decision until the day. In this way, by not settling the matter at once, M. de Charlus knew that he could keep Charlie with him for at least two days, and take the opportunity of obtaining from him undertakings for the future in exchange for abandoning the duel, an exercise, he said, which in itself delighted him and which he would not forgo without regret. And in saying this he was quite sincere, for he had always enjoyed taking the field when it was a question of crossing swords or exchanging shots with an opponent.

Cottard arrived at length, although extremely late, for, delighted to act as second but even more terrified at the prospect, he had been obliged to halt at all the cafés or farms on the way, asking the occupants to be so kind as to show him the way to "No. 100" or "a certain place." As soon as he arrived, the Baron took him into another room, for he thought it more in keeping with the rules for Charlie and me not to be present at the interview, and he excelled in making the most ordinary room serve as a temporary throne-room or council chamber. When he was alone with Cottard he thanked him warmly, but informed him that it seemed probable that the remark which had been repeated to him had never really been made, and requested that in view of this the Doctor would be so good as to let the other second know that, barring possible complications, the incident might be regarded as closed. Now that the prospect of danger had receded, Cottard was disappointed. He was indeed tempted for a moment to give vent to anger, but he remembered that one of his masters, who had enjoyed the most successful medical career of his generation, having failed to enter the Academy at his first election by two votes only, had put a brave face on it and had gone and shaken hands with his successful rival. And so the Doctor refrained from an expression of indignation which could have made no difference, and, after murmuring, he the most timorous of men, that there were certain things which one could not overlook, added that in this case it was better so, that this solution delighted him. M. de Charlus, desirous of showing his gratitude to the Doctor, just as the Duke his brother might have straightened the collar of my father's great-coat or rather as a duchess might put her arm round the waist of a plebeian lady, brought his chair close to the Doctor's, notwithstanding the distaste which the latter inspired in him. And, not only without any physical pleasure, but having first to overcome a physical repulsion—as a Guermantes, not as an



invert—in taking leave of the Doctor he clasped his hand and caressed it for a moment with the kindly affection of a master stroking his horse's nose and giving it a lump of sugar. But Cottard, who had never allowed the Baron to see that he had so much as heard the vaguest rumours as to his morals, but nevertheless regarded him in his heart of hearts as belonging to the category of "abnormals" (indeed, with his habitual inaccuracy in the choice of terms, and in the most serious tone, he had said of one of M. Verdurin's footmen: "Isn't he the Baron's mistress?"), persons of whom he had little personal experience, imagined that this stroking of his hand was the immediate prelude to an act of rape for the accomplishment of which, the duel being a mere pretext, he had been enticed into a trap and led by the Baron into this remote apartment where he was about to be forcibly outraged. Not daring to leave his chair, to which fear kept him glued, he rolled his eyes in terror, as though he had fallen into the hands of a savage who, for all he knew, fed upon human flesh. At length M. de Charlus, releasing his hand and anxious to be hospitable to the end, said: "Won't you come and have one with us, as they say—what in the old days used to be called a *mazagran* or a *gloria*, drinks that are no longer to be found except, as archaeological curiosities, in the plays of Labiche and the cafés of Doncières. A *gloria* would be distinctly appropriate to the place, eh? And also to the occasion, what?"

"I am President of the Anti-Alcohol League," replied Cottard. "Some country sawbones has only got to pass, and it will be said that I do not practise what I preach. *Os homini sublime dedit coelumque tueri*," he added, not that this had any bearing on the matter, but because his stock of Latin quotations was extremely limited, albeit sufficient to astound his pupils.

M. de Charlus shrugged his shoulders and led Cottard back to where we were, after exacting a promise of secrecy which was all the more important to him since, the motive for the abortive duel being purely imaginary, it must on no account reach the ears of the officer whom he had arbitrarily selected as his adversary. While the four of us sat drinking, Mme Cottard, who had been waiting for her husband outside, where M. de Charlus had seen her perfectly well but had made no effort to summon her, came in and greeted the Baron, who held out his hand to her as though to a housemaid, without rising from his chair, partly in the manner of a king receiving homage, partly as a snob who does not wish a distinctly inelegant woman to sit down at his table, partly as an egoist who enjoys being alone with his friends and does not wish to be bothered. So Mme Cottard remained standing while she talked to M. de Charlus and her husband. But, possibly because politeness, the knowledge of the "done" thing, is not the exclusive prerogative of the Guermantes, and may all of a sudden illuminate and guide the dimmest brains, or else because, being constantly unfaithful to his wife, Cottard felt at odd moments, by way of compensation, the need to protect her against anyone who showed disrespect to her, the Doctor suddenly frowned, a thing I had never seen him do before, and, without consulting M. de Charlus, said in a tone of authority: "Come, Léontine, don't stand about like that, sit down." "But are you sure I'm not disturbing you?" Mme Cottard inquired timidly of M. de Charlus, who, surprised by the Doctor's tone, had made no observation. Whereupon, without giving him a second chance, Cottard repeated with authority: "I told you to sit down."

Presently the party broke up, and then M. de Charlus said to Morel: "I conclude from this whole affair, which has ended more happily than you deserved, that you do not know how to behave and that, at the expiry of your military service, I must take you back myself to your father, like the Archangel Raphael sent by God to the young Tobias." And the Baron smiled with an air of magnanimity, and a joy which Morel, to whom the prospect of being thus led home afforded no pleasure, did not appear to share. In the exhilaration of comparing himself to the Archangel, and Morel to the son of Tobit, M. de Charlus no longer thought of the purpose of his remark, which had been to explore the ground to see whether, as he hoped, Morel would consent to come with him to Paris. Intoxicated by his love, or by his self-love, the Baron did not see or pretended not to see the violinist's wry grimace, for, leaving him by himself in the café, he said to me with a proud smile: "Did you notice how, when I compared him to the son of Tobit, he became wild with joy? That was because, being extremely intelligent, he at once understood that the Father with whom he was henceforth to live was not his father after the flesh, who must be some horrible mustachioed valet, but his spiritual father, that is to say Myself. What a triumph for him! How proudly he reared his head! What joy he felt at having understood me! I am sure that he will now repeat day after day: 'O God who didst give the blessed Archangel Raphael as *guide* to thy servant Tobias upon a long journey, grant to us, thy servants, that we may ever be protected by him and armed with his succour.' I did not even need," added the Baron, firmly convinced that he would one day sit before the throne of God, "to tell him that I was the heavenly messenger. He realised it for himself, and was struck dumb with joy!" And M. de Charlus (whom joy, on the contrary, did not deprive of speech), heedless of the passers-by who turned to stare at him, assuming that he must be a lunatic, cried out alone and at the top of his voice, raising his hands in the air: "Alleluia!"

This reconciliation gave but a temporary respite to M. de Charlus's torments. Often, when Morel had gone on manoeuvres too far away for M. de Charlus to be able to go and visit him or to send me to talk to him, he would write the Baron desperate and affectionate letters, in which he assured him that he would have to put an end to his life because, owing to a ghastly affair, he needed twenty-five thousand francs. He did not mention what this ghastly affair was, and had he done so, it would doubtless have been an invention. As far as the money was concerned, M. de Charlus would willingly have sent it had he not felt that it would make Charlie independent of him and free to receive the favours of someone else. And so he refused, and his telegrams had the dry, cutting tone of his voice. When he was certain of their effect, he longed for Morel to fall out with him for ever, for, knowing very well that it was the contrary that would happen, he could not help dwelling upon all the drawbacks that would be revived with this inevitable liaison. But if no answer came from Morel, he lay awake all night, had not a moment's peace, so great is the number of the things of

which we live in ignorance, and of the deep, inner realities that remain hidden from us. Then he would think up every conceivable supposition as to the enormity which had put Morel in need of twenty-five thousand francs, would give it every possible form, attach to it, one after another, a variety of proper names. I believe that at such moments M. de Charlus (in spite of the fact that his snobbishness, which was now diminishing, had already been overtaken if not outstripped by his increasing curiosity as to the ways of the people) must have recalled with a certain nostalgia the graceful, many-coloured whirl of the fashionable gatherings at which the most charming men and women sought his company only for the disinterested pleasure that it afforded them, where nobody would have dreamed of "doing him down," of inventing a "ghastly affair" because of which one is prepared to take one's life if one does not at once receive twenty-five thousand francs. I believe that then, and perhaps because he had after all remained more "Combray" at heart than myself, and had grafted a feudal dignity on to his Germanic arrogance, he must have felt that one cannot with impunity lose one's heart to a servant, that the people are by no means the same thing as society: in short he did not "trust the people" as I have always done.

The next station on the little railway, Maineville, reminds me of an incident in which Morel and M. de Charlus were concerned. Before I speak of it, I ought to mention that the halt of the train at Maineville (when one was escorting to Balbec an elegant new arrival who, to avoid giving trouble, preferred not to stay at La Raspelière) was the occasion of scenes less painful than that which I shall describe in a moment. The new arrival, having his light luggage with him in the train, generally found that the Grand Hotel was rather too far away, but, as there was nothing before Balbec except small beach-resorts with uncomfortable villas, had yielded to a preference for luxury and well-being and resigned himself to the long journey when, as the train came to a standstill at Maineville, he suddenly saw looming up in front of him the Palace, which he could never have suspected of being a house of ill fame. "Well, don't let us go any further," he would invariably say to Mme Cottard, a woman well-known for her practical judgment and sound advice. "There's the very thing I want. What's the point of going on to Balbec, where I certainly shan't find anything better. I can tell at a glance that it has every modern comfort, and I can perfectly well invite Mme Verdurin there, for I intend, in return for her hospitality, to give a few little parties in her honour. She won't have so far to come as if I stay at Balbec. It seems to me the very place for her, and for your wife, my dear Professor. There are bound to be reception rooms, and we shall bring the ladies there. Between you and me, I can't imagine why Mme Verdurin didn't come and settle here instead of taking La Raspelière. It's far healthier than an old house like La Raspelière, which is bound to be damp, and isn't clean either; they have no hot water laid on, one can never get a wash. Maineville strikes me as being far more agreeable. Mme Verdurin could have played her role as hostess here to perfection. However, tastes differ; anyhow I intend to remain here. Mme Cottard, won't you come along with me? We shall have to be quick, of course, for the train will be starting again in a minute. You can pilot me through this establishment, which you doubtless know inside out, since you must often have visited it. It's an ideal setting for you." The others would have the greatest difficulty in making the unfortunate new arrival hold his tongue, and still more in preventing him from leaving the train, while he, with the obstinacy which often arises from a gaffe, would insist, would gather his luggage together and refuse to listen to a word until they had assured him that neither Mme Verdurin nor Mme Cottard would ever come to call upon him there. "Anyhow, I'm going to take up residence there. Mme Verdurin can write to me if she wishes to see me."

The incident that concerns Morel was of a more highly specialised order. There were others, but I confine myself at present, as the little train halts and the porter calls out "Doncières," "Grattevast," "Maineville" etc., to noting down the particular memory that the watering-place or garrison town recalls to me. I have already mentioned Maineville (*media villa*) and the importance that it had acquired from that luxurious house of prostitution which had recently been built there, not without arousing futile protests from the local mothers. But before I proceed to say why Maineville is associated in my memory with Morel and M. de Charlus, I must mention the disproportion (which I shall have occasion to examine more thoroughly later on) between the importance that Morel attached to keeping certain hours free, and the triviality of the occupations to which he pretended to devote them, this same disproportion recurring amid the explanations of another sort which he gave to M. de Charlus. He who played the disinterested artist for the Baron's benefit (and might do so with impunity in view of the generosity of his patron), when he wished to have the evening to himself in order to give a lesson, etc., never failed to add to his excuse the following words, uttered with a smile of cupidity: "Besides, there may be forty francs to be got out of it. That's not to be sneezed at. You must let me go, because as you see it's in my interest. Damn it all, I haven't got a regular income like you, I have my way to make in the world, it's a chance of earning a little money." In professing his anxiety to give his lesson, Morel was not altogether insincere. For one thing, it is false to say that money has no colour. A new way of earning it gives a fresh lustre to coins that are tarnished with use. Had he really gone out to give a lesson, it is probable that a couple of louis handed to him as he left the house by a girl pupil would have produced a different effect on him from a couple of louis coming from the hand of M. de Charlus. Besides, for a couple of louis the richest of men would travel miles, which become leagues when one is the son of a valet. But frequently M. de Charlus had his doubts as to the reality of the violin lesson, doubts which were increased by the fact that often the musician would offer pretexts of another sort, entirely disinterested from the material point of view, and at the same time absurd. Thus Morel could not help presenting a picture of his life, but one that was intentionally, and unintentionally too, so obscured that only certain parts of it were distinguishable. For a whole month he placed himself at M. de Charlus's disposal on condition that he might keep his evenings free, for he was anxious to put in a regular attendance at a course of algebra. Come and see M. de Charlus after his

classes? Oh, that was impossible; the classes sometimes went on very late. "Even after two o'clock in the morning?" the Baron asked. "Sometimes." "But you can learn algebra just as easily from a book." "More easily, for I don't get very much out of the lessons." "Well then! Besides, algebra can't be of any use to you." "I like it. It soothes my nerves." "It cannot be algebra that makes him ask for night leave," M. de Charlus said to himself. "Can he be working for the police?" In any case Morel, whatever objection might be made, reserved certain evening hours, whether for algebra or for the violin. On one occasion it was for neither, but for the Prince de Guermantes who, having come down for a few days to that part of the coast to pay the Princesse de Luxembourg a visit, met the musician without knowing who he was or being known to him either, and offered him fifty francs to spend the night with him in the brothel at Maineville; a twofold pleasure for Morel, in the remuneration received from M. de Guermantes and in the delight of being surrounded by women who would flaunt their tawny breasts uncovered. In some way or other M. de Charlus got wind of what had occurred and of the place appointed, but did not discover the name of the seducer. Mad with jealousy, and in the hope of identifying the latter, he telegraphed to Jupien, who arrived two days later, and when, early the following week, Morel announced that he would again be absent, the Baron asked Jupien if he would undertake to bribe the woman who kept the establishment to hide them in some place where they could witness what occurred. "That's all right. I'll see to it, dearie," Jupien assured the Baron. It is hard to imagine the extent to which this anxiety agitated the Baron's mind, and by the very fact of doing so had momentarily enriched it. Love can thus be responsible for veritable geological upheavals of the mind. In that of M. de Charlus, which a few days earlier had resembled a plain so uniform that as far as the eye could reach it would have been impossible to make out an idea rising above the level surface, there had suddenly sprung into being, hard as stone, a range of mountains, but mountains as elaborately carved as if some sculptor, instead of quarrying and carting away the marble, had chiselled it on the spot, in which there writhed in vast titanic groups Fury, Jealousy, Curiosity, Envy, Hatred, Suffering, Pride, Terror and Love.

Meanwhile the evening on which Morel was to be absent had come. Jupien's mission had proved successful. He and the Baron were to be there about eleven o'clock, and would be put in a place of concealment. When they were still three streets away from this luxurious house of prostitution (to which people came from all the fashionable resorts in the neighbourhood), M. de Charlus had begun to walk on tiptoe, to disguise his voice, to beg Jupien not to speak so loud, lest Morel should hear them from inside. But, on creeping stealthily into the entrance hall, the Baron, who was not accustomed to places of the sort, found himself, to his terror and amazement, in a gathering more clamorous than the Stock Exchange or a saleroom. It was in vain that he begged the maids who gathered round him to moderate their voices; in any case their voices were drowned by the stream of auctioneering cries from an old "madame" in a very brown wig with the grave, wrinkled face of a notary or a Spanish priest, who kept shouting in a thunderous voice, ordering the doors to be alternately opened and shut, like a policeman regulating the flow of traffic: "Take this gentleman to number 28, the Spanish room." "Let no more in." "Open the door again, these gentlemen want Mademoiselle Noémie. She's expecting them in the Persian parlour." M. de Charlus was as terrified as a countryman who has to cross the boulevards; while, to take a simile infinitely less sacrilegious than the subject represented on the capitals of the porch of the old church of Couliville, the voices of the young maids repeated in a lower tone, unceasingly, the madame's orders, like the catechisms that one hears schoolchildren chanting beneath the echoing vaults of a country church. Alarmed though he was, M. de Charlus, who in the street had trembled lest he should be heard, convinced in his own mind that Morel was at the window, was perhaps not so frightened after all in the din of those huge staircases on which one realised that from the rooms nothing could be seen. Coming at last to the end of his calvary, he found Mlle Noémie, who was to conceal him with Jupien but began by shutting him up in a sumptuously furnished Persian sitting-room from which he could see nothing at all. She told him that Morel had asked for some orangeade, and that as soon as he was served the two visitors would be taken to a room with a transparent panel. In the meantime, as she was wanted, she promised them, like a fairy godmother, that to help them to pass the time she was going to send them a "clever little lady." For she herself had to go. The clever little lady wore a Persian wrapper, which she wanted to remove. M. de Charlus begged her to do nothing of the sort, and she rang for champagne which cost 40 francs a bottle. Morel, during this time, was in fact with the Prince de Guermantes; he had, for form's sake, pretended to go into the wrong room by mistake, and had entered one in which there were two women, who had made haste to leave the two gentlemen undisturbed. M. de Charlus knew nothing of this, but stormed with rage, tried to open the doors, and sent for Mlle Noémie, who, hearing the clever little lady give M. de Charlus certain information about Morel which was not in accordance with what she herself had told Jupien, banished her promptly and presently sent, as a substitute for the clever little lady, a "dear little lady" who also showed them nothing but told them how respectable the house was and called, like her predecessor, for champagne. The Baron, foaming with rage, sent again for Mlle Noémie, who said to them: "Yes, it is taking rather long, the ladies are doing poses, he doesn't look as if he wanted to do anything." Finally, yielding to the promises and threats of the Baron, Mlle Noémie went away with an air of irritation, assuring them that they would not be kept waiting more than five minutes. The five minutes stretched to an hour, after which Noémie came and escorted an enraged Charlus and a disconsolate Jupien on tiptoe to a door which stood ajar, telling them: "You'll see splendidly from here. However, it's not very interesting just at present. He's with three ladies, and he's telling them about his army life." At length the Baron was able to see through the cleft of the door and also the reflexion in the mirrors beyond. But a mortal terror forced him to lean back against the wall. It was indeed Morel that he saw before him, but, as though the pagan mysteries and magic spells still existed, it was rather the shade of Morel, Morel embalmed, not even Morel restored to life like Lazarus, an apparition of Morel, a

phantom of Morel, Morel "walking" or "called up" in this room (in which the walls and couches everywhere repeated the emblems of sorcery), that was visible a few feet away from him, in profile. Morel had, as happens to the dead, lost all his colour; among these women, with whom one might have expected him to be making merry, he remained livid, fixed in an artificial immobility; to drink the glass of champagne that stood before him, his listless arm tried in vain to reach out, and dropped back again. One had the impression of that ambiguous state implied by a religion which speaks of immortality but means thereby something that does not exclude extinction. The women were plying him with questions: "You see," Mlle Noémie whispered to the Baron, "they're talking to him about his army life. It's amusing, isn't it?"—here she laughed—"You're glad you came? He's calm, isn't he," she added, as though she were speaking of a dying man. The women's questions came thick and fast, but Morel, inanimate, had not the strength to answer them. Even the miracle of a whispered word did not occur. M. de Charlus hesitated for barely a moment before he grasped what had really happened, namely that—whether from clumsiness on Jupien's part when he had called to make the arrangements, or from the expansive power of secrets once confided which ensures that they are never kept, or from the natural indiscretion of these women, or from their fear of the police—Morel had been told that two gentlemen had paid a large sum to be allowed to spy on him, unseen hands had spirited away the Prince de Guermantes, metamorphosed into three women, and the unhappy Morel had been placed, trembling, paralysed with fear, in such a position that if M. de Charlus could scarcely see him, he, terrified, speechless, not daring to lift his glass for fear of letting it fall, had a perfect view of the Baron.

The story, as it happened, ended no more happily for the Prince de Guermantes. When he had been sent away so that M. de Charlus should not see him, furious at his disappointment without suspecting who was responsible for it, he had implored Morel, still without letting him know who he was, to meet him the following night in the tiny villa which he had taken and which, despite the shortness of his projected stay in it, he had, obeying the same quirkish habit which we have already observed in Mme de Villeparisis, decorated with a number of family keepsakes so that he might feel more at home. And so, next day, Morel, constantly looking over his shoulder for fear of being followed and spied upon by M. de Charlus, had finally entered the villa, having failed to observe any suspicious passer-by. He was shown into the sitting-room by a valet, who told him that he would inform "Monsieur" (his master had warned him not to utter the word "Prince" for fear of arousing suspicions). But when Morel found himself alone, and went to the mirror to see that his forelock was not disarranged, he felt as though he was the victim of a hallucination. The photographs on the mantelpiece (which the violinist recognised, for he had seen them in M. de Charlus's room) of the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duchesse de Luxembourg and Mme de Villeparisis, left him at first petrified with fright. At the same moment he caught sight of the photograph of M. de Charlus, which was placed a little behind the rest. The Baron seemed to be transfixing him with a strange, unblinking stare. Mad with terror, Morel, recovering from his preliminary stupor and no longer doubting that this was a trap into which M. de Charlus had led him in order to put his fidelity to the test, leapt down the steps of the villa four at a time and set off along the road as fast as his legs would carry him, and when the Prince (thinking he had put a casual acquaintance through the required period of waiting, not without wondering whether the whole thing was entirely prudent and whether the individual in question might not be dangerous) came into the sitting-room, he found nobody there. In vain did he and his valet, fearful of burglary, and armed with revolvers, search the whole house, which was not large, the basement, and every corner of the garden, the companion of whose presence he had been certain had completely vanished. He met him several times in the course of the week that followed. But on each occasion it was Morel, the dangerous customer, who turned tail and fled, as though the Prince were more dangerous still. Stubborn in his suspicions, Morel never outgrew them, and even in Paris the sight of the Prince de Guermantes was enough to make him take to his heels. Thus was M. de Charlus protected from an infidelity which filled him with despair, and avenged without ever realising that he had been, still less how.

But already my memories of what I was told about all this are giving place to others, for the T. S. N., resuming its slow crawl, continues to set down or take up passengers at the succeeding stations.

At Grattevast, where his sister lived and where he had been spending the afternoon, M. Pierre de Verjus, Comte de Crécy (who was called simply the Comte de Crécy), would occasionally appear—a gentleman without means but of extreme distinction, whom I had come to know through the Cambremers, although he was by no means intimate with them. As he was reduced to an extremely modest, almost a penurious existence, I felt that a cigar and a drink were things that gave him so much pleasure that I formed the habit, on the days when I could not see Albertine, of inviting him to Balbec. A man of great refinement who expressed himself beautifully, with snow-white hair and a pair of charming blue eyes, he generally spoke, unassumingly and very delicately, of the comforts of life in a country house, which he had evidently known from experience, and also of pedigrees. On my inquiring what was engraved on his ring, he told me with a modest smile: "It is a sprig of verjuice grapes." And he added with degustatory relish: "Our arms are a sprig of verjuice grapes—symbolic, since my name is Verjus—slipped and leaved vert." But I fancy that he would have been disappointed if at Balbec I had offered him nothing better to drink than verjuice. He liked the most expensive wines, doubtless because he was deprived of them, because of his profound knowledge of what he was deprived of, because he had a taste for them, perhaps also because he had an exorbitant thirst. And so when I invited him to dine at Balbec, he would order the meal with a refined skill but eat a little too much, and drink copiously, making the waiters warm the wines that needed warming and place those that needed cooling upon ice. Before dinner and after, he would give the right date or number for a port or an old brandy,

as he would have given the date of the creation of a marquise which was not generally known but with which he was no less familiar.

As I was in Aimé's eyes a favoured customer, he was delighted that I should give these special dinners and would shout to the waiters: "Quick, lay number 25 for me," as though the table were for his own use. And, as the language of head waiters is not quite the same as that of section heads, assistants, boys, and so forth, when the time came for me to ask for the bill he would say to the waiter who had served us, making a continuous, soothing gesture with the back of his hand, as though he were trying to calm a horse that was ready to take the bit in its teeth: "Don't overdo it" (in adding up the bill), "gently does it." Then, as the waiter withdrew with this guidance, Aimé, fearing lest his recommendations might not be carried out to the letter, would call him back: "Here, let me make it out." And as I told him not to bother: "It's one of my principles that we ought never, as the saying is, to sting a customer." As for the manager, since my guest was attired simply, always in the same clothes, which were rather threadbare (albeit nobody would so well have practised the art of dressing expensively, like one of Balzac's dandies, had he possessed the means), he confined himself, out of respect for me, to watching from a distance to see that everything was all right, and beckoning to someone to place a wedge under one leg of the table which was not steady. This is not to say that he was not qualified, though he concealed his beginnings as a scullion, to lend a hand like anyone else. It required some exceptional circumstance nevertheless to induce him one day to carve the turkeys himself. I was out, but I heard afterwards that he carved them with a sacerdotal majesty, surrounded, at a respectful distance from the service-table, by a ring of waiters who, endeavouring thereby not so much to learn the art as to curry favour with him, stood gaping in open-mouthed admiration. The manager, however, as he plunged his knife with solemn deliberation into the flanks of his victims, from which he no more deflected his eyes, filled with a sense of his high function, than if he were expecting to read some augury therein, was totally oblivious of their presence. The hierophant was not even conscious of my absence. When he heard of it, he was distressed: "What, you didn't see me carving the turkeys myself?" I replied that having failed, so far, to see Rome, Venice, Siena, the Prado, the Dresden gallery, the Indies, Sarah in *Phèdre*, I had learned to resign myself, and that I would add his carving of turkeys to my list. The comparison with the dramatic art (Sarah in *Phèdre*) was the only one that he seemed to understand, for he had learned through me that on days of gala performances the elder Coquelin had accepted beginners' roles, even those of characters who had only a single line or none at all. "All the same, I'm sorry for your sake. When shall I be carving again? It will need some great event, it will need a war." (It needed the armistice, in fact.) From that day onwards, the calendar was changed, and time was reckoned thus: "That was the day after the day I carved the turkeys myself." "It was exactly a week after the manager carved the turkeys himself." And so this prosectomy furnished, like the Nativity of Christ or the Hegira, the starting point for a calendar different from the rest, but neither so extensively adopted nor so long observed.

The sadness of M. de Crécy's life was due, just as much as to his no longer keeping horses and a succulent table, to his mixing exclusively with people who were capable of supposing that Cambremers and Guermantes were one and the same thing. When he saw that I knew that Legrandin, who had now taken to calling himself Legrand de Méséglise, had no sort of right to that name, being moreover lit up by the wine that he was drinking, he burst into a sort of transport of joy. His sister would say to me with a knowing look: "My brother is never so happy as when he has a chance to talk to you." He felt indeed that he was alive now that he had discovered somebody who knew the unimportance of the Cambremers and the grandeur of the Guermantes, somebody for whom the social universe existed. So, after the burning of all the libraries on the face of the globe and the emergence of a race entirely unlettered, might an old Latin scholar recover his confidence in life if he heard somebody quoting a line of Horace. Hence, if he never left the train without saying to me: "When is our next little reunion?", it was not only with the avidity of a parasite but with the relish of a scholar, and because he regarded our Balbec agapes as an opportunity for talking about subjects which were precious to him and of which he was never able to talk to anyone else, and in that sense analogous to those dinners at which the Society of Bibliophiles assembles on certain specified dates round the particularly succulent board of the Union Club. He was extremely modest so far as his own family was concerned, and it was not from M. de Crécy himself that I learned that it was a very noble family and an authentic branch transplanted to France of the English family which bears the title of Crecy. When I learned that he was a real Crécy, I told him that one of Mme de Guermantes's nieces had married an American named Charles Crecy, and said that I did not suppose there was any connexion between them. "None," he said. "Any more than—not, of course, that my family is so distinguished—heaps of Americans who are called Montgomery, Berry, Chandos or Capel have with the families of Pembroke, Buckingham or Essex, or with the Duc de Berry." I thought more than once of telling him, as a joke, that I knew Mme Swann, who as a courtesan had been known at one time by the name Odette de Crécy; but although the Duc d'Alençon could not have been offended if one spoke to him of Emilienne d'Alençon, I did not feel that I was on sufficiently intimate terms with M. de Crécy to carry the joke so far. "He comes of a very great family," M. de Montsurvent said to me one day. "His patronymic is Saylor." And he went on to say that on the wall of his old castle above Incarville, which was now almost uninhabitable and which he, although born very rich, was now too impoverished to put in repair, was still to be read the old motto of the family. I thought this motto very fine, whether applied to the impatience of a predatory race ensconced in that eyrie from which its members must have swooped down in the past, or, at the present day, to its contemplation of its own decline, awaiting the approach of death in that towering, grim retreat. It is in this double sense indeed that this motto plays upon the name Saylor, in the words: "*Ne sçais l'heure.*"

At Hermenonville M. de Chevregny would sometimes get in, a gentleman whose name, Brichot told us, signified like that of Mgr de Cabrières "a place where goats assemble." He was related to the Cambremers, for which reason, and from a false appreciation of elegance, the latter often invited him to Féterne, but only when they had no other guests to dazzle. Living all the year round at Beausoleil, M. de Chevregny had remained more provincial than they. And so when he went for a few weeks to Paris, there was not a moment to waste if he was to "see everything" in the time; so much so that sometimes, a little dazed by the number of spectacles too rapidly digested, when he was asked if he had seen a particular play he would find that he was no longer absolutely sure. But this uncertainty was rare, for he had that detailed knowledge of Paris only to be found in people who seldom go there. He advised me which of the "novelties" I ought to see ("It's well worth your while"), regarding them however solely from the point of view of the pleasant evening that they might help to spend, and so completely ignoring the aesthetic point of view as never to suspect that they might indeed occasionally constitute a "novelty" in the history of art. So it was that, speaking of everything in the same tone, he told us: "We went once to the Opéra-Comique, but the show there isn't up to much. It's called *Pelléas et Mélisande*. It's trivial. Périer always acts well, but it's better to see him in something else. At the Gymnase, on the other hand, they're doing *La Châtelaine*. We went back to it twice; don't miss it, whatever you do, it's well worth seeing; besides, it's played to perfection; there's Frévalles, Marie Magnier, Baron fils"; and he went on to cite the names of actors of whom I had never heard, and without prefixing Monsieur, Madame or Mademoiselle like the Duc de Guermantes, who used to speak in the same ceremoniously contemptuous tone of the "songs of Mademoiselle Yvette Guilbert" and the "experiments of Monsieur Charcot." This was not M. de Chevregny's way: he said "Cornaglia and Dehelly" as he might have said "Voltaire and Montesquieu." For in him, with regard to actors as to everything that was Parisian, the aristocrat's desire to show his disdain was overcome by the provincial's desire to appear on familiar terms with everyone.

Immediately after the first dinner-party that I had attended at La Raspelière with what was still called at Féterne "the young couple," although M. and Mme de Cambremer were no longer, by any means, in their first youth, the old Marquise had written me one of those letters which one can pick out by their handwriting from among a thousand. She said to me: "Bring your delicious—charming—nice cousin. It will be a delight, a pleasure," failing always to observe the sequence that the recipient of her letter would naturally have expected, and with such unerring dexterity that I finally changed my mind as to the nature of these diminuendos, decided that they were deliberate, and found in them the same depravity of taste—transposed into the social key—that drove Sainte-Beuve to upset all the normal relations between words, to alter any expression that was at all habitual. Two methods, taught probably by different masters, clashed in this epistolary style, the second making Mme de Cambremer redeem the monotony of her multiple adjectives by employing them in a descending scale, and avoiding an ending on the common chord. On the other hand, I was inclined to see in these inverse gradations, no longer a stylistic refinement, as when they were the handiwork of the dowager Marquise, but a stylistic awkwardness whenever they were employed by the Marquis her son or by her lady cousins. For throughout the family, to quite a remote degree of kinship and in admiring imitation of Aunt Zélia, the rule of the three adjectives was held in great favour, as was a certain enthusiastic way of catching your breath when talking. An imitation that had passed into the blood, moreover; and whenever, in the family, a little girl from her earliest childhood took to stopping short while she was talking to swallow her saliva, her parents would say: "She takes after Aunt Zélia," would sense that as she grew older her upper lip would soon tend to be shadowed by a faint moustache, and would make up their minds to cultivate her inevitable talent for music.

It was not long before the relations of the Cambremers with Mme Verdurin were less satisfactory than with myself, for different reasons. They felt they must invite her to dine. The "young" Marquise said to me contemptuously: "I don't see why we shouldn't invite that woman. In the country one meets anybody, it's of no great consequence." But being at heart considerably awed, they frequently consulted me as to how they should put into effect their desire to make a polite gesture. Since they had invited Albertine and myself to dine with some friends of Saint-Loup, smart people of the neighbourhood who owned the château of Gourville and represented a little more than the cream of Norman society, to which Mme Verdurin, while pretending to despise it, was partial, I advised the Cambremers to invite the Mistress to meet them. But the lord and lady of Féterne, in their fear (so timorous were they) of offending their noble friends, or else (so ingenuous were they) of the possibility that M. and Mme Verdurin might be bored by people who were not intellectual, or yet again (since they were impregnated with a spirit of routine which experience had not fertilised) of mixing different kinds of people and committing a solecism, declared that it would not "work," that they "wouldn't hit it off together," and that it would be much better to keep Mme Verdurin (whom they would invite with all her little group) for another evening. For this coming evening—the smart one, to meet Saint-Loup's friends—they invited nobody from the little nucleus but Morel, in order that M. de Charlus might indirectly be informed of the brilliant people whom they had to their house, and also that the musician might help to entertain their guests, for he was to be asked to bring his violin. They threw in Cottard as well, because M. de Cambremer declared that he had some "go" about him and would "go down well" at a dinner-party; besides, it might turn out useful to be on friendly terms with a doctor if they should ever have anybody ill in the house. But they invited him by himself, so as not to "start anything with the wife." Mme Verdurin was outraged when she heard that two members of the little group had been invited without herself to dine "informally" at Féterne. She dictated to the Doctor, whose first impulse had been to accept, a stiff reply in which he said: "We are dining that evening with Mme Verdurin," a plural intended to teach the Cambremers a lesson and to show them that he was not detachable from Mme Cottard. As for Morel, Mme Verdurin had no need to draw up for

him an impolite course of behaviour, for he adopted one of his own accord, for the following reason. If he preserved with regard to M. de Charlus, insofar as his pleasures were concerned, an independence which distressed the Baron, we have seen that the latter's influence had made itself felt more strongly in other areas, and that he had for instance enlarged the young virtuoso's knowledge of music and purified his style. But it was still, at this point in our story at least, only an influence. At the same time there was one domain where anything that M. de Charlus might say was blindly accepted and acted upon by Morel. Blindly and foolishly, for not only were M. de Charlus's instructions false, but, even had they been valid in the case of a nobleman, when applied literally by Morel they became grotesque. The domain in which Morel was becoming so credulous and obeyed his master with such docility was the social domain. The violinist, who before meeting M. de Charlus had had no notion of society, had taken literally the brief and arrogant sketch of it that the Baron had outlined for him: "There are a certain number of outstanding families," M. de Charlus had told him, "first and foremost the Guermantes, who claim fourteen alliances with the House of France, which is flattering to the House of France if anything, for it was to Aldonce de Guermantes and not to Louis the Fat, his younger half-brother, that the throne of France should have passed. Under Louis XIV, we 'draped' at the death of Monsieur, as having the same grandmother as the king. A long way below the Guermantes, one may however mention the La Trémoilles, descended from the Kings of Naples and the Counts of Poitiers; the d'Uzès, not very old as a family but the oldest peers; the Luynes, of very recent origin but with the lustre of distinguished marriages; the Choiseuls, the Harcourts, the La Rochefoucaulds. Add to these the Noailles (notwithstanding the Comte de Toulouse), the Montesquiou and the Castellanes, and, I think I am right in saying, those are all. As for all the little people who call themselves Marquis de Cambremerde or de Gotoblazes, there is no difference between them and the humblest rookie in your regiment. Whether you go and do wee-wee at the Countess Cack's or cack at the Baroness Wee-wee's, it's exactly the same, you will have compromised your reputation and have used a shitty rag instead of toilet paper. Which is unsavoury."

Morel had piously taken in this history lesson, which was perhaps a trifle cursory; he looked upon these matters as though he were himself a Guermantes and hoped that he might some day have an opportunity of meeting the false La Tour d'Auvergues in order to let them see, by the contemptuous way he shook hands with them, that he did not take them very seriously. As for the Cambremers, here was his very chance to prove to them that they were no better than "the humblest in his regiment." He did not answer their invitation, and on the evening of the dinner declined at the last moment by telegram, as pleased with himself as if he had behaved like a Prince of the Blood. It must be added here that it is impossible to imagine the degree to which, in a more general sense, M. de Charlus could be intolerable, meddlesome and even—he who was so clever—stupid, in all the circumstances where the flaws in his character came into play. We may say indeed that these flaws are like an intermittent disease of the mind. Who has not observed the phenomenon in women, and even in men, endowed with remarkable intelligence but afflicted with nervous irritability? When they are happy, calm, satisfied with their surroundings, we marvel at their precious gifts; it is the truth, literally, that speaks through their lips. A touch of headache, the slightest prick to their self-esteem, is enough to alter everything. The luminous intelligence, become brusque, convulsive and shrunken, no longer reflects anything but an irritable, suspicious, teasing self, doing everything possible to displease.

The anger of the Cambremers was extreme; and in the meantime other incidents brought about a certain tension in their relations with the little clan. As we were returning, the Cottards, Charlus, Brichot, Morel and I, from a dinner at La Raspelière one evening after the Cambremers, who had been to lunch with friends at Harambouville, had accompanied us for part of our outward journey, "Since you're so fond of Balzac, and can find examples of him in the society of today," I had remarked to M. de Charlus, "you must feel that those Cambremers come straight out of the *Scènes de la vie de province*." But M. de Charlus, for all the world as though he had been their friend and I had offended him by my remark, at once cut me short: "You say that because the wife is superior to the husband," he remarked drily. "Oh, I wasn't suggesting that she was the *Muse du département*, or Mme de Bargeton, although ..." M. de Charlus again interrupted me: "Say rather, Mme de Mortsauf." The train stopped and Brichot got out. "Didn't you see us making signs to you? You're incorrigible." "What do you mean?" "Why, haven't you noticed that Brichot is madly in love with Mme de Cambremer?" I could see from the attitude of the Cottards and Charlie that there was not a shadow of doubt about this in the little nucleus. I thought that it must be malice on their part. "What, you didn't notice how distressed he became when you mentioned her," went on M. de Charlus, who liked to show that he had experience of women, and spoke of the sentiment they inspire as naturally as if it was what he himself habitually felt. But a certain equivocally paternal tone in addressing all young men—in spite of his exclusive affection for Morel—gave the lie to the womanising views which he expressed. "Oh! these children," he said in a shrill, mincing, sing-song voice, "one has to teach them everything, they're as innocent as newborn babes, they can't even tell when a man is in love with a woman. I was more fly than that at your age," he added, for he liked to use the expressions of the underworld, perhaps because they appealed to him, perhaps so as not to appear, by avoiding them, to admit that he consorted with people whose current vocabulary they were. A few days later, I was obliged to bow to the facts and acknowledge that Brichot was enamoured of the Marquise. Unfortunately he accepted several invitations to lunch with her. Mme Verdurin decided that it was time to put a stop to these proceedings. Quite apart from what she saw as the importance of such an intervention for the politics of the little nucleus, she had developed an ever-keener taste for remonstrations of this sort and the dramas to which they gave rise, a taste which idleness breeds just as much in the bourgeoisie as in the aristocracy. It was a day of great excitement at La Raspelière when Mme Verdurin was seen to disappear for a whole hour with Brichot, whom (it transpired) she proceeded to inform that Mme de Cambremer cared

nothing for him, that he was the laughing-stock of her drawing-room, that he would be dishonouring his old age and compromising his situation in the academic world. She went so far as to refer in touching terms to the laundress with whom he lived in Paris, and to their little girl. She won the day; Brichot ceased to go to Féterne, but his grief was such that for two days it was thought that he would lose his sight altogether, and in any case his disease had taken a leap forward from which it never retreated. In the meantime, the Cambremers, who were furious with Morel, deliberately invited M. de Charlus on one occasion without him. Receiving no reply from the Baron, they began to fear that they had committed a gaffe, and, deciding that rancour was a bad counsellor, wrote somewhat belatedly to Morel, an ineptitude which made M. de Charlus smile by proving to him the extent of his power. "You shall answer for us both that I accept," he said to Morel. When the evening of the dinner came, the party assembled in the great drawing-room of Féterne. In reality, the Cambremers were giving this dinner for those fine flowers of fashion M. and Mme Féré. But they were so afraid of displeasing M. de Charlus that although she had got to know the Férés through M. de Chevreigny, Mme de Cambremer went into a frenzy of alarm when, on the day of the dinner-party, she saw him arrive to pay a call on them at Féterne. She thought up every imaginable excuse for sending him back to Beausoleil as quickly as possible, not quickly enough, however, for him not to run into the Férés in the courtyard, who were as shocked to see him dismissed like this as he himself was ashamed. But, whatever happened, the Cambremers wished to spare M. de Charlus the sight of M. de Chevreigny, whom they judged to be provincial because of certain little points which can be overlooked within the family but have to be taken into account in front of strangers, who are in fact the last people in the world to notice them. But we do not like to display to them relatives who have remained at the stage which we ourselves have struggled to outgrow. As for M. and Mme Féré, they were in the highest degree what is described as "out of the top drawer." In the eyes of those who so defined them, no doubt the Guermantes, the Rohans and many others were also out of the top drawer, but their name made it unnecessary to say so. Since not everyone was aware of the exalted birth of M. Féré's mother, or of Mme Féré's, or of the extraordinarily exclusive circle in which she and her husband moved, when you mentioned their name you invariably added by way of explanation that they were "out of the very top drawer." Did their obscure name prompt them to a sort of haughty reserve? The fact remains that the Férés refused to know people on whom the La Trémoilles would not have forbore to call. It had needed the position of queen of her particular stretch of coast, which the old Marquise de Cambremer held in the Manche, to make the Férés consent to come to one of her afternoons every year. The Cambremers had invited them to dinner and were counting largely on the effect that M. de Charlus was going to make on them. It was discreetly announced that he was to be one of the party. It chanced that Mme Féré did not know him. Mme de Cambremer, on learning this, felt a keen satisfaction, and the smile of a chemist who is about to bring into contact for the first time two particularly important bodies hovered over her lips. The door opened, and Mme de Cambremer almost fainted when she saw Morel enter the room alone. Like a private secretary conveying his minister's apologies, like amorganatic wife expressing the Prince's regret that he is unwell (as Mme de Clinchamp used to do on behalf of the Duc d'Aumale), Morel said in the airiest of tones: "The Baron can't come. He's not feeling very well, at least I think that's the reason ... I haven't seen him this week," he added, these last words completing the despair of Mme de Cambremer, who had told M. and Mme Féré that Morel saw M. de Charlus at every hour of the day. The Cambremers pretended that the Baron's absence was a blessing in disguise, and, without letting Morel hear them, said to their other guests: "We can do very well without him, can't we, it will be all the more agreeable." But they were furious, suspected a plot hatched by Mme Verdurin, and, tit for tat, when she invited them again to La Raspelière, M. de Cambremer, unable to resist the pleasure of seeing his house again and of mingling with the little group, came, but came alone, saying that the Marquise was so sorry, but her doctor had ordered her to stay at home. The Cambremers hoped by this partial attendance at the same time to teach M. de Charlus a lesson and to show the Verdurins that they were not obliged to treat them with more than a limited politeness, as Princesses of the Blood used in the old days to show duchesses out, but only as far as the middle of the second chamber. After a few weeks, they were scarcely on speaking terms.

M. de Cambremer explained it to me as follows: "I must tell you that with M. de Charlus it was rather difficult. He is an extreme Dreyfusard ..."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes he is ... Anyhow his cousin the Prince de Guermantes is, and they've come in for a lot of abuse because of it. I have some relatives who are very particular about that sort of thing. I can't afford to mix with those people, I should alienate the whole of my family."

"Since the Prince de Guermantes is a Dreyfusard, that will make things all the easier," said Mme de Cambremer, "because Saint-Loup, who is said to be going to marry his niece, is one too. In fact it may well be the reason for the marriage."

"Come now, my dear," her husband replied, "you mustn't say that Saint-Loup, who's a great friend of ours is a Dreyfusard. One oughtn't to make such allegation. lightly. You'll make him highly popular in the Army!"

"He was once, but he isn't any longer," I explained to M. de Cambremer. "As for his marrying Mlle de Guermantes-Brassac, is there any truth in that?"

"People are talking of nothing else, but you should be in a position to know."

"But I tell you, he himself told me he was a Dreyfusard," said Mme de Cambremer, "—not that there isn't every excuse for him, the Guermantes are half German."

"As regards the Guermantes of the Rue de Varenne you can say entirely," said Cancan, "but Saint-Loup is another kettle of fish; he may have any number of German relations, but his father insisted on maintaining his



title as a French nobleman; he joined the colours in 1871 and was killed in the war in the most gallant fashion. Although I'm a stickler in these matters, it doesn't do to exaggerate either one way or the other. *In medio ... virtus*, ah, I forget the exact words. It's a remark I've heard Dr Cottard make. Now, there's a man who always has a word for it. You ought to have a *Petit Larousse* here."

To avoid having to give a verdict on the Latin quotation, and to get away from the subject of Saint-Loup, as to whom her husband seemed to think that she was wanting in tact, Mme de Cambremer fell back upon the Mistress, whose quarrel with them was even more in need of an explanation. "We were delighted to let La Raspelière to Mme Verdurin," said the Marquise. "The only trouble is that she appears to imagine that together with the house and everything else that she has managed to lay her hands on, the use of the meadow, the old hangings all sorts of things which weren't in the lease at all, she should also be entitled to make friends with us. The two things are entirely distinct. Our mistake lay in not getting everything done quite simply through a lawyer or an agency. At Féterne it doesn't much matter, but I can just imagine the face my aunt de Ch'nouville would make if she saw old mother Verdurin come marching in on one of my days with her hair all over the place. As for M. de Charlus, of course he knows some very nice people, but he knows some very nasty people too." I asked who. Driven into a corner, Mme de Cambremer finally said: "People say that it was he who was keeping a certain Monsieur Moreau, Morille, Morue, I can't remember exactly. Nothing to do, of course, with Morel the violinist," she added, blushing. "When I realised that Mme Verdurin imagined that because she was our tenant in the Manche she would have the right to come and call upon me in Paris, I saw that it was time to cut the painter."

Notwithstanding this quarrel with the Mistress, the Cambremers were on quite good terms with the faithful, and would readily get into our compartment when they were travelling by the train. Just before we reached Douville, Albertine, taking out her mirror for the last time, would sometimes deem it necessary to change her gloves or to take off her hat for a moment, and, with the tortoiseshell comb which I had given her and which she wore in her hair, to smooth out the knots, to fluff up the curls, and if necessary to push up her chignon over the waves which descended in regular valleys to her nape. Once we were in the carriages which had come to meet us, we no longer had any idea where we were; the roads were not lighted; we could tell by the louder noise of the wheels that we were passing through a village, we thought we had arrived, we found ourselves once more in the open country, we heard bells in the distance, we forgot that we were in evening dress, and we had almost fallen asleep when, at the end of this long stretch of darkness which, what with the distance we had travelled and the hitches and delays inseparable from railway journeys, seemed to have carried us on to a late hour of the night and almost half-way back to Paris, suddenly, after the crunching of the carriage wheels over a finer gravel had revealed to us that we had turned into the drive, there burst forth, reintroducing us into a social existence, the dazzling lights of the drawing-room, then of the dining-room where we were suddenly taken aback by hearing eight o'clock strike when we imagined it was long past, while the endless dishes and vintage wines would circulate among the men in tails and the women with bare arms, at a dinner glittering with light like a real metropolitan dinner-party but surrounded, and thereby changed in character, by the strange and sombre double veil which, diverted from their primal solemnity, the nocturnal, rural, maritime hours of the journey there and back had woven for it. Soon indeed the return journey obliged us to leave the radiant and quickly forgotten splendour of the lighted drawing-room for the carriages, in which I arranged to be with Albertine so that she should not be alone with other people, and often for another reason as well, which was that we could both do many things in a dark carriage, in which the jolts of the downward drive would moreover give us an excuse, should a sudden ray of light fall upon us, for clinging to one another. When M. de Cambremer was still on visiting terms with the Verdurins, he would ask me: "You don't think this fog will bring on your spasms? My sister's were terribly bad this morning. Ah! you've been having them too," he said with satisfaction. "I shall tell her tonight. I know that as soon as I get home the first thing she'll ask will be whether you've had any lately." He spoke to me of my sufferings only to lead up to his sister's, and made me describe mine in detail simply that he might point out the difference between them and hers. But notwithstanding these differences, as he felt that his sister's spasms entitled him to speak with authority, he could not believe that what "succeeded" with hers was not indicated as a cure for mine, and it irritated him that I would not try these remedies, for if there is one thing more difficult than submitting oneself to a regime it is refraining from imposing it on other people. "Not that I need speak, a mere layman, when you are here before the Areopagus, at the fountainhead of wisdom. What does Professor Cottard think about them?"

I saw his wife once again, as a matter of fact, because she had said that my "cousin" behaved rather weirdly, and I wished to know what she meant by this. She denied having said it, but at length admitted that she had been speaking of a person whom she thought she had seen with my cousin. She did not know the person's name and said finally that, if she was not mistaken, it was the wife of a banker, who was called Lina, Linette, Lisette, Lia, anyhow something like that. I felt that "wife of a banker" was inserted merely to put me off the scent. I wanted to ask Albertine whether it was true. But I preferred to give the impression of knowing rather than inquiring. Besides, Albertine would not have answered me at all, or would have answered me only with a "no" of which the "n" would have been too hesitant and the "o" too emphatic. Albertine never related facts that were damaging to her, but always other facts which could be explained only by the former, the truth being rather a current which flows from what people say to us, and which we pick up, invisible though it is, than the actual thing they have said. Thus, when I assured her that a woman whom she had known at Vichy was disreputable, she swore to me that this woman was not at all what I supposed and had never attempted to make her do anything improper. But she added, another day, when I was speaking of my curiosity as to people

of that sort, that the Vichy lady had a friend too, whom she, Albertine, did not know, but whom the lady had "promised to introduce to her." That she should have promised her this could only mean that Albertine wished it, or that the lady had known that by offering the introduction she would be giving her pleasure. But if I had pointed this out to Albertine, I should have given the impression that my revelations came exclusively from her; I should have put a stop to them at once, never have learned anything more, and ceased to make myself feared. Besides, we were at Balbec, and the Vichy lady and her friend lived at Menton; the remoteness, the impossibility of the danger made short work of my suspicions.

Often, when M. de Cambremer hailed me from the station, I had just been taking advantage of the darkness with Albertine, not without some difficulty as she had struggled a little, fearing that it was not dark enough. "You know, I'm sure Cottard saw us; anyhow, if he didn't, he must have noticed your breathless voice, just when they were talking about your other kind of breathlessness," Albertine said to me when we arrived at Douville station where we took the little train home. But if this return journey, like the outward one, by giving me a certain impression of poetry, awakened in me the desire to travel, to lead a new life, and so made me want to abandon any intention of marrying Albertine, and even to break off our relations for good, it also, by the very fact of their contradictory nature, made this breach easier. For, on the homeward journey just as much as on the other, at every station we were joined in the train or greeted from the platform by people whom we knew; the furtive pleasures of the imagination were overshadowed by those other, continual pleasures of sociability which are so soothing, so soporific. Already, before the stations themselves, their names (which had so fired my imagination ever since the day I had first heard them, that first evening when I had travelled down to Balbec with my grandmother) had become humanised, had lost their strangeness since the evening when Brichot, at Albertine's request, had given us a more complete account of their etymology. I had been charmed by the "flower" that ended certain names, such as Fiquefleur, Honfleur, Flers, Barfleur, Harfleur, etc., and amused by the "beef" that comes at the end of Bricqueboeuf. But the flower vanished, and also the beef, when Brichot (and this he had told me on the first day in the train) informed us that *fleur* means a harbour (like *fiord*), and that *boeuf*, in Norman *budh*, means a hut. As he cited a number of examples, what had appeared to me a particular instance became general: Bricqueboeuf took its place by the side of Elbeuf, and even in a name that was at first sight as individual as the place itself, like the name Pennedepie, in which peculiarities too impenetrable for reason to elucidate seemed to me to have been blended from time immemorial in a word as coarse, flavoursome and hard as a certain Norman cheese, I was disappointed to find the Gallic *pen* which means mountain and is as recognisable in Penmarch as in the Apennines. Since, at each halt of the train, I felt that we should have friendly hands to shake if not visitors to receive in our carriage, I said to Albertine: "Hurry up and ask Brichot about the names you want to know. You mentioned to me Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse."

"Yes, I love that *orgueil*, it's a proud village," said Albertine.

"You would find it prouder still," Brichot replied, "if instead of its French or even its low Latin form, as we find it in the cartulary of the Bishop of Bayeux, *Marcovilla superba*, you were to take the older form, more akin to the Norman, *Marculphivilla superba*, the village, the domain of Merculph. In almost all these names which end in *ville*, you might see still marshalled upon this coast the ghosts of the rude Norman invaders. At Hermenonville, you had, standing at the carriage door, only our excellent Doctor, who, obviously, has nothing of the Norse chieftain about him. But, by shutting your eyes, you might have seen the illustrious Herimund (*Herimundivilla*). Although, I can never understand why, people choose these roads, between Loigny and Balbec-Plage, rather than the very picturesque roads that lead from Loigny to old Balbec, Mme Verdurin has perhaps taken you out that way in her carriage. If so, you have seen Incarville, or the village of Wiscar; and Tourville, before you come to Mme Verdurin's, is the village of Turolde. Moreover, there were not only the Normans. It seems that the Germans (*Alemanii*) came as far as here: Aumenancourt, *Alemanicurtis*—don't let us speak of it to that young officer I see there; he would be capable of refusing to visit his cousins there any more. There were also Saxons, as is proved by the springs of Sissonne (the goal of one of Mme Verdurin's favourite excursions, and rightly so), just as in England you have Middlesex, Wessex. And what is inexplicable, it seems that the Goths, *gueux* as they were called, came as far as this, and even the Moors, for Mortagne comes from *Mauretania*. Their traces still remain at Gourville—*Gothorumvilla*. Some vestige of the Latins subsists also, for instance Lagny (*Latiniacum*)."

"I should like to know the explanation of Thorpehomme," said M. de Charlus. "I understand *homme*," he added, at which the sculptor and Cottard exchanged meaning glances. "But *Thorpe*?"

"*Homme* does not in the least mean what you are naturally led to suppose, Baron," replied Brichot, glancing mischievously at Cottard and the sculptor. "*Homme* has nothing to do, in this instance, with the sex to which I am not indebted for my mother. *Homme* is *holm*, which means a small island, etc. As for *Thorpe*, or village, we find that in any number of words with which I have already bored our young friend. Thus in Thorpehomme there is not the name of a Norman chief, but words of the Norman language. You see how the whole of this country has been Germanised."

"I think that is an exaggeration," said M. de Charlus. "Yesterday I was at Orgeville."

"This time I give you back the man I took from you in Thorpehomme, Baron. Without wishing to be pedantic, a charter of Robert I gives us, for Orgeville, *Otgerivilla*, the domain of Otger. All these names are those of ancient lords. Octeville-la-Venelle is a corruption of l'Avenel. The Avenels were a family of repute in the Middle Ages. Bourguenolles, where Mme Verdurin took us the other day, used to be written Bourg de Môles, for that village belonged in the eleventh century to Baudoin de Môles, as also did La Chaise-Baudoin; but here we are at Doncières."

"Heavens, look at all these subalterns trying to get in," said M. de Charlus with feigned alarm. "I'm thinking of you, for it doesn't affect me, I'm getting out here."

"You hear, Doctor?" said Brichot. "The Baron is afraid of officers passing over his body. And yet it's quite appropriate for them to be here in strength, for Doncières is precisely the same as Saint-Cyr, *Dominus Cyriacus*. There are plenty of names of towns in which *Sanctus* and *Sancta* are replaced by *Dominus* and *Domina*. Besides, this peaceful military town sometimes has a spurious look of Saint-Cyr, of Versailles, and even of Fontainebleau."

During these homeward journeys (as on the outward ones) I used to tell Albertine to put on her things, for I knew very well that at Aumencourt, Doncières, Epreville, Saint-Vast we should be receiving brief visits from friends. Nor did I find these disagreeable, whether it might be, at Hermenonville (the domain of Herimund) a visit from M. de Chevreigny, seizing the opportunity, when he had come down to meet other guests, of asking me to come over to lunch next day at Beausoleil, or (at Doncières) the sudden irruption of one of Saint-Loup's charming friends, sent by him (if he himself was not free) to convey to me an invitation from Captain de Borodino, from the officers' mess at the Coq-Hardi, or from the sergeants' at the Faisan Doré. Saint-Loup often came in person, and during the whole of the time he was with us I contrived, without letting anyone notice, to keep Albertine a prisoner under my unnecessarily vigilant eye. On one occasion however my watch was interrupted. During a protracted stop, Bloch, after greeting us, was making off at once to join his father—who, having just succeeded to his uncle's fortune, and having leased a country house by the name of La Commanderie, thought it befitting a country gentleman always to go about in a post-chaise, with postilions in livery—and asked me to accompany him to the carriage. "But make haste, for these quadrupeds are impatient. Come, O beloved of the gods, thou wilt give pleasure to my father." But I could not bear to leave Albertine in the train with Saint-Loup; they might, while my back was turned, get into conversation, go into another compartment, smile at one another, touch one another; my eyes, glued to Albertine, could not detach themselves from her so long as Saint-Loup was there. Now I could see quite well that Bloch, who had asked me as a favour to go and pay my respects to his father, in the first place thought it very ungracious of me to refuse when there was nothing to prevent me from doing so, the porters having told us that the train would remain for at least a quarter of an hour in the station, and almost all the passengers, without whom it would not leave, having alighted; and, what was more, had not the least doubt that it was because quite clearly—my conduct on this occasion furnished him with a decisive proof of it—I was a snob. For he was not unaware of the names of the people in whose company I was. In fact M. de Charlus had said to me some time before this, without remembering or caring that the introduction had been made long ago: "But you must introduce your friend to me; your behaviour shows a lack of respect for myself," and had talked to Bloch, who had seemed to please him immensely, so much so that he had gratified him with an: "I hope to meet you again." "Then it's final—you won't walk a hundred yards to say how-d'ye-do to my father, who would be so pleased?" Bloch said to me. I was sorry to appear to be lacking in comradeship, and even more so for the reason for which Bloch supposed that I was lacking in it, and to feel that he imagined that I was not the same towards my middle-class friends when I was with people of "birth." From that day he ceased to show the same friendliness towards me, and, what pained me more, had no longer the same regard for my character. But, in order to disabuse him as to the motive which made me remain in the carriage, I should have had to tell him something—to wit, that I was jealous of Albertine—which would have distressed me even more than letting him suppose that I was stupidly worldly. So it is that in theory we find that we ought always to explain ourselves frankly, to avoid misunderstandings. But very often life arranges these in such a way that, in order to dispel them, in the rare circumstances in which it might be possible to do so, we must reveal either—which was not the case here—something that would annoy our friend even more than the imaginary wrong that he imputes to us, or a secret the disclosure of which—and this was my predicament—appears to us even worse than the misunderstanding. And moreover, even without my explaining to Bloch, since I could not, my reason for not accompanying him, if I had begged him not to be offended, I should only have increased his umbrage by showing him that I had observed it. There was nothing to be done but to bow before the decree of fate which had willed that Albertine's presence should prevent me from accompanying him, and that he should suppose that it was on the contrary the presence of important people—the only effect of which, had they been a hundred times more important, would have been to make me devote my attention exclusively to Bloch and reserve all my civility for him. In this way, accidentally and absurdly, a minor incident (in this case the juxtaposition of Albertine and Saint-Loup) has only to be interposed between two destinies whose lines have been converging towards one another, for them to deviate, stretch further and further apart, and never converge again. And there are friendships more precious than Bloch's for myself which have been destroyed without the involuntary author of the offence having any opportunity to explain to the offended party what would no doubt have healed the injury to his self-esteem and called back his fugitive affection.

Friendships more precious than Bloch's would not, for that matter, be saying very much. He had all the faults that I most disliked, and it happened by chance that my affection for Albertine made them altogether intolerable. Thus in that brief moment in which I was talking to him while keeping my eye on Robert, Bloch told me that he had been to lunch at Mme Bontemps's and that everybody had spoken about me in the most glowing terms until the "decline of Helios." "Good," thought I, "since Mme Bontemps regards Bloch as a genius, the enthusiastic approval that he will have expressed for me will do more than anything that the others can have said, it will get back to Albertine. Any day now she is bound to learn—I'm surprised that her aunt has not repeated it to her already—that I'm a 'superior person.' " "Yes," Bloch went on, "everybody sang your praises. I alone preserved a silence as profound as though, in place of the repast (poor, as it happened)

that was set before us, I had absorbed poppies, dear to the blessed brother of Thanatos and Lethe, the divine Hypnos, who enwraps in pleasant bonds the body and the tongue. It is not that I admire you less than the band of ravening dogs with whom I had been bidden to feed. But I admire you because I understand you, and they admire you without understanding you. To tell the truth, I admire you too much to speak of you thus in public. It would have seemed to me a profanation to praise aloud what I carry in the profoundest depths of my heart. In vain did they question me about you, a sacred Pudor, daughter of Kronion, kept me mute."

I did not have the bad taste to appear annoyed, but this Pudor seemed to me akin—far more than to Kronion—to the reticence that prevents a critic who admires you from speaking of you because the secret temple in which you sit enthroned would be invaded by the mob of ignorant readers and journalists; to the reticence of the statesman who does not recommend you for a decoration because you would be lost in a crowd of people who are not your equals; to the reticence of the Academician who refrains from voting for you in order to spare you the shame of being the colleague of X—who is devoid of talent; to the reticence, finally, more respectable and at the same time more criminal, of the sons who implore us not to write about their dead father who abounded in merit, in order to ensure silence and repose, to prevent us from maintaining the stir of life and the sound of glory round the deceased, who himself would prefer the echo of his name upon the lips of men to all the wreaths upon his tomb, however piously borne.

If Bloch, while grieving me by his inability to understand the reason that prevented me from going to greet his father, had exasperated me by confessing that he had depreciated me at Mme Bontemps's (I now understood why Albertine had never made any allusion to this lunch-party and remained silent when I spoke to her of Bloch's affection for myself), my young Jewish friend had produced upon M. de Charlus an impression that was quite the opposite of annoyance.

Of course, Bloch now believed not only that I was incapable of depriving myself for a second of the company of smart people, but that, jealous of the advances that they might make to him (M. de Charlus, for instance), I was trying to put a spoke in his wheel and to prevent him from making friends with them; but for his part the Baron regretted that he had not seen more of my friend. As was his habit, he took care not to betray this feeling. He began by asking me various questions about Bloch, but in so casual a tone, with an interest that seemed so feigned, that it was as though he was not listening to the answers. With an air of detachment, in a chanting voice that expressed inattention more than indifference, and as though simply out of politeness to myself, M. de Charlus asked: "He looks intelligent, he said he wrote, has he any talent?" I told him that it had been very kind of him to say that he hoped to see Bloch again. The Baron gave not the slightest sign of having heard my remark, and as I repeated it four times without eliciting a reply, I began to wonder whether I had been the victim of an acoustic mirage when I thought I heard M. de Charlus utter those words. "He lives at Balbec?" crooned the Baron in a tone so far from interrogatory that it is regrettable that the written language does not possess a sign other than the question mark to end such apparently unquestioning remarks. It is true that such a sign would be of little use except to M. de Charlus. "No, they've taken a place near here, La Commanderie." Having learned what he wished to know, M. de Charlus pretended to despise Bloch. "How appalling," he exclaimed, his voice resuming all its clarion vigour. "All the places or properties called La Commanderie were built or owned by the Knights of the Order of Malta (of whom I am one), as the places called Temple or Cavalerie were by the Templars. That I should live at La Commanderie would be the most natural thing in the world. But a Jew! However, I am not surprised; it comes from a curious instinct for sacrilege, peculiar to that race. As soon as a Jew has enough money to buy a place in the country he always chooses one that is called Priory, Abbey, Minster, Chantry. I had some business once with a Jewish official, and guess where he lived: at Pont-l'Évêque. When he fell into disfavour, he had himself transferred to Brittany, to Pont-l'Abbé. When they perform in Holy Week those indecent spectacles that are called 'the Passion,' half the audience are Jews, exulting in the thought that they are about to hang Christ a second time on the Cross, at least in effigy. At one of the Lamoureux concerts, I had a wealthy Jewish banker sitting next to me. They played the *Childhood of Christ* by Berlioz, and he was thoroughly dismayed. But he soon recovered his habitually blissful expression when he heard the Good Friday music. So your friend lives at the Commanderie, the wretch! What sadism! You must show me the way to it," he added, resuming his air of indifference, "so that I may go there one day and see how our former domains endure such a profanation. It is unfortunate, for he has good manners, and he seems cultivated. The next thing I shall hear will be that his address in Paris is Rue du Temple!"

M. de Charlus gave the impression, by these words, that he was seeking merely to find a fresh example in support of his theory; but in reality he was asking me a question with a dual purpose, the principal one being to find out Bloch's address.

"Yes indeed," put in Brichot, "the Rue du Temple used to be called Rue de la Chevalerie-du-Temple. And in that connexion will you allow me to make a remark, Baron?"

"What? What is it?" said M. de Charlus tartly, the proffered remark preventing him from obtaining his information.

"No, it's nothing," replied Brichot in alarm. "It was in connexion with the etymology of Balbec, about which they were asking me. The Rue du Temple was formerly known as the Rue Barre-du-Bec, because the Abbey of Bec in Normandy had its Bar of Justice there in Paris."

M. de Charlus made no reply and looked as if he had not heard, which was one of his favourite forms of rudeness.

"Where does your friend live in Paris? As three streets out of four take their name from a church or an abbey, there seems every chance of further sacrilege there. One can't prevent Jews from living in the

Boulevard de la Madeleine, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré or the Place Saint-Augustin. So long as they do not carry their perfidy a stage further, and pitch their tents in the Place du Parvis-Notre-Dame, Quai de l'Archevêché, Rue Chanoinesse or Rue de l'Ave-Maria, we must make allowance for their difficulties."

We could not enlighten M. de Charlus, not being aware of Bloch's address at the time. But I knew that his father's office was in the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux.

"Oh, isn't that the last word in perversity!" exclaimed M. de Charlus, appearing to find a profound satisfaction in his own cry of ironical indignation. "Rue des Blancs-Manteaux!" he repeated, dwelling with emphasis upon each syllable and laughing as he spoke. "What sacrilege! To think that these White Mantles polluted by M. Bloch were those of the mendicant friars, styled Serfs of the Blessed Virgin, whom Saint Louis established there. And the street has always housed religious orders. The profanation is all the more diabolical since within a stone's throw of the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux there is a street whose name escapes me, which is entirely conceded to the Jews, with Hebrew characters over the shops, bakeries for unleavened bread, kosher butcheries—it's positively the Judengasse of Paris. That is where M. Bloch ought to reside. Of course," he went on in a lofty, grandiloquent tone suited to the discussion of aesthetic matters, and giving, by an unconscious atavistic reflex, the air of an old Louis XIII musketeer to his uptilted face, "I take an interest in all that sort of thing only from the point of view of art. Politics are not in my line, and I cannot condemn wholesale, because Bloch belongs to it, a nation that numbers Spinoza among its illustrious sons. And I admire Rembrandt too much not to realise the beauty that can be derived from frequenting the synagogue. But after all a ghetto is all the finer the more homogeneous and complete it is. You may be sure, moreover, so far are business instincts and avarice mingled in that race with sadism, that the proximity of the Hebraic street in question, the convenience of having close at hand the fleshpots of Israel, will have made your friend choose the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux. How curious it all is! It was there, by the way, that there lived a strange Jew who boiled the Host, after which I think they boiled him, which is stranger still since it seems to suggest that the body of a Jew can be equivalent to the Body of Our Lord. Perhaps it might be possible to arrange for your friend to take us to see the church of the White Mantles. Just think that it was there that they laid the body of Louis d'Orléans after his assassination by Jean sans Peur, which unfortunately did not rid us of the Orléans family. Personally, I have always been on the best of terms with my cousin the Duc de Chartres, but they are nevertheless a race of usurpers who caused the assassination of Louis XVI and the dethronement of Charles X and Henri V. Of course it runs in the family, since their ancestors include Monsieur, who was so styled doubtless because he was the most astounding old woman, and the Regent and the rest of them. What a family!"

This speech, anti-Jewish or pro-Hebrew—according to whether one pays attention to the overt meaning of its sentences or the intentions that they concealed—had been comically interrupted for me by a remark which Morel whispered to me, to the chagrin of M. de Charlus. Morel, who had not failed to notice the impression that Bloch had made, murmured his thanks in my ear for having "given him the push," adding cynically: "He wanted to stay, it's all jealousy, he'd like to take my place. Just like a Yid!"

"We might have taken advantage of this prolonged halt," M. de Charlus went on, "to ask your friend for some interpretations of ritual. Couldn't you fetch him back?" he pleaded desperately.

"No, it's impossible, he has gone away in a carriage, and besides, he's vexed with me."

"Thank you, thank you," Morel murmured.

"Your excuse is preposterous, one can always overtake a carriage, there is nothing to prevent your taking a car," replied M. de Charlus, in the tone of a man accustomed to carry everything before him. But observing my silence: "What is this more or less imaginary carriage?" he said to me insolently, and with a last ray of hope.

"It is an open post-chaise which must by this time have reached La Commanderie."

M. de Charlus bowed before the impossible and made a show of jocularly. "I can understand their recoiling from the idea of a new brougham. It might have swept them clean."

At last we were warned that the train was about to start, and Saint-Loup left us. But this was the only day on which by getting into our carriage he unwittingly caused me pain, when I momentarily thought of leaving him with Albertine in order to go with Bloch. On every other occasion his presence did not torment me. For of her own accord Albertine, to spare me any uneasiness, would on some pretext or other place herself in such a position that she could not even unintentionally brush against Robert, almost too far away even to shake hands with him; turning her eyes away from him, she would plunge, as soon as he appeared, into ostentatious and almost affected conversation with one of the other passengers, continuing this make-believe until Saint-Loup had gone. So that the visits which he paid us at Doncières, causing me no pain, no worry even, were in no way discordant from the rest, all of which I found pleasing because they brought me so to speak the homage and the hospitality of this land. Already, as the summer drew to a close, on our journeys from Balbec to Douville, when I saw in the distance the little resort of Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs where, for a moment in the evening, the crest of the cliffs glittered pink like the snow on a mountain at sunset, it no longer recalled to my mind—let alone the melancholy which its strange, sudden emergence had aroused in me on the first evening, when it filled me with such a longing to take the train back to Paris instead of going on to Balbec—the spectacle that in the morning, Elstir had told me, might be enjoyed from there, at the hour before sunrise, when all the colours of the rainbow are refracted from the rocks, and when he had so often wakened the little boy who had served him as model one year, to paint him, nude, upon the sands. The name Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs announced to me merely that there would presently appear a strange, witty, painted fifty-year-old with whom I should be able to talk about Chateaubriand and Balzac. And now, in the mists of evening, behind that cliff of Incarville which had filled my mind with so many dreams in the past, what I saw, as though its old sandstone

wall had become transparent, was the comfortable house of an uncle of M. de Cambremer in which I knew that I should always find a warm welcome if I did not wish to dine at La Raspelière or return to Balbec. So that it was not merely the place-names of this district that had lost their initial mystery, but the places themselves. The names, already half-stripped of a mystery which etymology had replaced by reasoning, had now come down a stage further still. On our homeward journeys, at Hermenonville, at Incarville, at Harambouville, as the train came to a standstill, we could make out shadowy forms which we did not at first identify and which Brichot, who could see nothing at all, might perhaps have mistaken in the darkness for the ghosts of Herimund, Wiscar and Herimbald. But they came up to our carriage. It was merely M. de Cambremer, now completely estranged from the Verdurins, who had come to see off his own guests and who, on behalf of his wife and his mother, came to ask me whether I would not let him "snatch me away" to spend a few days at Féterne where I should be entertained successively by a lady of great musical talent who would sing me the whole of Gluck, and a famous chess-player with whom I could have some splendid games, which would not interfere with the fishing expeditions and yachting trips in the bay, or even with the Verdurin dinner-parties, for which the Marquis gave me his word of honour that he would "lend" me, sending me there and fetching me back again, for my greater convenience and also to make sure of my returning. "But I cannot believe that it's good for you to go so high up. I know my sister could never stand it. She would come back in a fine state! She's not at all well just now ... Really, you had such a bad attack as that! Tomorrow you'll hardly be able to stand!" And he shook with laughter, not from malevolence but for the same reason which made him laugh whenever he saw a lame man hobbling along the street, or had to talk to a deaf person. "And before that? What, you hadn't had an attack for a fortnight? Do you know, that's simply marvellous. Really, you ought to come and stay at Féterne, you could talk to my sister about your attacks."

At Incarville it was the Marquis de Montpeyroux who, not having been able to go to Féterne, for he had been away shooting, had come "to meet the train" in top boots and with a pheasant's plume in his hat, to shake hands with the departing guests and at the same time with myself, bidding me expect, on the day of the week that would be most convenient to me, a visit from his son, whom he thanked me for inviting, adding that he would be very glad if I would make the boy read a little; or else M. de Crécy, come out to digest his dinner, he explained, smoking his pipe, accepting a cigar or indeed more than one, and saying to me: "Well, you haven't named a day for our next Lucullan evening. We have nothing to say to each other? Allow me to remind you that we left unsettled the question of the two Montgomery families. We really must settle it. I'm relying on you." Others had come simply to buy newspapers. And many others came and chatted with us who, I have often suspected, were to be found upon the platform of the station nearest to their little manor simply because they had nothing better to do than to converse for a moment with people of their acquaintance. They were a setting for social intercourse like any other, in fact, these halts of the little train, which itself appeared conscious of the role that had been allotted to it, had contracted a sort of human kindness: patient, of a docile nature, it waited as long as one wished for the stragglers, and even after it had started, would stop to pick up those who signalled to it; they would then run after it panting, in which they resembled it, though they differed from it in that they were running to overtake it at full speed whereas it was merely exercising a wise deliberation. And so Hermenonville, Harambouville, Incarville no longer suggested to me even the rugged grandeurs of the Norman Conquest, not content with having entirely rid themselves of the unaccountable melancholy in which I had seen them steeped long ago in the moist evening air. Doncières! To me, even after I had come to know it and had awakened from my dream, how long there had survived in that name those pleasantly glacial streets, lighted windows, succulent fowls! Doncières! Now it was merely the station at which Morel joined the train, Egleville (*Aquilae villa*) the one at which Princess Sherbatoff generally awaited us, Maineville the station at which Albertine left the train on fine evenings, when, if she was not too tired, she felt inclined to enjoy a moment more of my company, having, if she took a footpath, little if any further to walk than if she had alighted at Parville (*Paterni villa*). Not only did I no longer feel the anxious dread of loneliness which had gripped my heart the first evening; I had no longer any need to fear its reawakening, nor to feel myself a home-sick stranger in this land productive not only of chestnut-trees and tamarisks, but of friendships which from beginning to end of the route formed a long chain, interrupted like that of the blue hills, hidden here and there in the anfractuosity of the rock or behind the lime-trees of the avenue, but delegating at each stopping-place an amiable gentleman who came to punctuate my journey with a cordial handclasp, to prevent me from feeling its length, to offer if need be to continue it with me. Another would be at the next station, so that the whistle of the little train parted us from one friend only to enable us to meet others. Between the most isolated properties and the railway which skirted them almost at the pace of a person walking fairly fast, the distance was so slight that at the moment when, from the platform, outside the waiting-room, their owners hailed us, we might almost have imagined that they were doing so from their own doorstep, from their bedroom window, as though the little departmental line had been merely a provincial street and the isolated country house an urban mansion; and even at the few stations where no "good evening" sounded, the silence had a nourishing and calming plenitude, because I knew that it was formed from the slumber of friends who had gone to bed early in the neighbouring manor, where my arrival would have been greeted with joy if I had been obliged to arouse them to ask for some hospitable service. Apart from the fact that habit so fills up our time that we have not, after a few months, a free moment in a town where on our first arrival the day offered us the absolute disposal of all its twelve hours, if one of these had by any chance fallen vacant it would no longer have occurred to me to devote it to visiting some church for the sake of which I had first come to Balbec, or even to compare a scene painted by Elstir with the sketch that I had seen of it in his studio, but rather to go and play one more game of chess with M. Féré. It was indeed the

corrupting effect, as it was also the charm, of this country round Balbec, to have become for me a land of familiar acquaintances; if its territorial distribution, its extensive cultivation, along the entire length of the coast, with different forms of agriculture, gave of necessity to the visits which I paid to these different friends the aspect of a journey, they also reduced that journey to the agreeable proportions of a series of visits. The same place-names, so disturbing to me in the past that the mere *Country House Directory*, when I leafed through the section devoted to the Department of the Manche, caused me as much dismay as the railway time-table, had become so familiar to me that even in that time-table itself I could have consulted the page headed *Balbec to Douville via Doncières* with the same happy tranquillity as an address-book. In this too social valley, along the flanks of which I felt that there clung, whether visible or not, a numerous company of friends, the poetical cry of the evening was no longer that of the owl or the frog, but the "How goes it?" of M. de Criquetot or the "Khaire" of Brichot. Its atmosphere no longer aroused anguish, and, charged with purely human exhalations, was easily breathable, indeed almost too soothing. The benefit that I did at least derive from it was that of looking at things only from a practical point of view. The idea of marrying Albertine appeared to me to be madness.

#### *Chapter Fourteen*

I was only waiting for an opportunity for a final rupture. And, one evening, as Mamma was setting out next day for Combray, where she was to attend the deathbed of one of her mother's sisters, leaving me behind so that I might continue to benefit, as my grandmother would have wished, from the sea air, I had announced to her that I had irrevocably decided not to marry Albertine and would very soon stop seeing her. I was glad to have been able, by these words, to gratify my mother's wishes on the eve of her departure. She had made no secret of the fact that she was indeed extremely gratified. I also had to have things out with Albertine. As I was on my way back with her from La Raspelière, the faithful having alighted, some at Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, others at Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs, others again at Doncières, feeling particularly happy and detached from her, I had decided, now that there were only our two selves in the carriage, to broach the subject at last. Besides, the truth was that the member of the band of Balbec girls whom I loved, although she was absent at that moment, as were the rest of her friends, but was coming back there (I enjoyed being with them all, because each of them had for me, as on the day when I first saw them, something of the essence of all the rest, as though they belonged to a race apart), was Andrée. Since she was coming back again to Balbec in a few days' time, it was certain that she would at once pay me a visit, and then, in order to remain free, not to have to marry her if I did not wish to do so, to be able to go to Venice, but at the same time to have her entirely to myself in the meantime, the plan that I would adopt would be that of not seeming at all eager to come to her, and as soon as she arrived, when we were talking together, I would say to her: "What a pity I didn't see you a few weeks earlier. I should have fallen in love with you; now my heart is bespoken. But that makes no difference, we shall see one another frequently, for I am unhappy about my other love, and you will help to console me." I smiled inwardly as I thought of this conversation, for in this way I should give Andrée the impression that I was not really in love with her; hence she would not grow tired of me and I should take a joyful and pleasant advantage of her affection. But all this only made it all the more necessary that I should at last speak seriously to Albertine, in order not to behave dishonourably, and, since I had decided to devote myself to her friend, she herself must be given clearly to understand that I was not in love with her. I must tell her so at once, as Andrée might arrive any day. But as we were approaching Parville, I felt that we might not have time that evening and that it was better to put off until next day what was now irrevocably settled. I confined myself, therefore, to discussing with her our dinner that evening at the Verdurins'. As she was putting on her coat, the train having just left Incarville, the last station before Parville, she said to me: "Tomorrow then, more Verdurin. You won't forget that you're coming to call for me." I could not help answering rather tersely: "Yes, that is if I don't 'defect,' because I'm beginning to find that sort of life really stupid. In any case, if we do go, in order that my time at La Raspelière may not be totally wasted, I must remember to ask Mme Verdurin about something that could interest me a great deal, provide me with a subject for study, and give me pleasure as well, because I've really had very little this year at Balbec."

"That's not very polite to me, but I forgive you, because I can see that you're overwrought. What is this pleasure?"

"That Mme Verdurin should let me hear some things by a musician whose work she knows very well. I know one of his things myself, but it seems there are others and I should like to know if the rest of his work is published, if it's different from what I know."

"What musician?"

"My dear child, when I've told you that his name is Vinteuil, will you be any the wiser?"

We may have revolved every possible idea in our minds, and yet the truth has never occurred to us, and it is from without, when we are least expecting it, that it gives us its cruel stab and wounds us for ever.

"You can't think how you amuse me," replied Albertine, getting up, for the train was about to stop. "Not only does it mean a great deal more to me than you suppose, but even without Mme Verdurin I can get you all the information that you require. You remember my telling you about a friend, older than me, who had been a mother, a sister to me, with whom I spent the happiest years of my life, at Trieste, and whom in fact I'm expecting to join in a few weeks at Cherbourg, where we shall set out on a cruise together (it sounds a bit weird, but you know how I love the sea)? Well, this friend (oh! not at all the type of woman you might suppose!), isn't this extraordinary, is the best friend of your Vinteuil's daughter, and I know Vinteuil's daughter almost as well as I know her. I always call them my two big sisters. I'm not sorry to show you that your little Albertine can be of use to you in this question of music, about which you say, and quite rightly, that I know nothing at all."

At the sound of these words, uttered as we were entering the station of Parville, so far from Combray and Montjouvain, so long after the death of Vinteuil, an image stirred in my heart, an image which I had kept in reserve for so many years that even if I had been able to guess, when I stored it up long ago, that it had a noxious power, I should have supposed that in the course of time it had entirely lost it; preserved alive in the depths of my being—like Orestes whose death the gods had prevented in order that, on the appointed day, he might return to his native land to avenge the murder of Agamemnon—as a punishment, as a retribution (who knows?) for my having allowed my grandmother to die; perhaps rising up suddenly from the dark depths in which it seemed for ever buried, and striking like an Avenger, in order to inaugurate for me a new and terrible and only too well-merited existence, perhaps also to make dazzlingly clear to my eyes the fatal



consequences which evil actions eternally engender, not only for those who have committed them but for those who have done no more, or thought that they were doing no more, than look on at a curious and entertaining spectacle, as I, alas, had done on that afternoon long ago at Montjouvain, concealed behind a bush where (as when I had complacently listened to the account of Swann's love affairs) I had perilously allowed to open up within me the fatal and inevitably painful road of Knowledge. And at the same time, from my bitterest grief I derived a feeling almost of pride, almost of joy, that of a man whom the shock he has just received has carried at a bound to a point to which no voluntary effort could have brought him. The notion of Albertine as the friend of Mlle Vinteuil and of Mlle Vinteuil's friend, a practising and professional Sapphist, was as momentous, compared to what I had imagined when I doubted her most, as are the telephones that soar over streets, cities, fields, seas, linking one country to another, compared to the little acousticon of the 1889 Exhibition which was barely expected to transmit sound from one end of a house to the other. It was a terrible *terra incognita* on which I had just landed, a new phase of undreamed-of sufferings that was opening before me. And yet this deluge of reality that engulfs us, however enormous it may be compared with our timid and microscopic suppositions, has always been foreshadowed by them. It was doubtless something akin to what I had just learned, something akin to Albertine's friendship with Mlle Vinteuil, something which my mind would never have been capable of inventing, that I had obscurely apprehended when I became so uneasy at the sight of Albertine and Andrée together. It is often simply from lack of creative imagination that we do not go far enough in suffering. And the most terrible reality brings us, at the same time as suffering, the joy of a great discovery, because it merely gives a new and clear form to what we have long been ruminating without suspecting it.

The train had stopped at Parville, and, as we were the only passengers in it, it was in a voice weakened by a sense of the futility of his task, by the force of habit which nevertheless made him perform it and inspired in him simultaneously exactitude and indolence, and even more by a longing for sleep, that the porter shouted: "Parville!" Albertine, who stood facing me, seeing that she had arrived at her destination, stepped across the compartment and opened the door. But this movement which she thus made to get off the train tore my heart unendurably, just as if, contrary to the position independent of my body which Albertine's seemed to be occupying a yard away from it, this separation in space, which an accurate draughtsman would have been obliged to indicate between us, was only apparent, and anyone who wished to make a fresh drawing of things as they really were would now have had to place Albertine, not at a certain distance from me, but inside me. She gave me such pain by her withdrawal that, reaching after her, I caught her desperately by the arm.

"Would it be physically possible," I asked her, "for you to come and spend the night at Balbec?"

"Physically, yes. But I'm dropping with sleep."

"You'd be doing me an enormous favour ..."

"Very well, then, though I don't in the least understand. Why didn't you tell me sooner? I'll stay, though."

My mother was asleep when, after engaging a room for Albertine on a different floor, I entered my own. I sat down by the window, suppressing my sobs so that my mother, who was separated from me only by a thin partition, might not hear me. I had not even remembered to close the shutters, for at one moment, raising my eyes, I saw facing me in the sky that same faint glow as of a dying fire which one saw in the restaurant at Rivebelle in a study that Elstir had made of a sunset effect. I remembered the exaltation I had felt when, on the day of my first arrival at Balbec, I had seen from the railway this same image of an evening which preceded not the night but a new day. But no day now would be new to me any more, would arouse in me the desire for an unknown happiness; it would only prolong my sufferings, until the point when I should no longer have the strength to endure them. The truth of what Cottard had said to me in the casino at Incarville was now confirmed beyond a shadow of doubt. What I had long dreaded, had vaguely suspected of Albertine, what my instinct deduced from her whole personality and my reason controlled by my desire had gradually made me repudiate, was true! Behind Albertine I no longer saw the blue mountains of the sea, but the room at Montjouvain where she was falling into the arms of Mlle Vinteuil with that laugh in which she gave utterance as it were to the strange sound of her pleasure. For, with a girl as pretty as Albertine, was it possible that Mlle Vinteuil, having the desires she had, had not asked her to gratify them? And the proof that Albertine had not been shocked by the request, but had consented, was that they had not quarrelled, that indeed their intimacy had steadily increased. And that graceful movement with which Albertine had laid her chin upon Rosemonde's shoulder, gazed at her smilingly, and deposited a kiss upon her neck, that movement which had reminded me of Mlle Vinteuil but in interpreting which I had nevertheless hesitated to admit that an identical line traced by a gesture must of necessity be the result of an identical inclination, who knew whether Albertine might not quite simply have learned it from Mlle Vinteuil? Gradually, the lifeless sky took fire. I who until then had never awakened without a smile at the humblest things, the bowl of coffee, the sound of the rain, the roar of the wind, felt that the day which in a moment was about to dawn, and all the days to come, would no longer bring me the hope of an unknown happiness, but only the prolongation of my agony. I still clung to life; but I knew that I had nothing now but bitterness to expect from it. I ran to the lift, heedless of the hour, to ring for the lift-boy who acted as night watchman, and asked him to go to Albertine's room and to tell her that I had something of importance to say to her, if she could see me there. "Mademoiselle says she would rather come to you," was the answer he brought me. "She will be here in a moment." And presently, sure enough, in came Albertine in her dressing-gown.

"Albertine," I said to her in a low voice, warning her not to raise hers so as not to wake my mother, from whom we were separated only by that partition whose thinness, today a nuisance, because it confined us to whispers, resembled in the past, when it so clearly echoed my grandmother's intentions, a sort of musical

diaphanousness, "I'm ashamed to have disturbed you. Listen to me. To make you understand, I must tell you something which you do not know. When I came here, I left a woman whom I was to have married, who was ready to sacrifice everything for me. She was to start on a journey this morning, and every day for the last week I have been wondering whether I should have the courage not to telegraph to her that I was coming back. I did have the courage, but it made me so wretched that I thought I would kill myself. That is why I asked you last night if you would come and sleep at Balbec. If I had to die, I should have liked to bid you farewell."

And I let the tears which my fiction rendered natural flow freely.

"My poor boy, if I had only known, I should have spent the night beside you," cried Albertine, the idea that I might perhaps marry this woman, and that her own chance of making a "good marriage" was thus vanishing, never even crossing her mind, so sincerely was she moved by a grief the cause of which I was able to conceal from her, but not its reality and strength. "As a matter of fact," she said to me, "last night, throughout the entire journey from La Raspelière, I could see that you were nervous and unhappy, and I was afraid there must be something wrong." In reality my grief had begun only at Parville, and my nervous irritability, which was very different but which fortunately Albertine identified with it, arose from the tedium of having to spend a few more days in her company. She added: "I shan't leave you any more, I'm going to spend all my time here." She was offering me, in fact—and she alone could offer it—the sole remedy for the poison that was consuming me, a remedy homogeneous with it indeed, for although one was sweet and the other bitter, both were alike derived from Albertine. At that moment Albertine—my sickness—ceasing to cause me to suffer, left me—she, Albertine the remedy—as weak as a convalescent. But I reflected that she would presently be leaving Balbec for Cherbourg, and from there going to Trieste. Her old habits would be reviving. What I wished above everything else was to prevent Albertine from taking the boat, to make an attempt to carry her off to Paris. It was true that from Paris, more easily even than from Balbec, she might, if she wished, go to Trieste, but in Paris we should see; perhaps I might ask Mme de Guermantes to exert her influence indirectly upon Mlle Vinteuil's friend so that she should not remain at Trieste, to make her accept a situation elsewhere, perhaps with the Prince de ———, whom I had met at Mme de Villeparisis's and, indeed, at Mme de Guermantes's. And he, even if Albertine wished to go to his house to see her friend, might, warned by Mme de Guermantes, prevent them from meeting. Of course I might have reminded myself that in Paris, if Albertine had those tastes, she would find many other people with whom to gratify them. But every impulse of jealousy is unique and bears the imprint of the creature—in this instance Mlle Vinteuil's friend—who has aroused it. It was Mlle Vinteuil's friend who remained my chief preoccupation. The mysterious passion with which I had once thought of Austria because it was the country from which Albertine came (her uncle had been a counsellor at the Embassy there), because I could study its geographical peculiarities, the race that inhabited it, its historic buildings, its scenery, in Albertine's smile and in her ways, as in an atlas or an album of photographs—this mysterious passion I still felt but, by an inversion of symbols, in the domain of horror. Yes, it was from there that Albertine came. It was there that, in every house, she could be sure of finding, if not Mlle Vinteuil's friend, others of her kind. The habits of her childhood would revive, they would be meeting in three months' time for Christmas, then for the New Year, dates which were already painful to me in themselves, owing to an unconscious memory of the misery that I had felt on those days when, long ago, they separated me, for the whole of the Christmas holidays, from Gilberte. After the long dinner-parties, after the midnight revels, when everybody was gay and animated, Albertine would adopt the same poses with her friends there that I had seen her adopt with Andrée—albeit her friendship for Andrée might for all I knew be innocent—the same, perhaps, that Mlle Vinteuil, pursued by her friend, had revealed before my eyes at Montjouvain. To Mlle Vinteuil, while her friend titillated her desires before flinging herself upon her, I now gave the inflamed face of Albertine, of an Albertine whom I heard utter as she fled, then as she surrendered herself, her strange, deep laugh. What, in comparison with the anguish that I was now feeling, was the jealousy I had felt on the day when Saint-Loup had met Albertine with me at Doncières and she had flirted with him, or that I had felt when I thought of the unknown initiator to whom I was indebted for the first kisses that she had given me in Paris, on the day when I was waiting for a letter from Mlle de Stermaria? That other kind of jealousy, provoked by Saint-Loup or by any young man, was nothing. I should have had at the most in that case to fear a rival over whom I should have tried to gain the upper hand. But here the rival was not of the same kind as myself, had different weapons; I could not compete on the same ground, give Albertine the same pleasures, nor indeed conceive of them exactly. In many moments of our life, we would barter the whole of our future for a power that in itself is insignificant. I would at one time have forsworn all the good things in life to get to know Mme Blatin, because she was a friend of Mme Swann. Today, in order that Albertine might not go to Trieste, I would have endured every possible torment, and if that proved insufficient, would have inflicted torments on her, would have isolated her, kept her under lock and key, would have taken from her the little money that she had so that it should be physically impossible for her to make the journey. Just as, long ago, when I was anxious to go to Balbec, what had urged me to set off was the longing for a Persian church, for a stormy sea at daybreak, so what was now rending my heart as I thought that Albertine might perhaps be going to Trieste, was that she would be spending Christmas night there with Mlle Vinteuil's friend: for the imagination, when it changes its nature and turns into sensibility, does not thereby acquire control of a larger number of simultaneous images. Had anyone told me that she was not at that moment either at Cherbourg or at Trieste, that there was no possibility of her seeing Albertine, how I should have wept for joy! How my whole life and its future would have been changed! And yet I knew quite well that this localisation of my jealousy was arbitrary, that if Albertine had these tastes, she could gratify them with others. And perhaps even these same

girls, if they could have seen her elsewhere, would not have tortured my heart so acutely. It was Trieste, it was that unknown world in which I could feel that Albertine took a delight, in which were her memories, her friendships, her childhood loves, that exhaled that hostile, inexplicable atmosphere, like the atmosphere that used to float up to my bedroom at Combray, from the dining-room in which I could hear, talking and laughing with strangers amid the clatter of knives and forks, Mamma who would not be coming upstairs to say good-night to me; like the atmosphere that, for Swann, had filled the houses to which Odette went at night in search of inconceivable joys. It was no longer as of a delightful place where the people were pensive, the sunsets golden, the church bells melancholy, that I thought now of Trieste, but as of an accursed city which I should have liked to see instantaneously burned down and eliminated from the real world. That city was embedded in my heart as a fixed and permanent point. The thought of letting Albertine leave presently for Cherbourg and Trieste filled me with horror; as did even that of remaining at Balbec. For now that the revelation of her intimacy with Mlle Vinteuil had become almost a certainty, it seemed to me that at every moment when Albertine was not with me (and there were whole days on which, because of her aunt, I was unable to see her), she was giving herself to Bloch's sister and cousin, possibly to other girls as well. The thought that that very evening she might see the Bloch girls drove me mad. And so, when she told me that for the next few days she would stay with me all the time, I replied: "But the fact is, I want to go back to Paris. Won't you come with me? And wouldn't you like to come and live with us for a while in Paris?"

At all costs I must prevent her from being alone, for some days at any rate, must keep her with me so as to be certain that she could not meet Mlle Vinteuil's friend. In reality it would mean her living alone with me, for my mother, seizing the opportunity of a tour of inspection which my father had to make, had taken it upon herself as a duty, in obedience to my grandmother's wishes, to go down to Combray and spend a few days there with one of my grandmother's sisters. Mamma had no love for her aunt because she had not been to my grandmother, so loving to her, what a sister should be. Thus, when they grow up, do children remember with resentment the people who have been unkind to them. But having become my grandmother, Mamma was incapable of resentment; her mother's life was to her like a pure and innocent childhood from which she would draw those memories whose sweetness or bitterness regulated her actions with other people. Her aunt might have been able to provide Mamma with certain priceless details, but now she would have difficulty in obtaining them, the aunt being seriously ill (they spoke of cancer). Reproaching herself for not having gone sooner, because she wanted to keep my father company, she saw this as an additional reason for doing what her mother would have done, and, just as she went on the anniversary of the death of my grandmother's father, who had been such a bad parent, to lay upon his grave the flowers which my grandmother had been in the habit of taking there, so, to the side of the grave which was about to open, my mother wished to convey the soft words which her aunt had not come to offer to my grandmother. While she was at Combray, my mother would busy herself with certain alterations which my grandmother had always wished to have made, but only under her daughter's supervision. And so they had not yet been begun, Mamma not wishing, by leaving Paris before my father, to make him feel too keenly the burden of a grief in which he shared but which could not afflict him as it afflicted her.

"Ah! that wouldn't be possible just at present," Albertine replied. "Besides, why should you need to go back to Paris so soon, if the lady has gone?"

"Because I shall feel calmer in a place where I knew her than at Balbec, which she has never seen and which I've begun to loathe."

Did Albertine realise later on that this other woman had never existed, and that if, that night, I had really longed for death, it was because she had thoughtlessly revealed to me that she had been on intimate terms with Mlle Vinteuil's friend? It is possible. There are moments when it appears to me probable. At any rate, that morning, she believed in the existence of this other woman.

"But you ought to marry this lady," she said to me, "it would make you happy, my sweet, and I'm sure it would make her happy as well."

I replied that the thought that I might make this woman happy had almost made me decide to marry her; when, not long since, I had inherited a fortune which would enable me to provide my wife with ample luxury and pleasures, I had been on the point of accepting the sacrifice of the woman I loved. Intoxicated by the gratitude that I felt for Albertine's kindness, coming so soon after the terrible blow she had dealt me, just as one would think nothing of promising a fortune to the waiter who pours one out a sixth glass of brandy, I told her that my wife would have a motor-car and a yacht, that from that point of view, since Albertine was so fond of motoring and yachting, it was unfortunate that she was not the woman I loved, that I should have been the perfect husband for her, but that we should see, we should no doubt be able to meet on friendly terms. Nevertheless, since even when we are drunk we refrain from hailing passersby for fear of blows, I was not guilty of the imprudence (if such it was) that I should have committed in Gilberte's time, of telling her that it was she, Albertine, whom I loved.

"You see, I came very near to marrying her. But I didn't dare do it, after all, for I wouldn't have wanted to make a young woman live with anyone so sickly and troublesome as myself."

"But you must be mad. Anybody would be delighted to live with you, just look how people run after you. They're always talking about you at Mme Verdurin's, and in high society too, I'm told. She can't have been at all nice to you, that lady, to make you lose confidence in yourself like that. I can see what she is, she's a wicked woman, I detest her. Ah, if I were in her shoes!"

"Not at all, she is very kind, far too kind. As for the Verdurins and all the rest, I don't care a hang. Apart from the woman I love, whom in any case I've given up, I care only for my little Albertine; she is the only

person in the world who, by letting me see a great deal of her—that is, during the first few days,” I added, in order not to alarm her and to be able to ask anything of her during those days, “—can bring me a little consolation.”

I made only a vague allusion to the possibility of marriage, adding that it was quite impracticable since our characters were too different. Being, in spite of myself, still pursued in my jealousy by the memory of Saint-Loup's relations with “Rachel when from the Lord” and of Swann's with Odette, I was too inclined to believe that, once I was in love, I could not be loved in return, and that pecuniary interest alone could attach a woman to me. No doubt it was foolish to judge Albertine by Odette and Rachel. But it was not her that I was afraid of, it was myself; it was the feelings that I was capable of inspiring that my jealousy made me underestimate. And from this judgment, possibly erroneous, sprang no doubt many of the calamities that were to befall us.

“Then you decline my invitation to come to Paris?”

“My aunt wouldn't like me to leave just at present. Besides, even if I can come later on, wouldn't it look rather odd, my descending on you like that? In Paris everybody will know that I'm not your cousin.”

“Very well, then. We can say that we're more or less engaged. It can't make any difference, since you know that it isn't true.”

Albertine's neck, which emerged in its entirety from her nightdress, was strongly built, bronzed, grainy in texture. I kissed it as purely as if I had been kissing my mother to calm a childish grief which I did not believe that I would ever be able to eradicate from my heart. Albertine left me in order to go and dress. Already her devotion was beginning to falter; earlier she had told me that she would not leave me for a second (and I felt sure that her resolution would not last long, since I was afraid, if we remained at Balbec, that that very evening, in my absence, she might see the Bloch girls), whereas now she had just told me that she wished to call at Maineville and that she would come back and see me in the afternoon. She had not gone home the evening before; there might be letters there for her, and besides, her aunt might be anxious about her. I had replied: “If that's all, we can send the lift-boy to tell your aunt that you're here and to pick up your letters.” And, anxious to appear amenable but annoyed at being tied down, she had frowned for a moment and then, at once, very sweetly, had said: “All right” and had sent the lift-boy. Albertine had not been out of the room a moment before the boy came and tapped gently on my door. I could not believe that, while I was talking to Albertine, he had had time to go to Maineville and back. He came now to tell me that Albertine had written a note to her aunt and that she could, if I wished, come to Paris that very day. It was unfortunate that she had given him this message orally, for already, despite the early hour, the manager was about, and came to me in a great state to ask me whether there was anything wrong, whether I was really leaving, whether I could not stay just a few days longer, the wind that day being rather “frightened” (frightful). I did not wish to explain to him that at all costs I wanted Albertine to be out of Balbec before the hour at which the Bloch girls took the air, especially since Andrée, who alone might have protected her, was not there, and that Balbec was like one of those places in which an invalid who can no longer bear it is determined, even if he should die on the journey, not to spend another night. Moreover I should have to struggle against similar entreaties, in the hotel first of all, where the eyes of Marie Gineste and Céleste Albaret were red. (Marie indeed was giving vent to the swift-flowing tears of a mountain stream; Céleste, who was gentler, urged her to be calm; but, Marie having murmured the only line of poetry that she knew: “Here below the lilacs die,” Céleste could contain herself no longer, and a flood of tears spilled over her lilac-hued face; I dare say they had forgotten my existence by that evening.) Later, on the little local railway, despite all my precautions against being seen, I met M. de Cambremer who turned pale at the sight of my boxes, for he was counting upon me for the day after tomorrow; he infuriated me by trying to persuade me that my breathless fits were caused by the change in the weather, and that October would do them all the good in the world, and asked me whether I could not “postpone my departure by a sennight,” an expression the fatuity of which enraged me perhaps only because what he was suggesting to me made me feel ill. And while he talked to me in the railway carriage, at each station I was afraid of seeing, more terrible than Herimbald or Guiscard, M. de Crécy imploring me to invite him, or, more dreadful still, Mme Verdurin bent upon inviting me. But this was not to happen for some hours. I had not got there yet. I had to face only the despairing entreaties of the manager. I ushered him out of the room, for I was afraid that, although he kept his voice low, he would end by disturbing Mamma. I remained alone in my room, that room with the too lofty ceiling in which I had been so wretched on my first arrival, in which I had thought with such longing of Mlle de Stermaria, had watched for the appearance of Albertine and her friends, like migratory birds alighting upon the beach, in which I had possessed her with such indifference after I had sent the lift-boy to fetch her, in which I had experienced my grandmother's kindness, then realised that she was dead; those shutters, beneath which shone the early morning light, I had opened the first time to look out upon the first ramparts of the sea (those shutters which Albertine made me close in case anybody should see us kissing). I became aware of my own transformations by contrasting them with the unchangingness of my surroundings. One grows accustomed to these as to people, and when, all of a sudden, one recalls the different meaning that they used to convey to one and then, after they had lost all meaning, the events, very different from those of today, which they enshrined, the diversity of the acts performed beneath the same ceiling, between the same glazed bookshelves, the change in one's heart and in one's life which that diversity implies, seem to be increased still further by the unalterable permanence of the setting, reinforced by the unity of the scene.

Two or three times it occurred to me, for a moment, that the world in which this room and these bookshelves were situated, and in which Albertine counted for so little, was perhaps an intellectual world,

which was the sole reality, and my grief something like what we feel when we read a novel, a thing of which only a madman would make a lasting and permanent grief that prolonged itself through his life; that a tiny flicker of my will would suffice, perhaps, to attain to this real world, to re-enter it by breaking through my grief as one breaks through a paper hoop, and to think no more about what Albertine had done than we think about the actions of the imaginary heroine of a novel after we have finished reading it. For that matter, the mistresses whom I have loved most passionately have never coincided with my love for them. That love was genuine, since I subordinated everything else to seeing them, keeping them for myself alone, and would weep aloud if, one evening, I had waited for them in vain. But it was more because they had the faculty of arousing that love, of raising it to a paroxysm, than because they were its image. When I saw them, when I heard their voices, I could find nothing in them which resembled my love and could account for it. And yet my sole joy lay in seeing them, my sole anxiety in waiting for them to come. It was as though a virtue that had no connexion with them had been artificially attached to them by nature, and that this virtue, this quasi-electric power, had the effect upon me of exciting my love, that is to say of controlling all my actions and causing all my sufferings. But from this, the beauty, or the intelligence, or the kindness of these women was entirely distinct. As by an electric current that gives us a shock, I have been shaken by my loves, I have lived them, I have felt them: never have I succeeded in seeing or thinking them. Indeed I am inclined to believe that in these relationships (I leave out of account the physical pleasure which is their habitual accompaniment but is not enough in itself to constitute them), beneath the outward appearance of the woman, it is to those invisible forces with which she is incidentally accompanied that we address ourselves as to obscure deities. It is they whose good will is necessary to us, with whom we seek to establish contact without finding any positive pleasure in it. The woman herself, during our assignation with her, does little more than put us in touch with these goddesses. We have, by way of oblation, promised jewels and travels, uttered incantations which mean that we adore and, at the same time, contrary incantations which mean that we are indifferent. We have used all our power to obtain a fresh assignation, but one that is accorded to us without constraint. Would we in fact go to so much trouble for the woman herself, if she were not complemented by these occult forces, considering that, once she has left us, we are unable to say how she was dressed and realise that we never even looked at her?

What a deceptive sense sight is! A human body, even a beloved one, as Albertine's was, seems to us, from a few yards, from a few inches away, remote from us. And similarly with the soul that inhabits it. But if something brings about a violent change in the position of that soul in relation to us, shows us that it is in love with others and not with us, then by the beating of our shattered heart we feel that it is not a few feet away from us but within us that the beloved creature was. Within us, in regions more or less superficial. But the words: "That friend is Mlle Vinteuil" had been the *Open sesame*, which I should have been incapable of discovering by myself, that had made Albertine penetrate to the depths of my lacerated heart. And I might search for a hundred years without discovering how to open the door that had closed behind her.

I had ceased for a moment to hear these words ringing in my ears while Albertine had been with me just now. While kissing her, as I used to kiss my mother at Combray, to calm my anguish, I believed almost in Albertine's innocence, or at least did not think continuously of the discovery that I had made of her vice. But now that I was alone the words rang out afresh like those noises inside the ear which one hears as soon as someone stops talking to one. Her vice now seemed to me to be beyond any doubt. The light of approaching sunrise, by modifying the appearance of the things around me, made me once again, as if for a moment I were shifting my position in relation to it, even more bitterly aware of my suffering. I had never seen the dawn of so beautiful or so sorrowful a morning. And thinking of all the indifferent landscapes which were about to be lit up and which, only yesterday, would have filled me simply with the desire to visit them, I could not repress a sob when, with a gesture of oblation mechanically performed and symbolising, in my eyes, the bloody sacrifice which I was about to have to make of all joy, every morning, until the end of my life, a solemn renewal, celebrated as each day dawned, of my daily grief and of the blood from my wound, the golden egg of the sun, as though propelled by the rupture of equilibrium brought about at the moment of coagulation by a change of density, barbed with tongues of flame as in a painting, burst through the curtain behind which one had sensed it quivering for a moment, ready to appear on the scene and to spring forward, and whose mysterious congealed purple it annihilated in a flood of light. I heard myself weeping. But at that moment, to my astonishment, the door opened and, with a throbbing heart, I seemed to see my grandmother standing before me, as in one of those apparitions that had already visited me, but only in my sleep. Was it all only a dream, then? Alas, I was wide awake. "You see a likeness to your poor grandmother," said Mamma, for it was she, speaking gently as though to calm my fear, acknowledging however the resemblance, with a beautiful smile of modest pride which had always been innocent of coquetry. Her dishevelled hair, whose grey tresses were not hidden and strayed about her troubled eyes, her ageing cheeks, my grandmother's own dressing-gown which she was wearing, all these had for a moment prevented me from recognising her and had made me uncertain whether I was still asleep or my grandmother had come back to life. For a long time past my mother had resembled my grandmother far more than the young and smiling Mamma of my childhood. But I had ceased to think of this resemblance. So it is, when one has been sitting reading for a long time, one's mind absorbed, not noticing how the time was passing, that suddenly one sees round about one the sun that shone yesterday at the same hour call up the same harmonies, the same effects of colour that precede a sunset. It was with a smile that my mother drew my attention to my error, for it was pleasing to her that she should bear so strong a resemblance to her mother.

"I came," she said, "because while I was asleep I thought I heard someone crying. It wakened me. But how is it that you aren't in bed? And your eyes are filled with tears. What's the matter?"

I took her head in my arms: "Mamma, listen, I'm afraid you'll think me very changeable. But first of all, yesterday I spoke to you not at all nicely about Albertine; what I said was unfair."

"But what difference can that make?" said my mother, and, catching sight of the rising sun, she smiled sadly as she thought of her own mother, and, so that I might not lose the benefit of a spectacle which my grandmother used to regret that I never watched, she pointed to the window. But beyond the beach of Balbec, the sea, the sunrise, which Mamma was pointing out to me, I saw, with a gesture of despair which did not escape her notice, the room at Montjouvain where Albertine, curled up like a great cat, with her mischievous pink nose, had taken the place of Mlle Vinteuil's friend and was saying amid peals of her voluptuous laughter: "Well, all the better if they do see us! What, I wouldn't dare to spit on that old monkey?" It was this scene that I saw, beyond the scene which was framed in the open window and which was no more than a dim veil drawn over the other, superimposed upon it like a reflexion. It seemed, indeed, itself almost unreal, like a painted view. Facing us, where the cliff of Parville jutted out, the little wood in which we had played "ferret" dipped the picture of its foliage down into the sea, beneath the still-golden varnish of the water, as at the hour when often, at the close of day, after I had gone there to rest in the shade with Albertine, we had risen as we saw the sun sink in the sky. In the confusion of the night mists which still hung in pink and blue tatters over the water littered with the pearly debris of the dawn, boats sailed by, smiling at the slanting light which gilded their sails and the points of their bowsprits as when they are homeward bound at evening: an imaginary scene, shivering and deserted, a pure evocation of the sunset which did not rest, as at evening, upon the sequence of the hours of the day which I was accustomed to see precede it, detached, interpolated, more insubstantial even than the horrible image of Montjouvain which it did not succeed in cancelling, covering, concealing—a poetical, vain image of memory and dreams.

"But come," my mother was saying, "you said nothing unpleasant about her, you told me that she bored you a little, that you were glad you had given up the idea of marrying her. That's no reason for you to cry like that. Remember that your Mamma is going away today and couldn't bear to leave her big pet in such a state. Especially, my poor child, as I haven't time to comfort you. Even if my things are packed, one never has any time on the morning of a journey."

"It's not that."

And then, calculating the future, weighing up my desires, realising that such an affection on Albertine's part for Mlle Vinteuil's friend, and one of such long standing, could not have been innocent, that Albertine had been initiated, and, as every one of her instinctive actions made plain to me, had moreover been born with a predisposition towards that vice which my anxiety had all too often sensed in her, in which she must never have ceased to indulge (in which she was indulging perhaps at that moment, taking advantage of an instant in which I was not present), I said to my mother, knowing the pain that I was causing her, which she did not reveal and which betrayed itself only by that air of serious preoccupation which she wore when she was comparing the gravity of making me unhappy or making me ill, that air which she had worn at Combray for the first time when she had resigned herself to spending the night in my room, that air which at this moment was extraordinarily like my grandmother's when she had allowed me to drink brandy, I said to my mother: "I know how unhappy I'm going to make you. First of all, instead of remaining here as you wished, I want to leave at the same time as you. But that too is nothing. I don't feel well here, I'd rather go home. But listen to me, don't be too distressed. This is it. I was deceiving myself, I deceived you in good faith yesterday, I've been thinking it over all night. I absolutely must—and let's settle the matter at once, because I'm quite clear about it now, because I won't change my mind again, because I couldn't live without it—I absolutely must marry Albertine."

### **Addenda**

*The manuscript has a longer version of M. de Charlus's reply:*

"Good heavens, what a fate for that unfortunate canvas to be a prisoner in the house of such a person! To go there once by chance is in itself an error of taste; but to spend one's life there, especially if one is a thing of beauty, is so painful as to be quite unpardonable. There are certain forms of disgrace which it's a crime to resign oneself to ... [As a good Catholic, I honour St Euverte: *crossed out*] and I can remember very well from the Lives of the Saints what this confessor's qualifications for canonisation were; and indeed, if you like, as a no less good pagan, I respect Diana and admire her crescent, especially when it is placed in your hair by Elstir. But as for the contradictory monster, or even the monster pure and simple, whom you call Diane de Saint-Euverte, I confess I do not take the desire for a union of the churches as far as that. The name recalls the time when altars used to be raised to St Apollo. It is a very distant time—a time from which the person you speak of must incidentally date, judging by her face, which has strangely survived exhumation. And yet, in spite of everything, she is a person with whom one has certain things in common; she has always manifested a singular love of beauty." This observation would have appeared incomprehensible to the Marquise if for some minutes past, having ceased to understand, she had not given up listening. The love of beauty which caused M. de Charlus to cherish, together with a great deal of social contempt, a more deep-rooted respect for Mme de Saint-Euverte, was deduced from the fact that she always had as footmen a numerous and carefully selected pack of irreproachably vigorous young men. "Yes, what a destiny for a beautiful work of art which was spoiled from the start by living face to face with you! There is something tragic about the fate of these captive paintings. Just think, if ever you pay a brief visit to that lady from the *Golden Legend*, with what despair the poor portrait, imprisoned in its blue and rose-pink tones, must be saying to you:

How different are our fates! I must remain  
But you are free to go ...

And yet both of you are flowers. Flowers, themselves too in bondage, have contrived in their captivity sublime stratagems for passing on their messages. I confess that I should not be surprised if, with similar intelligence, some day when the windows of the Burgundian saint's wife were left open, your portrait unfolded its canvas wings and flew off, thus solving the problem of aerial navigation before mankind, and making Elstir, in a second and more unexpected form, the successor of Leonardo da Vinci."

*In place of this sentence the manuscript has a long passage which was not included in the original edition and which Proust here declares his explicit intention to return to later in the novel, though he did not have time to do so:*

People in society noticed the Princess's febrility, and her fear, though she was still very far from ageing, lest the state of nervous agitation in which she now lived might prevent her from keeping her young appearance. Indeed one evening, at a dinner party to which M. de Charlus was also invited and at which, for that reason, she arrived looking radiant but somehow strange, I realised that this strangeness arose from the fact that, thinking to improve her complexion and to look younger—and probably for the first time in her life—she was heavily made up. She exaggerated even further the eccentricity of dress which had always been a slight weakness of hers. She had only to hear M. de Charlus speak of a portrait to have its sitter's elaborate finery copied and to wear it herself. One day when, thus bedecked with an immense hat copied from a Gainsborough portrait (*it would be better to think of a painter whose hats were really extraordinary*), she was harping on the theme, which had now become a familiar one with her, of how sad it must be to grow old, and quoted in this connexion Mme Récamier's remark to the effect that she would know she was no longer beautiful when the little chimney-sweeps no longer turned to look at her in the street. "Don't worry, my dear little Marie," replied the Duchesse de Guermantes in a caressing voice, so that the affectionate gentleness of her tone should prevent her cousin from taking offence at the irony of the words, "you've only to go on wearing hats like the one you have on and you can be sure that they'll always turn round."

This love of hers for M. de Charlus which was beginning to be bruited abroad, combined with what was gradually becoming known about the latter's way of life, was almost as much of a help to the anti-Dreyfusards as the Princess's Germanic origin. When some wavering spirit pointed out in favour of Dreyfus's innocence the fact that a nationalist and anti-semitic Christian like the Prince de Guermantes had been converted to a belief in it, people would reply: "But didn't he marry a German?" "Yes, but ..." "And isn't that German woman rather highly strung? Isn't she infatuated with a man who has bizarre tastes?" And in spite of the fact that the Prince's Dreyfusism had not been prompted by his wife and had no connexion with the Baron's sexual proclivities, the philosophical anti-Dreyfusard would conclude: "There, you see! The Prince de Guermantes may be Dreyfusist in the best of good faith; but foreign influence may have been brought to bear on him by occult means. That's the most dangerous way. But let me give you a piece of advice. Whenever you come across a Dreyfusard, just scratch a bit. Not far underneath you'll find the ghetto, foreign blood, inversion or Wagneromania." And cravenly the subject would be dropped, for it had to be admitted that the Princess was a passionate Wagnerian.

Whenever the Princess was expecting a visit from me, since she knew that I often saw M. de Charlus, she would evidently prepare in advance a certain number of questions which she then put to me adroitly enough for me not to detect what lay behind them and which must have been aimed at verifying whether such and such an assertion, such and such an excuse by M. de Charlus in connexion with a certain address or a certain evening, were true or not. Sometimes, throughout my entire visit, she would not ask me a single question, however insignificant it might have appeared, and would try to draw my attention to this. Then, having said good-bye to me, she would suddenly, on the doorstep, ask me five or six as though without premeditation. So it went on, until one evening she sent for me. I found her in a state of extraordinary agitation, scarcely able to hold back her tears. She asked if she could entrust me with a letter for M. de Charlus and begged me to deliver it to him at all costs. I hurried round to his house, where I found him in front of the mirror wiping a few specks of powder from his face. He perused the letter—the most desperate appeal, I later learned—and asked me to reply that it was physically impossible that evening, that he was ill. While he was talking to me, he plucked from a vase one after another a number of roses each of a different hue, tried them in his buttonhole, and looked in the mirror to see how they matched his complexion, without being able to decide on any of them. His valet came in to announce that the barber had arrived, and the Baron held out his hand to say good-bye to me. “But he’s forgotten his curling tongs,” said the valet. The Baron flew into a terrible rage; only the unsightly flush which threatened to ruin his complexion persuaded him to calm down a little, though he remained plunged in an even more bitter despair than before because not only would his hair be less wavy than it might have been but his face would be redder and his nose shiny with sweat. “He can go and get them,” suggested the valet. “But I haven’t the time,” wailed the Baron in an ululation calculated to produce as terrifying an effect as the most violent rage while generating less heat in him who emitted it. “I haven’t the time,” he moaned. “I must leave in half an hour or I shall miss everything.” “Would Monsieur le Baron like him to come in, then?” “I don’t know, I can’t do without a touch of the curling tongs. Tell him he’s a brute, a scoundrel. Tell him ...”

At this point I left and hurried back to the Princess. Her breast heaving with emotion, she scribbled another message and asked me to go round to him again: “I’m taking advantage of your friendship, but if you only knew why ...” I returned to M. de Charlus. Just before reaching his house, I saw him join Jupien beside a parked cab. The headlights of a passing car lit up for a moment the peaked cap and the face of a bus conductor. Then I could see him no longer, for the cab had been halted in a dark corner near the entrance to a completely unlit cul-de-sac. I turned into this cul-de-sac so that M. de Charlus should not see me.

“Give me a second before I get in,” M. de Charlus said to Jupien. “My moustache isn’t ruffled?”

“No, you look superb.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“Don’t use such expressions, they don’t suit you. They’re all right for the fellow you’re going to see.”

“Ah, so he’s a bit loutish! I’m not averse to that. But tell me, what sort of man is he, not too skinny?”

I realised from all this that if M. de Charlus was failing to go to the help of a glorious princess who was wild with grief, it was not for the sake of a rendezvous with someone he loved, or even desired, but of an arranged introduction to someone he had never met before.

“No, he isn’t skinny; in fact he’s rather plump and fleshy. Don’t worry, he’s just your type, you’ll see, you’ll be very pleased with him, my little lambkin,” Jupien added, employing a form of address which seemed as personally inappropriate, as ritual, as when the Russians call a passer-by “little father.”

He got into the cab with M. de Charlus, and I might have heard no more had not the Baron, in his agitation, omitted to shut the window and moreover begun, without realising, in order to appear at his ease, to speak in the shrill, reverberating tone of voice which he assumed when he was putting on a social performance.

“I’m delighted to make your acquaintance, and I really must apologise for keeping you waiting in this nasty cab,” he said, in order to fill the vacuum in his anxious mind with words, and oblivious of the fact that the nasty cab must on the contrary seem perfectly nice to a bus conductor. “I hope you will give me the pleasure of spending an evening, a comfortable evening with me. Are you never free except in the evenings?”

“Only on Sundays.”

“Ah! you’re free on Sunday afternoons? Excellent. That makes everything much simpler. Do you like music? Do you ever go to concerts?”

“Yes, I often goes.”

“Ah! very good indeed. You see how nicely we’re getting on already? I really am delighted to know you. We might go to a Colonne concert. I often have the use of my cousin de Guermantes’s box, or my cousin Philippe de Coburg’s” (he did not dare say the King of Bulgaria for fear of seeming to be “showing off,” but although the bus conductor had no idea what the Baron was talking about and had never heard of the Coburgs, this princely name seemed already too showy to M. de Charlus, who in order not to give the impression of overrating what he was offering, modestly proceeded to disparage it). “Yes, my cousin Philippe de Coburg—you don’t know him?” and at once, as a rich man might say to a third-class traveller: “One’s so much more comfortable than in first-class,” he went on: “All the more reason for envying you, really, because he’s a bit of a fool, poor fellow. Or rather, it’s not so much that he’s a fool, but he’s irritating—all the Coburgs are. But in any case I envy you: that open-air life must be so agreeable, seeing so many different people, and in a charming spot, surrounded by trees—for I believe my friend Jupien told me that the terminus of your line was at La Muette. I’ve often wanted to live out there. There’s nowhere more beautiful in the whole of Paris. So it’s agreed, then: we’ll go to a Colonne concert. We can have the box closed. Not that I shouldn’t be extremely



flattered to be seen with you, but we'd be more peaceful ... Society is so boring, isn't it? Of course I don't mean my cousin Guermantes who is charming and so beautiful."

Just as shy scholars who are afraid of being accused of pedantry abbreviate an erudite allusion and only succeed in appearing more long-winded by becoming totally obscure, so the Baron, in seeking to belittle the splendour of the names he cited, made his discourse completely unintelligible to the bus conductor. The latter, failing to understand its terms, tried to interpret it according to its tone, and as the tone was that of someone who is apologising, he was beginning to fear that he might not receive the sum that Jupien had led him to expect.

"When you go to concerts on Sunday, do you go to the Colonne ones too?"

"Pardon?"

"What concert-hall do you go to on Sundays?" the Baron repeated, slightly irritated.

"Sometimes to Concordia, sometimes to the Apéritif Concert, or to the Concert Mayol. But I prefer to stretch me legs a bit. It ain't much fun having to stay sitting down all day long."

"I don't like Mayol. He has an effeminate manner that I find horribly unpleasant. On the whole I detest all men of that type."

Since Mayol was popular, the conductor understood what the Baron said, but was even more puzzled as to why he had wanted to see him, since it could not be for something he hated.

"We might go to a museum together," the Baron went on. "Have you ever been to a museum?"

"I only know the Louvre and the Waxworks Museum."

I returned to the Princess, bringing back her letter. In her disappointment, she burst out at me angrily, but apologised at once.

"You're going to hate me," she said. "I hardly dare ask you to go back a third time."

I stopped the cab a little before the cul-de-sac, and turned into it. The carriage was still there. M. de Charlus was saying to Jupien: "Well, the most sensible thing is for you to get out first with him, and see him on his way, and then rejoin me here ... All right, then, I hope to see you again. How shall we arrange it?"

"Well, you could send me a message when you go out for a meal at noon," said the conductor.

If he used this expression, which applied less accurately to the life of M. de Charlus, who did not "go out for a meal at noon," than to that of omnibus employees and others, this was doubtless not from lack of intelligence but from contempt for local colour. In the tradition of the old masters, he treated the character of M. de Charlus as a Veronese or a Racine those of the husband at the marriage feast in Cana or Orestes, whom they depict as though this legendary Jew and this legendary Greek had belonged, the one to the luxury-loving patriciate of Venice, the other to the court of Louis XIV. M. de Charlus was content to overlook the inaccuracy, and replied: "No, it would be simpler if you would arrange it with Jupien. I'll speak to him about it. Good-night, it's been delightful," he added, unable to relinquish either his worldly courtesy or his aristocratic hauteur. Perhaps he was even more formally polite at such moments than he was in society; for when one steps outside one's habitual sphere, shyness renders one incapable of invention, and it is the memory of one's habits that one calls upon for practically everything; hence it is upon the actions whereby one hoped to emancipate oneself from one's habits that the latter are most forcibly brought to bear, almost in the manner of those toxic states which intensify when the toxin is withdrawn.

Jupien got out with the conductor.

"Well then, what did I tell you?"

"Ah, I wouldn't mind a few evenings like that! I quite like hearing someone chatting away like that, steady like, a chap who doesn't get worked up. He isn't a priest?"

"No, not at all."

"He looks like a photographer I went to one time to get my picture taken. It's not him?"

"No, not him either."

"Come off it," said the conductor, who thought that Jupien was trying to deceive him and feared, since M. de Charlus had remained rather vague about future assignations, that he might "stand him up," "come off it, you can't tell me it isn't the photographer. I recognised him all right. He lives at 3, Rue de l'Echelle, and he's got a little black dog called Love, I think—so you see I know."

"You're talking rubbish," said Jupien. "I don't say there isn't a photographer who has a little black dog, but I do say he's not the man I introduced you to."

"All right, all right, you can say what you like, but I'm sticking to my own opinion."

"You can stick to it as long as you like for all I care. I'll call round tomorrow about the rendezvous."

Jupien returned to the cab, but the Baron, restive, had already got out of it.

"He's nice, most agreeable and well-mannered. But what's his hair like? He isn't bald, I hope? I didn't dare ask him to take his cap off. I was as nervous as a kitten."

"What a big baby you are!"

"Anyway we can discuss it, but the next time I should prefer to see him performing his professional functions. For instance I could take the corner seat beside him in his tram. And if it was possible by doubling the price, I should even like to see him do some rather cruel things—for example, pretend not to see the old ladies signalling to the tram and then having to go home on foot."

"You vicious thing! But that, dearie, would not be very easy, because there's also the driver, you see. He wants to be well thought of at work."

As I emerged from the cul-de-sac, I remembered the evening at the Princesse de Guermantes's (the evening which I interrupted in the middle of describing it with this anticipatory digression, but to which I shall

return) when M. de Charlus denied being in love with the Comtesse Molé, and I thought to myself that if we could read the thoughts of the people we know we would often be astonished to find that the biggest space in them was occupied by something quite other than what we suspected. I walked round to M. de Charlus's house. He had not yet returned. I left the letter. It was learned next day that the Princesse de Guermantes had poisoned herself by mistaking one medicine for another, an accident after which she was for several months at death's door and withdrew from society for several years. It sometimes happened to me also after that evening, on taking a bus, to pay my fare to the conductor whom Jupien had "introduced" to M. de Charlus in the cab. He was a big man, with an ugly, pimpled face and a short-sightedness that made him now wear what Françoise called "specicles." I could never look at him without thinking of the perturbation followed by amazement which the Princesse de Guermantes would have shown if I had had her with me and had said to her: "Wait a minute, I'm going to show you the person for whose sake M. de Charlus resisted your three appeals on the evening you poisoned yourself, the person responsible for all your misfortunes. You'll see him in a moment, he isn't far from here." Doubtless the Princess's heart would have beaten wildly in anticipation. And her curiosity would perhaps have been mixed with a secret admiration for a person who had been so attractive as to make M. de Charlus, as a rule so kind to her, deaf to her entreaties. How often, in her grief mingled with hatred and, in spite of everything, a certain fellow-feeling, must she not have attributed the most noble features to that person, whether she believed it to be a man or a woman! And then, on seeing this creature, ugly, pimpled, vulgar, with red-rimmed, myopic eyes, what a shock! Doubtless the cause of our sorrows, embodied in a human form beloved of another, is sometimes comprehensible to us; the Trojan elders, seeing Helen pass by, said to one another:

One single glance from her eclipses all our griefs.

But the opposite is perhaps more common, because (just as, conversely, admirable and beautiful wives are always being abandoned by their husbands) it often happens that people who are ugly in the eyes of almost everyone excite inexplicable passions; for what Leonardo said of painting can equally well be said of love, that it is *cosa mentale*, something in the mind. Moreover one cannot even say that the reaction of the Trojan elders is more or less common than the other (stupefaction on seeing the person who has caused our sorrows): for one has only to let a little time go by and the case of the Trojan elders almost always merges with the other; in other words there is only one case. Had the Trojan elders never seen Helen, and had she been fated to grow old and ugly, if one had said to them one day: "You're about to see the famous Helen," it is probable that, confronted with a dumpy, red-faced, misshapen old woman, they would have been no less stupefied than the Princesse de Guermantes would have been at the sight of the bus conductor.

*In place of this paragraph, the manuscript gives the following long development:*

Moving away from the dazzling "house of pleasure" insolently erected there despite the protests fruitlessly addressed to the mayor by the local families, I made for the cliffs and followed the sinuous paths leading towards Balbec. And I remembered certain walks along these paths with my grandmother. I had had a brief meeting earlier with a local doctor whom I was never to see again and who had told me that my grandmother would die soon; he was one of those people, perhaps malevolent, perhaps mad, perhaps afflicted with a fear of death which they want to induce in others as well, who later remind one of those witch-like vagrants encountered on a roadside who hurl some baneful and plausible prophecy at you. It was the first time I had thought of the possibility of her death. I could neither confide my anguish to her nor bear it myself when she left me. And whenever we took some particularly beautiful path together, I told myself that one day she would no longer be there when I took that path, and the mere idea that she would die one day turned my happiness in being with her to such torment that what I longed to do more than anything else was to forestall her and to die myself then and there. Now it was these same paths or similar ones that I was taking, and already the anguish I had felt in the train was fading, and if I had met Rosemonde [Albertine] I would have asked her to come with me. Suddenly I was attracted by the scent of the hawthorns which, as at Combray in the month of May, array themselves alongside a hedge in their large white veils and decorate this green French countryside with the Catholic whiteness of their demure procession. I went nearer, but my eyes did not know at what adjustment to set their optical apparatus in order to see the flowers at the same time along the hedge and in myself. Belonging at one and the same time to many springtimes, the petals stood out against a sort of magical deep background which, in spite of the strong sunlight, was plunged in semi-darkness either because of the twilight of my indistinct memories or because of the nocturnal hour of the Month of Mary. And then, in the flower which opened up before me in the hedge and which seemed to be animated by the clumsy flickering of my blurred and double vision, the flower that rose from my memory revolved without being able to fit itself exactly on to the elusive living blossoms in the tremulous hesitancy of their petals. The hawthorns brought out the heaviness of the blossom of an apple-tree sumptuously established opposite them, like those dowryless girls of good family who, while being friends of the daughters of a big cider-maker and acknowledging their fresh complexions and good appearance, know that they themselves have more chic in their crumpled white dresses. I did not have the heart to remain beside them, and yet I had been unable to resist stopping. But Bloch's sisters, whom I caught sight of without their seeing me, did not even turn their heads towards the hawthorns. The latter had made no sign to them, had said nothing to them; they were like those devout young girls who never miss a Month of Mary, during which they are not afraid to steal a glance at a young man with whom they will make an assignation in the countryside, and by whom they will even allow themselves to be kissed in the chapel when there is no one about, but would never dream—because it has been strictly forbidden—of speaking to or playing with children of another religion.

BOOK V  
THE CAPTIVE

At daybreak, my face still turned to the wall, and before I had seen above the big window-curtains what shade of colour the first streaks of light assumed, I could already tell what the weather was like. The first sounds from the street had told me, according to whether they came to my ears deadened and distorted by the moisture of the atmosphere or quivering like arrows in the resonant, empty expanses of a spacious, frosty, pure morning; as soon as I heard the rumble of the first tramcar, I could tell whether it was sodden with rain or setting forth into the blue. And perhaps these sounds had themselves been forestalled by some swifter and more pervasive emanation which, stealing into my sleep, diffused in it a melancholy that announced snow or else (through a certain intermittent little person) burst into so many hymns to the glory of the sun that, having first of all begun to smile in my sleep, having prepared my eyes, behind their shut lids, to be dazzled, I would awake finally to clarion peals of music. It was, in fact, principally from my bedroom that I took in the life of the outer world during this period. I know that Bloch reported that, when he called to see me in the evenings, he could hear the sound of conversation; as my mother was at Combray and he never found anybody in my room, he concluded that I was talking to myself. When, much later, he learned that Albertine had been staying with me at the time, and realised that I had concealed her presence from everybody, he declared that he saw at last the reason why, during that phase of my life, I had always refused to go out of doors. He was wrong. His mistake was, however, perfectly excusable, for reality, even though it is necessary, is not always foreseeable as a whole. People who learn some correct detail about another person's life at once draw conclusions from it which are not accurate, and see in the newly discovered fact an explanation of things that have no connexion with it whatsoever.

When I reflect now that, on our return from Balbec, Albertine had come to live in Paris under the same roof as myself, that she had abandoned the idea of going on a cruise, that she was installed in a bedroom within twenty paces of my own, at the end of the corridor, in my father's tapestried study, and that late every night, before leaving me, she used to slide her tongue between my lips like a portion of daily bread, a nourishing food that had the almost sacred character of all flesh upon which the sufferings that we have endured on its account have come in time to confer a sort of spiritual grace, what I at once call to mind in comparison is not the night that Captain de Borodino allowed me to spend in barracks, a favour which cured what was after all only a passing distemper, but the night on which my father sent Mamma to sleep in the little bed beside mine. So true is it that life when it chooses to deliver us once more from sufferings that seemed inescapable, does so in different, at times diametrically opposed conditions, so much so that it seems almost sacrilegious to note the identical nature of the consolations vouchsafed!

When Albertine had heard from Françoise that, in the darkness of my still curtained room, I was not asleep, she had no qualms about disturbing me as she washed herself in her bathroom. Then, frequently, instead of waiting until later in the day, I would go to my own bathroom, which adjoined hers and was a very agreeable place. Time was when a stage manager would spend hundreds of thousands of francs to begem with real emeralds the throne upon which a great actress would play the part of an empress. The Russian ballet has taught us that simple lighting effects, trained upon the right spot, will beget jewels as gorgeous and more varied. This decoration, already more ethereal, is not so pleasing, however, as that which, at eight o'clock in the morning, the sun substitutes for what we were accustomed to see when we did not rise before noon. The windows of our respective bathrooms, so that their occupants might not be visible from without, were not smooth and transparent but crinkled with an artificial and old-fashioned hoar-frost. All of a sudden, the sun would colour this muslin glass, gild it, and, gently disclosing in my person an earlier young man whom habit had long concealed, would intoxicate me with memories, as though I were in the heart of the country amidst golden foliage in which even a bird was not lacking. For I could hear Albertine ceaselessly humming:

For melancholy  
Is but folly,  
And he who heeds it is a fool.

I was too fond of her not to be able to spare a smile for her bad taste in music. This song had, as it happened, during the past summer, delighted Mme Bontemps, who presently heard people say that it was silly, with the result that, instead of asking Albertine to sing it when she had company, she would substitute:

A song of farewell rises from troubled springs,

which in its turn became "an old jingle of Massenet's the child is always dinning into our ears."

A cloud passed, blotting out the sun; I saw the prudish, leafy screen of glass grow dim and revert to a grey monochrome.

The partition that divided our two dressing-rooms (Albertine's, identical with my own, was a bathroom which Mamma, who had another at the opposite end of the flat, had never used for fear of disturbing my rest) was so thin that we could talk to each other as we washed in double privacy, carrying on a conversation that

was interrupted only by the sound of the water, in that intimacy which is so often permitted in hotels by the smallness and proximity of the rooms but which, in private houses in Paris, is so rare.

On other mornings, I would remain in bed, drowsing for as long as I chose, for orders had been given that no one was to enter my room until I had rung the bell, an act which, owing to the awkward position in which the electric push had been hung above my bed, took such a time that often, tired of feeling for it and glad to be left alone, I would lie back for some moments and almost fall asleep again. It was not that I was wholly indifferent to Albertine's presence in the house. Her separation from her girlfriends had succeeded in sparing my heart any fresh anguish. It kept it in a state of repose, in a semi-immobility which would help it to recover. But this calm which my mistress procured for me was an assuagement of suffering rather than a joy. Not that it did not enable me to taste many joys from which the intensity of my anguish had debarred me, but, far from my owing them to Albertine, who in any case I no longer found very pretty and with whom I was bored, with whom I was indeed clearly conscious that I was not in love, I tasted these joys on the contrary when Albertine was not with me. And so, to begin the morning, I did not send for her at once, especially if it was a fine day. For some moments, knowing that he would make me happier than Albertine, I remained closeted with the little person inside me, the melodious psalmist of the rising sun, of whom I have already spoken. Of the different persons who compose our personality, it is not the most obvious that are the most essential. In myself, when ill health has succeeded in uprooting them one after another, there will still remain two or three endowed with a hardier constitution than the rest, notably a certain philosopher who is happy only when he has discovered between two works of art, between two sensations, a common element. But I have sometimes wondered whether the last of all might not be this little mannikin, very similar to another whom the optician at Combray used to set up in his shop window to forecast the weather, and who, doffing his hood when the sun shone, would put it on again if it was going to rain. I know how selfish this little mannikin is; I may be suffering from an attack of breathlessness which only the coming of rain would assuage, but he pays no heed, and, at the first drops so impatiently awaited, all his gaiety forgotten, he sullenly pulls down his hood. Conversely, I dare say that in my last agony, when all my other "selves" are dead, if a ray of sunshine steals into the room while I am drawing my last breath, the little barometric mannikin will feel a great relief, and will throw back his hood to sing: "Ah, fine weather at last!"

I would ring for Françoise. I would open the *Figaro*. I would scan its columns and ascertain that it did not contain an article, or so-called article, which I had sent to the editor, and which was no more than a slightly revised version of the page that had recently come to light, written long ago in Dr Percepied's carriage, as I gazed at the spires of Martinville. Then I would read Mamma's letter. She found it odd, if not shocking, that a girl should be living alone with me. On the first day, at the moment of leaving Balbec, when she saw how wretched I was and was worried about leaving me by myself, my mother had perhaps been glad when she heard that Albertine was travelling with us and saw that, side by side with our own boxes (those boxes among which I had spent the night in tears in the hotel at Balbec) Albertine's too—narrow and black, having for me the appearance of coffins, and as to which I did not know whether they would bring life or death to our house—had been loaded on to the "twister." But I had never even asked myself the question, being all overjoyed, in the radiant morning, after the fear of having to remain at Balbec, that I was taking Albertine with me. But if at the start my mother had not been hostile to this proposal (speaking kindly to my friend like a mother whose son has been seriously wounded and who is grateful to the young mistress who is nursing him with loving care), she had become so now that it had been all too completely realised and the girl was prolonging her sojourn in our house, moreover in the absence of my parents. I cannot, however, say that my mother ever openly manifested this hostility to me. As in the past, when she had ceased to dare to reproach me with my nervous instability and my laziness, now she had qualms—which perhaps I did not altogether perceive or did not wish to perceive at the time—about running the risk, by offering any criticism of the girl to whom I had told her that I intended to make an offer of marriage, of casting a shadow over my life, making me in time to come less devoted to my wife, of sowing perhaps, for a season when she herself would no longer be there, the seeds of remorse at having grieved her by marrying Albertine. Mamma preferred to seem to be approving a choice which she felt herself powerless to make me reconsider. But all the people who saw her at that time have since told me that in addition to her grief at having lost her mother she had an air of constant preoccupation. This mental strife, this inward debate, had the effect of overheating my mother's brow, and she was constantly opening the windows to let in the fresh air. But she failed to come to any decision, for fear of influencing me in the wrong direction and so spoiling what she believed to be my happiness. She could not even bring herself to forbid me to keep Albertine for the time being in our house. She did not wish to appear more strict than Mme Bontemps, who was the person principally concerned, and who saw no harm in the arrangement, which greatly surprised my mother. All the same, she regretted that she had been obliged to leave us together, by departing just at that moment for Combray where she might have to remain (and did in fact remain) for many months, during which my great-aunt required her incessant attention by day and night. Everything was made easier for her down there thanks to the kindness and devotion of Legrandin who, sparing himself no pains, kept putting off his return to Paris from week to week, not that he knew my aunt at all well, but simply, first of all, because she had been his mother's friend, and also because he knew that the invalid, condemned to die, valued his attentions and could not do without him. Snobbery is a grave disease, but it is localised and so does not utterly corrupt the soul. I, on the other hand, unlike Mamma, was extremely glad of her absence at Combray, but for which I should have been afraid (being unable to tell Albertine to conceal it) of her learning of the girl's friendship with Mlle Vinteuil. This would have been to my mother an insurmountable obstacle, not merely to a marriage about which she had meanwhile begged me to say nothing

definite as yet to Albertine, and the thought of which was becoming more and more intolerable to myself, but even to the latter's being allowed to stay for any length of time in the house. Failing so grave a reason, of which she was not aware, Mamma, through the dual effect of the edifying and liberating example of my grandmother, according to whom, in her admiration of George Sand, virtue consisted in nobility of soul, and of my own corrupting influence, was now indulgent towards women whose conduct she would have condemned in the past, or even now had they been any of her own middle-class friends in Paris or Combray, but whose large-heartedness I extolled to her and whom she forgave much because of their affection for me.

However all this may be, and even apart from any question of propriety, I doubt whether Mamma could have put up with Albertine, since she had retained from Combray, from my aunt Leonie, from all her kindred, habits of punctuality and order of which my mistress had not the remotest conception. She would never think of shutting a door and, by the same token, would no more hesitate to enter a room if the door stood open than would a dog or a cat. Her somewhat inconvenient charm was, in fact, that of behaving in the household not so much like a girl as like a domestic animal which comes into a room and goes out again and is to be found wherever one least expects to find it, and she would often—something that I found profoundly restful—come and lie down beside me on my bed, making a place for herself from which she never stirred, without disturbing me as a person would have done. She ended, however, by conforming to my hours of sleep, and not only never attempted to enter my room but would take care not to make a sound until I had rung my bell. It was Françoise who impressed these rules of conduct upon her. She was one of those Combray servants, conscious of their master's place in the world, who feel that the least that they can do is to see that he is treated with all the respect to which they consider him entitled. When a stranger on leaving after a visit gave Françoise a tip to be shared with the kitchenmaid, he had barely slipped his coin into her hand before Françoise, with an unparalleled display of speed, tact and energy, had passed the word to the kitchenmaid who came forward to thank him, not in a murmur, but openly and clearly, as Françoise had told her that she must do. The parish priest of Combray was no genius, but he also knew what was right and proper. Under his instruction, the daughter of some Protestant cousins of Mme Sazerat's had been converted to Catholicism, and her family had behaved impeccably towards him. There was a question of her marrying a young nobleman of Méséglise. The young man's parents wrote to inquire about her in a somewhat arrogant letter, in which they expressed contempt for her Protestant origin. The priest replied in such a tone that the Méséglise nobleman, crushed and grovelling, wrote a very different letter in which he begged as the most precious favour to marry the girl.

Françoise deserved no special credit for making Albertine respect my slumbers. She was imbued with the tradition. From her studied silence, or the peremptory response that she made to a proposal to enter my room, or to send in some message to me, which Albertine had expressed in all innocence, the latter realised with astonishment that she was now living in an alien world, where strange customs prevailed, governed by rules of conduct which one must never dream of infringing. She had already had a forewarning of this at Balbec, but, in Paris, made no attempt to resist, and would wait patiently every morning for the sound of my bell before venturing to make any noise.

The training that Françoise gave her was also salutary for our old servant herself, in that it gradually stilled the lamentations which, ever since our return from Balbec, she had not ceased to utter. For, just as we were boarding the train, she had remembered that she had failed to say good-bye to the housekeeper of the hotel, a mustachioed lady who looked after the bedroom floors and barely knew Françoise by sight, but had been comparatively civil to her. Françoise insisted on getting out of the train, going back to the hotel, making her farewells to the housekeeper, and postponing her departure for Paris until the following day. Common sense, coupled with my sudden horror of Balbec, restrained me from granting her this concession, but my refusal had infected her with a morbid ill-humour which the change of air had not sufficed to cure and which lingered on in Paris. For, according to Françoise's code, as illustrated in the carvings of Saint-André-des-Champs, to wish for the death of an enemy, or even to inflict it, is not forbidden, but it is a horrible sin not to do the right thing, not to return a civility, to omit, like a regular churl, to say good-bye to the housekeeper before leaving a hotel. Throughout the journey, the continually recurring memory of her not having taken leave of this woman had dyed Françoise's cheeks with a scarlet flush that was quite alarming. And if she refused to eat or drink until we reached Paris, it was perhaps because this memory was a real "weight" on her stomach (every social class has its own pathology) even more than to punish us.

Among the reasons which led Mamma to write me a letter every day, a letter which never failed to include some quotation from Mme de Sévigné, was the memory of my grandmother. Mamma would write to me: "Mme Sazerat gave us one of those little luncheons of which she possesses the secret and which, as your poor grandmother would have said, quoting Mme de Sévigné, deprive us of solitude without affording us company." In one of my earlier replies I was inept enough to write to Mamma: "By those quotations, your mother would recognise you at once." Which brought me, three days later, the reproof: "My poor boy, if it was to speak to me of *my mother*, your reference to Mme de Sévigné was most inappropriate. She would have answered you as she answered Mme de Grignan: 'So she was nothing to you? I had supposed that you were related.'"

By this time, I would hear my mistress leaving or returning to her room. I would ring the bell, for it was time now for Andrée to arrive with the chauffeur, Morel's friend, lent me by the Verdurins, to take Albertine out. I had spoken to the latter of the remote possibility of our marriage; but I had never made her any formal promise; she herself, from discretion, when I said to her: "I don't know, but it might perhaps be possible," had shaken her head with a melancholy smile, as much as to say "Oh, no it won't," which meant: "I'm too poor." And so, while I continued to say: "Nothing could be less certain" when speaking of plans for the future, for

the present I did everything in my power to amuse her, to make her life agreeable, with perhaps the unconscious design of thereby making her wish to marry me. She herself laughed at my lavish generosity. "Andrée's mother would pull a bit of a face if she saw me turn into a rich lady like herself, what she calls a lady who has 'horses, carriages, pictures.' What? Did I never tell you that she says that. Oh, she's quite a type! What surprises me is that she raises pictures to the same dignity as horses and carriages."

We shall see in due course that, in spite of stupid habits of speech which she had not outgrown, Albertine had developed to an astonishing degree. This was a matter of complete indifference to me, a woman's intellectual qualities having always interested me so little that if I pointed them out to some woman or other it was solely out of politeness. Celeste's curious genius alone might perhaps appeal to me. In spite of myself, I would continue to smile for some moments, when, for instance, having ascertained that Albertine was not in my room, she accosted me with: "Heavenly deity perched on a bed!" "But why, Celeste," I would say, "why deity?" "Oh, if you suppose that you have anything in common with the mortals who make their pilgrimage on our vile earth, you are greatly mistaken!" "But why 'perched' on a bed? Can't you see that I'm lying in bed?" "You never lie. Who ever saw anybody lie like that? You've just alighted there. With your white pyjamas, and the way you twist your neck, you look for all the world like a dove."

Albertine, even in the discussion of the most trivial matters, expressed herself very differently from the little girl that she had been only a few years earlier at Balbec. She would go so far as to declare, in connexion with a political incident of which she disapproved: "I consider that fearsome," and I am not sure that it was not about this time that she learned to say, when she wanted to indicate that she thought a book badly written: "It's interesting, but really, it might have been written *by a pig*."

The rule that she must not enter my room until I had rung amused her greatly. As she had adopted our family habit of quotation, and in following it drew upon the plays in which she had acted at her convent and for which I had expressed a liking, she always compared me to Assuerus:<sup>1</sup>

And death is the reward of whoso dares  
To venture in his presence unawares ...  
None is exempt; nor is there any whom  
Degree or sex can save from such a doom;  
Even I myself ...  
Like all the rest, I by this law am bound;  
And, to address him, I must first be found  
By him, or he must call me to his side.

Physically, too, she had changed. Her blue, almond-shaped eyes—now even more elongated—had altered in appearance; they were indeed of the same colour, but seemed to have passed into a liquid state. So much so that, when she closed them, it was as though a pair of curtains had been drawn to shut out a view of the sea. It was no doubt this aspect of her person that I remembered most vividly each night on leaving her. For, quite contrarily, every morning the ripple of her hair, for instance, continued to give me the same surprise, as though it were some novelty that I had never seen before. And yet, above the smiling eyes of a girl, what could be more beautiful than that clustering coronet of black violets? The smile offers greater friendship; but the little gleaming coils of blossoming hair, more akin to the flesh of which they seem to be a transposition into tiny wavelets, are more provocative of desire.

As soon as she entered my room, she would spring on to my bed and sometimes would expatiate upon my type of intellect, would vow in a transport of sincerity that she would sooner die than leave me: this was on mornings when I had shaved before sending for her. She was one of those women who can never distinguish the cause of what they feel. The pleasure they derive from a fresh complexion they explain to themselves by the moral qualities of the man who seems to offer them a possibility of future happiness, which is capable, however, of diminishing and becoming less compelling the longer he refrains from shaving.

I would inquire where she was thinking of going.

"I believe Andrée wants to take me to the Buttes-Chaumont; I've never been there."

Of course it was impossible for me to discern among so many other words whether beneath these a falsehood lay concealed. Besides, I could trust Andrée to tell me of all the places that she visited with Albertine. At Balbec, when I had felt utterly weary of Albertine, I had made up my mind to say, untruthfully, to Andrée: "My little Andrée, if only I had met you again sooner, it's you that I would have loved! But now my heart is pledged to another. All the same, we can see a great deal of each other, for my love is causing me great unhappiness, and you will help me to find consolation." And now these same lying words had become true within the space of three weeks. Perhaps Andrée had believed in Paris that it was indeed a lie and that I was in love with her, as she would doubtless have believed at Balbec. For the truth is so variable for each of us, that other people have difficulty in recognising what it is. And as I knew that she would tell me everything that she and Albertine had done, I had asked her, and she had agreed, to come and call for Albertine almost every day. Thus I could without anxiety remain at home. Also, Andrée's privileged position as one of the girls of the little band gave me confidence that she would obtain everything I might want from Albertine. Truly, I could have said to her now in all sincerity that she would be capable of setting my mind at rest.

At the same time, my choice of Andrée (who happened to be staying in Paris, having given up her plan of returning to Balbec) as guide and companion to my mistress was prompted by what Albertine had told me of the affection that her friend had felt for me at Balbec, at a time when, on the contrary, I was afraid that I bored her; indeed, if I had known this at the time, it is perhaps with Andrée that I would have fallen in love.

"What, you never knew?" said Albertine, "but we were always joking about it. Do you mean to say you never noticed how she used to copy all your ways of talking and arguing? Especially when she'd just been with you, it was really striking. She had no need to tell us whether she had seen you. As soon as she joined us, we could tell at once. We used to look at one another and laugh. She was like a coalheaver who tries to pretend that he isn't one, although he's black all over. A miller has no need to say that he's a miller—you can see the flour all over his clothes, and the mark of the sacks he has carried on his shoulder. Andrée was just the same, she would twist her eyebrows the way you do, and stretch out her long neck, and I don't know what all. When I pick up a book that has been in your room, even if I'm reading it out of doors, I can tell at once where it's been because it still has a faint whiff of your beastly fumigations. It's only the tiniest thing—I can't really explain—but it's rather a nice thing really. Anyhow whenever anybody spoke nicely about you, seemed to think a lot of you, Andrée was in ecstasies."

Notwithstanding all this, in case there might have been some secret plan made behind my back, I would advise her to give up the Buttes-Chaumont for that day and to go instead to Saint-Cloud or somewhere else.

It was not of course, as I was well aware, that I was the least bit in love with Albertine. Love is no more perhaps than the diffusion of those eddies which, in the wake of an emotion, stir the soul. Certain such eddies had indeed stirred my soul through and through when Albertine spoke to me at Balbec about Mlle Vinteuil, but these were now stilled. I no longer loved Albertine, for I no longer felt anything of the pain I had felt in the train at Balbec on learning how Albertine had spent her adolescence, with visits perhaps to Montjouvain. I had thought about all this for long enough, and it was now healed. But from time to time certain expressions used by Albertine made me suppose—why, I cannot say—that she must in the course of her life, short as it had been, have received many compliments, many declarations, and received them with pleasure, that is to say with sensuality. Thus she would say in any connexion: "Is that true? Is it really true?" Of course, if she had said, like an Odette: "Is it really true, that thumping lie?" I should not have been disturbed, for the very absurdity of the formula would have explained itself as a stupid inanity of feminine wit. But her questioning air: "Is that true?" gave on the one hand the strange impression of a creature incapable of judging things by herself, who relies on your corroboration, as though she were not endowed with the same faculties as yourself (if you said to her: "We've been out for a whole hour," or "It's raining," she would ask: "Is that true?"). Unfortunately, on the other hand, this want of facility in judging external phenomena for herself could not be the real origin of her "Is that true? Is it really true?" It seemed rather that these words had been, from the dawn of her precocious nubility, replies to: "You know, I never saw anybody as pretty as you," or "You know I'm madly in love with you, you excite me terribly"—affirmations that were answered, with a coquettishly acquiescent modesty, by these repetitions of: "Is that true? Is it really true?" which no longer served Albertine, when in my company, save to reply by a question to some such affirmation as: "You've been asleep for more than an hour," "Is that true?"

Without feeling to the slightest degree in love with Albertine, without including in the list of my pleasures the moments that we spent together, I had nevertheless remained preoccupied with the way in which she disposed of her time; had I not, indeed, fled from Balbec in order to make certain that she could no longer meet this or that person with whom I was so afraid of her doing wrong for fun (fun at my expense, perhaps), that I had adroitly planned to sever, by my departure, all her dangerous entanglements at one blow? And Albertine had such extraordinary passivity, such a powerful faculty for forgetting, and for complying with one's wishes, that these relations had indeed been severed and the phobia that haunted me cured. But such a phobia is capable of assuming as many forms as the undefined evil that is its cause. So long as my jealousy had not been reincarnated in new people, I had enjoyed after the passing of my anguish an interval of calm. But the slightest pretext serves to revive a chronic disease, just as the slightest opportunity may enable the vice of the person who is the cause of our jealousy to be practised anew (after a lull of chastity) with different people. I had managed to separate Albertine from her accomplices, and, by so doing, to exorcise my hallucinations; if it was possible to make her forget people, to cut short her attachments, her taste for sensual pleasure was chronic too, and was perhaps only waiting for an opportunity to be given its head. Now Paris provided just as many opportunities as Balbec. In any town whatsoever, she had no need to seek, for the evil existed not in Albertine alone, but in others to whom any opportunity for pleasure is good. A glance from one, understood at once by the other, brings the two famished souls in contact. And it is easy for an astute woman to appear not to have seen, then five minutes later to join, the person who has read her glance and is waiting for her in a side street, and to make an assignation in a trice. Who will ever know? And it was so simple for Albertine to tell me, in order that she might continue these practices, that she was anxious to revisit some place on the outskirts of Paris that she had liked. And so it was enough that she should return later than usual, that her expedition should have taken an inexplicably long time, although it was perhaps perfectly easy to explain (without bringing in any sensual reason), for my malady to break out afresh, attached this time to mental pictures which were not of Balbec, and which I would set to work, as with their predecessors, to destroy, as though the destruction of an ephemeral cause could put an end to a congenital disease. I did not take into account the fact that in these acts of destruction in which I had as an accomplice, in Albertine, her faculty of changing, her ability to forget, almost to hate, the recent object of her love, I was sometimes causing great pain to one or other of those unknown persons with whom she had successively taken her pleasure, and that I was doing so in vain, for they would be abandoned but replaced, and, parallel to the path strewn with all the derelicts of her light-hearted infidelities, there would continue for me another, pitiless path interrupted only by an occasional brief respite; so that my suffering, had I thought about it, could end only with Albertine's life or with my own. Even in the first days after our return to Paris, not satisfied by

the information that Andrée and the chauffeur had given me as to their expeditions with my mistress, I had felt the environs of Paris to be as baleful as those of Balbec, and had gone off for a few days in the country with Albertine. But everywhere my uncertainty as to what she might be doing was the same, the possibility that it was something wrong as abundant, surveillance even more difficult, with the result that I had returned with her to Paris. In leaving Balbec, I had imagined that I was leaving Gomorrah, plucking Albertine from it; in reality, alas, Gomorrah was disseminated all over the world. And partly out of jealousy, partly out of ignorance of such joys (a case which is extremely rare), I had arranged unawares this game of hide and seek in which Albertine would always elude me.

I questioned her point-blank: "Oh, by the way, Albertine, am I dreaming, or did you tell me that you knew Gilberte Swann?" "Yes; that's to say that she spoke to me once in class, because she had a set of the French history notes. In fact she was very nice and lent them to me, and I gave them back to her when I next saw her." "Is she the kind of woman that I object to?" "Oh, not at all, quite the opposite."

But, rather than indulge in this sort of interrogation, I would often devote to imagining Albertine's excursions the energy that I did not employ in sharing them, and would speak to her with the enthusiasm which unfulfilled designs can keep intact. I expressed so keen a longing to see once again some window in the Sainte-Chapelle, so keen a regret that I was not able to go there with her alone, that she said to me lovingly: "Why, my sweet, since you seem so keen about it, make a little effort, come with us. We'll wait as long as you like, until you're ready. And if you'd rather be alone with me, I'll just send Andrée home, she can come another time." But these very entreaties to me to go out added to the calm which enabled me to yield to my desire to remain indoors.

It did not occur to me that the apathy reflected in my thus delegating to Andrée or the chauffeur the task of soothing my agitation, by leaving them to keep watch on Albertine, was paralysing and deadening in me all those imaginative impulses of the mind, all those inspirations of the will, which enable us to guess and to forestall what a person is going to do. It was all the more dangerous because by nature I have always been more open to the world of potentiality than to the world of contingent reality. This helps one to understand the human heart, but one is apt to be taken in by individuals. Productive of suffering, my jealousy was born of mental images, not based on probability. Now there may occur in the lives of men and of nations (and there was to occur in mine) a moment when we need to have within us a chief of police, a clear-sighted diplomat, a master-detective, who instead of pondering over the possible contingencies that extend to all the points of the compass, reasons soundly and says to himself: "If Germany announces this, it means that she intends to do something else, not just 'something' in the abstract but precisely this or that or the other, which she may perhaps have already begun to do," or "If so-and-so has fled, it is not in the direction *a* or *b* or *d*, but to the point *c*, and the place to which we must direct our search for him is *c*." Alas, I allowed this faculty, which was not highly developed in me, to grow numb, to lose strength, to disappear, by letting myself be lulled as soon as others were engaged in keeping watch on my behalf.

As for the reason for my desire to remain at home, I should have been very reluctant to explain it to Albertine. I told her that the doctor had ordered me to stay in bed. This was not true. And if it had been true, his instructions would have been powerless to prevent me from accompanying my mistress. I asked her to excuse me from going out with herself and Andrée. I shall mention only one of my reasons, which was dictated by prudence. Whenever I went out with Albertine, if she left my side for a moment I became anxious, began to imagine that she had spoken to or simply looked at somebody. If she was not in the best of tempers, I thought that I must be causing her to miss or to postpone some appointment. Reality is never more than a first step towards an unknown on the road to which one can never progress very far. It is better not to know, to think as little as possible, not to feed one's jealousy with the slightest concrete detail. Unfortunately, in the absence of an outer life, incidents are created by the inner life too; in the absence of expeditions with Albertine, the random course of my solitary reflexions furnished me at times with some of those tiny fragments of the truth which attract to themselves, like a magnet, an inkling of the unknown, which from that moment becomes painful. Even if one lives under the equivalent of a bell jar, associations of ideas, memories, continue to act upon us. But these internal shocks did not occur immediately; no sooner had Albertine set off on her drive than I was revived, if only for a few moments, by the exhilarating virtues of solitude. I took my share in the pleasures of the new day; the arbitrary desire—the capricious and purely solipsistic impulse—to savour them would not have sufficed to place them within my reach, had not the particular state of the weather not merely evoked for me their past images but affirmed their present reality, immediately accessible to all men whom a contingent and consequently negligible circumstance did not compel to remain at home. On certain fine days, the weather was so cold, one was in such full communication with the street, that it seemed as though the outer walls of the house had been dismantled, and, whenever a tramcar passed, the sound of its bell reverberated like that of a silver knife striking a house of glass. But it was above all in myself that I heard, with rapture, a new sound emitted by the violin within. Its strings are tightened or relaxed by mere differences in the temperature or the light outside. Within our being, an instrument which the uniformity of habit has rendered mute, song is born of these divergences, these variations, the source of all music: the change of weather on certain days makes us pass at once from one note to another. We recapture the forgotten tune the mathematical necessity of which we might have deduced, and which for the first few moments we sing without recognising it. These modifications alone, internal though they had come from without, gave me a fresh vision of the external world. Communicating doors, long barred, reopened in my brain. The life of certain towns, the gaiety of certain excursions, resumed their place in my consciousness.



With my whole being quivering around the vibrating string, I would have sacrificed my dim former existence and my life to come, erased by the india-rubber of habit, for a state so unique.

If I had not gone out with Albertine on her long expedition, my mind would stray all the further afield, and, because I had refused to savour with my senses this particular morning, I enjoyed in imagination all the similar mornings, past or possible, or more precisely a certain type of morning of which all those of the same kind were but the intermittent apparition which I had at once recognised; for the sharp air blew the book open of its own accord at the right page, and I found before me, already marked, so that I might follow it from my bed, the Gospel for the day. This ideal morning filled my mind full of a permanent reality identical with all similar mornings, and infected me with a joyousness which my physical debility did not diminish: for, a sense of well-being resulting far less from the soundness of our health than from the surplus of our energies, we can achieve it just as well by restricting the scope of our activity as by increasing our strength. The activity with which I was overflowing and which I kept constantly charged as I lay in bed, made me pulsate and leap internally, like a machine which, prevented from moving from its position, turns over on itself.

Françoise would come in to light the fire, and in order to make it draw, would throw upon it a handful of twigs, the scent of which, forgotten for a year past, traced round the fireplace a magic circle within which, glimpsing myself poring over a book, now at Combray, now at Doncières, I was as joyful, while remaining in my bedroom in Paris, as if I had been on the point of setting out for a walk along the Méséglise way, or of going to join Saint-Loup and his friends on manoeuvres. It often happens that the pleasure which everyone takes in turning over the keepsakes that his memory has collected is keenest in those whom the tyranny of physical illness and the daily hope of its cure prevent, on the one hand, from going out to seek in nature scenes that resemble those memories and, on the other hand, leave so convinced that they will shortly be able to do so that they can remain gazing at them in a state of desire and appetite and not regard them merely as memories or pictures. But, even if they could never have been more than this for me, even if, in recalling them, I could see them as pictures only, they none the less suddenly re-created out of my present self, the whole of that self, by virtue of an identical sensation, the child or the youth who had first seen them. There had been not merely a change in the weather outside, or, inside the room, a change of smells; there had been in myself an alteration in age, the substitution of another person. The scent, in the frosty air, of the twigs of brushwood was like a fragment of the past, an invisible ice-floe detached from some bygone winter advancing into my room, often, moreover, striated with this or that perfume or gleam of light, as though with different years in which I found myself once more submerged, overwhelmed, even before I had identified them, by the exhilaration of hopes long since abandoned. The sun's rays fell upon my bed and passed through the transparent shell of my attenuated body, warmed me, made me glow like crystal. Then, like a famished convalescent already battenning upon all the dishes that are still forbidden him, I wondered whether marriage with Albertine might not spoil my life, not only by making me assume the too arduous task of devoting myself to another person, but by forcing me to live apart from myself because of her continual presence and depriving me for ever of the joys of solitude.

And not of these alone. Even if one asks of the day nothing but desires, there are some—those that are excited not by things but by people—whose character it is to be personal and particular. So that if, on rising from my bed, I went to the window and drew the curtain aside for a moment, it was not merely, as a pianist for a moment turns back the lid of his instrument, to ascertain whether, on the balcony and in the street, the sunlight was tuned to exactly the same pitch as in my memory, but also to catch a glimpse of some laundress carrying her linen-basket, a baker-woman in a blue apron, a dairymaid with a tucker and white linen sleeves, carrying the yoke from which her milk-churns are suspended, some haughty fair-haired girl escorted by her governess—an image, in short, which differences of outline, perhaps quantitatively insignificant, were enough to make as different from any other as, in a phrase of music, the difference between two notes, an image but for the vision of which I should have dispossessed my day of the goals which it might have to offer to my desires of happiness. But if the access of joy brought me by the spectacle of women whom it was impossible to imagine *a priori* made the street, the town, the world, more desirable, more deserving of exploration, it set me longing, for that very reason, to recover my health, to go out of doors and, without Albertine, to be a free man. How often, at the moment when the unknown woman who was to haunt my dreams passed beneath the window, sometimes on foot, sometimes at full speed in a motor-car, did I not suffer from the fact that my body could not follow my gaze which kept pace with her, and falling upon her as though shot from the embrasure of my window by an arquebus, arrest the flight of the face that held out for me the offer of a happiness which, thus cloistered, I should never know!

Of Albertine, on the other hand, I had nothing more to learn. Every day she seemed to me less pretty. Only the desire that she aroused in others, when, on learning of it, I began to suffer again and wanted to challenge their possession of her, raised her in my eyes to a lofty pinnacle. She was capable of causing me pain, but no longer any joy. Pain alone kept my wearisome attachment alive. As soon as it subsided, and with it the need to appease it, requiring all my attention like some agonising distraction, I felt how utterly meaningless she was to me, as I must be to her. I was miserable at the thought that this state of affairs should persist, and, at certain moments, I longed to hear of something terrible that she had done, something that would keep us estranged until I was cured, giving us a chance to make it up and to reconstitute in a different and more flexible form the chain that bound us.

In the meantime, I relied on countless events, on countless pleasures, to procure for her in my company the illusion of that happiness which I did not feel capable of giving her. I should have liked, as soon as I was cured, to set off for Venice, but how was I to manage it, if I married Albertine, I who was so jealous of her

that even in Paris whenever I decided to stir from my room it was to go out with her? Even when I stayed in the house all the afternoon, my thoughts accompanied her on her drive, traced a distant blue horizon, created round the centre that was myself a fluctuating zone of vague uncertainty. "How completely," I said to myself, "would Albertine spare me the anguish of separation if, in the course of one of these drives, seeing that I had ceased to talk of marriage, she decided not to come back, and went off to her aunt's without my having to say good-bye to her!" My heart, now that its scar had begun to heal, was beginning to detach itself from hers; I could, in my imagination, shift her, separate her from myself without pain. No doubt, failing myself, some other man would be her husband, and in her freedom she would indulge in those amorous adventures which filled me with horror. But the day was so fine, I was so certain that she would return in the evening, that even if the idea of possible misbehaviour did enter my mind, I could, by an exercise of free will, imprison it in a part of my brain in which it had no more importance than the vices of an imaginary person would have had in my real life; manipulating the supple hinges of my thought, with an energy which I felt, in my head, at once physical and mental, as it were a muscular movement and a spiritual impulse, I had broken away from the state of perpetual preoccupation in which I had hitherto been confined, and was beginning to move in a free atmosphere, in which the idea of sacrificing everything in order to prevent Albertine from marrying someone else and to put an obstacle in the way of her taste for women seemed as unreasonable in my own eyes as in those of a person who had never known her.

However, jealousy is one of those intermittent maladies the cause of which is capricious, arbitrary, always identical in the same patient, sometimes entirely different in another. There are asthma sufferers who can assuage their attacks only by opening the windows, inhaling the high winds, the pure air of mountains, others by taking refuge in the heart of the city, in a smoke-filled room. There are few jealous men whose jealousy does not allow certain derogations. One will consent to infidelity provided he is told of it, another provided it is concealed from him, wherein they are equally absurd, since if the latter is more literally deceived inasmuch as the truth is not disclosed to him, the other demands from that truth the aliment, the extension, the renewal of his sufferings.

What is more, these two inverse idiosyncrasies of jealousy often extend beyond words, whether they implore or reject confidences. We see jealous lovers who are jealous only of the men with whom their mistress has relations in their absence, but allow her to give herself to another man, if it is done with their permission, near at hand, and, if not actually before their eyes, at least under their roof. This case is not at all uncommon among elderly men who are in love with a young woman. They feel the difficulty of winning her favours, sometimes their inability to satisfy her, and, rather than be deceived, prefer to allow into the house, into an adjoining room, some man whom they consider incapable of giving her bad advice, but not incapable of giving her pleasure. With others it will be just the opposite; never allowing their mistress to go out by herself for a single minute in a town they know, keeping her in a state of veritable bondage, they allow her to go for a month to a place they do not know, where they cannot picture to themselves what she may be doing. With regard to Albertine, I had both sorts of soothing quirk. I should not have been jealous if she had enjoyed her pleasures in my vicinity, with my encouragement, completely under my surveillance, thereby relieving me of any fear of mendacity; nor should I have been jealous if she had moved to a place so unfamiliar and remote that I could not imagine, had no possibility of knowing, and no temptation to know, her manner of life. In either case, my uncertainty would have been eliminated by a knowledge or an ignorance equally complete.

The decline of day plunging me back by an act of memory into a cool atmosphere of long ago, I would inhale it with the same delight as Orpheus the subtle air, unknown upon this earth, of the Elysian Fields. But already the day was ending and I would be overcome by the desolation of evening. Looking mechanically at the clock to see how many hours must elapse before Albertine's return, I would see that I still had time to dress and go downstairs to ask my landlady, Mme de Guermantes, for particulars of various pretty articles of clothing which I wanted to give Albertine. Sometimes I would meet the Duchess in the courtyard, going out shopping, even if the weather was bad, in a close-fitting hat and furs. I knew quite well that to a number of intelligent people she was merely a lady like any other, the name Duchesse de Guermantes signifying nothing, now that there are no longer any duchies or principalities; but I had adopted a different point of view in my manner of enjoying people and places. This lady in furs braving the bad weather seemed to me to carry with her all the castles of the territories of which she was duchess, princess, viscountess, as the figures carved over a portal hold in their hands the cathedral they have built or the city they have defended. But my mind's eyes alone could discern these castles and these forests in the gloved hand of the lady in furs who was a cousin of the king. My bodily eyes distinguished in it only, on days when the sky was threatening, an umbrella with which the Duchess did not hesitate to arm herself. "It's much wiser—one can never be certain, I may find myself miles from home, with a cabman demanding a fare *beyond my means*." The words "too dear" and "beyond my means" kept recurring all the time in the Duchess's conversation, as did also: "I'm too poor"—without its being possible to decide whether she spoke thus because she thought it amusing to say that she was poor, being so rich, or because she thought it smart, being so aristocratic (that is to say affecting to be a peasant), not to attach to riches the importance that people give them who are merely rich and nothing else and who look down on the poor. Perhaps it was, rather, a habit contracted at a time in her life when, already rich, but not rich enough to satisfy her needs considering the expense of keeping up all those properties, she felt a certain financial embarrassment which she did not wish to appear to be concealing. The things about which we most often jest are generally, on the contrary, the things that worry us but that we do not wish to appear to be worried by, with perhaps a secret hope of the further advantage that the person to whom we are talking, hearing us treat the matter as a joke, will conclude that it is not true.

But on most evenings at this hour I could count on finding the Duchess at home, and I was glad of this, for it was more convenient for the purpose of discussing at length the particulars that Albertine required. And I would go down almost without thinking how extraordinary it was that I should be calling upon that mysterious Mme de Guermantes of my boyhood simply in order to make use of her for a practical purpose, as one makes use of the telephone, a supernatural instrument before whose miracles we used to stand amazed, and which we now employ without giving it a thought, to summon our tailor or to order an ice cream.

The accessories of costume gave Albertine enormous pleasure. I could not resist giving her some new trifle every day. And whenever she had spoken to me rapturously of a scarf, a stole, a sunshade which, from the window or as they passed one another in the courtyard, her eyes, that so quickly distinguished anything connected with elegance of dress, had seen round the throat, over the shoulders, or in the hand of Mme de Guermantes, knowing how the girl's naturally fastidious taste (refined still further by the lessons in elegance which Elstir's conversation had been to her) would by no means be satisfied by any mere substitute, even of a pretty thing, such as fills its place in the eyes of the common herd but differs from it entirely, I would go in secret to ask the Duchess to explain to me where, how, from what model the article had been created that had taken Albertine's fancy, how I should set about obtaining one exactly similar, in what lay the maker's secret, the charm (what Albertine called the "chic," the "style") of its manner and—the beauty of the material having also its importance—the name and quality of the fabrics that I was to insist upon their using.

When I had mentioned to Albertine, on our return from Balbec, that the Duchesse de Guermantes lived opposite us, in the same building, she had assumed, on hearing the proud title and great name, that more than indifferent, that hostile, contemptuous air which is the sign of an impotent desire in proud and passionate natures. Splendid though Albertine's might be, the qualities that lay buried in it could develop only amid those trammels which are our personal tastes, or that bereavement of those of our tastes that we have been obliged to forgo, as in Albertine's case snobbery: in other words, what are called aversions. Albertine's aversion for society people occupied very little room in her nature, and appealed to me as an aspect of the revolutionary spirit—that is to say an embittered love for the nobility—engraved upon the obverse side of the French character to that which displays the aristocratic style of Mme de Guermantes. Albertine would perhaps not have given a thought to this aristocratic style, in view of the impossibility of achieving it, but remembering that Elstir had spoken to her of the Duchess as the best-dressed woman in Paris, her republican contempt for a duchess gave way to a keen interest in a fashionable woman. She was always asking me to tell her about Mme de Guermantes, and was glad that I should call on the Duchess to obtain advice about her own clothes. No doubt I could have got this from Mme Swann, and indeed I did once write to her with this intention. But Mme de Guermantes seemed to me to carry the art of dressing even further. If, on going down for a moment to see her, after making sure that she had not gone out and leaving word that I was to be warned as soon as Albertine returned, I found the Duchess swathed in the mist of a grey crepe de Chine gown, I accepted this aspect of her which I felt to be due to complex causes and to be quite unalterable, and steeped myself in the atmosphere which it exhaled, like that of certain late afternoons cushioned in pearly grey by a vaporous fog; if, on the other hand, her indoor gown was Chinese with red and yellow flames, I gazed at it as at a glowing sunset; these garmerits were not a casual decoration alterable at will, but a given, poetical reality like that of the weather, or the light peculiar to a certain hour of the day.

Of all the outdoor and indoor gowns that Mme de Guermantes wore, those which seemed most to respond to a specific intention, to be endowed with a special significance, were the garments made by Fortuny from old Venetian models. Is it their historical character, or is it rather the fact that each one of them is unique, that gives them so special a significance that the pose of the woman who is wearing one while she waits for you to appear or while she talks to you assumes an exceptional importance, as though the costume had been the fruit of a long deliberation and your conversation was somehow detached from everyday life like a scene in a novel? In the novels of Balzac, we see his heroines put on this or that dress on purpose when they are expecting some particular visitor. The dresses of today have less character, always excepting the creations of Fortuny. There is no room for vagueness in the novelist's description, since the dress does really exist, its smallest details are as naturally preordained as those of a work of art. Before putting on one or another of them, the woman has had to make a choice between two garments that are not more or less alike but each one profoundly individual, and identifiable by name.

But the dress did not prevent me from thinking of the woman. Indeed, Mme de Guermantes seemed to me at this time more attractive than in the days when I was still in love with her. Expecting less of her (I no longer went to visit her for her own sake), it was almost with the relaxed negligence one exhibits when alone, with my feet on the fender, that I listened to her as though I were reading a book written in the language of long ago. I was sufficiently detached to enjoy in what she said that pure charm of the French language which we no longer find either in the speech or in the writing of the present day. I listened to her conversation as to a folk song deliciously and purely French; I understood why I should have heard her deriding Maeterlinck (whom in fact she now admired, out of feminine weak-mindedness, influenced by those literary fashions whose rays spread slowly), as I understood why Mérimée had derided Baudelaire, Stendhal, Balzac, Paul-Louis Courier, Victor Hugo, Meilhac, Mallarmé. I was well aware that the critic had a far more restricted outlook than his victim, but also a purer vocabulary. That of Mme de Guermantes, almost as much as that of Saint-Loup's mother, was enchantingly pure. It is not in the bloodless pastiches of the writers of today who say *au fait* (for "in reality"), *singulièrement* (for "in particular"), *étonné* (for "struck with amazement"), and the like, that we recapture the old speech and the true pronunciation of words, but in conversing with a Mme de Guermantes or a Françoise. I had learned from the latter, when I was five years old, that one did not say "the Tarn" but

“the Tar;” not “Beam” but “Bear.” The effect of which was that at twenty, when I began to go into society, I had no need to be taught there that one ought not to say, like Mme Bontemps, “Madame de Beam.”

It would not be true to say that the Duchess was unaware of this earthy and quasi-peasant quality that survived in her, or was entirely innocent of affectation in displaying it. But, on her part, it was not so much the false simplicity of a great lady aping the countrywoman, or the pride of a duchess bent upon snubbing the rich ladies who express contempt for the peasants whom they do not know, as the quasi-artistic preference of a woman who knows the charm of what she possesses and is not going to spoil it with a coat of modern varnish. In the same way, everybody used to know a Norman innkeeper, landlord of the “William the Conqueror” at Dives, who had carefully refrained—a rare thing indeed—from giving his hostelry the modern comforts of a hotel, and, albeit a millionaire, retained the speech and the smock of a Norman peasant and allowed you to enter his kitchen and watch him prepare with his own hands, as in a farmhouse, a dinner which was nevertheless infinitely better, and even more expensive, than in the most luxurious hotel.

All the local sap that survives in the old noble families is not enough; it must be embodied in a person of sufficient intelligence not to despise it, not to obliterate it beneath a society veneer. Mme de Guermantes, unfortunately clever and Parisian and, when I knew her, retaining nothing of her native soil but its accent, had at least, when she wished to describe her life as a girl, contrived for her speech one of those compromises (between what would have seemed too spontaneously provincial on the one hand or artificially literary on the other) which form the attraction of George Sand’s *La Petite Fadette* or of certain legends related by Chateaubriand in his *Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe*. My chief pleasure was in hearing her tell some anecdote which brought peasants into the picture with herself. The historic names, the old customs, gave to these blendings of the castle with the village a distinctly attractive savour. Having stayed in contact with the lands where it was sovereign, a certain type of aristocracy remains regional, so that the simplest utterance unfolds under our eyes a whole map of France, historical and geographical.

If there was no affectation, no deliberate effort to fabricate a special language, then this style of pronunciation was a regular museum of French history displayed in conversation. “My great-uncle Fitt-jam” was not at all surprising, for we know that the Fitz-James family are proud to boast that they are French nobles and do not like to hear their name pronounced in the English fashion. One must, however, marvel at the touching docility of the people who had previously supposed themselves obliged to pronounce certain names phonetically, and who, all of a sudden, after hearing the Duchesse de Guermantes pronounce them otherwise, adopted a pronunciation which they could never have guessed. Thus the Duchess, who had had a great-grandfather attending on the Comte de Chambord, liked to tease her husband for having turned Orleanist by proclaiming: “We old Frochedorf people ...” The visitor, who had always imagined that he was correct in saying “Frohsdorf,” at once turned his coat, and ever afterwards might be heard saying “Frochedorf.”

On one occasion when I asked Mme de Guermantes who a young blood was whom she had introduced to me as her nephew but whose name I had failed to catch, I was none the wiser when from the back of her throat the Duchess uttered in a very loud but quite inarticulate voice: “C’est l’ ... i Eon, frère à Robert. He claims to have the same shape of skull as the ancient Welsh.” Then I realised that she had said: “C’est le petit Léon,” and that this was the Prince de Leon, who was indeed Robert de Saint-Loup’s brother-in-law. “I know nothing about his skull,” she went on, “but the way he dresses, and I must say he does dress very well, is not at all in the style of those parts. Once when I was staying at Josselin, with the Rohans, we all went over to a place of pilgrimage to which peasants had come from pretty well every part of Brittany. A great hulking villager from Leon stood gaping at Robert’s brother-in-law in his beige breeches. ‘What are you staring at me like that for?’ said Leon, ‘I bet you don’t know who I am.’ The peasant admitted as much. ‘Well,’ said Leon, ‘I’m your Prince.’ ‘Oh!’ said the peasant, taking off his cap and apologising. ‘I thought you were an *Anglaise*.’”

And if, seizing this point of departure, I led Mme de Guermantes on to talk about the Rohans (with whom her own family had frequently intermarried), her conversation would become impregnated with a hint of the melancholy charm of the Breton “pardons,” the calvary processions, and (as that true poet Pampille would say) with “the pungent flavour of buckwheat pancakes cooked over a gorse fire.”

Of the Marquis du Lau (whose sad end is familiar—when, himself deaf, he used to be taken to call on Mme H—who was blind), she would recall the less tragic years when, after the day’s sport, at Guermantes, he would change into slippers before having tea with the King of England, to whom he did not regard himself as inferior, and with whom, as we see, he did not stand on ceremony. She described all this so picturesquely that she seemed to invest him with the plumed musketeer hat of the somewhat vainglorious gentlemen of Périgord.

But even in the mere designation of people Mme de Guermantes, having remained herself a countrywoman—which was her great strength—would take care to distinguish between different provinces, and place people within them, as a Parisian-born woman could never have done, and those simple names, Anjou, Poitou, Périgord, re-created landscapes in her conversation.

To revert to the pronunciation and vocabulary of Mme de Guermantes, it is in this aspect that the nobility shows itself truly conservative, with everything that the word implies in the sense of being at once slightly puerile, slightly dangerous, stubborn in its resistance to change, but at the same time diverting to an artist. I wanted to know the original spelling of the name Jean. I learned it when I received a letter from a nephew of Mme de Villeparisis who signs himself—as he was christened, as he figures in the Almanach de Gotha—Jehan de Villeparisis, with the same handsome, superfluous, heraldic *h* that we admire, illuminated in vermilion or ultramarine, in a Book of Hours or in a stained-glass window.

Unfortunately, I never had time to prolong these visits indefinitely, for I was anxious, as far as possible, not to return home after Albertine. But it was only in dribbles that I was able to obtain from Mme de Guermantes that information as to her clothes which was of use in helping me to order costumes similar in style, so far as it was possible for a young girl to wear them, for Albertine.

"For instance, Madame, that evening when you dined with Mme de Saint-Euverte, and then went on to the Princesse de Guermantes, you had a dress that was all red, with red shoes, you were marvellous, you reminded me of a sort of great blood-red blossom, a glittering ruby—now, what was that dress called? Is it the sort of thing that a young girl can wear?"

The Duchess, imparting to her tired features the radiant expression that the Princesse des Laumes used to wear when Swann paid her compliments years ago, glanced quizzically and delightedly, with tears of merriment in her eyes, at M. de Bréauté who was always there at that hour and who sat beaming behind his monocle with an indulgent smile for this intellectual's rigmarole because of the physical excitement of youth which seemed to him to underlie it. The Duchess appeared to be saying: "What's the matter with him? He must be mad." Then turning to me with a winning expression: "I wasn't aware that I looked like a glittering ruby or a blood-red blossom, but I do indeed remember that I had on a red dress: it was red satin, which was being worn that season. Yes, a young girl can wear that sort of thing at a pinch, but you told me that your friend never went out in the evening. It's a full evening dress, not a thing that she can put on to pay calls."

What is extraordinary is that of the evening in question, which after all was not so very remote, Mme de Guermantes remembered nothing but what she had been wearing, and had forgotten a certain incident which nevertheless, as we shall see presently, ought to have mattered to her greatly. It seems that among men and women of action (and society people are men and women of action on a minute, a microscopic scale, but action none the less), the mind, overtaxed by the need to attend to what is going to happen in an hour's time, commits very little to memory. As often as not, for instance, it was not with the object of deliberately misleading and making himself appear innocent of an error of judgment that M. de Norpois, when you reminded him of the prophecies he had uttered with regard to an alliance with Germany of which nothing had ever come, would say: "You must be mistaken, I have no recollection of it whatever, it isn't like me, for in that sort of conversation I am always most laconic, and I would never have predicted the success of one of those *coups d'éclat* which are often nothing more than *coups de tête* and habitually degenerate into *coups de force*. It is beyond question that in the remote future a Franco-German *rapprochement* might come into being and would be highly profitable to both countries; nor would France have the worse of the bargain, I dare say; but I have never spoken of it because the time is not yet ripe, and if you wish to know my opinion, in asking our late enemies to join with us in solemn wedlock, I consider that we would be courting a grave setback and would receive some unpleasant shocks." In saying this M. de Norpois was not being untruthful; he had simply forgotten. We quickly forget what we have not deeply considered, what has been dictated to us by the spirit of imitation, by the passions of the day. These change, and with them our memory undergoes alteration. Even more than diplomats, politicians are unable to remember the point of view which they adopted at a certain moment, and some of their palinodes are due less to an excess of ambition than to a deficiency of memory. As for society people, they remember very little.

Mme de Guermantes assured me that, at the party to which she had gone in a red dress, she did not remember Mme de Chaussepierre's being present, and that I must be mistaken. And yet, heaven knows, the Chaussepierres had been present enough in the minds of both the Duke and the Duchess since then. For the following reason. M. de Guermantes had been the senior vice-president of the Jockey Club when the president died. Certain members of the club who were not popular in society and whose sole pleasure was to blackball the men who did not invite them to their houses launched a campaign against the Duc de Guermantes who, certain of being elected, and relatively indifferent to the presidency which was a small matter for a man in his social position, paid no attention. It was urged against him that the Duchess was a Dreyfusard (the Dreyfus case was long since over, but twenty years later people would still talk about it, and so far only two years had elapsed) and entertained the Rothschilds, that too much consideration had been shown of late to certain great international potentates like the Duc de Guermantes, who was half German. The campaign found sympathetic ears, clubs being always jealous of men who are in the public eye, and detesting big fortunes. Chaussepierre's was by no means meagre, but nobody could be offended by it; he spent hardly a sou, the couple lived in a modest apartment, the wife went about dressed in black wool. A passionate music-lover, she did indeed give little afternoon parties to which many more singers were invited than to the Guermantes. But no one talked about these parties, which occurred without any refreshments, often in the absence of the husband, in the obscurity of the Rue de la Chaise. At the Opera, Mme de Chaussepierre passed unnoticed, always among people whose names recalled the most "die-hard" element of the intimate circle of Charles X, but who were retiring and unsocial. On the day of the election, to the general surprise, obscurity triumphed over glitter: Chaussepierre, the second vice-president, was elected president of the Jockey, and the Duc de Guermantes was left sitting—that is to say, in the senior vice-president's chair. Of course, being president of the Jockey means little or nothing to princes of the highest rank such as the Guermantes. But not to be president when it is your turn, to be passed over in favour of a Chaussepierre, whose wife's greeting Oriane not only had refused to acknowledge two years earlier but had gone so far as to show offence at being greeted by such an obscure scarecrow, this the Duke did find hard to swallow. He pretended to be above such setbacks, asserting incidentally that it was his long-standing friendship with Swann that was at the root of it. Actually, his anger never cooled.

One curious thing was that nobody had ever before heard the Duc de Guermantes make use of the quite commonplace expression "well and truly;" but ever since the Jockey Club election, whenever anybody referred to the Dreyfus case, out would come "well and truly." "Dreyfus case, Dreyfus case, it's easy to say, and it's a misuse of the term. It's not a question of religion, it's well and truly political." Five years might go by without your hearing him say "well and truly" again, if during that time nobody mentioned the Dreyfus case, but if, at the end of five years, the name Dreyfus cropped up, "well and truly" would at once follow automatically. The Duke could not in any case bear to hear any mention of the case, "which has been responsible," he would say, "for so many misfortunes," although he was really conscious of one only: his failure to become president of the Jockey.

And so on the afternoon in question—the afternoon on which I reminded Mme de Guermantes of the red dress she had worn at her cousin's party—M. de Bréauté was none too well received when, for want of anything better to say, by an association of ideas which remained obscure and which he did not illuminate, he began, twisting his tongue about between his pursed lips: "Talking of the Dreyfus case ..." (why the Dreyfus case?—we were talking simply of a red dress, and certainly poor Bréauté, whose only desire was to make himself agreeable, can have had no malicious intention, but the mere name of Dreyfus made the Duc de Guermantes knit his Jupiterian brows) "... I was told of a rather nice remark, damned clever, 'pon my word, that was made by our friend Cartier" (the reader may care to know that this Cartier, Mme de Villefranche's brother, had not the slightest connexion with the jeweller of that name), "not that I'm in the least surprised, for he's got wit enough and to spare."

"Oh!" broke in Oriane, "he can spare me his wit. I can't tell you how much your friend Cartier has always bored me, and I've never been able to understand the boundless charm that Charles de La Trémoille and his wife seem to find in the creature, for I meet him there every time I go to their house."

"My dear Dutt-yess," replied Bréauté, who had difficulty in pronouncing *ch*, "I think you're a bit hard on Cartier. It's true that he has perhaps made himself rather excessively at home at the La Trémoilles', but after all he does provide Tyarles with a sort of—what shall I say? I say?—a sort of *fidus Achates*, and that has become a very rare bird indeed in these days. Anyhow, what he's supposed to have said is that if M. Zola had gone out of his way to stand his trial and to be convicted, it was in order to enjoy the only sensation he had never yet tried, that of being in prison."

"And so he ran away before they could arrest him," Oriane broke in. "Your story doesn't hold water. Besides, even if it was plausible, I find the remark absolutely idiotic. If that's what you call witty!"

"Good grate-ious, my dear Oriane," replied Bréauté who, finding himself contradicted, was beginning to lose confidence, "it's not my remark, I'm telling you it as it was told to me, take it for what it's worth. Anyhow, it earned M. Cartier a proper dressing-down from that excellent fellow La Trémoille who, quite rightly, doesn't like people to discuss what one might call, so to speak, current events in his drawing-room, and was all the more annoyed because Mme Alphonse Rothschild was present. Cartier was given a positive roasting by La Trémoille."

"Of course," said the Duke, in the worst of tempers, "the Alphonse Rothschilds, even if they have the tact never to speak of that abominable affair, are Dreyfusards at heart, like all the Jews. Indeed that is an argument *ad hominem*" (the Duke was a trifle vague in his use of the expression *ad hominem*) "which is not sufficiently exploited to prove the dishonesty of the Jews. If a Frenchman robs or murders somebody, I don't consider myself bound, because he's a Frenchman like myself, to find him innocent. But the Jews will never admit that one of their co-citizens is a traitor, although they know it perfectly well, and never think of the terrible repercussions" (the Duke was thinking, naturally, of that accursed election of Chaussepierre) "which the crime of one of their people can bring even to ... Come, Oriane, you're not going to pretend that it isn't damning to the Jews that they all support a traitor. You're not going to tell me that it isn't because they're Jews."

"I'm afraid I am," retorted Oriane (feeling, together with a trace of irritation, a certain desire to hold her own against Jupiter Tonans and also to put "intelligence" above the Dreyfus case). "Perhaps it's just because they are Jews and know themselves that they realise that a person can be a Jew and not necessarily a traitor and anti-French, as M. Drumont seems to maintain. Certainly, if he'd been a Christian, the Jews wouldn't have taken any interest in him, but they did so because they knew quite well that if he hadn't been a Jew people wouldn't have been so ready to think him a traitor *a priori*, as my nephew Robert would say."

"Women never understand a thing about politics," exclaimed the Duke, fastening his gaze upon the Duchess. "That shocking crime is not simply a Jewish cause, but *well and truly* an affair of vast national importance which may bring the most appalling consequences for France, which ought to have driven out all the Jews, whereas I'm sorry to say that the sanctions taken up to the present have been directed (in an ignoble fashion, which should be overruled) not against them but against the most eminent of their adversaries, against men of the highest rank who have been cast aside to the ruin of our unhappy country."

I felt that the conversation had taken a wrong turning and reverted hurriedly to the topic of clothes.

"Do you remember, Madame," I said, "the first time that you were friendly to me ..."

"The first time that I was friendly to him," she repeated, turning with a smile to M. de Bréauté, the tip of whose nose grew more pointed, and his smile more tender out of politeness to Mme de Guermantes, while his voice, like a knife on the grindstone, emitted a few vague and rusty sounds.

"... You were wearing a yellow dress with big black flowers."

"But, my dear boy, that's the same thing, those are evening dresses."

"And your hat with the cornflowers that I liked so much! Still, those are all things of the past. I should like to order for the girl I mentioned to you a fur coat like the one you had on yesterday morning. Would it be

possible for me to see it?"

"Of course; Hannibal has to be going in a moment. You shall come to my room and my maid will show you everything. Only, my dear boy, though I shall be delighted to lend you anything you like, I must warn you that if you have things from Callot's or Doucet's or Paquin's copied by some small dressmaker, the result is never the same."

"But I never dreamed of going to a small dressmaker. I know quite well it wouldn't be the same thing, but I should be interested to hear you explain why."

"You know quite well I can never explain anything, I'm a perfect fool, I talk like a peasant. It's a question of handiwork, of style; as far as furs go, I can at least give you a line to my furrier, so that he shan't rob you. But you realise that even then it will cost you eight or nine thousand francs."

"And that indoor gown that you were wearing the other evening, with such a curious smell, dark, fluffy, speckled, streaked with gold like a butterfly's wing?"

"Ah! that's one of Fortuny's. Your young lady can quite well wear that in the house. I have heaps of them; you shall see them presently, in fact I can give you one or two if you like. But I should like you to see one that my cousin Talleyrand has. I must write to her for the loan of it."

"But you had such charming shoes as well. Were they Fortuny too?"

"No, I know the ones you mean, they're made of some gold kid we came across in London, when I was shopping with Consuelo Manchester. It was amazing. I could never make out how they did it, it was just like a golden skin, simply that, with a tiny diamond in front. The poor Duchess of Manchester is dead, but if it's any help to you I can write and ask Lady Warwick or the Duchess of Marlborough to try and get me some more. I wonder, now, if I haven't a piece of the stuff left. You might be able to have a pair made here. I shall look for it this evening, and let you know."

Since I endeavoured as far as possible to leave the Duchess before Albertine had returned, it often happened, because of the hour, that I met in the courtyard as I came away from her door M. de Charlus and Morel on their way to have tea at ... Jupien's, a supreme treat for the Baron! I did not encounter them every day but they went there every day. It may, incidentally, be observed that the regularity of a habit is usually in direct proportion to its absurdity. Really striking things we do as a rule only by fits and starts. But senseless lives, of a kind in which a crackpot deprives himself of all pleasure and inflicts the greatest discomforts upon himself, are those that change least. Every ten years, if we had the curiosity to inquire, we should find the poor wretch still asleep at the hours when he might be living his life, going out at the hours when there is nothing to do but get oneself murdered in the streets, sipping iced drinks when he is hot, still trying desperately to cure a cold. A slight burst of energy, for a single day, would be sufficient to change these habits for good and all. But the fact is that lives of this sort are on the whole peculiar to people who are incapable of energy. Vices are another aspect of these monotonous existences which the exercise of will-power would suffice to render less painful. Both aspects were to be observed simultaneously when M. de Charlus came every day with Morel to have tea at Jupien's. A single outburst had marred this daily custom. The tailor's niece having said one day to Morel: "That's all right then, come tomorrow and I'll stand you tea," the Baron had quite justifiably considered this expression very vulgar on the lips of a person whom he regarded as almost a prospective daughter-in-law, but as he enjoyed being offensive and became intoxicated by his own indignation, instead of his simply asking Morel to give her a lesson in refinement, the whole of their homeward walk was a succession of violent scenes. In the most rude and arrogant tone the Baron said: "So your 'touch' which, I can see, is not necessarily allied to 'tact,' has hindered the normal development of your sense of smell, since you could allow that fetid expression 'stand you tea'—at fifteen centimes, I suppose—to waft its stench of sewage to my regal nostrils? When you have come to the end of a violin solo, have you ever in my house been rewarded with a fart, instead of frenzied applause or a silence more eloquent still since it is due to fear of being unable to restrain, not what your young woman lavishes upon us, but the sob that you have brought to my lips?"

When a public official has had similar reproaches heaped upon him by his chief, he is invariably sacked next day. Nothing, on the contrary, could have been more painful to M. de Charlus than to dismiss Morel, and, fearing indeed that he had gone a little too far, he began to sing the girl's praises in the minutest detail, tastefully expressed and unconsciously sprinkled with impertinent observations. "She is charming; as you are a musician, I suppose that she seduced you by her voice, which is very beautiful in the high notes, where she seems to await the accompaniment of your B sharp. Her lower register appeals to me less, and that must bear some relation to the triple rise of her strange and slender throat, which when it seems to have come to an end begins again; but these are trivial details, it is her silhouette that I admire. And as she is a dressmaker and must be handy with her scissors, you must get her to give me a pretty paper cut-out of herself."

Charlie had paid but little attention to this eulogy, the charms which it extolled in his betrothed having completely escaped his notice. But he said, in reply to M. de Charlus: "That's all right, my boy, I shall tell her off properly, and she won't talk like that again." If Morel addressed M. de Charlus thus as his "boy," it was not that the handsome violinist was unaware that his own years numbered barely a third of the Baron's. Nor did he use the expression as Jupien would have done, but with that simplicity which in certain relations postulates that a suppression of the difference in age has tacitly preceded tenderness (a feigned tenderness in Morel's case, in others a sincere tenderness). Thus, at about this time M. de Charlus received a letter worded as follows: "My dear Palamède, when am I going to see you again? I miss you terribly and think of you often ... etc. Ever yours, PIERRE." M. de Charlus racked his brains to discover which of his relatives it could be who took the liberty of addressing him so familiarly, and must consequently know him intimately, although he

failed to recognise the handwriting. All the princes to whom the Almanach de Gotha accords a few lines passed in procession through his mind for a few days. And then, all of a sudden, an address written on the back of the letter enlightened him: the writer was the doorman at a gambling club to which M. de Charlus sometimes went. This doorman had not felt that he was being discourteous in writing in this tone to M. de Charlus, for whom on the contrary he felt the deepest respect. But he felt that it would be uncivil not to address by his Christian name a gentleman who had kissed one several times, and thereby—he naively imagined—bestowed his affection on one. M. de Charlus was secretly delighted by this familiarity. He even brought M. de Vaugoubert away from an afternoon party in order to show him the letter. And yet, heaven knows M. de Charlus did not care to go about with M. de Vaugoubert. For the latter, his monocle stuck in his eye, would keep looking round at every passing youth. What was worse, shedding all restraint when he was with M. de Charlus, he adopted a form of speech which the Baron detested. He referred to everything male in the feminine, and, being intensely stupid, imagined this pleasantry to be extremely witty, and was continually in fits of laughter. As at the same time he attached enormous importance to his position in the diplomatic service, these deplorable sniggering exhibitions in the street were constantly interrupted by sudden fits of terror at the simultaneous appearance of some society person or, worse still, of some civil servant. “That little telegraph messenger,” he said, nudging the scowling Baron with his elbow, “I used to know her, but she’s turned respectable, the wretch! Oh, that messenger from the Galeries Lafayette, what a dream! Good God, there’s the head of the Commercial Department. I hope he didn’t notice anything. He’s quite capable of mentioning it to the Minister, who would put me on the retired list, all the more so because it appears he’s one himself.” M. de Charlus was speechless with rage. At length, to bring this infuriating walk to an end, he decided to produce the letter and give it to the Ambassador to read, but warned him to be discreet, for he liked to pretend that Charlie was jealous, in order to be able to persuade people that he was loving. “And,” he added with a priceless expression of benevolence, “we ought always to try to cause as little pain as possible.”

Before we come back to Jupien’s shop, the author would like to say how grieved he would be if the reader were to be offended by his portrayal of such weird characters. On the one hand (and this is the less important aspect of the matter), it may be felt that the aristocracy is, in these pages, disproportionately accused of degeneracy in comparison with the other classes of society. Were this true, it would be in no way surprising. The oldest families end by displaying, in a red and bulbous nose, or a misshapen chin, characteristic signs in which everyone recognises “blood.” But among these persistent and increasingly pronounced features, there are others that are not visible, to wit tendencies and tastes. It would be a more serious objection, were there any foundation for it, to say that all this is alien to us, and that we ought to extract poetry from the truth that is close at hand. Art extracted from the most familiar reality does indeed exist and its domain is perhaps the largest of any. But it is none the less true that considerable interest, not to say beauty, may be found in actions inspired by a cast of mind so remote from anything we feel, from anything we believe, that they remain incomprehensible to us, displaying themselves before our eyes like a spectacle without rhyme or reason. What could be more poetic than Xerxes, son of Darius, ordering the sea to be scourged with rods for having engulfed his fleet?

It is certain that Morel, relying on the influence which his personal attractions gave him over the girl, communicated to her, as coming from himself, the Baron’s criticism, for the expression “stand you tea” disappeared as completely from the tailor’s shop as, from a salon, some intimate acquaintance who used to call daily but with whom, for one reason or another, the hostess has quarrelled or whom she wants to keep out of sight and meets only outside. M. de Charlus was pleased by the disappearance of “stand you tea.” He saw in it a proof of his own ascendancy over Morel and the removal of the one little blemish from the girl’s perfection. In short, like everyone of his kind, while genuinely fond of Morel and of the girl who was all but engaged to him, and an ardent advocate of their marriage, he thoroughly enjoyed his power to create, as and when he pleased, more or less inoffensive little scenes, outside and above which he himself remained as Olympian as his brother would have done. Morel had told M. de Charlus that he loved Jupien’s niece and wished to marry her, and the Baron enjoyed accompanying his young friend on visits in which he played the part of father-in-law to be, indulgent and discreet. Nothing pleased him better.

My personal opinion is that “stand you tea” had originated with Morel himself, and that in the blindness of her love the young seamstress had adopted an expression from her beloved which jarred horribly with her own pretty way of speaking. This way of speaking, the charming manners that went with it, and the patronage of M. de Charlus brought it about that many customers for whom she had worked received her as a friend, invited her to dinner, and introduced her to their friends, though the girl accepted their invitations only with the Baron’s permission and on the evenings that suited him. “A young seamstress received in society?” the reader will exclaim, “how improbable!” If one thinks about it, it was no less improbable that at one time Albertine should have come to see me at midnight, and that she should now be living with me. And yet this might perhaps have been improbable of anyone else, but not of Albertine, fatherless and motherless, leading so free a life that at first I had taken her, at Balbec, for the mistress of a racing cyclist, a girl whose nearest of kin was Mme Bontemps who in the old days, at Mme Swann’s, had admired in her niece only her bad manners and who now closed her eyes to anything that might rid her of the girl through a wealthy marriage from which a little of the wealth would trickle into the aunt’s pocket (in the highest society, very wellborn and very penurious mothers, having succeeded in finding rich brides for their sons, allow themselves to be kept by the young couples, and accept presents of furs, cars and money from daughters-in-law whom they do not like but whom they introduce to their friends).



The day may come when dressmakers will move in society—nor should I find it at all shocking. Jupien's niece, being an exception, cannot yet be regarded as a portent, for one swallow does not make a summer. At all events, if the very modest advancement of Jupien's niece did scandalise some people, Morel was not among them, for on certain points his stupidity was so intense that not only did he label "rather a fool" this girl who was a thousand times cleverer than himself, and foolish perhaps only in loving him, but he actually took to be adventuresses, dressmakers' assistants in disguise playing at being ladies, the highly reputable ladies who invited her to their houses and whose invitations she accepted without a trace of vanity. Naturally these were not Guermantes, or even people who knew the Guermantes, but rich and elegant middle-class women broad-minded enough to feel that it is no disgrace to invite a dressmaker to your house and at the same time snobbish enough to derive some satisfaction from patronising a girl whom His Highness the Baron de Charlus was in the habit, in all propriety of course, of visiting daily.

Nothing could have pleased the Baron more than the idea of this marriage, for he felt that in this way Morel would not be taken from him. It appears that Jupien's niece had been, when scarcely more than a child, "in trouble." And M. de Charlus, while he sang her praises to Morel, would not have been averse to confiding this secret to his friend—who would have been furious—and thus sowing the seeds of discord. For M. de Charlus, although terribly spiteful, resembled a great many kind people who sing the praises of some man or woman to prove their own kindness, but would avoid like poison the soothing words, so rarely uttered, that would be capable of putting an end to strife. Notwithstanding this, the Baron refrained from making any insinuation, for two reasons. "If I tell him," he said to himself, "that his lady-love is not spotless, his vanity will be hurt and he will be angry with me. Besides, how am I to know that he is not in love with her? If I say nothing, this flash in the pan will soon subside, I shall be able to control their relations as I choose, and he will love her only to the extent that I shall allow. If I tell him of his betrothed's past transgression, who knows whether my Charlie may not still be sufficiently enamoured of her to become jealous? Then I shall by my own doing be converting a harmless and easily controlled flirtation into a serious passion, which is a difficult thing to manage." For these reasons, M. de Charlus preserved a silence which had only the outward appearance of discretion, but was in another respect meritorious, since it is almost impossible for men of his sort to hold their tongues.

Moreover, the girl herself was delightful, and M. de Charlus, who found that she satisfied all the aesthetic interest that he was capable of taking in women, would have liked to have hundreds of photographs of her. Not such a fool as Morel, he was delighted to hear the names of the respectable ladies who invited her to their houses, and whom his social instinct was able to place, but he took good care (wishing to retain his hold over him) not to say so to Charlie, who, a complete oaf in this respect, continued to believe that, apart from the "violin class" and the Verdurins, there existed only the Guermantes and the few almost royal houses enumerated by the Baron, all the rest being but "dregs" or "scum." Charlie interpreted these expressions of M. de Charlus literally.

What, you will say, M. de Charlus, awaited in vain every day of the year by so many ambassadors and duchesses, not dining with the Prince de Croy because one has to give precedence to the latter, M. de Charlus spent all the time that he denied to these great lords and ladies with a tailor's niece! In the first place—the paramount reason—Morel was there. But even if he had not been there, I see nothing improbable in it, or else you are judging things as one of Aimé's minions would have done. Few except waiters believe that an excessively rich man always wears dazzling new clothes and a supremely smart gentleman gives dinner parties for sixty and travels everywhere by car. They deceive themselves. Very often an excessively rich man wears constantly the same jacket; while a supremely smart gentleman is one who in a restaurant hobnobs only with the staff and, on returning home, plays cards with his valet. This does not prevent him from refusing to give precedence to Prince Murat.

Among the reasons which made M. de Charlus look forward to the marriage of the young couple was this, that Jupien's niece would then be in some sense an extension of Morel's personality, and so of the Baron's power over him and knowledge of him. It would never even have occurred to him to feel the slightest scruple about "betraying," in the conjugal sense, the violinist's future wife. But to have a "young couple" to guide, to feel himself the redoubtable and all-powerful protector of Morel's wife, who, looking upon the Baron as a god, would thereby prove that Morel had inculcated this idea into her, and would thus contain in herself something of Morel—all this would add a new variety to the form of M. de Charlus's domination and bring to light in his "creature," Morel, a creature the more—the husband—that is to say would give the Baron something different, new, curious, to love in him. Perhaps indeed this domination would be stronger now than it had ever been. For whereas Morel by himself, naked so to speak, often resisted the Baron whom he felt certain of winning back, once he was married he would soon fear for his household, his bed and board, his future, would offer to M. de Charlus's wishes a wider target, an easier hold. All this, and even at a pinch, on evenings when he was bored, the prospect of stirring up trouble between husband and wife (the Baron had always been fond of battle-pictures) was pleasing to him. Less pleasing, however, than the thought of the state of dependence upon himself in which the young people would live. M. de Charlus's love for Morel acquired a delicious novelty when he said to himself: "His wife too will be mine just as much as he is; they will always behave in such a way as not to annoy me, they will obey my every whim, and thus she will be a sign (hitherto unknown to me) of what I had almost forgotten, what is so very dear to my heart—that to all the world, to everyone who sees that I protect and house them, to myself, Morel is mine." This testimony, in the eyes of the world and in his own, pleased M. de Charlus more than anything. For the possession of what we love is an even greater joy than love itself. Very often, those who conceal this possession from the world do so only

from the fear that the beloved object may be taken from them. And their happiness is diminished by this prudent reticence.

The reader may remember that Morel had once told the Baron that his great ambition was to seduce some young girl, and this one in particular, and that to succeed in his enterprise he would promise to marry her, but, the rape accomplished, would “buzz off;” but what with the declarations of love for Jupien’s niece which Morel had poured out to him, M. de Charlus had forgotten this confession. What was more, Morel had quite possibly forgotten it himself. There was perhaps a real gap between Morel’s nature—as he had cynically admitted, perhaps even artfully exaggerated it—and the moment at which it would regain control of him. As he became better acquainted with the girl, she had appealed to him, he grew fond of her; he knew himself so little that he even perhaps imagined that he was in love with her, for ever. True, his initial desire, his criminal intention remained, but concealed beneath so many superimposed feelings that there is nothing to prove that the violinist would not have been sincere in saying that this vicious desire was not the true motive of his action. There was, moreover, a brief period during which, without his admitting it to himself precisely, this marriage appeared to him to be necessary. Morel was suffering at the time from violent cramp in the hand, and found himself obliged to contemplate the possibility of having to give up the violin. Since, in everything but his art, he was astonishingly lazy, he was faced with the necessity of finding someone to keep him; and he preferred that it should be Jupien’s niece rather than M. de Charlus, this arrangement offering him greater freedom and also a wide choice of different kinds of women, ranging from the apprentices, perpetually changing, whom he would persuade Jupien’s niece to procure for him, to the rich and beautiful ladies to whom he would prostitute her. That his future wife might refuse to lend herself to these ploys, that she could be to such a degree perverse, never entered Morel’s calculations for a moment. However, his cramp having ceased, they receded into the background and were replaced by pure love. His violin would suffice, together with his allowance from M. de Charlus, whose demands upon him would certainly be reduced once he, Morel, was married to the girl. This marriage was the urgent thing, because of his love, and in the interest of his freedom. He asked Jupien for his niece’s hand, and Jupien consulted her. This was wholly unnecessary. The girl’s passion for the violinist streamed around her, like her hair when she let it down, as did the joy in her beaming eyes. In Morel, almost everything that was agreeable or advantageous to him awakened moral emotions and words to correspond, sometimes even melting him to tears. It was therefore sincerely—if such a word can be applied to him—that he addressed to Jupien’s niece speeches as steeped in sentimentality (sentimental too are the speeches that so many young noblemen who look forward to a life of idleness address to some charming daughter of a bourgeois plutocrat) as the theories he had expounded to M. de Charlus about the seduction and deflowering of virgins had been steeped in unmitigated vileness. However, there was another side to this virtuous enthusiasm for a person who afforded him pleasure and to the solemn promises that he made to her. As soon as the person ceased to cause him pleasure, or indeed if, for example, the obligation to fulfil the promises that he had made caused him displeasure, she at once became the object of an antipathy which he sought to justify in his own eyes and which, after some neurasthenic disturbance, enabled him to prove to himself, as soon as the balance of his nervous system was restored, that, even looking at the matter from a purely virtuous point of view, he was released from any obligation.

Thus, towards the end of his stay at Balbec, he had managed somehow to lose all his money and, not daring to mention the matter to M. de Charlus, looked about for someone to whom he might appeal. He had learned from his father (who at the same time had forbidden him ever to become a “sponger”) that in such circumstances the correct thing is to write to the person whom you intend to ask for a loan saying that you have a “business matter to discuss with him,” that you would like to make a “business appointment.” This magic formula had so enchanted Morel that he would, I believe, have been glad to lose his money, simply to have the pleasure of asking for a “business” appointment. In the course of his life he had found that the formula did not have quite the magic power that he supposed. He had discovered that certain people, to whom otherwise he would never have written at all, did not reply within five minutes of receiving his letter asking to “talk business” to them. If the afternoon went by without his receiving an answer, it never occurred to him that, even on the most optimistic assumption, it was quite possible that the gentleman addressed had not yet come home, or had had other letters to write, if indeed he had not gone away, or fallen ill, or something of that sort. If, by an extraordinary stroke of luck, Morel was given an appointment for the following morning, he would accost his intended creditor with: “I was quite surprised not to get an answer, and I wondered whether there was anything wrong; but I’m glad to see you’re quite well,” and so forth. So, at Balbec, without telling me that he wished to talk “business” to him, he had asked me to introduce him to that very Bloch to whom he had been so unpleasant a week earlier in the train. Bloch had not hesitated to lend him—or rather to get M. Nissim Bernard to lend him—five thousand francs. From that moment Morel had worshipped Bloch. He asked himself with tears in his eyes how he could show his gratitude to a person who had saved his life. Finally, I undertook to ask on his behalf for a thousand francs a month from M. de Charlus, a sum which he would at once forward to Bloch who would thus find himself repaid within quite a short time. The first month, Morel, still under the impact of Bloch’s generosity, sent him the thousand francs immediately, but after this he doubtless decided that the remaining four thousand francs might be put to more satisfactory use, for he began to speak extremely ill of Bloch. The mere sight of him was enough to fill his mind with dark thoughts, and Bloch himself having forgotten the exact amount that he had lent Morel, and having asked him for 3,500 francs instead of 4,000, which would have left the violinist 500 francs to the good, the latter took the line that, in view of so preposterous a fraud, not only would he not pay another centime but his creditor might consider himself very fortunate if Morel did not bring an action against him. As he said this his eyes

blazed. Not content with asserting that Bloch and M. Nissim Bernard had no cause for resentment against him, he was soon saying that they might count themselves lucky that he showed no resentment towards them. Finally, M. Nissim Bernard having apparently stated that Thibaud played as well as Morel, the latter felt that he ought to take the matter to court, such a remark being calculated to damage him professionally; then, since there was no longer any justice in France, especially against the Jews (anti-semitism having been in Morel the natural effect of a loan of 5,000 francs from a Jew), took to never going out without a loaded revolver.

A similar sullen reaction in the wake of keen affection was soon to occur in Morel with regard to the tailor's niece. It is true that M. de Charlus may have been to some extent unwittingly responsible for this change, for he was in the habit of declaring, without meaning a word of it, and merely to tease them, that once they were married he would never see them again and would leave them to fend for themselves. This idea was in itself quite insufficient to detach Morel from the girl; but, lurking in his mind, it was ready when the time came to combine with other related ideas capable, once the compound was formed, of becoming a powerful disruptive agent.

It was not very often, however, that I was fated to meet M. de Charlus and Morel. Often they had already gone into Jupien's shop when I came away from the Duchess, for the pleasure that I found in her company was such that I was led to forget not merely the anxious expectation that preceded Albertine's return, but even the hour of that return.

I shall set apart from the other days on which I lingered at Mme de Guermantes's one that was marked by a trivial incident the cruel significance of which entirely escaped me and was not brought home to me until long afterwards. On this particular evening, Mme de Guermantes had given me, knowing that I was fond of them, some branches of syringa which had been sent to her from the South. When I left her and went upstairs to our flat, Albertine had already returned, and on the staircase I ran into Andrée, who seemed to be distressed by the powerful smell of the flowers that I was bringing home.

"What, are you back already?" I said.

"Only a moment ago, but Albertine had some letters to write, so she sent me away."

"You don't think she's up to any mischief?"

"Not at all, she's writing to her aunt, I think. But you know how she dislikes strong scents, she won't be particularly thrilled by your syringa."

"How stupid of me! I shall tell Françoise to put them out on the service stairs."

"Do you imagine Albertine won't notice the scent of them on you? Next to tuberose they've the strongest scent of any flower, I always think. Anyhow, I believe Françoise has gone out shopping."

"But in that case, as I haven't got my latchkey, how am I to get in?"

"Oh, you've only got to ring the bell. Albertine will let you in. Besides, Françoise may have come back by this time."

I said good-bye to Andrée. I had no sooner pressed the bell than Albertine came to open the door, which she had some difficulty in doing since, in the absence of Françoise, she did not know where to turn on the light. At last she managed to let me in, but the scent of the syringa put her to flight. I took them to the kitchen, so that meanwhile my mistress, leaving her letter unfinished (I had no idea why), had time to go to my room, from which she called to me, and to lie down on my bed. Once again, at the actual moment I saw nothing in all this that was not perfectly natural, at the most a little confused, but in any case unimportant. She had nearly been caught with Andrée, and had snatched a brief respite for herself by turning out all the lights, going to my room so that I should not see the disorder of her bed, and pretending to be writing a letter. But we shall see all this—the truth of which I never ascertained—later on.

In general, apart from this isolated incident, everything would be quite normal when I returned from my visits to the Duchess. Since Albertine never knew whether I might not wish to go out with her before dinner, I usually found in the hall her hat, coat and umbrella, which she had left lying there in case they should be needed. As soon as I caught sight of them on opening the door, the atmosphere of the house became breathable once more. I felt that, instead of a rarefied air, it was happiness that filled it. I was rescued from my melancholy, the sight of these trifles gave me possession of Albertine, and I would rush to greet her.

On the days when I did not go down to Mme de Guermantes, so that time should not hang too heavy for me during the hour that preceded Albertine's return, I would take up an album of Elstir's work, one of Bergotte's books, or Vinteuil's sonata. Then, just as those works of art which seem to address themselves to the eye or ear alone require that, if we are to appreciate them, our awakened intelligence shall collaborate closely with those organs, I would unconsciously summon up from within me the dreams that Albertine had inspired in me long ago before I knew her and that had been quenched by the routine of everyday life. I would cast them into the composer's phrase or the painter's image as into a crucible, or use them to enrich the book that I was reading. And no doubt the latter appeared all the more vivid in consequence. But Albertine herself gained just as much by being thus transported from one into the other of the two worlds to which we have access and in which we can place alternately the same object, by escaping thus from the crushing weight of matter to play freely in the fluid spaces of the mind. I found myself suddenly and for an instant capable of passionate feelings for this wearisome girl. She had at that moment the appearance of a work by Elstir or Bergotte, I felt a momentary ardour for her, seeing her in the perspective of imagination and art.

Presently I would be told that she had returned; though there was a standing order that her name was not to be mentioned if I was not alone, and if, for instance, I had Bloch in the room with me, I would compel him to stay a little longer so that there should be no risk of his meeting my mistress in the hall. For I concealed the fact that she was staying in the house, and even that I ever saw her there, so afraid was I that one of my

friends might become infatuated with her, and wait for her outside, or that in a momentary encounter in the passage or the hall she might make a signal and fix a rendezvous. Then I would hear the rustle of Albertine's skirt on her way to her own room, for, out of tact and also no doubt in the spirit in which, when we used to go to dinner at La Raspelière, she went out to great lengths to ensure that I should have no cause for jealousy, she did not come to my room when she knew that I was not alone. But it was not only for this reason, as I suddenly realised. I remembered; I had known a different Albertine then all at once she had changed into another, the Albertine of today. And for this change I could hold no one responsible but myself. Everything that she would have admitted to me readily and willingly when we were simply good friends had ceased to flow from her as soon as she had suspected that I was in love with her, or, without perhaps thinking of the name of Love, had divined the existence in me of an inquisitorial sentiment that desires to know, yet suffers from knowing, and seeks to learn still more. Ever since that day, she had concealed everything from me. She kept away from my room whether she thought my visitor was male or (as was not often the case) female, she whose eyes used at one time to sparkle so brightly whenever I mentioned a girl: "You must try and get her to come here. I'd be amused to meet her." "But she's what you call a bad type." "Precisely, that'll make it all the more fun." At that moment, I might perhaps have learned all that there was to know. And even when, in the little Casino, she had withdrawn her breasts from Andrée's, I believe that this was due not to my presence but to that of Cottard, who was capable, she doubtless thought, of giving her a bad reputation. And yet, even then, she had already begun to "freeze," confiding words no longer issued from her lips, her gestures became guarded. Then she had rid herself of everything that might have disturbed me. To those parts of her life of which I knew nothing she ascribed a character the inoffensiveness of which my ignorance conspired to accentuate. And now the transformation was completed; she went straight to her room if I was not alone, not merely from fear of disturbing me, but in order to show me that she was not interested in other people. There was one thing alone that she would never again do for me, that she would have done only in the days when it would have left me indifferent, that she would then have done without hesitation for that very reason, namely, confess. I should be for ever reduced, like a judge, to drawing uncertain conclusions from verbal indiscretions that were perhaps explicable without postulating guilt. And always she would feel that I was jealous, and judging her.

Our engagement was assuming the aspect of a criminal trial, and gave her the timorousness of a guilty party. Now she changed the conversation whenever it turned on people, men or women, who were not of mature years. It was when she had not yet suspected that I was jealous of her that I should have asked her to tell me what I wanted to know. One ought always to take advantage of that period. It is then that one's mistress tells one about her pleasures and even the means by which she conceals them from other people. She would no longer have admitted to me now as she had admitted at Balbec, partly because it was true, partly by way of apology for not making her affection for me more evident, for I had already begun to weary her even then, and she had gathered from my kindness to her that she need not show as much affection to me as to others in order to obtain more from me than from them—she would no longer have admitted to me now as she had admitted then: "I think it stupid to let people see who one loves. I'm just the opposite: as soon as a person attracts me, I pretend not to take any notice. In that way, nobody knows anything about it."

What, it was the same Albertine of today, with her pretensions to frankness and indifference to everyone, who had told me that! She would never have expressed such a rule of conduct to me now! She contented herself, when she was chatting to me, with applying it by saying of some girl or other who might cause me anxiety: "Oh, I don't know, I didn't even look at her, she's too insignificant." And from time to time, to anticipate discoveries which I might make, she would proffer the sort of confessions whose very tone, before one knows the reality which they are intended to distort, to exculpate, already betrays them as lies.

As I listened to Albertine's footsteps with the consoling pleasure of thinking that she would not be going out again that evening, I marvelled at the thought that, for this girl whom at one time I had supposed that I could never possibly succeed in knowing, returning home every day actually meant returning to my home. The fugitive and fragmentary pleasure, compounded of mystery and sensuality, which I had felt at Balbec, on the night when she had come to sleep at the hotel, had been completed and stabilised, filling my hitherto empty dwelling with a permanent store of domestic, almost conjugal, ease that radiated even into the passages and upon which all my senses, either actively or, when I was alone, in imagination as I awaited her return, peacefully fed. When I had heard the door of Albertine's room shut behind her, if I had a friend with me I made haste to get rid of him, not leaving him until I was quite sure that he was on the staircase, down which I might even escort him for a few steps.

Coming towards me in the passage, Albertine would greet me with: "I say, while I'm taking off my things, I shall send you Andrée. She's looked in for a minute to say hello." And still swathed in the big grey veil, falling from her chinchilla toque, which I had given her at Balbec, she would turn from, me and go back to her room, as though she had guessed that Andrée, whom I had entrusted with the duty of watching over her, would presently, by relating their day's adventures in full detail, mentioning their meeting with some person of their acquaintance, impart a certain clarity of outline to the vague regions in which the day-long excursion had run its course and which I had been incapable of imagining.

Andrée's defects had become more marked; she was no longer as pleasant a companion as when I first knew her. One noticed now, on the surface, a sort of sour uneasiness, ready to gather like a swell on the sea, merely if I happened to mention something that gave pleasure to Albertine and myself. This did not prevent Andrée from being nicer to me and liking me better—and I had frequent proof of this—than other more amiable people. But the slightest look of happiness on a person's face, if it was not caused by herself, gave a shock to

her nerves, as unpleasant as that given by a banging door. She could accept sufferings in which she had no part, but not pleasures; if she saw that I was unwell, she was distressed, was sorry for me, would have stayed to nurse me. But if I displayed a satisfaction as trifling as that of stretching myself with a blissful expression as I shut a book, saying: "Ah! I've just spent two delightful hours reading. What an enjoyable book!" these words, which would have given pleasure to my mother, to Albertine, to Saint-Loup, provoked in Andrée a sort of disapprobation, perhaps simply a sort of nervous discomfort. My satisfactions caused her an irritation which she was unable to conceal. These defects were supplemented by others of a more serious nature; one day when I mentioned the young man so learned in matters of racing, gambling and golf, so uneducated in everything else, whom I had met with the little band at Balbec, Andrée said with a sneer: "You know that his father is a swindler, he only just missed being prosecuted. They're swaggering now more than ever, but I tell everybody about it. I should love them to bring an action for slander against me. I'd have something to say in the witness-box!" Her eyes sparkled. In fact I discovered that the father had done nothing wrong, and that Andrée knew this as well as anybody. But she had felt spurned by the son, had looked around for something that would embarrass him, put him to shame, and had concocted a whole string of evidence which she imagined herself called upon to give in court, and, by dint of repeating the details to herself, was perhaps herself unsure whether they were true or not. And so, in her present state (and even without her brief, mad hatreds), I should not have wished to see her, if only because of the malevolent touchiness that surrounded with a sour and frigid carapace her warmer and better nature. But the information which she alone could give me about my mistress interested me too much for me to be able to neglect so rare an opportunity of acquiring it.

Andrée would come into my room, shutting the door behind her. They had met a girl they knew, whom Albertine had never mentioned to me.

"What did they talk about?"

"I can't tell you; I took advantage of the fact that Albertine wasn't alone to go and buy some wool."

"Buy some wool?"

"Yes, it was Albertine who asked me to get it."

"All the more reason not to have gone. It was perhaps a pretext to get you out of the way."

"But she asked me to go for it before we met her friend."

"Ah!" I would reply, breathing again. At once my suspicions were revived: she might, for all I knew, have made an appointment beforehand with her friend and have provided herself with an excuse to be left alone when the time came. Besides, could I be certain that it was not my former hypothesis (according to which Andrée did not always tell me the truth) that was correct? Andrée was perhaps in league with Albertine.

Love, I used to say to myself at Balbec, is what we feel for a person; our jealousy seems rather to be directed towards that person's actions; we feel that if she were to tell us everything, we might perhaps easily be cured of our love. However skilfully jealousy is concealed by him who suffers from it, it is very soon detected by her who has inspired it, and who applies equal skill in her turn. She seeks to put us off the scent of what might make us unhappy, and easily succeeds, for, to the man who is not forewarned, how should a casual remark reveal the falsehoods that lie beneath it? We do not distinguish this remark from the rest; spoken apprehensively, it is received unheedingly. Later on, when we are alone, we shall return to this remark, which will seem to us not altogether consistent with the facts of the case. But do we remember it correctly? There seems to arise spontaneously in us, with regard to it and to the accuracy of our memory, a doubt of the sort which, in certain nervous conditions, prevents us from remembering whether we have bolted the door, no less after the fiftieth time than after the first; it would seem that we can repeat the action indefinitely without its ever being accompanied by a precise and liberating memory. But at least we can shut the door again for the fifty-first time. Whereas the disturbing remark exists in the past, in an imperfect hearing of it which it is not within our power to re-enact. Then we concentrate our attention upon other remarks which conceal nothing, and the sole remedy, which we do not want, is to be ignorant of everything in order not to have any desire for further knowledge.

As soon as jealousy is discovered, it is regarded by the person who is its object as a challenge which justifies deception. Moreover, in our endeavour to learn something, it is we who have taken the initiative in lying and deceit. Andrée or Aimé may promise us that they will say nothing, but will they keep their promise? Then Bloch could promise nothing because he knew nothing. And Albertine has only to talk to any of the three in order to learn, with the help of what Saint-Loup would have called "cross-checking," that we are lying to her when we claim to be indifferent to her actions and morally incapable of having her watched. Following thus upon my habitual boundless uncertainty as to what Albertine might be doing, an uncertainty too indeterminate not to remain painless, which was to jealousy what that incipient forgetfulness in which assuagement is born of vagueness is to grief, the little fragment of an answer which Andrée had just brought me at once began to raise fresh questions; in exploring one sector of the vast zone that extended round me, I had succeeded only in pushing back still further that unknowable thing which, when we seek to form a definite idea of it, another person's life invariably is to us. I would continue to interrogate Andrée while Albertine, from tact and in order to leave me free (was she conscious of this?) to question her friend, prolonged her toilet in her own room.

"I think Albertine's uncle and aunt both like me," I would thoughtlessly remark to Andrée, forgetting her peculiar nature.

At once I would see her glutinous features change, like a mixture that has turned; her face would seem permanently clouded. Her mouth would become bitter. Nothing remained in Andrée of that juvenile gaiety

which, like all the little band and notwithstanding her delicate health, she had displayed in the year of my first visit to Balbec and which now (it is true that Andrée was several years older) became so rapidly eclipsed in her. But I would make it reappear involuntarily before Andrée left me that evening to go home to dinner. "Somebody was singing your praises to me today in the most glowing terms," I would say to her. Immediately a ray of joy would beam from her eyes; she looked as though she really loved me. She avoided my gaze but smiled at the empty air with a pair of eyes that had suddenly become quite round. "Who was it?" she would ask with an artless, avid interest. I would tell her, and, whoever it was, she was delighted.

Then the time would come for her to leave me. Albertine would come back to my room; she had undressed, and was wearing one of the crepe de Chine dressing-gowns or Japanese kimonos which I had asked Mme de Guermantes to describe to me, and for some of which supplementary details had been furnished me by Mme Swann, in a letter that began: "After your long eclipse, I felt as I read your letter about my *tea-gowns* that I was hearing from a ghost."

Albertine had on her feet a pair of black shoes studded with brilliants which Françoise indignantly called clogs and which were modelled upon those which, from the drawing-room window, she had seen Mme de Guermantes wearing in the evening, just as a little later Albertine took to wearing slippers, some of gold kid, others of chinchilla, the sight of which gave me great pleasure because they were all of them signs (which other shoes would not have been) that she was living under my roof. She had also certain things which had not come to her from me, including a fine gold ring. I admired upon it the outspread wings of an eagle. "It was my aunt who gave me it," she explained. "She can be quite nice sometimes after all. It makes me feel terribly old, because she gave it to me on my twentieth birthday."

Albertine took a far keener interest in all these pretty things than the Duchess, because, like every obstacle in the way of a possession (in my own case the ill health which made travel so difficult and so desirable), poverty, more generous than opulence, gives to women far more than the clothes that they cannot afford to buy: the desire for those clothes which goes hand in hand with a genuine, detailed, thorough knowledge of them. She, because she had never been able to afford these things, and I, because in ordering them for her I was seeking to give her pleasure, were both of us like students who already know all about the pictures which they are longing to go to Dresden or Vienna to see. Whereas rich women, amid the vast quantities of their hats and gowns, are like those tourists to whom a visit to a gallery, being preceded by no desire, gives merely a sensation of bewilderment, boredom and exhaustion. A particular toque, a particular sable coat, a particular Doucet dressing-gown with pink-lined sleeves, assumed for Albertine, who had observed them, coveted them and, thanks to the exclusiveness and meticulousness that characterise desire, had at once isolated them from the rest against an empty background in which the lining or the sash stood out to perfection, and studied them down to the smallest detail—and for myself who had gone to Mme de Guermantes in quest of an explanation of what constituted the peculiar merit, the superiority, the stylishness of each garment and the inimitable cut of the great designer—an importance, a charm which they certainly did not possess for the Duchess, surfeited before she had even acquired an appetite, and would not, indeed, have possessed for me had I seen them a few years earlier while accompanying some lady of fashion on one of her wearisome tours of the dressmakers' shops.

To be sure, a woman of fashion was what Albertine too was gradually becoming. For, while each of the things that I ordered for her was the prettiest of its kind, with all the refinements that might have been added to it by Mme de Guermantes or Mme Swann, she was beginning to possess these things in abundance. But it mattered little, since she had admired them beforehand and in isolation. When we have been smitten by one painter, then by another, we may end by feeling for the whole gallery an admiration that is not frigid, for it is made up of successive enthusiasms, each one exclusive in its day, which finally have joined forces and become reconciled in one whole.

She was not, moreover, frivolous, read a great deal when she was alone, and read aloud to me when we were together. She had become extremely intelligent. She would say, quite falsely in fact: "I'm appalled when I think that but for you I should still be quite ignorant. Don't contradict. You have opened up a world of ideas to me which I never suspected, and whatever I may have become I owe entirely to you."

It will be remembered that she had spoken in similar terms of my influence over Andrée. Had either of them a real feeling for me? And, in themselves, what were Albertine and Andrée? To know the answer, I should have to immobilise you, to cease to live in that perpetual state of expectancy ending always in a different presentment of you, I should have to cease to love you in order to fix your image, cease to be conscious of your interminable and always disconcerting arrival, O girls, O successive rays in the swirling vortex wherein we throb with emotion on seeing you reappear while barely recognising you, in the dizzy velocity of light. We might perhaps remain unaware of that velocity, and everything would seem to us motionless, did not a sexual attraction set us in pursuit of you, O drops of gold, always dissimilar and always surpassing our expectation! Each time, a girl so little resembles what she was the time before (shattering, as soon as we catch sight of her, the memory that we had retained of her and the desire that we had proposed to gratify), that the stability of nature which we ascribe to her is purely fictitious and a convention of speech. We have been told that some pretty girl is tender, loving, full of the most delicate feelings. Our imagination accepts this assurance, and when we behold for the first time, beneath the woven girdle of her golden hair, the rosy disc of her face, we are almost afraid that this too virtuous sister, cooling our ardour by her very virtue, can never be to us the lover for whom we have been longing. What secrets, however, we confide to her from the first moment, on the strength of that nobility of heart, what plans we make together! But a few days later, we regret that we were so confiding, for the rosy-cheeked girl, at our second meeting, addresses us in the language of a lascivious Fury.

As for the successive facets which after pulsating for some days the roseate light, now eclipsed, presents to us, it is not even certain that a momentum external to these girls has not modified their aspect, and this might well have happened with my band of girls at Balbec. People extol to us the gentleness, the purity of a virgin. But afterwards they feel that something more spicy would please us better, and recommend her to show more boldness. In herself was she one more than the other? Perhaps not, but capable of yielding to any number of different possibilities in the headlong current of life. With another, whose whole attraction lay in a certain ruthlessness (which we counted upon subduing to our own will), as, for instance, with the fearsome jumping girl at Balbec who grazed in her leaps the bald pates of startled old gentlemen, what a disappointment when, a new facet of her personality being presented to us, just as we are making tender declarations fired by the memory of her cruelty to others, we hear her telling us, by way of an opening gambit, that she is shy, that she can never say anything intelligent to anyone at a first introduction, so frightened is she, and that it is only after a fortnight or so that she will be able to talk to us at her ease. The steel has turned to cotton wool, and there is nothing left for us to attempt to break down, since of her own accord she has shed her hard integument. Of her own accord, but through our fault perhaps, for the tender words which we addressed to Harshness had perhaps, even without any deliberate calculation on her part, suggested to her that she ought to be gentle. (Distressing as the change may have been to us, it was not altogether *maladroit*, for our gratitude for all her gentleness may exact more from us than our delight at overcoming her cruelty.)

I do not say that a day will not come when, even to these luminous girls, we shall assign sharply defined characters, but that will be because they will have ceased to interest us, because their entry upon the scene will no longer be, for our heart, the apparition which it expected to be different and which, each time, leaves it overwhelmed by fresh incarnations. Their immobility will come from our indifference to them, which will deliver them up to the judgment of our intelligence. The latter's conclusions will not in fact be very much more categorical, for after deciding that some defect, predominant in the one, was happily absent from the other, it will see that this defect was offset by some precious quality. So that, from the false judgment of our intelligence, which comes into play only when we have lost interest, there will emerge well-defined, stable characters of girls, which will enlighten us no more than did the surprising faces that used to appear every day when, in the bewildering speed of our expectation, they presented themselves daily, weekly, too different to allow us, since their course was never arrested, to classify them, to award degrees of merit. As for our sentiments, we have said so too often to repeat it here, as often as not love is no more than the association of the image of a girl (whom otherwise we should soon have found intolerable) with the heartbeats inseparable from an endless wait in vain and her failure to turn up at the end of it. All this is true not only of impressionable young men in the face of changeable girls. At the stage that our narrative has now reached, it appears, as I later learned, that Jupien's niece had altered her opinion of Morel and M. de Charlus. My chauffeur, to reinforce her love for Morel, had extolled to her, as existing in the violinist, boundless refinements of delicacy in which she was all too ready to believe. And at the same time Morel never ceased to complain to her of the despotic treatment that he received from M. de Charlus, which she ascribed to malevolence, never imagining that it could be due to love. She was moreover forced to acknowledge that M. de Charlus was a tyrannical presence at all their meetings. And in corroboration of this, she had heard society women speak of the Baron's atrocious spitefulness. Lately, however, her judgment had been completely reversed. She had discovered in Morel (without ceasing for that reason to love him) depths of malevolence and perfidy, compensated it was true by frequent gentleness and genuine sensitivity, and in M. de Charlus an immense and unsuspected kindness mixed with incomprehensible asperities. And so she had been no more able to arrive at a definite judgment of what, each in himself, the violinist and his protector really were, than I was able to form of Andrée, whom nevertheless I saw every day, or of Albertine who was living with me.

On the evenings when the latter did not read aloud to me, she would play me some music or begin a game of draughts, or a conversation, which I would interrupt with kisses. Our relations had a simplicity that made them soothing. The very emptiness of her life gave Albertine a sort of eagerness to comply with the few demands I made on her. Behind this girl, as behind the purple light that used to filter beneath the curtains of my room at Balbec, while outside the concert blared, there shone the blue-green undulations of the sea. Was she not, after all (she in whose being there now existed an idea of me so habitual and familiar that, next to her aunt, I was perhaps the person whom she distinguished least from herself), the girl whom I had seen the first time at Balbec, beneath her flat cap, with her insistent laughing eyes, a stranger still, slender as a silhouette projected against the waves? These effigies preserved intact in our memory astonish us, when we recall them, by their dissimilarity from the person we know, and we realise what a task of remodelling is performed every day by habit. In the charm that Albertine had in Paris, by my fireside, there still survived the desire that had been aroused in me by that insolent and blossoming cortege along the beach, and just as Rachel retained in Saint-Loup's eyes, even after he had made her abandon it, the glamour of her stage life, so in this Albertine cloistered in my house, far from Balbec whence I had hurried her away, there persisted the excitement, the social confusion, the restless futility, the roving desires of seaside life. She was so effectively caged that on certain evenings I did not even ask her to leave her room for mine, she whom at one time all the world pursued, whom I had found it so hard to overtake as she sped past on her bicycle, whom the lift-boy himself was unable to bring back to me, leaving me with little hope of her coming, although I sat up waiting for her all night. Had not Albertine been—out there in front of the hotel—like a great actress of the blazing beach, arousing jealousy when she advanced upon that natural stage, speaking to no one, jostling the habitués, dominating her friends? And was not this so greatly coveted actress the same who, withdrawn by me from the stage, shut up in my house, was now here, shielded from the desires of all those who might

henceforth seek for her in vain, sitting now in my room, now in her own, engaged in some work of design or engraving?

No doubt, in the first days at Balbec, Albertine seemed to exist on a parallel plane to that on which I was living, but one that had converged on it (after my visit to Elstir) and had finally joined it, as my relations with her, at Balbec, in Paris, then at Balbec again, grew more intimate. Moreover, what a difference there was between the two pictures of Balbec, on my first visit and on my second, pictures composed of the same villas from which the same girls emerged by the same sea! In Albertine's friends at the time of my second visit, whom I knew so well, whose good and bad qualities were so clearly engraved on their features, how could I recapture those fresh, mysterious strangers who once could not thrust open the doors of their chalets with a screech over the sand or brush past the quivering tamarisks without making my heart beat? Their huge eyes had sunk into their faces since then, doubtless because they had ceased to be children, but also because those ravishing strangers, those actresses of that first romantic year, about whom I had gone ceaselessly in quest of information, no longer held any mystery for me. They had become for me, obedient to my whims, a mere grove of budding girls, from among whom I was not a little proud of having plucked, and hidden away from the rest of the world, the fairest rose.

Between the two Balbec settings, so different one from the other, there was the interval of several years in Paris, the long expanse of which was dotted with all the visits that Albertine had paid me. I saw her in the different years of my life occupying, in relation to myself, different positions which made me feel the beauty of the intervening spaces, that long lapse of time during which I had remained without seeing her and in the diaphanous depths of which the roseate figure that I saw before me was carved with mysterious shadows and in bold relief. This was due also to the superimposition not merely of the successive images which Albertine had been for me, but also of the great qualities of intelligence and heart, and of the defects of character, all alike unsuspected by me, which Albertine, in a germination, a multiplication of herself, a fleshy efflorescence in sombre colours, had added to a nature that formerly could scarcely have been said to exist, but was now difficult to plumb. For other people, even those of whom we have dreamed so much that they have come to seem no more than pictures, figures by Benozzo Gozzoli against a greenish background, of whom we were inclined to believe that they varied only according to the point of vantage from which we looked at them, their distance from us, the effect of light and shade, such people, while they change in relation to ourselves, change also in themselves, and there had been an enrichment, a solidification and an increase of volume in the figure once simply outlined against the sea.

Moreover, it was not only the sea at the close of day that existed for me in Albertine, but at times the drowsy murmur of the sea upon the shore on moonlit nights. For sometimes, when I got up to fetch a book from my father's study, my mistress, having asked my permission to lie down while I was out of the room, was so tired after her long outing in the morning and afternoon in the open air that, even if I had been away for a moment only, when I returned I found her asleep and did not wake her. Stretched out at full length on my bed, in an attitude so natural that no art could have devised it, she reminded me of a long blossoming stem that had been laid there; and so in a sense she was: the faculty of dreaming, which I possessed only in her absence, I recovered at such moments in her presence, as though by falling asleep she had become a plant. In this way, her sleep realised to a certain extent the possibility of love: alone, I could think of her, but I missed her, I did not possess her; when she was present, I spoke to her, but was too absent from myself to be able to think of her; when she was asleep, I no longer had to talk, I knew that I was no longer observed by her, I no longer needed to live on the surface of myself.

By shutting her eyes, by losing consciousness, Albertine had stripped off, one after another, the different human personalities with which she had deceived me ever since the day when I had first made her acquaintance. She was animated now only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, more alien, and yet one that belonged more to me. Her personality was not constantly escaping, as when we talked, by the outlets of her unacknowledged thoughts and of her eyes. She had called back into herself everything of her that lay outside, had withdrawn, enclosed, reabsorbed herself into her body. In keeping her in front of my eyes, in my hands, I had an impression of possessing her entirely which I never had when she was awake. Her life was submitted to me, exhaled towards me its gentle breath.

I listened to this murmuring, mysterious emanation, soft as a sea breeze, magical as a gleam of moonlight, that was her sleep. So long as it lasted, I was free to dream about her and yet at the same time to look at her, and, when that sleep grew deeper, to touch, to kiss her. What I felt then was a love as pure, as immaterial, as mysterious, as if I had been in the presence of those inanimate creatures which are the beauties of nature. And indeed, as soon as her sleep became at all deep, she ceased to be merely the plant that she had been; her sleep, on the margin of which I remained musing, with a fresh delight of which I never tired, which I could have gone on enjoying indefinitely, was to me a whole landscape. Her sleep brought within my reach something as serene, as sensually delicious as those nights of full moon on the bay of Balbec, calm as a lake over which the branches barely stir, where, stretched out upon the sand, one could listen for hours on end to the surf breaking and receding.

On entering the room, I would remain standing in the doorway, not venturing to make a sound, and hearing none but that of her breath rising to expire upon her lips at regular intervals, like the reflux of the sea, but drowsier and softer. And at the moment when my ear absorbed that divine sound, I felt that there was condensed in it the whole person, the whole life of the charming captive outstretched there before my eyes. Carriages went rattling past in the street, but her brow remained as smooth and untroubled, her breath as light, reduced to the simple expulsion of the necessary quantity of air. Then, seeing that her sleep would not



be disturbed, I would advance cautiously, sit down on the chair that stood by the bedside, then on the bed itself.

I spent many a charming evening talking and playing with Albertine, but none so sweet as when I was watching her sleep. Granted that she had, as she chatted with me, or played cards, a naturalness that no actress could have imitated; it was a more profound naturalness, as it were at one remove, that was offered me by her sleep. Her hair, falling along her pink cheek, was spread out beside her on the bed, and here and there an isolated straight tress gave the same effect of perspective as those moonlit trees, lank and pale, which one sees standing erect and stiff in the backgrounds of Elstir's Raphaelesque pictures. If Albertine's lips were closed, her eyelids, on the other hand, seen from where I was placed, seemed so loosely joined that I might almost have questioned whether she really was asleep. At the same time those lowered lids gave her face that perfect continuity which is unbroken by the eyes. There are people whose faces assume an unaccustomed beauty and majesty the moment they cease to look out of their eyes.

I would run my eyes over her, stretched out below me. From time to time a slight, unaccountable tremor ran through her, as the leaves of a tree are shaken for a few moments by a sudden breath of wind. She would touch her hair and then, not having arranged it to her liking, would raise her hand to it again with motions so consecutive, so deliberate, that I was convinced that she was about to wake. Not at all; she grew calm again in the sleep from which she had not emerged. Thereafter she lay motionless. She had laid her hand on her breast, the limpness of the arm so artlessly childlike that I was obliged, as I gazed at her, to suppress the smile that is provoked in us by the solemnity, the innocence and the grace of little children.

I, who was acquainted with many Albertines in one person, seemed now to see many more again reposing by my side. Her eyebrows, arched as I had never noticed them, encircled the globes of her eyelids like a halcyon's downy nest. Races, atavisms, vices reposed upon her face. Whenever she moved her head, she created a different woman, often one whose existence I had never suspected. I seemed to possess not one but countless girls. Her breathing, as it became gradually deeper, made her breast rise and fall in a regular rhythm, and above it her folded hands and her pearls, displaced in a different way by the same movement, like boats and mooring chains set swaying by the movement of the tide. Then, feeling that the tide of her sleep was full, that I should not run aground on reefs of consciousness covered now by the high water of profound slumber, I would climb deliberately and noiselessly on to the bed, lie down by her side, clasp her waist in one arm, and place my lips upon her cheek and my free hand on her heart and then on every part of her body in turn, so that it too was raised, like the pearls, by her breathing; I myself was gently rocked by its regular motion: I had embarked upon the tide of Albertine's sleep.

Sometimes it afforded me a pleasure that was less pure. For this I had no need to make any movement, but allowed my leg to dangle against hers, like an oar which one trails in the water, imparting to it now and again a gentle oscillation like the intermittent wing-beat of a bird asleep in the air. I chose, in gazing at her, the aspect of her face which one never saw and which was so beautiful. It is I suppose comprehensible that the letters which we receive from a person should be more or less similar to one another and combine to trace an image of the writer sufficiently different from the person we know to constitute a second personality. But how much stranger is it that a woman should be conjoined, like Radica with Doodica,<sup>2</sup> with another woman whose different beauty makes us infer another character, and that in order to see them we must look at one of them in profile and the other in full face. The sound of her breathing, which had grown louder, might have given the illusion of the panting of sexual pleasure, and when mine was at its climax, I could kiss her without having interrupted her sleep. I felt at such moments that I had possessed her more completely, like an unconscious and unresisting object of dumb nature. I was not troubled by the words that she murmured from time to time in her sleep; their meaning was closed to me, and besides, whoever the unknown person to whom they referred, it was upon my hand, upon my cheek that her hand, stirred by an occasional faint tremor, tightened for an instant. I savoured her sleep with a disinterested, soothing love, just as I would remain for hours listening to the unfurling of the waves.

Perhaps people must be capable of making us suffer intensely before they can procure for us, in the hours of remission, the same soothing calm as nature does. I did not have to answer her as when we were engaged in conversation, and even if I could have remained silent, as for that matter I did when it was she who was talking, still while listening to her I did not penetrate so far into the depths of her being. As I continued to hear, to capture from moment to moment, the murmur, soothing as a barely perceptible breeze, of her pure breath, it was a whole physiological existence that was spread out before me, at my disposal; just as I used to remain for hours lying on the beach, in the moonlight, so long could I have remained there gazing at her, listening to her. Sometimes it was as though the sea was beginning to swell, as though the storm was making itself felt even inside the bay, and I would press myself against her and listen to the gathering roar of her breath.

Sometimes, when she was too warm, she would take off her kimono while she was already almost asleep and fling it over an armchair. As she slept I would tell myself that all her letters were in the inner pocket of this kimono, into which she always thrust them. A signature, an assignation, would have sufficed to prove a lie or to dispel a suspicion. When I could see that Albertine was sound asleep, leaving the foot of the bed where I had been standing motionless in contemplation of her, I would take a step forward, seized by a burning curiosity, feeling that the secret of this other life lay offering itself to me, flaccid and defenceless, in that armchair. Perhaps I took this step forward also because to stand perfectly still and watch her sleeping became tiring after a while. And so, on tiptoe, constantly turning round to make sure that Albertine was not waking, I would advance towards the armchair. There I would stop short, and stand for a long time gazing at the

kimono, as I had stood for a long time gazing at Albertine. But (and here perhaps I was wrong) never once did I touch the kimono, put my hand in the pocket, examine the letters. In the end, realising that I would never make up my mind, I would creep back to the bedside and begin again to watch the sleeping Albertine, who would tell me nothing, whereas I could see lying across an arm of the chair that kimono which would perhaps have told me much.

And just as people pay a hundred francs a day for a room at the Grand Hotel at Balbec in order to breathe the sea air, I felt it to be quite natural that I should spend more than that on her, since I had her breath upon my cheek, between my lips which I laid half-open upon hers, through which her life flowed against my tongue.

But this pleasure of seeing her sleep, which was as sweet to me as that of feeling her live, was cut short by another pleasure, that of seeing her wake. It was, carried to a more profound and more mysterious degree, the same pleasure as I felt in having her under my roof. It was gratifying to me, of course, that when she alighted from the car in the afternoon, it should be to my house that she was returning. It was even more so to me that when, from the underworld of sleep, she climbed the last steps of the staircase of dreams, it was in my room that she was reborn to consciousness and life, that she wondered for an instant: "Where am I?" and, seeing the objects by which she was surrounded, and the lamp whose light scarcely made her blink her eyes, was able to assure herself that she was at home on realising that she was waking in *my* home. In that first delicious moment of uncertainty, it seemed to me that once again I was taking possession of her more completely, since, instead of her returning to her own room after an outing, it was my room that, as soon as Albertine should have recognised it, was about to enclose, to contain her, without there being any sign of misgiving in her eyes, which remained as calm as if she had never slept at all. The uncertainty of awakening, revealed by her silence, was not at all revealed in her eyes.

Then she would find her tongue and say: "My—" or "My darling—" followed by my Christian name, which, if we give the narrator the same name as the author of this book, would be "My Marcel," or "My darling Marcel." After this I would never allow a member of my family, by calling me "darling," to rob of their precious uniqueness the delicious words that Albertine uttered to me. As she uttered them, she pursed her lips in a little pout which she spontaneously transformed into a kiss. As quickly as she had earlier fallen asleep, she had awoken.

No more than my own progression in time, no more than the fact of looking at a girl sitting near me beneath a lamp that shed upon her a very different light from that of the sun when I used to see her striding along the seashore, was this material enrichment, this autonomous progress of Albertine, the determining cause of the difference between my present view of her and my original impression of her at Balbec. A longer term of years might have separated the two images without effecting so complete a change; it had come about, this sudden and fundamental change, when I had learned that Albertine had been virtually brought up by Mlle Vinteuil's friend. If at one time I had been overcome with excitement when I thought I detected mystery in Albertine's eyes, now I was happy only at times when from those eyes, from those cheeks even, as revealing as the eyes, at one moment so gentle but quickly turning sullen, I succeeded in expelling every trace of mystery. The image which I sought, upon which I relied, for which I would have been prepared to die, was no longer that of Albertine leading an unknown life, it was that of an Albertine as known to me as it was possible for her to be (and it was for this reason that my love could not be lasting unless it remained unhappy, for by definition it did not satisfy the need for mystery), an Albertine who did not reflect a distant world, but desired nothing else—there were moments when this did indeed appear to be the case—than to be with me, to be exactly like me, an Albertine who was the image precisely of what was mine and not of the unknown.

When it is thus from an hour of anguish in relation to another person that love is born, when it is from uncertainty whether we shall keep or lose that person, such a love bears the mark of the revolution that has created it, it recalls very little of what we had previously seen when we thought of the person in question. And although my first impressions of Albertine, silhouetted against the sea, might to some small extent persist in my love for her, in reality, these earlier impressions occupy but a tiny place in a love of this sort, in its strength, in its agony, in its need of comfort and its resort to a calm and soothing memory with which we would prefer to abide and to learn nothing more of the beloved, even if there were something horrible to be known. Even if the previous impressions are retained, such a love is made of very different stuff!

Sometimes I would put out the light before she came in. It was in the darkness, barely guided by the glow of a smouldering log, that she would lie down by my side. My hands and my cheeks alone identified her without my eyes seeing her, my eyes that were often afraid of finding her changed; so that, by virtue of these blind caresses, she may perhaps have felt bathed in a warmer tenderness than usual.

On other evenings, I undressed and went to bed, and, with Albertine perched on the side of the bed, we would resume our game or our conversation interrupted by kisses; and in the physical desire that alone makes us take an interest in the existence and character of another person, we remain so true to our own nature (even if, on the other hand, we abandon successively the different persons whom we have loved in turn) that on one occasion, catching sight of myself in the mirror at the moment when I was kissing Albertine and calling her "my little girl," the sorrowful, passionate expression on my own face, similar to the expression it would have worn long ago with Gilberte whom I no longer remembered, and would perhaps assume one day with another if I were ever to forget Albertine, made me think that, over and above any personal considerations (instinct requiring that we consider the person of the moment as the only real one), I was performing the duties of an ardent and painful devotion dedicated as an oblation to the youth and beauty of Woman. And yet with this desire by which I was honouring youth with a votive offering, with my memories

too of Balbec, there was blended, in my need to keep Albertine thus every evening by my side, something that had hitherto been foreign to my amorous existence at least, if it was not entirely new in my life. It was a soothing power the like of which I had not experienced since the evenings at Combray long ago when my mother, stooping over my bed, brought me repose in a kiss. To be sure, I should have been greatly astonished at that time had anyone told me that I was not extremely kind and especially that I would ever seek to deprive someone else of a pleasure. I must have known myself very imperfectly then, for my pleasure in having Albertine to live with me was much less a positive pleasure than the pleasure of having withdrawn from the world, where everyone was free to enjoy her in turn, the blossoming girl who, if she did not bring me any great joy, was at least withholding joy from others. Ambition and fame would have left me unmoved. Even more was I incapable of feeling hatred. And yet to love carnally was none the less, for me, to enjoy a triumph over countless rivals. I can never repeat it often enough: it was more than anything else an appeasement.

For all that I might, before Albertine returned, have doubted her, have imagined her in the room at Montjouvain, once she was in her dressing-gown and seated facing my chair or (if, as was more frequent, I had remained in bed) at the foot of my bed, I would deposit my doubts in her, hand them over for her to relieve me of them, with the abnegation of a worshipper uttering a prayer. All through the evening she might have been there, curled up in a mischievous ball on my bed, playing with me like a cat; her little pink nose, the tip of which she made even tinier with a coquettish glance which gave it a daintiness characteristic of certain women who are inclined to be plump, might have given her an inflamed and provocative air; she might have allowed a tress of her long, dark hair to fall over her pale-pink waxen cheek and, half shutting her eyes, unfolding her arms, have seemed to be saying to me: "Do what you like with me"—but when the time came for her to leave me, and she drew close to me to say good-night, it was a softness that had become almost familial that I kissed on either side of her sturdy neck which then never seemed to me brown or freckled enough, as though these solid qualities were associated with a certain frank good nature in Albertine.

"Are you coming with us tomorrow, old crosspatch?" she would ask before leaving me.

"Where are you going?"

"That will depend on the weather and on you. But have you written anything today, my little darling? No? Then it was hardly worth your while not coming with us. Tell me, by the way, when I came in this evening, you knew my step, you guessed at once who it was?"

"Of course. Could I possibly be mistaken? Couldn't I tell my little goose's footprint among a thousand? She must let me take her shoes off before she goes to bed, it will give me such pleasure. You're so nice and pink in all that white lace."

Such was my answer; amid the sensual expressions, others will be recognised that were peculiar to my grandmother and my mother. For, little by little, I was beginning to resemble all my relations: my father who—in a very different fashion from myself, no doubt, for if things repeat themselves, it is with great variations—took so keen an interest in the weather; and not my father only, but, more and more, my aunt Leonie. Otherwise Albertine could not but have been a reason for my going out, so as not to leave her on her own, beyond my control. Although every day I found an excuse in some particular indisposition, what made me so often remain in bed was a person—not Albertine, not a person I loved but a person with more power over me than any beloved—who had transmigrated into me, a person despotic to the point of silencing at times my jealous suspicions or at least of preventing me from going to verify whether they had any foundation, and that person was my aunt Léonie—my aunt Leonie, who was entirely steeped in piety and with whom I could have sworn that I had not a single point in common, I who was so passionately fond of pleasure, apparently worlds apart from that maniac who had never known any pleasure in her life and lay telling her beads all day long, I who suffered from my inability to actualise a literary career whereas she had been the one person in the family who could never understand that reading was anything other than a means of whiling away the time, of "amusing oneself," which made it, even at Eastertide, permissible on Sundays, when every serious occupation is forbidden in order that the whole day may be hallowed by prayer. And as if it were not enough that I should bear an exaggerated resemblance to my father, to the extent of not being satisfied like him with consulting the barometer, but becoming an animated barometer myself, as if it were not enough that I should allow myself to be ordered by my aunt Leonie to stay at home and watch the weather, from my bedroom window or even from my bed, here I was talking now to Albertine, at one moment as the child that I had been at Combray used to talk to my mother, at another as my grandmother used to talk to me. When we have passed a certain age, the soul of the child that we were and the souls of the dead from whom we sprang come and shower upon us their riches and their spells, asking to be allowed to contribute to the new emotions which we feel and in which, erasing their former image, we recast them in an original creation. Thus my whole past from my earliest years, and, beyond these, the past of my parents and relations, blended with my impure love for Albertine the tender charm of an affection at once filial and maternal. We have to give hospitality, at a certain stage in our lives, to all our relatives who have journeyed so far and gathered round us.

Before Albertine obeyed and took off her shoes, I would open her chemise. Her two little uplifted breasts were so round that they seemed not so much to be an integral part of her body as to have ripened there like fruit; and her belly (concealing the place where a man's is disfigured as though by an iron clamp left sticking in a statue that has been taken down from its niche) was closed, at the junction of her thighs, by two valves with a curve as languid, as reposeful, as cloistral as that of the horizon after the sun has set. She would take off her shoes, and lie down by my side.

O mighty attitudes of Man and Woman, in which there seeks to be united, in the innocence of the world's first days and with the humility of clay, what the Creation made separate, in which Eve is astonished and

submissive before Man by whose side she awakens, as he himself, alone still, before God who has fashioned him! Albertine would fold her arms behind her dark hair, her hip swelling, her leg drooping with the inflexion of a swan's neck that stretches upwards and then curves back on itself. When she was lying completely on her side, there was a certain aspect of her face (so sweet and so beautiful from in front) which I could not endure, hook-nosed as in one of Leonardo's caricatures, seeming to betray the malice, the greed for gain, the deceitfulness of a spy whose presence in my house would have filled me with horror and whom that profile seemed to unmask. At once I took Albertine's face in my hands and altered its position.

"Be a good boy and promise me that if you don't come out tomorrow you'll work," she would say as she slipped her chemise on again.

"Yes, but don't put on your dressing-gown yet."

Sometimes I ended by falling asleep by her side. The room would grow cold, more wood would be wanted. I would try to find the bell above my head, but fail to do so, after fingering all the copper rods in turn save those between which it hung, and would say to Albertine who had sprung from the bed so that Françoise should not find us lying side by side: "No, come back for a moment, I can't find the bell."

Sweet, gay, innocent moments to all appearance, and yet moments in which there gathers the unsuspected possibility of disaster, which makes the amorous life the most precarious of all, that in which the unpredictable rain of sulphur and brimstone falls after the most radiant moments, whereupon, without having the heart or the will to draw a lesson from our misfortune, we set to work at once to rebuild upon the slopes of the crater from which nothing but catastrophe can emerge. I was as carefree as those who imagine their happiness will last. It is precisely because this tenderness has been necessary to give birth to pain—and will return moreover at intervals to calm it—that men can be sincere with each other, and even with themselves, when they pride themselves on a woman's lovingness, although, taking things all in all, at the heart of their intimacy there lurks continuously and secretly, unavowed to the rest of the world, or revealed unintentionally by questions and inquiries, a painful disquiet. But this could not have come to birth without the preliminary tenderness, which even afterwards is intermittently necessary to make the pain bearable and to avoid ruptures; and concealment of the secret hell that a life shared with the woman in question really is, to the point of parading an allegedly tender intimacy, expresses a genuine point of view, a universal process of cause and effect, one of the modes whereby the production of grief and pain is rendered possible.

It no longer surprised me that Albertine should be in the house, and would not be going out tomorrow except with myself or in the custody of Andrée. These habits of shared life, these broad lines by which my existence was demarcated and within which nobody might penetrate but Albertine, and also (in the future plan, of which I was still unaware, of my life to come, like the plan drawn up by an architect for monuments which will not be erected until long afterwards) the remoter lines, parallel to these and broader still, by which, like an isolated hermitage, the somewhat rigid and monotonous prescription of my future loves was adumbrated, had in reality been traced that night at Balbec when, in the little train, after Albertine had revealed to me who it was that had brought her up, I had decided at all costs to remove her from certain influences and to prevent her from straying out of my sight for some days. Day after day had gone by, and these habits had become mechanical, but, like those rites the meaning of which History seeks to discover, I could have said (though I would not have wished to say) to anybody who asked me to explain the meaning of this life of seclusion which I carried so far as no longer to go to the theatre, that its origin lay in the anxiety of an evening and my need to prove to myself, during the days that followed, that the girl of whose unfortunate childhood I had learned should have no possibility, whether she wished to or not, of exposing herself to similar temptations. I no longer thought, except very rarely, of these possibilities, but they were nevertheless to remain vaguely present in my consciousness. The fact that I was destroying them—or trying to do so—day by day was doubtless the reason why I took such pleasure in kissing those cheeks which were no more beautiful than many others; beneath any carnal attraction at all deep, there is the permanent possibility of danger.

I had promised Albertine that, if I did not go out with her, I would settle down to work. But in the morning, just as if, taking advantage of our being asleep, the house had miraculously flown, I awoke in different weather beneath another clime. We do not begin to work as soon as we disembark in a strange country to the conditions of which we have to adapt ourselves. And each day was for me a different country. How could I even recognise my indolence itself, under the novel forms which it assumed? Sometimes, on days when the weather was beyond redemption, mere residence in the house, situated in the midst of a steady and continuous rain, had all the gliding ease, the soothing silence, the interest of a sea voyage; another time, on a bright day, to lie still in bed was to let the lights and shadows play around me as round a tree-trunk. Or yet again, at the first strokes of the bell of a neighbouring convent, rare as the early morning worshippers, barely whitening the dark sky with their hesitant hail-showers, melted and scattered by the warm breeze, I would discern one of those tempestuous, disordered, delightful days, when the roofs, soaked by an intermittent downpour and dried by a gust of wind or a ray of sunshine, let fall a gurgling raindrop and, as they wait for the wind to turn again, preen their iridescent pigeon's-breast slates in the momentary sunshine; one of those days filled with so many changes of weather, atmospheric incidents, storms, that the idle man does not feel that he has wasted them because he has been taking an interest in the activity which, in default of himself, the atmosphere, acting as it were in his stead, has displayed; days similar to those times of revolution or war which do not seem empty to the schoolboy playing truant, because by loitering outside the Law Courts or by

reading the newspapers he has the illusion of deriving from the events that have occurred, failing the work which he has neglected, an intellectual profit and an excuse for his idleness; days, finally, to which one may compare those on which some exceptional crisis has occurred in one's life from which the man who has never done anything imagines that he will acquire industrious habits if it is happily resolved: for instance, the morning on which he sets out for a duel which is to be fought under particularly dangerous conditions, and he is suddenly made aware, at the moment when it is perhaps about to be taken from him, of the value of a life of which he might have made use to begin some important work, or merely to enjoy a few pleasures, and of which he has failed to make any use at all. "If only I'm not killed," he says to himself, "how I shall settle down to work the very minute, and how I shall enjoy myself too!" Life has in fact suddenly acquired a higher value in his eyes, because he puts into life everything that it seems to him capable of giving instead of the little that he normally demands of it. He sees it in the light of his desire, not as his experience has taught him that he was apt to make it, that is to say so tawdry. It has, at that moment, become filled with work, travel, mountain-climbing, all the splendid things which, he tells himself, the fatal outcome of the duel may render impossible, without thinking that they were already impossible before there was any question of a duel, owing to the bad habits which, even had there been no duel, would have persisted. He returns home without even a scratch, but he continues to find the same obstacles to pleasures, excursions, travel, to everything which for a moment he had feared that death would deprive him of; life is sufficient for that. As for work—exceptional circumstances having the effect of intensifying what previously existed in a man, work in the industrious, idleness in the lazy—he takes a holiday from it.

I followed his example, and did as I had always done since my first resolution to become a writer, which I had made long ago, but which seemed to me to date from yesterday, because I had regarded each intervening day as non-existent. I treated this day in a similar fashion, allowing its showers of rain and bursts of sunshine to pass without doing anything, and vowing that I would begin to work next day. But then I was no longer the same man beneath a cloudless sky; the golden note of the bells contained, like honey, not only light but the sensation of light (and also the sickly savour of preserved fruits, because at Combray it had often loitered like a wasp over our cleared dinner-table). On this day of dazzling sunshine, to remain until nightfall with my eyes shut was a thing permitted, customary, health-giving, pleasant, seasonable, like keeping the outside shutters closed against the heat. It was in such weather as this that at the beginning of my second visit to Balbec I used to hear the violins of the orchestra amid the blue-green surge of the rising tide. How much more fully did I possess Albertine today! There were days when the sound of a bell striking the hour bore upon the sphere of its sonority a plaque so spread with moisture or with light that it was like a transcription for the blind or, if you like, a musical interpretation of the charm of rain or the charm of sunlight. So much so that, at the moment, as I lay in bed with my eyes shut, I said to myself that everything is capable of transposition and that a universe that was exclusively audible might be as full of variety as the other. Travelling lazily upstream from day to day as in a boat, and seeing an endlessly changing succession of enchanted scenes appear before my eyes, scenes which I did not choose, which a moment earlier had been invisible to me, and which my memory presented to me one after another without my being free to choose them, I idly pursued over that smooth expanse my stroll in the sunshine.

Those morning concerts at Balbec were not long past. And yet, at that comparatively recent time, I had given but little thought to Albertine. Indeed, on the very first days after my arrival, I had not known that she was at Balbec. From whom then had I learned it? Oh, yes, from Aimé. It was a fine sunny day like this. The worthy Aimé! He was glad to see me again. But he does not like Albertine. Not everybody can like her. Yes, it was he who told me that she was at Balbec. But how did he know? Ah! he had met her, had thought that she was badly-behaved. At that moment, as I approached Aimé's story by a different facet from the one it had presented when he had told it to me, my thoughts, which hitherto had been sailing blissfully over these untroubled waters, exploded suddenly, as though they had struck an invisible and perilous mine, treacherously moored at this point in my memory. He had told me that he had met her, that he had thought her badly-behaved. What had he meant by bad behaviour? I had understood him to mean vulgar behaviour, because, to contradict him in advance, I had declared that she was most refined. But no, perhaps he had meant Gomorran behaviour. She was with another girl, perhaps their arms were round one another's waists, perhaps they were staring at other women, were indeed behaving in a manner which I had never seen Albertine adopt in my presence. Who was the other girl? Where had Aimé met her, this odious Albertine?

I tried to recall exactly what Aimé had said to me, in order to see whether it could be related to what I imagined, or whether he had meant nothing more than common manners. But in vain might I ask the question, the person who put it and the person who could supply the recollection were, alas, one and the same person, myself, who was momentarily duplicated but without any additional insight. Question as I might, it was myself who answered, I learned nothing more. I no longer gave a thought to Mlle Vinteuil. Born of a new suspicion, the fit of jealousy from which I was suffering was new too, or rather it was only the prolongation, the extension of that suspicion; it had the same theatre, which was no longer Montjouvain but the road upon which Aimé had met Albertine, and for its object one or other of the various friends who might have been with Albertine that day. It was perhaps a certain Elisabeth, or else perhaps those two girls whom Albertine had watched in the mirror at the Casino, while appearing not to see them. She had doubtless been having relations with them, and also with Esther, Bloch's cousin. Such relations, had they been revealed to me by a third person, would have been enough almost to kill me, but since it was I who imagined them, I took care to add sufficient uncertainty to deaden the pain. We succeed in absorbing daily in enormous doses, under the guise of suspicions, this same idea that we are being betrayed, a quite small quantity of which might prove fatal if injected by the needle of a shattering word. And it is no doubt for that reason, and as a byproduct of the instinct of self-preservation, that the same jealous man does not hesitate to form the most terrible suspicions upon a basis of innocuous facts, provided that, whenever any proof is brought to him, he refuses to accept the irrefutable evidence. Besides, love is an incurable malady, like those diathetic states in which rheumatism affords the sufferer a brief respite only to be replaced by epileptiform headaches. If my jealous suspicion was calmed, I then felt a grudge against Albertine for not having been tender enough, perhaps for having made fun of me with Andrée. I thought with alarm of the idea that she must have formed if Andrée had repeated all our conversations; the future loomed black and menacing. This mood of depression left me only if a new jealous suspicion drove me to further inquiries or if, on the other hand, Albertine's displays of affection made my happiness seem to me insignificant. Who could this girl be? I must write to Aimé, try to see him, and then check his statement by talking to Albertine, making her confess. In the meantime, convinced that it must be Bloch's cousin, I asked Bloch himself, who had not the remotest idea of my purpose, simply to let me see her photograph, or, better still, to arrange for me to meet her.

How many persons, cities, roads jealousy makes us eager thus to know! It is a thirst for knowledge thanks to which, with regard to various isolated points, we end by acquiring every possible notion in turn except the one that we require. One can never tell whether a suspicion will not arise, for, all of a sudden, one recalls a remark that was not clear, an alibi that cannot have been given without a purpose. One has not seen the person again, but there is such a thing as a retrospective jealousy, that is born only after we have left the person, a delayed-action jealousy. Perhaps the habit that I had acquired of nursing within me certain desires,

the desire for a young girl of good family such as those I used to see pass beneath my window escorted by their governesses, and especially for the girl whom Saint-Loup had mentioned to me, the one who frequented houses of ill fame, the desire for handsome lady's-maids, and especially for Mme Putbus's, the desire to go to the country in early spring to see once again hawthorns, apple-trees in blossom, storms, the desire for Venice, the desire to settle down to work, the desire to live like other people—perhaps the habit of storing up all these desires, without assuaging any of them, contenting myself with a promise to myself not to forget to satisfy them one day—perhaps this habit, so many years old already, of perpetual postponement, of what M. de Charlus used to castigate under the name of procrastination, had become so prevalent in me that it took hold of my jealous suspicions also and, while encouraging me to make a mental note that I would not fail, some day, to have things out with Albertine as regards the girl, or possibly girls (this part of the story was confused and blurred in my memory and to all intents and purposes indecipherable) with whom Aimé had met her, made me also postpone this inquest. In any case, I would not mention the subject to my mistress this evening, for fear of making her think me jealous and so offending her.

And yet when, on the following day, Bloch sent me the photograph of his cousin Esther, I made haste to forward it to Aimé. And at the same moment I remembered that Albertine had that morning refused me a pleasure which might indeed have tired her. Was that in order to reserve it for someone else, this afternoon, perhaps? For whom? Jealousy is thus endless, for even if the beloved, by dying for instance, can no longer provoke it by her actions, it may happen that memories subsequent to any event suddenly materialise and behave in our minds as though they too were events, memories which hitherto we had never explored, which had seemed to us unimportant, and to which our own reflexion upon them is sufficient, without any external factors, to give a new and terrible meaning. There is no need for there to be two of you, it is enough to be alone in your room, thinking, for fresh betrayals by your mistress to come to light, even though she is dead. And so we ought not to fear in love, as in everyday life, the future alone, but even the past, which often comes to life for us only when the future has come and gone—and not only the past which we discover after the event but the past which we have long kept stored within ourselves and suddenly learn how to interpret.

No matter, I was only too happy, as afternoon turned to evening, that the hour was not far off when I should be able to look to Albertine's presence for the appeasement which I needed. Unfortunately, the evening that followed was one of those when this appeasement was not forthcoming, when the kiss that Albertine would give me when she left me for the night, very different from her usual kiss, would no more soothe me than my mother's kiss had soothed me long ago, on days when she was vexed with me and I dared not call her back although I knew that I should be unable to sleep. Such evenings were now those on which Albertine had formed for the next day some plan about which she did not wish me to know. Had she confided it to me, I would have shown an eagerness to ensure its realisation that no one but Albertine could have inspired in me. But she told me nothing, and she had no need to tell me anything; as soon as she came in, before she had even crossed the threshold of my room, while she was still wearing her hat or toque, I had already detected the unknown, restive, desperate, uncontrollable desire. These were often the evenings when I had awaited her return with the most loving thoughts, and looked forward to throwing my arms round her neck with the warmest affection. Alas, misunderstandings such as I had often had with my parents, whom I would find cold or irritable when I ran to embrace them, overflowing with love, are as nothing in comparison with those that occur between lovers. The anguish then is far less superficial, far harder to endure; it has its seat in a deeper layer of the heart.

On this particular evening, however, Albertine was obliged to mention the plan that she had in mind; I gathered at once that she wished to go next day to pay a visit to Mme Verdurin, a visit to which in itself I would have seen no objection. But evidently her object was to meet someone there, to prepare some future pleasure. Otherwise she would not have attached so much importance to this visit. That is to say, she would not have kept on assuring me that it was of no importance. I had in the course of my life followed a progression which was the opposite of that adopted by peoples who make use of phonetic writing only after having considered the characters as a set of symbols; having, for so many years, looked for the real life and thought of other people only in the direct statements about them which they supplied me with of their own free will, in the absence of these I had come to attach importance, on the contrary, only to disclosures that are not a rational and analytical expression of the truth; the words themselves did not enlighten me unless they were interpreted in the same way as a rush of blood to the cheeks of a person who is embarrassed, or as a sudden silence. Such and such an adverb (for instance that used by M. de Cambremer when he understood that I was "literary" and, not having yet spoken to me, as he was describing a visit he had paid to the Verdurins, turned to me with: "*Incidentally*, Borelli was there!") bursting into flames through the involuntary, sometimes perilous contact of two ideas which the speaker has not expressed but which, by applying the appropriate methods of analysis or electrolysis, I was able to extract from it, told me more than a long speech. Albertine sometimes let fall in her conversation one or other of these precious amalgams which I made haste to "treat" so as to transform them into lucid ideas.

It is in fact one of the most terrible things for the lover that whereas particular details—which only experiment or espionage, among so many possible realisations, would ever make known to him—are so difficult to discover, the truth on the other hand is so easy to detect or merely to sense. Often, at Balbec, I had seen her fasten on girls who came past us a sudden lingering stare, like a physical contact, after which, if I knew the girls, she would say to me: "Suppose we asked them to join us? I should so enjoy insulting them." And now, for some time past, doubtless since she had succeeded in reading my mind, no request to me to invite anyone, not a word, not even a sidelong glance from her eyes, which had become objectless and mute,

and, with the abstracted, vacant expression that accompanied them, as revealing as had been their magnetic swerve before. Yet it was impossible for me to reproach her, or to ply her with questions about things which she would have declared to be so petty, so trivial, stored up by me simply for the pleasure of "nitpicking." It is hard enough to say: "Why did you stare at that girl who went past?" but a great deal harder to say: "Why did you not stare at her?" And yet I knew quite well—or at least I should have known if I had not chosen instead to believe those affirmations of hers—what Albertine's demeanour comprehended and proved, like such and such a contradiction in the course of conversation which often I did not perceive until long after I had left her, which kept me in anguish all night long, which I never dared mention to her again, but which nevertheless continued to honour my memory from time to time with its periodical visits. Even in the case of these furtive or sidelong glances on the beach at Balbec or in the streets of Paris, I might sometimes wonder whether the person who provoked them was not only an object of desire at the moment when she passed, but an old acquaintance, or else some girl who had simply been mentioned to her and whom, when I heard about it, I was astonished that anybody could have mentioned to her, so remote was she from what one would have guessed Albertine's range of acquaintance to be. But the Gomorrah of today is a jigsaw puzzle made up of pieces that come from places where one least expected to find them. Thus I once saw at Rive-belle a big dinner-party of ten women, all of whom I happened to know, at least by name, and who, though as dissimilar as could be, were none the less perfectly united, so much so that I never saw a party so homogeneous, albeit so composite.

To return to the girls whom we passed in the street, never would Albertine stare at an old person, man or woman, with such fixity, or on the other hand with such reserve and as though she saw nothing. Cuckolded husbands who know nothing in fact know perfectly well. But it requires more accurate and abundant evidence to create a scene of jealousy. Besides, if jealousy helps us to discover a certain tendency to falsehood in the woman we love, it multiplies this tendency a hundredfold when the woman has discovered that we are jealous. She lies (to an extent to which she has never lied to us before), whether from pity, or from fear, or because she instinctively shies away in a flight that is symmetrical with our investigations. True, there are love affairs in which from the start a woman of easy virtue has posed as virtue incarnate in the eyes of the man who is in love with her. But how many others consist of two diametrically opposite periods! In the first, the woman speaks almost freely, with slight modifications, of her zest for pleasure and of the amorous life which it has made her lead, all of which she will deny later on with the utmost vigour to the same man when she senses that he is jealous of her and spying on her. He comes to regret the days of those first confidences, the memory of which torments him nevertheless. If the woman continued to make them, she would furnish him almost unaided with the secret of her conduct which he has been vainly pursuing day after day. And besides, what abandon those early confidences proved, what trust, what friendship! If she cannot live without being unfaithful to him, at least she would be doing so as a friend, telling him of her pleasures, associating him with them. And he thinks with regret of the sort of life which the early stages of their love seemed to promise, which the sequel has rendered impossible, turning that love into something agonisingly painful, which will make a final parting, according to circumstances, either inevitable or impossible.

Sometimes the script from which I deciphered Albertine's lies, without being ideographic, needed simply to be read backwards; thus this evening she had tossed at me casually the message, intended to pass almost unnoticed: "I may go and see the Verdurins tomorrow. I don't really know whether I will go, I don't particularly want to." A childish anagram of the admission: "I shall go to the Verdurins' tomorrow, it's absolutely certain, I attach the utmost importance to it." This apparent hesitation indicated a firm resolution and was intended to diminish the importance of the visit while informing me of it. Albertine always adopted a dubitative tone for irrevocable decisions. Mine was no less irrevocable: I would see that this visit to Mme Verdurin did not take place. Jealousy is often only an anxious need to be tyrannical applied to matters of love. I had doubtless inherited from my father this abrupt, arbitrary desire to threaten the people I loved best in the hopes with which they were lulling themselves with a sense of security which I wanted to expose to them as false; when I saw that Albertine had planned without my knowledge, behind my back, an expedition which I would have done everything in the world to make easier and more pleasant for her had she taken me into her confidence, I said casually, in order to make her tremble, that I expected to go out the next day myself.

I began to suggest to Albertine other expeditions in directions which would have made the visit to the Verdurins impossible, in words stamped with a feigned indifference beneath which I strove to conceal my agitation. But she had detected it. It encountered in her the electric power of a contrary will which violently repulsed it; I could see the sparks flash from Albertine's pupils. What use was it, though, to pay attention to what her eyes were saying at that moment? How had I failed to observe long ago that Albertine's eyes belonged to the category which even in a quite ordinary person seems to be composed of a number of fragments because of all the places in which the person wishes to be—and to conceal the desire to be—on that particular day? Eyes mendaciously kept always immobile and passive, but none the less dynamic, measurable in the yards or miles to be traversed before they reach the desired, the implacably desired meeting-place, eyes that are not so much smiling at the pleasure which tempts them as shadowed with melancholy and discouragement because there may be a difficulty in their getting there. Even when you hold them in your hands, such persons are fugitives. To understand the emotions which they arouse, and which others, even better-looking, do not, we must recognise that they are not immobile but in motion, and add to their person a sign corresponding to that which in physics denotes speed.



If you upset their plans for the day, they confess to you the pleasure they had concealed from you: "I did so want to go and have tea with so and so who I'm fond of." And then, six months later, if you come to know the person in question, you will learn that the girl whose plans you had upset, who, trapped, in order that you might set her free had confessed to you that she was thus in the habit of taking tea with a dear friend every day at the hour at which you did not see her, has never once been inside this person's house, that they have never had tea together, since the girl used to explain that her whole time was taken up by none other than yourself. And so the person with whom she confessed that she was going to tea, with whom she begged you to allow her to go to tea, that person, a reason admitted by necessity, it was not her, it was somebody else, it was something else still! What something else? Which somebody else?

Alas, the multifaceted eyes, far-ranging and melancholy, might enable us perhaps to measure distance, but do not indicate direction. The boundless field of possibilities extends before us, and if by any chance the reality presented itself to our eyes, it would be so far outside the limits of the possible that, knocking suddenly against this looming wall, we should fall over backwards in a daze. It is not even essential that we should have proof of her movement and flight, it is enough that we should guess them. She had promised us a letter; we were calm, we were no longer in love. The letter has not come; each mail fails to bring it; what can have happened? Anxiety is born afresh, and love. It is such people more than any others who inspire love in us, to our desolation. For every new anxiety that we feel on their account strips them in our eyes of some of their personality. We were resigned to suffering, thinking that we loved outside ourselves, and we perceive that our love is a function of our sorrow, that our love perhaps is our sorrow, and that its object is only to a very small extent the girl with the raven hair. But, when all is said, it is such people more than any others who inspire love.

More often than not, a body becomes the object of love only when an emotion, fear of losing it, uncertainty of getting it back, melts into it. Now this sort of anxiety has a great affinity for bodies. It adds to them a quality which surpasses beauty itself, which is one of the reasons why we see men who are indifferent to the most beautiful women fall passionately in love with others who appear to us ugly. To such beings, such fugitive beings, their own nature and our anxiety fasten wings. And even when they are with us the look in their eyes seems to warn us that they are about to take flight. The proof of this beauty, surpassing beauty itself, that wings add is that often, for us, the same person is alternately winged and wingless. Afraid of losing her, we forget all the others. Sure of keeping her, we compare her with those others whom at once we prefer to her. And as these fears and these certainties may vary from week to week, a person may one week see everything that gave us pleasure sacrificed to her, in the following week be sacrificed herself, and so on for months on end. All of which would be incomprehensible did we not know (from the experience, which every man shares, of having at least once in a lifetime ceased to love a woman, forgotten her) how very insignificant in herself a woman is when she is no longer—or is not yet—permeable to our emotions. And, of course, if we speak of fugitive beings it is equally true of imprisoned ones, of captive women whom we think we shall never be able to possess. Hence men detest procuresses, because they facilitate flight and dangle temptations, but if on the other hand we are in love with a cloistered woman, we willingly have recourse to a procuress to snatch her from her prison and bring her to us. In so far as relations with women whom we abduct are less permanent than others, the reason is that the fear of not succeeding in procuring them or the dread of seeing them escape is the whole of our love for them and that once they have been carried off from their husbands, torn from their footlights, cured of the temptation to leave us, dissociated in short from our emotion whatever it may be, they are only themselves, that is to say next to nothing, and, so long desired, are soon forsaken by the very man who was so afraid of their forsaking him.

I have said: "How could I have failed to guess?" But had I not guessed it from the first day at Balbec? Had I not detected in Albertine one of those girls beneath whose envelope of flesh more hidden persons stir, I will not say than in a pack of cards still in its box, a closed cathedral or a theatre before we enter it, but than in the whole vast ever-changing crowd? Not only all these persons, but the desire, the voluptuous memory, the restless searching of so many persons. At Balbec I had not been troubled because I had never even supposed that one day I should be following a trail, even a false trail. Nevertheless, it had given Albertine, in my eyes, the plenitude of someone filled to the brim by the superimposition of so many persons, of so many desires and voluptuous memories of persons. And now that she had one day let fall the name "Mlle Vinteuil," I should have liked, not to tear off her dress to see her body, but through her body to see and read the whole diary of her memories and her future passionate assignations.

Strange how the things that are probably most insignificant suddenly assume an extraordinary value when a person whom we love (or who has lacked only this duplicity to make us love her) conceals them from us! In itself, suffering does not of necessity inspire in us sentiments of love or hatred towards the person who causes it: a surgeon can hurt us without arousing any personal emotion in us. But with a woman who has continued for some time to assure us that we are everything in the world to her, without being herself everything in the world to us, a woman whom we enjoy seeing, kissing, taking on our knee, we are astonished if we merely sense from a sudden resistance that she is not at our entire disposal. Disappointment may then revive in us the forgotten memory of an old anguish, which we nevertheless know to have been provoked not by this woman but by others whose betrayals stretch back like milestones through our past. And indeed, how have we the heart to go on living, how can we move a finger to preserve ourselves from death, in a world in which love is provoked only by lies and consists solely in our need to see our sufferings appeased by the person who has made us suffer? To escape from the depths of despondency that follow the discovery of this lying and this resistance, there is the sad remedy of endeavouring to act, against her will, with the help of people whom we

feel to be more closely involved than we are in her life, upon her who is resisting us and lying to us, to play the cheat in turn, to make ourselves loathed. But the suffering caused by such a love is of the kind which must inevitably lead the sufferer to seek an illusory comfort in a change of position. These means of action are not wanting, alas! And the horror of the kind of love which anxiety alone has engendered lies in the fact that we turn over and over incessantly in our cage the most trivial utterances; not to mention that rarely do the people for whom we feel this love appeal to us physically to any great extent, since it is not our deliberate preference, but the accident of a moment's anguish (a moment indefinitely prolonged by our weakness of character, which repeats its experiments every evening until it yields to sedatives) that has chosen for us.

No doubt my love for Albertine was not the most barren of those to which, through lack of will-power, a man may descend, for it was not entirely platonic; she did give me some carnal satisfaction, and moreover she was intelligent. But all this was supererogatory. What occupied my mind was not something intelligent that she might have said, but a chance remark that had aroused in me a doubt as to her actions; I tried to remember whether she had said this or that, in what tone, at what moment, in response to what words, to reconstruct the whole scene of her dialogue with me, to recall at what moment she had expressed a desire to visit the Verdurins, what word of mine had brought that look of vexation to her face. The most important event might have been at issue without my going to so much trouble to establish the truth of it, to reconstitute its precise atmosphere and colour. No doubt, after these anxieties have intensified to a degree which we find unbearable, we sometimes manage to calm them altogether for an evening. We too are invited to the party which the woman we love was to attend and the true nature of which has been obsessing us for days; she has neither looks nor words for anyone but us; we take her home and then, all our anxieties dispelled, we enjoy a repose as complete and as healing as the deep sleep that comes after a long walk. And no doubt such repose is worth a high price. But would it not have been simpler not to buy ourselves, deliberately, the preceding anxiety, and at an even higher price? Besides, we know all too well that however profound these temporary respites may be, anxiety will still prevail. Often, indeed, it is revived by a remark that was intended to set our mind at rest. The demands of our jealousy and the blindness of our credulity are greater than the woman we love could ever suppose. When, spontaneously, she swears to us that such and such a man is no more to her than a friend, she shatters us by informing us—something we never suspected—that he has been her friend. While she is telling us, in proof of her sincerity, how they had tea together that very afternoon, at each word that she utters the invisible, the unsuspected, takes shape before our eyes. She admits that he has asked her to be his mistress, and we suffer agonies at the thought that she can have listened to his overtures. She refused them, she says. But presently, when we recall her story, we wonder whether that refusal is really genuine, for there is wanting, between the different things that she said to us, that logical and necessary connexion which, more than the facts related, is the sign of truth. Besides, there was that frightening note of scorn in her voice: "I said to him no, categorically," which is to be found in every class of society when a woman is lying. We must nevertheless thank her for having refused, encourage her by our kindness to repeat these painful confidences in the future. At the most, we may remark: "But if he had already made advances to you, why did you accept his invitation to tea?" "So that he should not hold it against me and say that I hadn't been nice to him." And we dare not reply that by refusing she would perhaps have been nicer to us.

Albertine alarmed me further when she said that I was quite right to say, out of regard for her reputation, that I was not her lover, since "for that matter," she went on, "it's perfectly true that you aren't." I was not perhaps her lover in the full sense of the word, but then, was I to suppose that all the things that we did together she did also with all the other men whose mistress she swore to me that she had never been? The desire to know at all costs what Albertine was thinking, whom she saw, whom she loved—how strange that I should sacrifice everything to this need, since I had felt the same need to know in the case of Gilberte names and facts which now meant nothing to me! I was perfectly well aware that in themselves Albertine's actions were of no greater interest. It is curious that a first love, if by the fragile state in which it leaves one's heart it paves the way for subsequent loves, does not at least provide one, in view of the identity of symptoms and sufferings, with the means of curing them. Besides, is there any need to know a fact? Are we not aware beforehand, in a general way, of the mendacity and even the discretion of those women who have something to conceal? Is there any possibility of error? They make a virtue of their silence, when we would give anything to make them speak. And we feel certain that they have assured their accomplice: "I never say anything. It won't be through me that anybody will hear about it, I never say anything."

A man may give his fortune and even his life for a woman, and yet know quite well that in ten years' time, more or less, he would refuse her the fortune, prefer to keep his life. For then that woman would be detached from him, alone, that is to say non-existent. What attaches us to people are the countless roots, the innumerable threads which are our memories of last night, our hopes for tomorrow morning, the continuous weft of habit from which we can never free ourselves. Just as there are misers who hoard from generosity, so we are spendthrifts who spend from avarice, and it is not so much to a person that we sacrifice our life as to everything of ours that may have become attached to that person, all those hours and days, all those things compared with which the life we have not yet lived, our life in the relative future, seems to us more remote, more detached, less intimate, less our own. What we need is to extricate ourselves from these bonds which are so much more important than the person, but they have the effect of creating in us temporary obligations which mean that we dare not leave the person for fear of being badly thought of, whereas later on we would so dare, for, detached from us, that person would no longer be part of us, and because in reality we create obligations (even if, by an apparent contradiction, they should lead to suicide) towards ourselves alone.

If I was not in love with Albertine (and of this I could not be sure) then there was nothing extraordinary in the place that she occupied in my life: we live only with what we do not love, with what we have brought to live with us only in order to kill the intolerable love, whether it be for a woman, for a place, or again for a woman embodying a place. Indeed we should be terrified of beginning to love again if a new separation were to occur. I had not yet reached this stage with Albertine. Her lies, her admissions, left me to complete the task of elucidating the truth: her innumerable lies, because she was not content with merely lying, like everyone who imagines that he or she is loved, but was by nature, quite apart from this, a liar (and so inconsistent moreover that, even if she told me the truth every time about, for instance, what she thought of other people, she would say something different every time); her admissions, because, being so rare, so quickly cut short, they left between them, in so far as they concerned the past, huge blanks over the whole expanse of which I was obliged to retrace—and for that first of all to discover—her life.

As for the present, so far as I could interpret the sibylline utterances of Françoise, it was not only on particular points but over a whole area that Albertine lied to me, and “one fine day” I would see what Françoise pretended to know, what she refused to tell me, what I dared not ask her. It was no doubt with the same jealousy that she had shown in the past with regard to Eulalie that Françoise would speak of the most unlikely things, but so vaguely that at most one could deduce therefrom the highly improbable insinuation that the poor captive (who was a lover of women) preferred marriage with somebody who did not appear to be me. If this had been so, how, in spite of her telepathic powers, could Françoise have come to hear of it? Certainly, Albertine’s statements could give me no definite enlightenment, for they were as different day by day as the colours of a spinning-top that has almost come to a standstill. However, it seemed that it was hatred more than anything else that impelled Françoise to speak. Not a day went by without her addressing to me, and I in my mother’s absence enduring, such speeches as:

“To be sure, you’re very nice, and I shall never forget the debt of gratitude that I owe you” (this probably so that I might establish fresh claims upon her gratitude) “but the house has become infected ever since niceness brought in deceitfulness, ever since cleverness has been protecting the stupidest person that ever was seen, ever since refinement, good manners, wit, dignity in all things, the appearance and the reality of a prince, allow themselves to be dictated to and plotted against and me to be humiliated—me who’ve been forty years in the family—by vice, by everything that’s most vulgar and base.”

What Françoise resented most about Albertine was having to take orders from somebody who was not one of ourselves, and also the strain of the additional housework which, affecting the health of our old servant (who would not, for all that, accept any help in the house, not being a “good for nothing”), in itself would have accounted for her irritability and her furious hatred. Certainly, she would have liked to see Albertine-Esther banished from the house. This was Françoise’s dearest wish. And, by consoling her, its fulfilment would in itself have given our old servant some rest. But to my mind there was more to it than this. So violent a hatred could have originated only in an over-strained body. And, more even than of consideration, Françoise was in need of sleep.

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Albertine went to take off her things and, to lose no time in finding out what I wanted to know, I seized the telephone receiver and invoked the implacable deities, but succeeded only in arousing their fury which expressed itself in the single word “Engaged.” Andrée was in fact engaged in talking to someone else. As I waited for her to finish her conversation, I wondered why it was—now that so many of our painters are seeking to revive the feminine portraits of the eighteenth century, in which the cleverly devised setting is a pretext for portraying expressions of expectation, sulkiness, interest, reverie—why it was that none of our modern Bouchers or Fragonards had yet painted, instead of “The Letter” or “The Harpsichord,” this scene which might be entitled “At the telephone,” in which there would come spontaneously to the lips of the listener a smile that is all the more genuine because it is conscious of being unobserved.

Finally I got through to Andrée: “Are you coming to call for Albertine tomorrow?” I asked, and as I uttered Albertine’s name, I thought of the envy Swann had aroused in me when he had said to me, on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes’s party: “Come and see Odette,” and I had thought how potent, when all was said, was a Christian name which, in the eyes of the whole world including Odette herself, had on Swann’s lips alone this entirely possessive sense. Such a monopoly—summed up in a single word—over the whole existence of another person had appeared to me, whenever I was in love, to be sweet indeed! But in fact, when we are in a position to say it, either we no longer care, or else habit, while not blunting its tenderness, has changed its sweetness to bitterness.\* I knew that I alone was in a position to say “Albertine” in that tone to Andrée. And yet, to Albertine, to Andrée, and to myself, I felt that I was nothing. And I realised the impossibility which love comes up against. We imagine that it has as its object a being that can be laid down in front of us, enclosed within a body. Alas, it is the extension of that being to all the points in space and time that it has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess its contact with this or that place, this or that hour, we do not possess that being. But we cannot touch all these points. If only they were indicated to us, we might perhaps contrive to reach out to them. But we grope for them without finding them. Hence mistrust, jealousy, persecutions. We waste precious time on absurd clues and pass by the truth without suspecting it.

But already one of the irascible deities with the breathtakingly agile handmaidens was becoming irritated, not because I was speaking but because I was saying nothing.

“Come along, I’ve been holding the line for you all this time; I shall cut you off.”

However, she did nothing of the sort but, evoking Andrée's presence, enveloped it, like the great poet that a damsel of the telephone always is, in the atmosphere peculiar to the home, the district, the very life itself of Albertine's friend.

"Is that you?" asked Andrée, whose voice was projected towards me with an instantaneous speed by the goddess whose privilege it is to make sound more swift than light.

"Listen," I replied, "go wherever you like, anywhere, except to Mme Verdurin's. You must at all cost keep Albertine away from there tomorrow."

"But that's just where she's supposed to be going."

"Ah!"

But I was obliged to break off the conversation for a moment and to make menacing gestures, for if Françoise continued—as though it were something as unpleasant as vaccination or as dangerous as the aeroplane—to refuse to learn to use the telephone, whereby she would have spared us the trouble of conversations which she might intercept without any harm, on the other hand she would at once come into the room whenever I was engaged in a conversation so private that I was particularly anxious to keep it from her ears. When she had left the room at last, not without lingering to take away various objects that had been lying there since the previous day and might perfectly well have been left there for an hour longer, and to put on to the fire a log made quite superfluous by the burning heat generated in me by the intruder's presence and my fear of finding myself "cut off" by the operator, "I'm sorry," I said to Andrée, "I was interrupted. Is it absolutely certain that she has to go to the Verdurins' tomorrow?"

"Absolutely, but I can tell her that you don't want her to."

"No, not at all, but I might possibly come with you."

"Ah!" said Andrée, in a voice that sounded annoyed and somehow alarmed by my audacity, which was incidentally fortified as a result.

"Well then, good-night, and please forgive me for disturbing you for nothing."

"Not at all," said Andrée, and (since, now that the telephone has come into general use, a decorative ritual of polite phrases has grown up round it, as round the tea-tables of the past) she added: "It's been a great pleasure to hear your voice."

I might have said the same, and with greater truth than Andrée, for I had been deeply affected by the sound of her voice, having never noticed before that it was so different from the voices of other people. Then I recalled other voices still, women's voices especially, some of them slowed down by the precision of a question and by mental concentration, others made breathless, even interrupted at moments, by the lyrical flow of what they were relating; I recalled one by one the voices of all the girls I had known at Balbec, then Gilberte's, then my grandmother's, then Mme de Guermantes's; I found them all dissimilar, moulded by a speech peculiar to each of them, each playing on a different instrument, and I thought to myself how thin must be the concert performed in paradise by the three or four angel musicians of the old painters, when I saw, mounting to the throne of God by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, the harmonious and multiphonic salutation of all the Voices. I did not leave the telephone without thanking, in a few propitiatory words, the goddess who reigns over the speed of sound for having kindly exercised on behalf of my humble words a power which made them a hundred times more rapid than thunder. But my thanksgiving received no other response than that of being cut off.

When Albertine came back to my room, she was wearing a black satin dress which had the effect of making her seem paler, of turning her into the pallid, intense Parisian woman, etiolated by lack of fresh air, by the atmosphere of crowds and perhaps by the practice of vice, whose eyes seemed the more uneasy because they were not brightened by any colour in her cheeks.

"Guess," I said to her, "who I've just been talking to on the telephone. Andrée!"

"Andrée?" exclaimed Albertine in a loud, astonished, excited voice that so simple a piece of intelligence hardly seemed to call for. "I hope she remembered to tell you that we met Mme Verdurin the other day."

"Mme Verdurin? I don't remember," I replied as though I were thinking of something else, in order to appear indifferent to this meeting and not to betray Andrée who had told me where Albertine was going next day. But how could I tell whether Andrée was not herself betraying me, whether she would not tell Albertine tomorrow that I had asked her to prevent her at all costs from going to the Verdurins', and whether she had not already revealed to her that I had on several occasions made similar recommendations? She had assured me that she had never repeated anything, but the value of this assertion was counterbalanced in my mind by the impression that for some time past Albertine's face had ceased to show the trust that she had placed in me for so long.

Suffering, when we are in love, ceases from time to time, but only to resume in a different form. We weep to see the beloved no longer respond to us with those bursts of affection, those amorous advances of earlier days; we suffer even more when, having relinquished them with us, she resumes them with others; then, from this suffering, we are distracted by a new and still more agonising pang, the suspicion that she has lied to us about how she spent the previous evening, when she was no doubt unfaithful to us; this suspicion in turn is dispelled, and we are soothed by our mistress's affectionate kindness; but then a forgotten word comes back to us; we had been told that she was ardent in moments of pleasure, whereas we have always found her calm; we try to picture to ourselves these passionate frenzies with others, we feel how very little we are to her, we observe an air of boredom, longing, melancholy while we are talking, we observe like a black sky the slovenly clothes she puts on when she is with us, keeping for other people the dresses with which she used to flatter us. If, on the contrary, she is affectionate, what joy for a moment! But when we see that little tongue stuck out

as though in invitation, we think of those to whom that invitation was so often addressed that even perhaps with me, without her thinking of those others, it had remained for Albertine, by force of long habit, an automatic signal. Then the feeling that she is bored by us returns. But suddenly this pain is reduced to nothing when we think of the unknown evil element in her life, of the places, impossible to identify, where she has been, where she still goes perhaps during the hours when we are not with her, if indeed she is not planning to live there altogether, those places in which she is separated from us, does not belong to us, is happier than when she is with us. Such are the revolving searchlights of jealousy.

Jealousy is moreover a demon that cannot be exorcised, but constantly reappears in new incarnations. Even if we could succeed in exterminating them all, in keeping the beloved for ever, the Spirit of Evil would then adopt another form, more pathetic still, despair at having obtained fidelity only by force, despair at not being loved.

Tender and sweet though Albertine was on certain evenings, she no longer had any of those spontaneous impulses which I remembered from Balbec when she used to say "How very nice you are, really!" and her whole heart seemed to go out to me unrestrained by any of those grievances which she now felt and which she kept to herself because she doubtless considered them irremediable, impossible to forget, unavowable, but which nevertheless created between us a significant verbal prudence on her part or an impassable barrier of silence.

"And may one be allowed to know why you telephoned to Andrée?"

"To ask whether she had any objection to my joining you tomorrow and paying the Verdurins the visit I've been promising them since La Raspelière."

"Just as you like. But I warn you, there's an appalling fog this evening, and it's sure to last over tomorrow. I mention it because I shouldn't like you to make yourself ill. Personally, I need hardly say that I'd love you to come with us. However," she added with a thoughtful air, "I'm not at all sure that I'll go to the Verdurins'. They've been so kind to me that I ought, really ... Next to you, they've been nicer to me than anybody, but there are some things about them that I don't quite like. I simply must go to the Bon Marché or the Trois-Quartiers and get a white bodice to wear with this dress which is really too black."

To allow Albertine to go by herself into a big shop crowded with people perpetually brushing against one, provided with so many exits that a woman can always say that when she came out she could not find her carriage which was waiting further along the street, was something that I was quite determined never to consent to, but the thought of it made me extremely unhappy. And yet it did not occur to me that I ought long ago to have ceased to see Albertine, for she had entered, for me, upon that lamentable period in which a person, scattered in space and time, is no longer a woman but a series of events on which we can throw no light, a series of insoluble problems, a sea which, like Xerxes, we scourge with rods in an absurd attempt to punish it for what it has engulfed. Once this period has begun, we are perforce vanquished. Happy are they who understand this in time not to prolong unduly a futile, exhausting struggle, hemmed in on every side by the limits of the imagination, a struggle in which jealousy plays so sorry a part that the same man who, once upon a time, if the eyes of the woman who was always by his side rested for an instant upon another man, imagined an intrigue and suffered endless torments, now resigns himself to allowing her to go out by herself, sometimes with the man whom he knows to be her lover, preferring to the unknowable this torture which at least he knows! It is a question of the rhythm to be adopted, which afterwards one follows from force of habit. Neurotics who could never stay away from a dinner-party will eventually take rest cures which never seem to them to last long enough; women who recently were still of easy virtue live in penitence. Jealous lovers who, to keep an eye on the woman they loved, cut short their hours of sleep, deprived themselves of rest, now feeling that her desires, the world so vast and secret, and time are too much for them, allow her to go out without them, then to travel, and finally separate from her. Jealousy thus perishes for want of nourishment and has survived so long only by clamouring incessantly for fresh food. I was still a long way from this state.

I was now at liberty to go out with Albertine as often as I wished. As there had recently sprung up round Paris a number of aerodromes, which are to aeroplanes what harbours are to ships, and as, ever since the day when, on the way to La Raspelière, that almost mythological encounter with an airman, at whose passage overhead my horse had reared, had been to me like a symbol of liberty, I often chose to end our day's excursion—with the ready approval of Albertine, a passionate lover of every form of sport—at one of these aerodromes. We went there, she and I, attracted by that incessant stir of departure and arrival which gives so much charm to a stroll along a jetty, or merely along a beach, to those who love the sea, and to loitering about an "aviation centre" to those who love the sky. From time to time, amid the repose of the machines that lay inert and as though at anchor, we would see one being laboriously pulled by a number of mechanics, as a boat is dragged across the sand at the bidding of a tourist who wishes to go for an outing on the sea. Then the engine was started, the machine ran along the ground, gathered speed, until finally, all of a sudden, at right angles, it rose slowly, in the braced and as it were static ecstasy of a horizontal speed suddenly transformed into a majestic, vertical ascent. Albertine could not contain her joy, and would demand explanations of the mechanics who, now that the machine was in the air, were strolling back to the sheds. The passenger, meanwhile, was covering mile after mile; the huge skiff, upon which our eyes remained fixed, was now no more than a barely visible dot in the sky, a dot which, however, would gradually recover its solidity, its size, its volume, when, as the time allowed for the excursion drew to an end, the moment came for landing. And we watched with envy, Albertine and I, as he sprang to earth, the passenger who had gone up like that to enjoy in the solitary expanses of the open sky the calm and limpidity of evening. Then, whether from the aerodrome or from some museum or church that we had been visiting, we would return home together for dinner. And yet I

did not return home calmed, as I used to be at Balbec by less frequent excursions which I rejoiced to see extend over a whole afternoon and would afterwards contemplate, standing out like clustering flowers, against the rest of Albertine's life as against an empty sky beneath which one muses pleasantly, without thinking. Albertine's time did not belong to me then in such ample quantities as today. Yet it had seemed to me then to belong to me much more, because I then took into account—my love rejoicing in them as in the bestowal of a favour—only the hours that she spent with me, whereas now—my jealousy searching anxiously among them for the possibility of a betrayal—it was only those hours that she spent apart from me.

Tomorrow, evidently, she was looking forward to a few such hours. I must choose to cease from suffering or to cease from loving. For, just as in the beginning it is formed by desire, so afterwards love is kept in existence only by painful anxiety. I felt that part of Albertine's life eluded me. Love, in the pain of anxiety as in the bliss of desire, is a demand for a whole. It is born, and it survives, only if some part remains for it to conquer. We love only what we do not wholly possess. Albertine was lying when she told me that she probably would not go to see the Verdurins, as I was lying when I said that I wished to go. She was seeking merely to dissuade me from going out with her, and I, by my abrupt announcement of this plan which I had no intention of putting into practice, to touch what I felt to be her most sensitive spot, to track down the desire that she was concealing and to force her to admit that my company next day would prevent her from gratifying it. She had virtually made this admission by ceasing suddenly to wish to go to see the Verdurins.

"If you don't want to go to the Verdurins'," I told her, "there is a splendid charity show at the Trocadéro." She listened to my exhortations to attend it with a doleful air. I began to be harsh with her as at Balbec, at the time of my first fit of jealousy. Her face reflected her disappointment, and in reproaching her I used the same arguments that had been so often advanced against me by my parents when I was small, and that had appeared so unintelligent and cruel to my misunderstood childhood. "No, in spite of your gloomy look," I said to Albertine, "I can't feel sorry for you; I should feel sorry for you if you were ill, if you were in trouble, if you had suffered some bereavement; not that you would mind in the least, I dare say, considering your expenditure of false sensibility over nothing. Besides, I'm not very impressed by the sensibility of people who pretend to be so fond of us and are quite incapable of doing us the smallest favour, and whose minds wander so that they forget to deliver the letter we have entrusted to them on which our whole future depends."

A great part of what we say being no more than a recitation from memory, I had often heard these words uttered by my mother, who (always ready to explain to me that one ought not to confuse genuine sensibility with sentimentality, what the Germans, whose language she greatly admired despite my grandfather's loathing for that nation, called *Empfindung* and *Empfinderei*) once, when I was in tears, had gone so far as to tell me that Nero was probably highly-strung and was none the better for that. Indeed, like those plants which bifurcate as they grow, side by side with the sensitive boy which was all that I had been, there was now a man of the opposite sort, full of common sense, of severity towards the morbid sensibility of others, a man resembling what my parents had been to me. No doubt, as each of us is obliged to continue in himself the life of his forebears, the level-headed, caustic individual who did not exist in me at the start had joined forces with the sensitive one, and it was natural that I should become in my turn what my parents had been to me. What is more, at the moment when this new personality took shape in me, he found his language ready made in the memory of the sarcastic, scolding things that had been said to me, that I must now say to others, and that came so naturally to my lips, either because I evoked them through mimicry and association of memories, or because the delicate and mysterious incrustations of genetic energy had traced in me unawares, as upon the leaf of a plant, the same intonations, the same gestures, the same attitudes as had been characteristic of those from whom I sprang. Sometimes, playing the sage when talking to Albertine, I seemed to be hearing my grandmother. Indeed it often happened to my mother (so many obscure unconscious currents caused everything in me even down to the tiniest movements of my fingers to be drawn into the same cycles as my parents) to imagine that it was my father at the door, so similar was my knock to his.

Moreover the coupling of contrary elements is the law of life, the principle of fertilisation, and, as we shall see, the cause of many misfortunes. As a rule we detest what resembles ourselves, and our own faults when observed in another person exasperate us. How much the more does a man who has passed the age at which one instinctively displays them, a man who, for instance, has maintained an expression of icy calm through the most aggravating moments, execrate those same faults if it is another man, younger or simpler or stupider, who displays them! There are sensitive people for whom merely to see in other people's eyes the tears which they themselves have held back is infuriating. It is excessive similarity that, in spite of affection, and sometimes all the more the greater the affection, causes division to reign in families.

Possibly in myself, as in many other people, the second man that I had become was simply another aspect of the first, excitable and sensitive where he himself was concerned, a sage mentor to others. Perhaps it was so also with my parents according to whether they were considered in relation to me or in themselves. In the case of my grandmother and mother it was only too clear that their severity towards me was deliberate on their part and indeed cost them dear, but perhaps even my father's coldness too was only an external aspect of his sensibility. For it was perhaps the human truth of this twofold aspect—the one concerned with the inner life, the other with social relations—that was expressed in a remark which seemed to me at the time as false in substance as it was commonplace in form, when someone said of my father: "Beneath his icy exterior, he conceals an extraordinary sensibility; the truth is that he's ashamed of his feelings." Did it not in fact conceal incessant secret storms, that calm of his, interspersed at times with sententious reflections and ironical comments on the awkward manifestations of sensibility, which now I too affected in my relations with everyone and above all never swerved from, in certain circumstances, with Albertine?

I really believe that I came near that day to making up my mind to break with her and to set out for Venice. What bound me anew in my chains had to do with Normandy, not that she showed any inclination to go to that region where I had been jealous of her (for it was my good fortune that her plans never impinged upon the painful zones in my memory), but because when I happened to say to her: "It's as though I were speaking to you about your aunt's friend who lived at Infreville," she replied angrily, delighted—like everyone in an argument who is anxious to muster as many points as possible on his side—to show me that I was in the wrong and herself in the right: "But my aunt never knew anybody at Infreville, and I've never been near the place." She had forgotten the lie that she had told me one afternoon about the touchy lady with whom she simply must go and have tea, even if by visiting this lady she were to forfeit my friendship and shorten her own life. I did not remind her of her lie. But it shattered me. And once again I postponed our rupture to another day. A person has no need of sincerity, nor even of skill in lying, in order to be loved. Here I mean by love reciprocal torture.

I saw nothing reprehensible that evening in speaking to her as my grandmother—that mirror of perfection—used to speak to me, nor, when I told her that I would escort her to the Verdurins', in having adopted the brusque manner of my father, who would never inform us of any decision except in a manner calculated to cause us the maximum of agitation, out of all proportion to the decision itself. So that it was easy for him to call us absurd for appearing so distressed by so small a matter, our distress corresponding in reality to the perturbation that he had aroused in us. And if—like the inflexible wisdom of my grandmother—these arbitrary whims of my father's had been passed on to me to complement the sensitive nature to which they had so long remained alien and, throughout my whole childhood, had caused so much suffering, that sensitive nature informed them very exactly as to the points at which they could most effectively be aimed: there is no better informer than a reformed thief, or a subject of the nation one is fighting. In certain untruthful families, a brother who has come to call without any apparent reason and makes some casual inquiry on the doorstep as he leaves, appearing scarcely to listen to the answer, indicates thereby to his brother that this inquiry was the sole object of his visit, for the brother is quite familiar with that air of detachment, those words uttered as though in parentheses and at the last moment, having frequently had recourse to them himself. Similarly, there are pathological families, kindred sensibilities, fraternal temperaments, initiated into that mute language which enables the members of a family to understand each other without speaking. Thus who can be more nerve-racking than a neurotic? And then there may have been a deeper and more general cause for my behaviour in these cases. In those brief but inevitable moments when we hate someone we love—moments which last sometimes for a whole lifetime in the case of people we do not love—we do not wish to appear kind in order not to be pitied, but at once as unpleasant and as happy as possible so that our happiness may be truly hateful and wound to the very soul the occasional or permanent enemy. To how many people have I not untruthfully maligned myself, simply in order that my "successes" might seem to them the more immoral and infuriate them the more! The proper thing to do would be to take the opposite course, to show without arrogance that we have generous feelings, instead of taking such pains to hide them. And this would be easy if we were capable of never hating, of always loving. For then we should be so happy to say only the things that can make other people happy, melt their hearts, make them love us.

True, I felt some remorse at being so insufferable to Albertine, and said to myself: "If I didn't love her, she would be more grateful to me, for I wouldn't be nasty to her; but no, it would be the same in the end, for I should also be less nice." And I might, in order to justify myself, have told her that I loved her. But the avowal of that love, apart from the fact that it would have told Albertine nothing new, would perhaps have made her colder towards me than the harshness and deceit for which love was the sole excuse. To be harsh and deceitful to the person whom we love is so natural! If the interest that we show towards other people does not prevent us from being gentle towards them and complying with their wishes, it is because our interest is not sincere. Other people leave us indifferent, and indifference does not prompt us to unkindness.

The evening was drawing to a close. Before Albertine went to bed, there was no time to lose if we wished to make peace, to renew our embraces. Neither of us had yet taken the initiative.

Meanwhile, feeling that in any case she was angry with me, I took the opportunity of mentioning Esther Levy. "Bloch tells me," I said untruthfully, "that you're a great friend of his cousin Esther."

"I shouldn't know her if I saw her," said Albertine with a vague look.

"I've seen her photograph," I continued angrily. I did not look at Albertine as I said this, so that I did not see her expression, which would have been her sole reply, for she said nothing.

It was no longer the peace of my mother's kiss at Combray that I felt when I was with Albertine on these evenings, but, on the contrary, the anguish of those on which my mother scarcely bade me good-night, or even did not come up to my room at all, either because she was cross with me or was kept downstairs by guests. This anguish—not merely its transposition into love but this anguish itself—which for a time had specialised in love and which, when the separation, the division of the passions occurred, had been assigned to love alone, now seemed once more to be extending to them all, to have become indivisible again as in my childhood, as though all my feelings, which trembled at the thought of my not being able to keep Albertine by my bedside, at once as a mistress, a sister, a daughter, and as a mother too, of whose regular good-night kiss I was beginning once more to feel the childish need, had begun to coalesce, to become unified in the premature evening of my life which seemed fated to be as short as a winter day. But if I felt the same anguish as in my childhood, the different person who caused me to feel it, the difference in the feeling she inspired in me, the very transformation in my character, made it impossible for me to demand its appeasement from Albertine as in the old days from my mother. I could no longer say: "I'm unhappy." I confined myself, with a heavy heart,

to speaking of inconsequential matters that took me no further towards a happy solution. I waded knee-deep in painful platitudes. And with that intellectual egoism which, if some insignificant fact happens to have a bearing on our love, makes us pay great respect to the person who has discovered it, as fortuitously perhaps as the fortune-teller who has foretold some trivial event which has afterwards come to pass, I came near to regarding Françoise as more inspired than Bergotte and Elstir because she had said to me at Balbec: "That girl will bring you nothing but trouble."

Every minute brought me nearer to Albertine's good-night, which at length she said. But that evening her kiss, from which she herself was absent and which made no impression on me, left me so anxious that, with a throbbing heart, I watched her make her way to the door, thinking: "If I'm to find a pretext for calling her back, keeping her here, making peace with her, I must be quick; only a few steps and she will be out of the room, only two, now one, she's turning the handle; she's opening the door, it's too late, she has shut it behind her!" But perhaps it was not too late after all. As in the old days at Combray when my mother had left me without soothing me with her kiss, I wanted to rush after Albertine, I felt that there would be no peace for me until I had seen her again, that this renewed encounter would turn into something tremendous which it had not been before and that—if I did not succeed by my own efforts in ridding myself of this misery—I might perhaps acquire the shameful habit of going to beg from Albertine. I sprang out of bed when she was already in her room, I paced up and down the corridor, hoping that she would come out of her room and call me; I stood stock-still outside her door for fear of failing to hear some faint summons, I returned for a moment to my own room to see whether she might not by some lucky chance have forgotten her handkerchief, her bag, something which I might have appeared to be afraid of her needing during the night, and which would have given me an excuse for going to her room. No, there was nothing. I returned to my station outside her door, but the crack beneath it no longer showed any light. Albertine had put out the light, she was in bed; I remained there motionless, hoping for some lucky accident which did not occur; and long afterwards, frozen, I returned to bestow myself between my own sheets and cried for the rest of the night.

But on certain such evenings I had recourse to a ruse which won me Albertine's kiss. Knowing how quickly sleep came to her as soon as she lay down (she knew it also, for, instinctively, before lying down, she would take off the slippers which I had given her, and her ring which she placed by the bedside, as she did in her own room when she went to bed), knowing how heavy her sleep was, how affectionate her awakening, I would find an excuse for going to look for something and make her lie down on my bed. When I returned she would be asleep and I saw before me the other woman that she became whenever one saw her full-face. But her personality quickly changed when I lay down beside her and saw her again in profile. I could take her head, lift it up, press her face to my lips, put her arms round my neck, and she would continue to sleep, like a watch that never stops, like an animal that stays in whatever position you put it in, like a climbing plant, a convolvulus which continues to thrust out its tendrils whatever support you give it. Only her breathing was altered by each touch of my fingers, as though she were an instrument on which I was playing and from which I extracted modulations by drawing different notes from one after another of its strings. My jealousy subsided, for I felt that Albertine had become a creature that breathes and is nothing else besides, as was indicated by the regular suspiration in which is expressed that pure physiological function which, wholly fluid, has the solidity neither of speech nor of silence; and, in its ignorance of all evil, drawn seemingly rather from a hollowed reed than from a human being, that breath, truly paradisiacal to me who at such moments felt Albertine to be withdrawn from everything, not only physically but morally, was the pure song of the angels. And yet, in that breathing, I thought to myself of a sudden that perhaps many names of people, borne on the stream of memory, must be revolving.

Sometimes indeed the human voice was added to that music. Albertine would murmur a few words. How I longed to catch their meaning! It would happen that the name of a person of whom we had been speaking and who had aroused my jealousy would come to her lips, but without making me unhappy, for the memory that it brought with it seemed to be only that of the conversations that she had had with me on the subject. One evening, however, when with her eyes still shut she half awoke, she said tenderly, addressing me: "Andrée." I concealed my emotion. "You're dreaming, I'm not Andrée," I said to her, smiling. She smiled also: "Of course not, I wanted to ask you what Andrée said to you this evening." "I assumed that you used to lie beside her like that." "Oh no, never," she said. But, before making this reply, she had hidden her face for a moment in her hands. So her silences were merely screens, her surface affection merely kept beneath the surface a thousand memories which would have rent my heart, her life was full of those incidents the good-natured, bantering account of which forms one's daily gossip at the expense of other people, people who do not matter, but which, so long as a woman remains buried in the depths of one's heart, seem to us so precious a revelation of her life that, for the privilege of exploring that underlying world, we would gladly sacrifice our own. Then her sleep would seem to me a marvellous and magic world in which at certain moments there rises from the depths of the barely translucent element the avowal of a secret which we shall not understand. But as a rule, when Albertine was asleep, she seemed to have recaptured her innocence. In the attitude which I had imposed upon her, but which in her sleep she had speedily made her own, she seemed to trust herself to me. Her face had lost any expression of cunning or vulgarity, and between herself and me, towards whom she raised her arm, on whom she rested her hand, there seemed to be an absolute surrender, an indissoluble attachment. Her sleep moreover did not separate her from me and allowed her to retain the consciousness of our affection; its effect was rather to abolish everything else; I would kiss her, tell her that I was going to take a turn outside, and she would half-open her eyes and say to me with a look of surprise—for the hour was indeed late—"But where are you off to, my darling—" (calling me by my Christian name), and at once fall asleep again. Her



sleep was no more than a sort of blotting out of the rest of her life, an even silence over which from time to time familiar words of tenderness would pass in their flight. By putting these words together, one might have arrived at the unalloyed conversation, the secret intimacy of a pure love. This calm slumber delighted me, as a mother, reckoning it a virtue, is delighted by her child's sound sleep. And her sleep was indeed that of a child. Her awakening also, so natural and so loving, before she even knew where she was, that I sometimes asked myself with dread whether she had been in the habit, before coming to live with me, of not sleeping alone but of finding, when she opened her eyes, someone lying by her side. But her childlike grace was more striking. Like a mother again, I marvelled that she should always awake in such a good humour. After a few moments she would recover consciousness, would utter charming words, unconnected with one another, mere twitterings. By a sort of reversal of roles, her throat, which as a rule one seldom remarked, now almost startlingly beautiful, had acquired the immense importance which her eyes, by being closed in sleep, had lost, her eyes, my regular interlocutors to which I could no longer address myself after the lids had closed over them. Just as the closed lids impart an innocent, grave beauty to the face by suppressing all that the eyes express only too plainly, there was in the words, not devoid of meaning but interrupted by moments of silence, which Albertine uttered as she awoke, a pure beauty of a kind that is not constantly tarnished, as is conversation, by habits of speech, stale repetitions, traces of familiar defects. Moreover, when I had decided to wake Albertine, I would have been able to do so without fear, knowing that her awakening would bear no relation to the evening that we had passed together, but would emerge from her sleep as morning emerges from night. As soon as she had begun to open her eyes with a smile, she would have offered me her lips, and before she had even said a word, I would have savoured their freshness, as soothing as that of a garden still silent before the break of day.

The day after the evening when Albertine had told me that she might perhaps, then that she might not, be going to see the Verdurins, I awoke early, and, while I was still half asleep, my joy informed me that it was a spring day interpolated in the middle of the winter. Outside, popular themes skilfully transposed for various instruments, from the horn of the china repairer, or the trumpet of the chair mender, to the flute of the goatherd who seemed, on a fine morning, to be a Sicilian drover, were lightly orchestrating the matutinal air with an "Overture for a Public Holiday." Our hearing, that delightful sense, brings us the company of the street, of which it traces every line for us, sketches all the figures that pass along it, showing us their colours. The iron shutters of the baker's shop and of the dairy, which had been lowered last night over every possibility of feminine bliss, were now being raised, like the canvas of a ship that is getting under way and about to set sail across the transparent sea, on to a vision of young shopgirls. This sound of the iron shutters being raised would perhaps have been my sole pleasure in a different part of the town. In this quarter a hundred other sounds contributed to my joy, of which I would not have missed a single one by remaining too long asleep. It is one of the enchantments of the old aristocratic quarters that they are at the same time plebeian. Just as, sometimes, cathedrals used to have them within a stone's throw of their portals (which have even preserved the name, like the door of Rouen cathedral styled the Booksellers', because these latter used to expose their merchandise in the open air beside it), so various minor trades, but in this case itinerant, passed in front of the noble Hotel de Guermantes, and made one think at times of the ecclesiastical France of long ago. For the beguiling calls which they launched at the little houses on either side had, with rare exceptions, little connexion with song. They differed from song as much as the declamation—scarcely tinged by even the most imperceptible modulation—of *Boris Godunov* and *Pelléas*; but on the other hand recalled the drone of a priest intoning his office, of which these street scenes are but the good-humoured, secular, and yet half-liturgical counterpart. Never had I so delighted in them as since Albertine had come to live with me; they seemed to me a joyous signal of her awakening, and by interesting me in the life of the world outside made me all the more conscious of the soothing virtue of a beloved presence, as constant as I could wish. Several of the foodstuffs peddled in the street, which personally I detested, were greatly to Albertine's liking, so much so that Françoise used to send her young footman out to buy them, slightly humiliated perhaps at finding himself mixing with the plebeian crowd. Very distinct in this peaceful quarter (where the noises were no longer a cause of lamentation to Françoise and had become a source of pleasure to myself), there reached my ears, each with its different modulation, recitatives declaimed by these humble folk as they would be in the music—so entirely popular—of *Boris*, where an initial tonality is barely altered by the inflexion of one note leaning upon another, music of the crowd, which is more speech than music. It was "Winkles, winkles, a ha'porth of winkles!" that brought people running to buy the cornets in which were sold those horrid little shellfish, which, if Albertine had not been there, would have repelled me, as did the snails which I heard being peddled at the same hour. Here again it was of the barely musical declamation of Moussorgsky that the vendor reminded me, but not of it alone. For after having almost "spoken" the refrain: "Who'll buy my snails, fine, fresh snails?" it was with the vague sadness of Maeterlinck, transposed into music by Debussy, that the snail vendor, in one of those mournful cadences in which the composer of *Pelléas* shows his kinship with Rameau: "If vanquished I must be, is it for thee to be my vanquisher?"<sup>3</sup> added with a singsong melancholy: "Only tuppence a dozen ..."

I have always found it difficult to understand why these perfectly simple words were sighed in a tone so far from appropriate, as mysterious as the secret which makes everyone look sad in the old palace to which Melisande has not succeeded in bringing joy, and as profound as one of the thoughts of the aged Arkel who seeks to utter in the simplest words the whole lore of wisdom and destiny. The very notes upon which the voice of the old King of Allemonde or that of Golaud rises with ever-increasing sweetness to say: "We do not know what is happening here. It may seem strange. Perhaps nothing that happens is in vain," or else: "You

mustn't be frightened ... she was a poor little mysterious creature, like everyone," were those which served the snail vendor to repeat in an endless cantilena: "Only tuppence a dozen ..." But this metaphysical lamentation scarcely had time to expire upon the shore of the infinite before it was interrupted by a shrill trumpet. This time it was not a question of victuals; the words of the libretto were: "Dogs clipped, cats doctored, tails and ears docked."

It was true that the fantasy or wit of each vendor or vendress frequently introduced variations into the words of all these chants that I used to hear from my bed. And yet a ritual suspension interposing a silence in the middle of a word, especially when it was repeated a second time, constantly evoked the memory of old churches. In his little cart drawn by a she-ass which he stopped in front of each house before entering the courtyard, the old-clothes man, brandishing a whip, intoned: "Old clothes, any old clothes, old clo ... thes" with the same pause between the final syllables as if he had been intoning in plainchant: "*Per omnia saecula saeculo ... rum*" or "*requiescat in pa ... ce*" although he had no reason to believe in the immortality of his clothes, nor did he offer them as cerements for the eternal rest in peace. And similarly, as the motifs, even at this early hour, were beginning to interweave with one another, a costermonger pushing her little hand-cart employed in her litany the Gregorian division:

Tender and green,  
Artichokes tender and sweet,  
Ar ... tichokes

although she had probably never heard of the antiphony, or of the seven tones that symbolise, four the arts of the quadrivium and three those of the trivium.

Drawing from a penny whistle, or from a bagpipe, airs of his own southern country whose sunlight harmonised well with these fine days, a man in a smock, carrying a bullwhip in his hand and wearing a Basque beret on his head, stopped before each house in turn. It was the goatherd with two dogs driving before him his string of goats. As he came from a distance, he arrived fairly late in our quarter; and the women came running out with bowls to receive the milk that was to give strength to their little ones. But with the Pyrenean airs of this benign shepherd was now blended the bell of the grinder, who cried: "Knives, scissors, razors." With him the saw-setter was unable to compete, for, lacking an instrument, he had to be content with calling: "Any saws to set? Here's the setter!" while in a gayer mood the tinker, after enumerating the pots, pans and everything else that he repaired, struck up the refrain:

Tan, ran, tan, tan, tan, tan,  
For pots or cans, oh! I'm your man.  
I'll mend them all with a tink, tink, tink,  
And never leave a chink, chink, chink,

and little Italians carrying big iron boxes painted red, upon which the numbers—winning and losing—were marked, and flourishing their rattles, issued the invitation: "Enjoy yourselves, ladies, here's a treat."

Françoise brought in the *Figaro*. A glance was sufficient to show me that my article had still not appeared. She told me that Albertine had asked whether she might come to my room and sent word that she had after all given up the idea of calling upon the Verdurins and had decided to go, as I had advised her, to the "special" matinee at the Trocadéro—what nowadays would be called, though with considerably less significance, a "gala" matinee—after a short ride which she had promised to take with Andrée. Now that I knew that she had abandoned her possibly nefarious intention of going to see Mme Verdurin, I said with a laugh: "Tell her to come in," and told myself that she might go wherever she chose and that it was all the same to me. I knew that by the end of the afternoon, when dusk began to fall, I should probably be a different man, moping, attaching to every one of Albertine's movements an importance that they did not possess at this morning hour when the weather was so fine. For my insouciance was accompanied by a clear notion of its cause, but was in no way modified thereby.

"Françoise assured me that you were awake and that I wouldn't be disturbing you," said Albertine as she entered the room. And since, next to making me catch cold by opening the window at the wrong moment, what Albertine most dreaded was to come into my room when I was asleep: "I hope I haven't done wrong," she went on. "I was afraid you'd say to me:

What insolent mortal comes to meet his doom?"

And she laughed that laugh which I always found so disturbing.

I replied in the same jesting vein:

Was it for you this stern decree was made?

And, lest she should ever venture to infringe it, added: "Although I'd be furious if you did wake me."

"I know, I know, don't be frightened," said Albertine.

To show that I was mollified, I added, still enacting the scene from *Esther* with her, while in the street below the cries continued, drowned by our conversation:

In you alone a certain grace I see  
That always charms and never wearies me

(and to myself I thought: "Yes, she does weary me very often"). And remembering what she had said to me the night before, as I thanked her extravagantly for having given up the Verdurins, so that another time she would

obey me similarly with regard to something else, I said: "Albertine, you distrust me although I love you and you place your trust in people who don't love you" (as though it were not natural to distrust the people who love you and who alone have an interest in lying to you in order to find out things, to thwart you), and added these lying words: "It's funny, you don't really believe that I love you. As a matter of fact, I don't *adore* you." She lied in her turn when she told me that she trusted nobody but myself and then became sincere when she assured me that she knew quite well that I loved her. But this affirmation did not seem to imply that she did not believe me to be a liar who spied on her. And she seemed to forgive me as though she saw these defects as the agonising consequence of a great love or as though she herself did not feel entirely guiltless.

"I beg of you, my darling girl, no more of that trick riding you were practising the other day. Just think, Albertine, if you were to have an accident?"\*

Of course I did not wish her any harm. But how delighted I should have been if, with her horses, she had taken it into her head to ride off somewhere, wherever she chose, and never come back to my house again! How it would have simplified everything, that she should go and live happily somewhere else, I did not even wish to know where!

"Oh! I know you wouldn't survive me for forty-eight hours. You'd kill yourself."\*

Thus did we exchange lying speeches. But a truth more profound than that which we would utter were we sincere may sometimes be expressed and announced by another channel than that of sincerity.

"You don't mind all that noise outside?" she asked me. "Personally I love it. But you're such a light sleeper."

I was on the contrary often an extremely heavy sleeper (as I have already said, but am compelled to repeat in view of what follows), especially when I only fell asleep in the morning. As this kind of sleep is—on an average—four times as refreshing, it seems to the awakened sleeper to have lasted four times as long, when it has really been four times as short. A splendid, sixteenfold error in multiplication which gives so much beauty to our awakening and gives life a veritable new dimension, like those drastic changes of rhythm which, in music, mean that in an *andante* a quaver has the same duration as a minim in a *prestissimo*, and which are unknown in our waking state. There, life is almost always the same, whence the disappointments of travel. Yet it would seem that our dreams are sometimes made of the coarsest stuff of life, but that stuff is as it were treated, kneaded so thoroughly—with a protraction due to the fact that none of the temporal limitations of the waking state is there to prevent it from tapering off into unbelievable heights—that we fail to recognise it. On the mornings after this good fortune had befallen me, after the sponge of sleep had wiped from my brain the signs of everyday occupations that are traced upon it as on a blackboard, I was obliged to bring my memory back to life; by an exercise of will we can recapture what the amnesia of sleep or of a stroke has made us forget, what gradually returns to us as our eyes open or our paralysis disappears. I had lived through so many hours in a few minutes that, wishing to address Françoise, for whom I had rung, in words that corresponded to the facts of real life and were regulated by the clock, I was obliged to exert all my inner power of compression in order not to say: "Well, Françoise, here we are at five o'clock in the evening and I haven't set eyes on you since yesterday afternoon." And seeking to dispel my dreams, giving them the lie and lying to myself as well, I said brazenly, compelling myself with all my might to silence, the direct opposite: "Françoise, it must be at least ten o'clock!" I did not even say ten o'clock in the morning, but simply ten o'clock, so that this incredible hour might appear to be uttered in a more natural tone. And yet to say these words, instead of those that continued to run in the mind of the half-awakened sleeper that I still was, demanded the same effort of equilibrium that a man requires when, jumping out of a moving train and running for some yards along the platform, he manages to avoid falling. He runs for a moment because the environment that he has just left was one animated by great velocity, and utterly unlike the inert soil to which his feet find it difficult to accustom themselves.

Because the dream world is not the waking world, it does not follow that the waking world is less real; far from it. In the world of sleep, our perceptions are so overloaded, each of them blanketed by a superimposed counterpart which doubles its bulk and blinds it to no purpose, that we are unable even to distinguish what is happening in the bewilderment of awakening: was it Françoise who had come to me, or I who, tired of calling her, went to her? Silence at that moment was the only way of revealing nothing, as when we are brought before a magistrate cognisant of all the charges against us when we ourselves have not been informed of them. Was it Françoise who had come, or was it I who had summoned her? Was it not, indeed, Françoise who had been asleep and I who had just awoken her? To go further still, was not Françoise contained within me, for the distinction between persons and their interaction barely exists in that murky obscurity in which reality is no more translucent than in the body of a porcupine, and our all but non-existent perception may perhaps give us an idea of the perception of certain animals? Besides, in the state of limpid unreason that precedes these heavy slumbers, if fragments of wisdom float there luminously, if the names of Taine and George Eliot are not unknown, the waking state remains none the less superior to the extent that it is possible to continue it every morning, but not to continue the dream life every night. But perhaps there are other worlds more real than the waking world. Even if we have seen transformed by each new revolution in the arts, and still more, at the same time, by the degree of proficiency or culture that distinguishes an artist from an ignorant fool.

And often an extra hour of sleep is an attack of paralysis after which we must recover the use of our limbs and learn to speak. Our will would not be adequate for this task. We have slept too long, we no longer exist. Our waking is barely felt, mechanically and without consciousness, as a water pipe might feel the turning off of a tap. A life more inanimate than that of the jellyfish follows, in which we could equally well believe that we had been drawn up from the depths of the sea or released from gaol, were we but capable of thinking anything at all. But then from the highest heaven the goddess Mnemotechnia bends down and holds out to us

in the formula “the habit of ringing for coffee” the hope of resurrection. Even then, the instantaneous gift of memory is not always so simple. Often we have at our disposal, in those first minutes in which we allow ourselves to glide into the waking state, a variety of different realities among which we imagine that we can choose as from a pack of cards. It is Friday morning and we have just returned from a walk, or else it is teatime by the sea. The idea of sleep and that we are lying in bed in our nightshirt is often the last thing that occurs to us. The resurrection is not effected at once; we think we have rung the bell, but we have not done so, and we utter senseless remarks. Movement alone restores thought, and when we have actually pressed the electric button we are able to say slowly but distinctly: “It must be at least ten o’clock, Françoise. Bring me my coffee.”

Françoise, *mirabile dictu*, could have had no suspicion of the sea of unreality in which I was still wholly immersed and through which I had had the energy to make my strange question penetrate. Her answer would be: “It’s ten past ten,” which made me appear quite rational and enabled me not to betray the fantastic conversations by which I had been interminably lulled (on days when a mountain of non-existence had not crushed all life out of me). By force of will, I had reintegrated myself with reality. I was still enjoying the last shreds of sleep, that is to say of the only source of invention, the only novelty that exists in story-telling, since none of our narrations in the waking state, even when embellished with literary graces, admit those mysterious differences from which beauty derives. It is easy to speak of the beauty created by opium. But to a man who is accustomed to sleeping only with the aid of drugs, an unexpected hour of natural sleep will reveal the vast, matutinal expanse of a landscape as mysterious and more refreshing. By varying the hour and the place in which we go to sleep, by wooing sleep in an artificial manner, or on the contrary by returning for a day to natural sleep—the strangest kind of all to whomsoever is in the habit of putting himself to sleep with soporifics—we succeed in producing a thousand times as many varieties of sleep as a gardener could produce of carnations or roses. Gardeners produce flowers that are delicious dreams, and others too that are like nightmares. When I fell asleep in a certain way I used to wake up shivering, thinking that I had caught the measles, or, what was far more painful, that my grandmother (of whom I no longer ever thought) was hurt because I had mocked her that day at Balbec when, in the belief that she was about to die, she had wished me to have a photograph of her. At once, although I was awake, I felt that I must go and explain to her that she had misunderstood me. But already my bodily warmth was returning. The diagnosis of measles was set aside, and my grandmother was so far away that she no longer made my heart ache.

Sometimes over these different kinds of sleep a sudden darkness fell. I was afraid to continue my walk along an entirely unlighted avenue, where I could hear prowling foot-steps. Suddenly an argument broke out between a policeman and one of those women whom one often saw driving hackney carriages, and mistook at a distance for young coachmen. Upon her box among the shadows I could not see her, but she was speaking, and in her voice I could read the perfections of her face and the youthfulness of her body. I strode towards her, in the darkness, to get into her carriage before she drove off. It was a long way. Fortunately, her argument with the policeman was prolonged. I overtook the carriage which was still stationary. This part of the avenue was lighted by street lamps. The driver became visible. It was indeed a woman, but large and old and corpulent, with white hair tumbling beneath her cap, and a strawberry mark on her face. I walked past her, thinking: “Is this what happens to the youth of women? If we have a sudden desire to see those we have met in the past, have they grown old? Is the young woman we desire like a character on the stage when, through the defection of the actress who created the part, the management is obliged to entrust it to a new star? But then it is no longer the same.”

Then I would be overcome with a feeling of sadness. We have thus in our sleep countless images of pity, like Renaissance Pietà’s, not, like them, wrought in marble, but on the contrary unsubstantial. They have their purpose, however, which is to remind us of a more compassionate, more humane view of things, which we are too apt to forget in the icy common sense, sometimes full of hostility, of the waking state. Thus I was reminded of the vow that I had made at Balbec that I would always treat Françoise with compassion. And for the whole of that morning at least I would manage to compel myself not to be irritated by Françoise’s quarrels with the butler, to be gentle with Françoise to whom everyone else showed so little kindness. For that morning only, and I would have to try to frame a code that was a little more permanent; for, just as nations are not governed for any length of time by a policy of pure sentiment, so men are not governed for long by the memory of their dreams. Already this dream was beginning to fade away. In attempting to recall it in order to portray it I made it fade all the faster. My eyelids were no longer so firmly sealed over my eyes. If I tried to reconstruct my dream, they would open completely. We must constantly choose between health and sanity on the one hand, and spiritual pleasures on the other. I have always been cowardly enough to choose the former. Moreover, the perilous power that I was renouncing was even more perilous than one might suppose. Those dreams, those images of pity, do not fly away alone. When we alter thus the conditions in which we go to sleep, it is not our dreams alone that fade, but, for days on end, sometimes for years, the faculty not merely of dreaming but of going to sleep. Sleep is divine but by no means stable; the slightest shock makes it volatile. A friend to habit, it is kept night after night in its appointed place by habit, more steadfast than itself, protected from any possible disturbance; but if it is displaced, if it is no longer subjugated, it melts away like a vapour. It is like youth and love, never to be recaptured.

In these various forms of sleep, as likewise in music, it was the lengthening or shortening of the interval that created beauty. I enjoyed this beauty, but on the other hand I had missed in my sleep, however brief, a good number of the street cries which render perceptible to us the peripatetic life of the tradesmen, the victuallers of Paris. And so, habitually (without, alas, foreseeing the drama in which these late awakenings and the

draconian, Medo-Persian laws of a Racinian Assuerus were presently to involve me) I made an effort to wake early so as to miss none of these cries. In addition to the pleasure of knowing how fond Albertine was of them and of being out of doors myself without leaving my bed, I heard in them as it were the symbol of the atmosphere of the world outside, of the dangerous stirring life through the midst of which I did not allow her to move save under my tutelage, in an external prolongation of her seclusion, and from which I withdrew her at the hour of my choosing to make her return home to my side.

Hence it was with the utmost sincerity that I was able to say in answer to Albertine: "On the contrary, they give me pleasure because I know that you like them."

"Straight from the boat, oysters, from the boat!"

"Oh, oysters! I've been simply longing for some!"

Fortunately Albertine, partly from fickleness, partly from docility, quickly forgot the things for which she had been longing, and before I had time to tell her that she would find better oysters at Prunier's, she wanted in succession all the things that she heard cried by the fish woman: "Prawns, lovely prawns, alive, alive-o ... skate, nice fresh skate ... whiting to fry, to fry ... here comes the mackerel, freshly caught mackerel, my ladies, beautiful mackerel ... who'll buy my mussels, fine fat mussels!"

In spite of myself, the warning: "Here comes the mackerel" made me shudder. But as this warning could not, I felt, apply to our chauffeur, I thought only of the fish of that name, which I detested, and my uneasiness did not last.<sup>4</sup>

"Ah! mussels," said Albertine, "I should so like some mussels."

"My darling! They were all very well at Balbec, but here they're not worth eating; besides, I implore you, remember what Cottard told you about mussels."

But my remark was all the more ill-chosen in that the next costermonger announced a thing that Cottard had forbidden even more strictly:

Lettuce, cos lettuce, not to hawk,  
Lovely cos lettuce out for a walk.

Albertine consented, however, to forgo the cos lettuces, on the condition that I would promise to buy for her in a few days' time from the woman who cried: "Argenteuil asparagus, lovely green asparagus." A mysterious voice, from which one would have expected some stranger utterance, insinuated: "Barrels, barrels ..." One was obliged to remain under the disappointing impression that nothing more was being offered than barrels, for the word was almost entirely drowned by the cry: "Glazier, gla-zier, any broken panes, here comes the gla-zier," a Gregorian division which reminded me less, however, of the liturgy than did the call of the rag-and-bone man, unwittingly reproducing one of those abrupt changes of tone in the middle of a prayer which are common enough in the ritual of the church: "*Praeceptis salutaribus moniti et divina institutione formati, audemus dicere*," says the priest, ending briskly upon "*dicere*." Without irreverence, as the pious of the Middle Ages used to perform farces and satires on the very threshold of the church, it was of that "*dicere*" that the rag-and-bone man reminded one when, after drawling the other words, he uttered the final syllable with a brusqueness befitting the accentuation laid down by the great seventh-century Pope: "Any old rags, any old iron, any ..." (all this chanted slowly, as were the two syllables that followed, whereas the last concluded more briskly than "*dicere*") "rabbit ... skins." The oranges ("Valencia oranges, lovely ripe oranges"), the humble leeks even ("Here's fine leeks"), the onions ("Threepence a rope") sounded for me as it were an echo of the rolling waves in which, left to herself, Albertine might have perished, and thus assumed the sweetness of a *suave mari magno*.

Here's carrots for lunch  
At tuppence a bunch.

"Oh!" exclaimed Albertine, "cabbages, carrots, oranges. Just the things I want to eat. Do make Françoise go out and buy some. She shall cook us a dish of creamed carrots. Besides, it will be so nice to eat all these things together. It will be all the shouts we're hearing transformed into a good dinner. Oh, please, ask Françoise to give us instead skate *au beurre noir*. It's so good!"

"Very well, my little darling. But don't stay any longer, otherwise you'll be asking for every single thing on the barrows."

"All right, I'm off, but I never want anything again for our dinners, except what we've heard cried in the street. It's such fun. And to think that we shall have to wait two whole months before we hear: 'Green and tender beans, fresh green beans!' How true that is: tender beans; you know I like them as soft as soft, dripping with oil and vinegar, you wouldn't think you were eating them, they melt in the mouth like drops of dew. Oh dear, it's the same with the cream cheese, such a long time to wait: 'Good cream cheese, fresh cheese!' And the dessert grapes from Fontainebleau: 'Best *chasselas* for sale.' " (And I thought with dismay of all the time that I should have to spend with her before those grapes were in season.) "Wait, though. I said I wanted only the things that we had heard cried, but of course I make exceptions. And so it's by no means impossible that I may look in at Rebattet's and order an ice for the two of us. You'll tell me that it's not the season for them, but I do so want one!"

I was disturbed by this plan of going to Rebattet's, rendered more certain and more suspect in my eyes by the words "it's by no means impossible." It was the day on which the Verdurins were "at home," and, ever since Swann had informed them that Rebattet's was the best place, it was there that they ordered their ices and pastries.

"I have no objection to an ice, my darling Albertine, but let me order it for you, I don't know myself whether it will be from Poiré-Blanche's, or Rebattet's, or the Ritz, anyhow I shall see."

"Then you're going out?" she said with a look of mistrust.

She always maintained that she would be delighted if I went out more often, but if anything I said gave her to suppose that I would not be staying indoors, her uneasy air made me think that the joy she would evince on seeing me go out more often was perhaps not altogether sincere.

"I may perhaps go out, perhaps not. You know quite well that I never make plans beforehand. In any case ices are not a thing that's hawked in the streets, so why do you want one?"

And then she answered me in words which showed me what a fund of intelligence and latent taste had suddenly developed in her since Balbec, in words akin to those which, she maintained, were due entirely to my influence, to living continually in my company, words which, however, I should never have uttered, as though I had been somehow forbidden by an unknown authority ever to decorate my conversation with literary forms. Perhaps the future was not destined to be the same for Albertine as for myself. I had almost a presentiment of this when I saw her eagerness to employ in speech images so "bookish," which seemed to me to be reserved for another, more sacred use, of which I was still in ignorance. She said to me (and I was, in spite of everything, deeply touched, for I thought to myself: True, I myself wouldn't speak like that, and yet, all the same, but for me *she* wouldn't be speaking like that. She has been profoundly influenced by me, and cannot therefore help but love me, since she is my creation): "What I like about these foodstuffs that the pedlars cry is that a thing heard like a rhapsody changes its nature when it comes to the table and addresses itself to my palate. As for ices (for I hope that you won't order me one that isn't cast in one of those old-fashioned moulds which have every architectural shape imaginable), whenever I eat them, temples, churches, obelisks, rocks, a sort of picturesque geography is what I see at first before converting its raspberry or vanilla monuments into coolness in my gullet."

I thought that this was a little too well expressed, but she felt that I thought that it was well expressed and went on, pausing for a moment when she had brought off a simile to laugh that beautiful laugh of hers which was so painful to me because it was so voluptuous.

"Oh dear, at the Ritz I'm afraid you'll find Vendôme Columns of ice, chocolate ice or raspberry, and then you'll need a lot of them so that they may look like votive pillars or pylons erected along an avenue to the glory of Coolness. They make raspberry obelisks too, which will rise up here and there in the burning desert of my thirst, and I shall make their pink granite crumble and melt deep down in my throat which they will refresh better than any oasis" (and here the deep laugh broke out, whether from satisfaction at talking so well, or in self-mockery for using such carefully contrived images, or, alas, from physical pleasure at feeling inside herself something so good, so cool, which was tantamount to a sexual pleasure). "Those mountains of ice at the Ritz sometimes suggest Monte Rosa, and indeed, if it's a lemon ice, I don't object to its not having a monumental shape, its being irregular, abrupt, like one of Elstir's mountains. It mustn't be too white then, but slightly yellowish, with that look of dull, dirty snow that Elstir's mountains have. The ice needn't be at all big, only half an ice if you like, those lemon ices are still mountains, reduced to a tiny scale, but our imagination restores their dimensions, like those Japanese dwarf trees which one feels are still cedars, oaks, manchineels; so much so that if I arranged a few of them beside a little trickle of water in my room I should have a vast forest, stretching down to a river, in which children would lose their way. In the same way, at the foot of my yellowish lemon ice, I can see quite clearly postillions, travellers, post-chaises over which my tongue sets to work to roll down freezing avalanches that will swallow them up" (the cruel delight with which she said this excited my jealousy); "just as," she went on, "I set my lips to work to destroy, pillar by pillar, those Venetian churches of a porphyry that is made with strawberries, and send what's left over crashing down upon the worshippers. Yes, all those monuments will pass from their stony state into my inside which thrills already with their melting coolness. But, you know, even without ices, nothing is so exciting or makes one so thirsty as the advertisements for thermal springs. At Montjouvain, at Mlle Vinteuil's, there was no good confectioner who made ices in the neighbourhood, but we used to make our own tour of France in the garden by drinking a different mineral water every day, like Vichy water which, as soon as you pour it out, sends up from the bottom of the glass a white cloud which fades and dissolves if you don't drink it at once."

But to hear her speak of Montjouvain was too painful, and I cut her short.

"I'm boring you, good-bye my darling," she said.

What a change from Balbec, where I would defy Elstir himself to have been able to divine in Albertine this wealth of poetry, though a poetry less strange, less personal than that of Celeste Albaret, for instance. Albertine would never have thought of the things that Celeste used to say to me, but love, even when it seems to be nearing its end, is partial. I preferred the picturesque geography of her ices, the somewhat facile charm of which seemed to me a reason for loving Albertine and a proof that I had some power over her, that she loved me.

As soon as Albertine had gone out, I felt how exhausting was her perpetual presence, insatiable in its restless animation, which disturbed my sleep with its movements, made me live in a perpetual chill by her habit of leaving doors open, and forced me—in order to find excuses that would justify my not accompanying her, without, however, appearing too unwell, and at the same time seeing that she was not unaccompanied—to display every day greater ingenuity than Sheherazade. Unfortunately, if by a similar ingenuity the Persian storyteller postponed her own death, I was hastening mine. There are thus in life certain situations that are not all created, as was this, by amorous jealousy and a precarious state of health which does not permit us to share the life of a young and active person, situations in which nevertheless the problem of whether to



continue a shared life or to return to the separate existence of the past poses itself almost in medical terms: to which of the two sorts of repose ought we to sacrifice ourselves (by continuing the daily strain, or by returning to the agonies of separation)—to that of the head or that of the heart?

In any event, I was very glad that Andrée was to accompany Albertine to the Trocadéro, for recent and on the whole fairly trivial incidents had persuaded me that—though I still had, of course, the same confidence in the chauffeur's honesty—his vigilance, or at least the perspicacity of his vigilance, was not quite what it had once been. It happened that, only a short while before, I had sent Albertine alone in his charge to Versailles, and she told me that she had had lunch at the Reservoirs; as the chauffeur had mentioned Vatel's restaurant, on discovering this contradiction I found an excuse to go downstairs and speak to him (it was still the same man, whose acquaintance we made at Balbec) while Albertine was dressing.

"You told me that you had lunch at Vatel's, but Mlle Albertine mentioned the Reservoirs. What's the explanation?"

The chauffeur replied: "Oh, I said I had my lunch at Vatel's, but I've no idea where Mademoiselle had hers. She left me as soon as we reached Versailles to take a horse cab, which she prefers when it isn't a long drive."

Already I was furious at the thought that she had been alone; still, it was only during the time that it took her to have lunch.

"You might surely," I suggested mildly (for I did not wish to appear to be keeping Albertine actually under surveillance, which would have been humiliating to myself, and doubly so, for it would have shown that she concealed her activities from me), "have had your lunch, I don't say at her table, but in the same restaurant?"

"But she told me not to bother to meet her before six o'clock in the Place d'Armes. I wasn't to call for her after lunch."

"Ah!" I said, making an effort to conceal my dismay. And I returned upstairs. So it was for more than seven hours on end that Albertine had been alone, left to her own devices. I could reassure myself, it is true, that the cab had not been merely an expedient whereby to escape from the chauffeur's supervision. In town, Albertine preferred dawdling in a cab, saying that one had a better view, that the air was milder. Nevertheless, she had spent seven hours about which I should never know anything. And I dared not think of the manner in which she must have spent them. I felt that the driver had been extremely maladroit, but my confidence in him was henceforth absolute. For if he had been to the slightest extent in league with Albertine, he would never have admitted that he had left her unguarded from eleven o'clock in the morning until six in the evening. There could be but one other explanation (and it was absurd) of the chauffeur's admission. This was that some quarrel between Albertine and himself had prompted him, by making a minor disclosure to me, to show her that he was not the sort of man who could be silenced, and that if, after this first gentle warning, she did not toe the line with him, he would simply spill the beans. But this explanation was absurd; it first of all presupposed a non-existent quarrel between him and Albertine, and then meant attributing the character of a blackmailer to this handsome chauffeur who had always shown himself so affable and obliging. In fact, two days later I saw that he was more capable than in my suspicious frenzy I had for a moment supposed of exercising over Albertine a discreet and perspicacious vigilance. Having managed to take him aside and talk to him of what he had told me about Versailles, I said to him in a casual, friendly tone: "That drive to Versailles you told me about the other day was everything that it should have been, you behaved perfectly as you always do. But if I may give you just a little hint, nothing of any great consequence, I feel such a responsibility now that Mme Bontemps has placed her niece in my charge, I'm so afraid of accidents, I feel so guilty about not accompanying her, that I'd be happier if it were you alone, you who are so safe, so wonderfully skilful, to whom no accident can possibly happen, who drove Mlle Albertine everywhere. Then I need fear nothing."

The charming apostolic motorist smiled a subtle smile, his hand resting upon the consecration-cross of his wheel.<sup>5</sup> Then he answered me in the following words which (banishing all the anxiety from my heart and filling it instead with joy) made me want to fling my arms round his neck.

"Never fear," he said to me. "Nothing can happen to her, for when my wheel isn't guiding her, my eye follows her everywhere. At Versailles, I went quietly along and visited the town with her, as you might say. From the Reservoirs she went to the Château, from the Château to the two Trianons, with me following her all the time without appearing to see her, and the amazing thing is that she never saw me. Oh, even if she had it wouldn't have been such a calamity. It was only natural, since I had the whole day before me with nothing to do, that I should visit the Château too. All the more so because Mademoiselle certainly can't have failed to notice that I've read a bit myself and take an interest in all those old curiosities." (This was true; indeed I should have been surprised if I had learned that he was a friend of Morel's, so far did he surpass the violinist in taste and sensitivity.) "Anyhow, she didn't see me."

"She must have met some of her friends, of course, for she has several at Versailles."

"No, she was alone all the time."

"Then people must have stared at her, such a dazzling young lady all by herself."

"Why, of course they stared at her, but she knew practically nothing about it; she went round all the time with her eyes glued to her guide-book, or gazing up at the pictures."

The chauffeur's story seemed to me all the more accurate in that it was indeed a postcard representing the Château, and another representing the two Trianons, that Albertine had sent me on the day of her visit. The care with which the obliging chauffeur had followed every step of her itinerary touched me deeply. How could I have supposed that this rectification—in the form of a generous amplification—of the account he had given two days earlier was due to the fact that in those two days Albertine, alarmed that the chauffeur should have spoken to me, had submitted and made her peace with him? This suspicion never even occurred to me.

What is certain is that this version of the chauffeur's story, by ridding me of any fear that Albertine might have deceived me, quite naturally cooled my ardour towards my mistress and made me take less interest in the day that she had spent at Versailles. I think, however, that the chauffeur's explanations, which, by absolving Albertine, made her seem even more boring to me than before, would not perhaps have been sufficient to calm me so quickly. Two little pimples which she had on her forehead for a few days were perhaps even more effective in modifying the feelings of my heart. Finally, these feelings were diverted further still from her (so far that I was conscious of her existence only when I set eyes on her) by the strange confidence volunteered me by Gilberte's maid, whom I met by chance. I learned that, when I used to go to see Gilberte every day, she was in love with a young man of whom she saw a great deal more than of myself. I had had a momentary inkling of this at the time, and indeed I had questioned this very maid. But, as she knew that I was in love with Gilberte, she had denied the story, had sworn that Mlle Swann had never set eyes on the young man. Now, however, knowing that my love had long since died, that for years past I had left all her letters unanswered—and also perhaps because she was no longer in Gilberte's service—of her own accord she gave me a full account of the amorous episode of which I had known nothing. This seemed to her quite natural. I assumed, remembering the oaths she had sworn at the time, that she had not been aware of what was going on. Not at all; it was she herself who used to go, on the orders of Mme Swann, to inform the young man whenever the one I loved was alone. The one I loved then ... But I asked myself whether my love of those days was as dead as I thought, for this story pained me. Since I do not believe that jealousy can revive a dead love, I supposed that my painful impression was due, in part at least, to the injury to my self-esteem, for a number of people whom I did not like and who at that time and even a little later—their attitude has since altered—affected a contemptuous attitude towards me, knew perfectly well, while I was in love with Gilberte, that I was being duped. And this made me wonder retrospectively whether in my love for Gilberte there had not been an element of self-love, since it so pained me now to discover that all the hours of tenderness which had made me so happy were recognised, by people I did not like, as downright deception on Gilberte's part at my expense. In any case, love or self-love, Gilberte was almost dead in me, but not entirely, and the result of this chagrin was to prevent me from worrying unduly about Albertine, who occupied so small a place in my heart. Nevertheless, to return to her (after so long a digression) and to her expedition to Versailles, the postcards of Versailles (is it possible, then, to have one's heart thus obliquely assailed by two simultaneous and interwoven jealousies, each inspired by a different person?) gave me a slightly disagreeable impression whenever my eye fell upon them as I tidied my papers. And I thought that if the chauffeur had not been such a worthy fellow, the accordance of his second narrative with Albertine's cards would not have amounted to much, for what are the first things that people send you from Versailles but the Chateau and the Trianons, unless the cards have been chosen by some sophisticated person who adores a certain statue, or by some idiot who selects as a "view" of Versailles the horse tramway station or the goods depot.

But perhaps I am wrong in saying an idiot, such postcards not having always been bought by a person of that sort at random, for their interest as coming from Versailles. For two whole years men of intelligence, artists, used to find Siena, Venice, Granada a "bore," and would say of the humblest omnibus, of every railway carriage: "There you have true beauty." Then this fancy passed like the rest. Indeed, I am not sure that people did not revert to the "sacrilege of destroying the noble relics of the past." At any rate, a first-class railway carriage ceased to be regarded as *a priori* more beautiful than St Mark's in Venice. People continued to say: "Here you have real life, the return to the past is artificial," but without drawing any definite conclusion. At all events, while retaining full confidence in the chauffeur, to ensure that Albertine would be unable to desert him without his daring to stop her for fear of being taken for a spy, I no longer allowed her to go out after this without the reinforcement of Andrée, whereas for a time I had found the chauffeur sufficient. I had even allowed her then (a thing I would never dare do now) to stay away for three whole days by herself with the chauffeur and to go almost as far as Balbec, such a craving did she have for travelling at high speed in an open car. Three days during which my mind had been quite at rest, although the rain of postcards that she had showered upon me did not reach me, owing to the appalling state of the Breton postal system (good in summer, but disorganised, no doubt, in winter), until a week after the return of Albertine and the chauffeur, so hale and hearty that on the very morning of their return they resumed their daily outings as though nothing had happened. I was delighted that Albertine should be going this afternoon to the Trocadéro, to this "special" matinee, but above all reassured by the fact that she would have a companion there in the shape of Andrée.

Dismissing these reflexions, now that Albertine had gone out, I went and stood for a moment at the window. There was at first a silence, amid which the whistle of the tripe vendor and the hooting of the trams reverberated through the air in different octaves, like a blind piano-tuner. Then gradually the interwoven motifs became distinct, and others were combined with them. There was also a new whistle, the call of a vendor the nature of whose wares I never discovered, a whistle that exactly resembled the whistle of the trams, and since it was not carried out of earshot by its own velocity, it gave the impression of a single tram-car, not endowed with motion, or broken down, immobilised, screeching at brief intervals like a dying animal.

And I felt that, should I ever have to leave this aristocratic quarter—unless it were to move to one that was entirely plebeian—the streets and boulevards of central Paris (where the greengrocery, fishmongering and other trades, established in big stores, rendered superfluous the cries of the street hawkers, who in any case would have been unable to make themselves heard) would seem to me very dreary, quite uninhabitable, stripped, drained of all these litanies of the small trades and itinerant victuals, deprived of the orchestra that came every morning to charm me. On the pavement a woman with no pretence to fashion (or else obedient to an ugly fashion) came past, too brightly dressed in a sack overcoat of goatskin; but no, it was not a woman, it



was a chauffeur who, enveloped in his goatskin, was proceeding on foot to his garage. Winged messengers of variegated hue, escaped from the big hotels, were speeding towards the stations bent over their handlebars, to meet the arrivals by the morning trains. The whirring of a violin was due at one time to the passing of a car, at another to my not having put enough water in my electric hot-water bottle. In the middle of the symphony an old-fashioned tune rang out; replacing the sweet-seller, who generally accompanied her song with a rattle, the toy-seller, to whose kazoo was attached a jumping-jack which he sent bobbing in all directions, paraded other puppets for sale, and, indifferent to the ritual declamation of Gregory the Great, the reformed declamation of Palestrina or the lyrical declamation of the moderns, warbled at the top of his voice, a belated adherent of pure melody:

Come along all you mummies and dads,  
Here's toys for your lasses and lads!  
I make them myself,  
And I pocket the pelf.  
Tralala, tralala, tralalee.  
Come along youngsters ...

Making no attempt to compete with this lively aria, little Italians in berets offered their statuettes for sale in silence. Soon, however, a young fifer compelled the toy merchant to move on and to chant more inaudibly, though in brisk time: "Come along all you mummies and dads!" Was this young fifer one of the dragoons whom I used to hear in the mornings at Doncières? No, for what followed was: "Here comes the china restorer. I repair glass, marble, crystal, bone, ivory and antiques. Here comes the restorer." In a butcher's shop, between an aureole of sunshine on the left and a whole ox suspended from a hook on the right, a young assistant, very tall and slender, with fair hair and a long neck emerging from a sky-blue collar, was displaying a lightning speed and a religious conscientiousness in putting on one side the most exquisite fillets of beef, on the other the coarsest parts of the rump, and placing them on glittering scales surmounted by a cross from which there dangled a set of beautiful chains, and—although he did nothing afterwards but arrange in the window a display of kidneys, steaks and ribs—was really far more reminiscent of a handsome angel who, on the Day of Judgment, will organise for God, according to their quality, the separation of the good and the wicked and the weighing of souls. And once again the thin, shrill music of the fife rose into the air, herald no longer of the destruction that Françoise used to dread whenever a regiment of cavalry filed past, but of "repairs" promised by an "antiquary," simpleton or rogue, who, in either case highly eclectic and very far from specialising, applied his art to the most diverse materials. The little bakers' girls hastened to stuff into their baskets the long loaves ordered for some luncheon party, while the dairymaids deftly attached the milk-churns to their yokes. Could it, I wondered, be altogether warranted, the nostalgic view I had of these young creatures? Would it not have been different if I had been able to detain for a few moments at close quarters one of those whom from the height of my window I saw only inside their shops or in motion? To estimate the loss that I suffered by my seclusion, that is to say the riches that the day had to offer me, I should have had to intercept in the long unwinding of the animated frieze some damsel carrying her laundry or her milk, transfer her for a moment, like the silhouette of a mobile piece of stage decor between its supports, into the frame of my door, and keep her there before my eyes for long enough to elicit some information about her which would enable me to find her again some day, like the identification discs which ornithologists or ichthyologists attach before setting them free to the legs or bellies of the birds or fishes whose migrations they are anxious to trace.

And so I told Françoise that I wanted some shopping done, and asked her to send up to me, should any of them call, one or other of the girls who were constantly coming to the house with laundry or bread or jugs of milk, and whom she herself used often to send on errands. In doing so I was like Elstir, who, obliged to remain closeted in his studio, on certain days in spring when the knowledge that the woods were full of violets gave him a hunger to see some, used to send his concierge out to buy him a bunch; and then it was not the table upon which he had posed the little floral model, but the whole carpet of undergrowth where in other years he had seen, in their thousands, the serpentine stems bowed beneath the weight of their tiny blue heads, that Elstir would fancy that he had before his eyes, like an imaginary zone defined in his studio by the limpid odour of the evocative flower.

Of a laundry girl, on a Sunday, there was not the slightest prospect. As for the baker's girl, as ill luck would have it she had rung the bell when Françoise was not about, had left her loaves in their basket on the landing, and had made off. The greengrocer's girl would not call until much later. Once, I had gone to order a cheese at the dairy, and among the various young female employees had noticed a startling towhead, tall in stature though little more than a child, who seemed to be day-dreaming, amid the other errand-girls, in a distinctly haughty attitude. I had seen her from a distance only, and for so brief an instant that I could not have described her appearance, except to say that she must have grown too fast and that her head supported a mane that gave the impression far less of capillary characteristics than of a sculptor's stylised rendering of the separate meanderings of parallel snow-tracks on a mountainside. This was all that I had been able to make out, apart from a sharply defined nose (a rare thing in a child) in a thin face, which recalled the beaks of baby vultures. It was not only the clustering of her comrades round her that prevented me from seeing her distinctly, but also my uncertainty whether the sentiments which I might, at first sight and subsequently, inspire in her would be those of shy pride, or of irony, or of a scorn which she would express later on to her friends. These alternative suppositions which I had formed about her in a flash had thickened the blurred atmosphere around her in which she was veiled like a goddess in a cloud shaken by thunder. For moral

uncertainty is a greater obstacle to an exact visual perception than any defect of vision would be. In this too skinny young person, who also struck one's attention too forcibly, the excess of what another person would perhaps have called her charms was precisely what was calculated to repel me, but had nevertheless had the effect of preventing me from even noticing, let alone remembering, anything about the other dairymaids, whom the aquiline nose of this one and her uninviting look, pensive, private, seeming to be passing judgment, had totally eclipsed, as a white streak of lightning plunges the surrounding countryside into darkness. And thus, of my call to order a cheese at the dairy, I had remembered (if one can say "remember" in speaking of someone so carelessly observed that one adapts to the nullity of the face ten different noses in succession), I had remembered only the girl I had found displeasing. This can be enough to set a love affair in motion. And yet I might have forgotten the startling towhead and might never have wished to see her again, had not Françoise told me that, though still quite a nipper, she had all her wits about her and would shortly be leaving her employer, since she had been going too fast and owed money in the neighbourhood. It has been said that beauty is a promise of happiness. Conversely, the possibility of pleasure may be a beginning of beauty.

I began to read Mamma's letter. Behind her quotations from Mme de Sévigné ("If my thoughts are not entirely black at Combray, they are at least dark grey; I think of you constantly; I long for you; your health, your affairs, your absence: think how they must seem to me when the dusk descends") I sensed that my mother was vexed to find Albertine's stay in the house prolonged, and my intention of marriage, although not yet announced to the betrothed, confirmed. She did not express her annoyance more directly because she was afraid that I might leave her letters lying about. Even then, veiled as they were, she reproached me for not informing her immediately, after each of them, that I had received it: "You remember how Mme de Sévigné used to say: 'When one is far away, one no longer laughs at letters which begin: *I have received yours.*'" Without referring to what distressed her most, she expressed displeasure at my lavish expenditure: "Where on earth does all your money go? It is distressing enough that, like Charles de Sévigné, you do not know what you want and are 'two or three people at once,' but do try at least not to be like him in spending money so that I may never have to say of you: 'He has discovered how to spend and have nothing to show, how to lose without gambling and how to pay without clearing himself of debt.'"

I had just finished Mamma's letter when Françoise returned to tell me that she had in the house that same rather too forward young dairymaid of whom she had spoken to me. "She can quite well take Monsieur's letter and do his shopping for him if it's not too far. You'll see, she's just like a Little Red Ridinghood." Françoise went to fetch the girl, and I could hear her showing the way and saying: "Come along now, frightened because there's a passage! Stuff and nonsense, I never thought you'd be such a goose. Have I got to lead you by the hand?" And Françoise, like a good and faithful servant who means to see that her master is respected as she respects him herself, had draped herself in the majesty that ennobles the procuress in the paintings of the old masters, wherein the mistress and the lover fade into insignificance by comparison.

Elstir, when he gazed at the violets, had no need to bother about what they were doing. The entry of the young dairymaid at once robbed me of my contemplative calm; I could no longer think of anything except how to give plausibility to the fable of the letter that she was to deliver and I began to write quickly without venturing to cast more than a furtive glance at her, so that I might not seem to have brought her into my room to be scrutinised. She was invested for me with that charm of the unknown which would not have existed for me in a pretty girl whom I had found in one of those houses where they attend on one. She was neither naked nor in disguise, but a genuine dairymaid, one of those whom we picture to ourselves as being so pretty when we do not have the time to approach them; she was a particle of what constitutes the eternal desire, the eternal regret of life, the twofold current of which is at length diverted, directed towards us. Twofold, for if it is a question of the unknown, of a person who, from her stature, her proportions, her indifferent glance, her haughty calm, we suspect must be divine, at the same time we want this woman to be thoroughly specialised in her profession, enabling us to escape from ourselves into that world which a special costume makes us romantically believe to be different. Indeed, if we wanted to embody in a formula the law of our amorous curiosities, we should have to seek it in the maximum divergence between a woman glimpsed and a woman approached and caressed. If the women of what used at one time to be called the closed houses, if prostitutes themselves (provided that we know them to be prostitutes) attract us so little, it is not because they are less beautiful than other women, but because they are ready and waiting; because they already offer us precisely what we seek to attain; it is because they are not conquests. The divergence, there, is at its minimum. A whore smiles at us in the street as she will smile when she is by our side. We are sculptors. We want to obtain of a woman a statue entirely different from the one she has presented to us. We have seen a girl strolling, indifferent and insolent, along the seashore, we have seen a shop-assistant, serious and active behind her counter, who will answer us curtly if only to avoid being subjected to the jibes of her comrades, or a fruit-vendor who barely answers us at all. Whereupon we will not rest until we can discover by experiment whether the proud girl on the seashore, the shop-assistant obsessed with what other people will say, the aloof fruit-vendor, cannot be made, by skilful handling on our part, to relax their uncompromising attitude, to throw about our necks those arms that were laden with fruit, to bend towards our lips, with a smile of consent, eyes hitherto cold or absent—oh, the beauty of the eyes of a working-girl, eyes which were stern in working hours when she was afraid of the scan-dalmongering of her companions, eyes which shunned our obsessive gaze and which, now that we have seen her alone and face to face, allow their pupils to light up with sunny laughter when we speak of making love! Between the shopgirl, or the laundress busy with her iron, or the fruit-seller, or the dairymaid—and that selfsame wench when she is about to become one's mistress, the maximum

divergence is attained, stretched indeed to its extreme limits, and varied by those habitual gestures of her profession which make a pair of arms describe, during the hours of toil, an arabesque as different as it is possible to imagine from those supple bonds that already every evening are fastened about one's neck while the mouth shapes itself for a kiss. And so one spends one's life in anxious approaches, constantly renewed, to serious working-girls whose calling seems to distance them from one. Once they are in one's arms, they are no longer what they were, the distance that one dreamed of bridging is abolished. But one begins anew with other women, one devotes all one's time, all one's money, all one's energy to these enterprises, one is enraged by the too cautious driver who may make us miss the first rendezvous, one works oneself up into a fever. And yet one knows that this first rendezvous will bring the end of an illusion. No matter: as long as the illusion lasts one wants to see whether one can convert it into reality, and then one thinks of the laundress whose coldness one remarked. Amorous curiosity is like the curiosity aroused in us by the names of places; perpetually disappointed, it revives and remains for ever insatiable.

Alas, as soon as she stood before me, the fair dairymaid with the streaky locks, stripped of all the desires and imaginings that had been aroused in me, was reduced to her mere self. The quivering cloud of my suppositions no longer enveloped her in a dizzying haze. She acquired an almost apologetic air from having (in place of the ten, the twenty that I recalled in turn without being able to fix them in my memory) but a single nose, rounder than I had thought, which gave her a hint of stupidity and had in any case lost the faculty of multiplying itself. This flyaway caught on the wing, inert, crushed, incapable of adding anything to its own paltry appearance, no longer had my imagination to collaborate with it. Fallen into the inertia of reality, I sought to spring back again; her cheeks, which I had not noticed in the shop, appeared to me so pretty that I was abashed, and to recover my composure said to the young dairymaid: "Would you be so kind as to hand me the *Figaro* which is lying there. I must make sure of the address to which I am going to send you." Thereupon, as she picked up the newspaper, she disclosed as far as her elbow the red sleeve of her jersey and handed me the conservative sheet with a neat and courteous gesture which pleased me by its swift familiarity, its fluffy appearance and its scarlet hue. While I was opening the *Figaro*, for the sake of something to say, and without raising my eyes, I asked the girl: "What do you call that red knitted thing you're wearing? It's very pretty." She replied: "It's my sweater." For, by a slight downward tendency common to all fashions, the garments and words which a few years earlier seemed to belong to the relatively smart world of Albertine's friends, were now the currency of working-girls. "Are you quite sure it won't be giving you too much trouble," I said, while I pretended to be searching the columns of the *Figaro*, "if I send you rather a long way?" As soon as I myself thus appeared to consider the job I wanted her to do for me somewhat arduous, she began to feel that it would be a nuisance to her: "The only thing is, I'm supposed to be going for a ride on my bike this afternoon. You see, Sunday's the only day we've got." "But won't you catch cold, going bare-headed like that?" "Oh, I shan't be bare-headed, I'll have my cap, and I could get on without it with all the hair I have." I raised my eyes to those flavescent, frizzy locks and felt myself caught in their swirl and swept away, with a throbbing heart, amid the lightning and the blasts of a hurricane of beauty. I continued to study the newspaper, but although it was only to keep myself in countenance and to gain time, while only pretending to read I nevertheless took in the meaning of the words that were before my eyes, and my attention was caught by the following: "To the programme already announced for this afternoon in the great hall of the Trocadéro must be added the name of Mlle Lea who has consented to appear in *Les Fourberies de Nérine*. She will of course take the part of Nérine, which she plays with dazzling verve and bewitching gaiety." It was as though an invisible hand had brutally torn from my heart the bandage beneath which its wound had begun to heal since my return from Balbec. The flood of my anguish came pouring out in torrents. Lea was the actress friend of the two girls at Balbec whom Albertine, without appearing to see them, had watched in the mirror, one afternoon at the Casino. It was true that at Balbec Albertine, at the name of Lea, had adopted a particular tone of solemnity in order to say to me, almost shocked that anyone could suspect such a pattern of virtue: "Oh no, she isn't in the least that sort of woman. She's a very nice person." Unfortunately for me, when Albertine made an assertion of this kind, it was invariably a first stage in a series of different assertions. Shortly after the first would come this second one: "I don't know her." In the third phase, after Albertine had spoken to me of somebody who was "above suspicion" and whom (in the second place) she did not know, she would gradually forget first of all that she had said that she did not know the person and then, unwittingly contradicting herself, would inform me that she did. This first lapse of memory having occurred, and the new assertion been made, a second lapse of memory would begin, concerning the person's being above suspicion. "Isn't so and so," I would ask, "one of those women?" "Why, of course, everybody knows that!" Immediately the note of solemnity was sounded afresh in an assertion which was a vague echo, greatly reduced, of the first assertion of all. "I'm bound to say that she has always behaved perfectly properly with me. Of course, she knows that I'd soon send her about her business if she tried it on. But that's neither here nor there. I'm obliged to give her credit for the genuine respect she has always shown me. It's easy to see she knew the sort of person she had to deal with." We remember the truth because it has a name, is rooted in the past, but a makeshift lie is quickly forgotten. Albertine would forget this latest lie, her fourth, and, one day when she was anxious to gain my confidence by confiding in me, would open up to me with regard to the same person who at the outset had been so respectable and whom she did not know: "She took quite a fancy to me at one time. Three or four times she asked me to walk home with her and to come up and see her. I saw no harm in walking home with her, in front of lots of people, in broad daylight, in the open air. But when we reached her front door I always made some excuse and I never went upstairs." Shortly after this, Albertine would make some remark about the beautiful things that this lady had in her house. By proceeding from one approximation to another one would

doubtless have succeeded in getting her to tell the truth, a truth which was perhaps less serious than I was inclined to believe, for, though susceptible to women, she perhaps preferred a male lover, and, now that she had me, might not have given a thought to Lea.

Already, in the case of quite a number of women at any rate, it would have been enough for me to gather together and present to my mistress a synthesis of her contradictory statements, in order to convict her of her misdeeds (misdeeds which, like astronomical laws, it is a great deal easier to deduce by a process of reasoning than to detect and observe in reality). But then she would have preferred to say that one of her statements had been a lie, the withdrawal of which would thus bring about the collapse of my whole system of deduction, rather than acknowledge that everything she had told me from the start was simply a tissue of mendacious tales. There are similar tales in the *Arabian Nights* which we find charming. They pain us coming from a person whom we love, and thereby enable us to penetrate a little deeper in our knowledge of human nature instead of being content to play around on its surface. Grief enters into us and forces us, out of painful curiosity, to probe. Whence emerge truths which we feel that we have no right to keep hidden, so much so that a dying atheist who has discovered them, certain of his own extinction, indifferent to fame, will nevertheless devote his last hours on earth to an attempt to make them known.

However, I was still at the first stage of enlightenment with regard to Lea. I was not even aware whether Albertine knew her. No matter, it came to the same thing. I must at all costs prevent her from renewing this acquaintance or making the acquaintance of this stranger at the Trocadéro. I say that I did not know whether she knew Lea or not; yet I must in fact have learned this at Balbec, from Albertine herself. For amnesia obliterated from my mind as well as from Albertine's a great many of the statements that she had made to me. Memory, instead of being a duplicate, always present before one's eyes, of the various events of one's life, is rather a void from which at odd moments a chance resemblance enables one to resuscitate dead recollections; but even then there are innumerable little details which have not fallen into that potential reservoir of memory, and which will remain for ever unverifiable. One pays no attention to anything that one does not connect with the real life of the woman one loves; one forgets immediately what she has said to one about such and such an incident or such and such people one does not know, and her expression while she was saying it. And so when, in due course, one's jealousy is aroused by these same people, and seeks to ascertain whether or not it is mistaken, whether it is indeed they who are responsible for one's mistress's impatience to go out, and her annoyance when one has prevented her from doing so by returning earlier than usual, one's jealousy, ransacking the past in search of a clue, can find nothing; always retrospective, it is like a historian who has to write the history of a period for which he has no documents; always belated, it dashes like an enraged bull to the spot where it will not find the dazzling, arrogant creature who is tormenting it and whom the crowd admire for his splendour and cunning. Jealousy thrashes around in the void, uncertain as we are in those dreams in which we are distressed because we cannot find in his empty house a person whom we have known well in life, but who here perhaps is another person and has merely borrowed the features of our friend, uncertain as we are even more after we awake when we seek to identify this or that detail of our dream. What was one's mistress's expression when she told one that? Did she not look happy, was she not actually whistling, a thing that she never does unless she has some amorous thought in her mind and finds one's presence importunate and irritating? Did she not tell one something that is contradicted by what she now affirms, that she knows or does not know such and such a person? One does not know, and one will never know; one searches desperately among the unsubstantial fragments of a dream, and all the time one's life with one's mistress goes on, a life that is oblivious of what may well be of importance to one, and attentive to what is perhaps of none, a life hagridden by people who have no real connexion with one, full of lapses of memory, gaps, vain anxieties, a life as illusory as a dream.

I suddenly realised that the young dairymaid was still in the room. I told her that the place was undoubtedly a long way off, and that I did not need her. Whereupon she also decided that it would be too much trouble: "There's a fine match this afternoon, and I don't want to miss it." I felt that she must already be in the habit of saying "Sport's the thing," and that in a few years' time she would be talking about "living her own life." I told her that I certainly did not need her any longer, and gave her five francs. Immediately, having little expected this largesse, and telling herself that if she got five francs for doing nothing she would get a great deal more for doing my errand, she began to find that her match was of no importance. "I could easily have taken your message. I can always find time." But I pushed her towards the door, for I needed to be alone: I must at all costs prevent Albertine from meeting Lea's girlfriends at the Trocadéro. It was essential that I should succeed in doing so, but I did not yet know how, and during these first few moments I opened my hands, gazed at them, cracked my knuckles, whether because the mind, when it cannot find what it is seeking, in a fit of laziness decides to halt for an instant during which it is vividly aware of the most insignificant things, like the blades of grass on a railway embankment which we see from the carriage window trembling in the wind, when the train stops in the open country—an immobility that is not always more fruitful than that of a captured animal which, paralysed by fear or mesmerised, gazes without moving a muscle—or because I was holding my body in readiness—with my mind at work inside it and, in my mind, the means of action against this or that person—as though it were simply a weapon from which would be fired the shot that would separate Albertine from Lea and her two friends. It is true that, earlier that morning, when Françoise had come in to tell me that Albertine was going to the Trocadéro, I had said to myself: "Albertine is at liberty to do as she pleases," and had supposed that in this radiant weather her actions would remain without any perceptible importance to me until the evening. But it was not only the morning sun, as I had thought, that had made me so carefree; it was because, having obliged Albertine to abandon the plans that she might perhaps have initiated or even realised

at the Verdurins', and having reduced her to attending a matinee which I myself had chosen and with a view to which she could not have planned anything, I knew that whatever she did would of necessity be innocent. Similarly, if Albertine had said a few moments later: "I don't really care if I kill myself," it was because she was certain that she would not kill herself. Surrounding both myself and Albertine there had been this morning (far more than the sunny day) that environment which itself is invisible but through the translucent and changing medium of which we saw, I her actions, she the importance of her own life—that is to say those beliefs which we do not perceive but which are no more assimilable to a pure vacuum than is the air that surrounds us; composing round about us a variable atmosphere, sometimes excellent, often unbreathable, they deserve to be studied and recorded as carefully as the temperature, the barometric pressure, the season, for our days have their own singularity, physical and moral. The belief, which I had failed to notice this morning but in which nevertheless I had been joyously enveloped until the moment when I had looked a second time at the *Figaro*, that Albertine would do nothing that was not blameless—that belief had vanished. I was no longer living in the fine sunny day, but in another day carved out of it by my anxiety lest Albertine might renew her acquaintance with Lea, and more easily still with the two girls if, as seemed to me probable, they went to applaud the actress at the Trocadéro where it would not be difficult for them to meet Albertine during one of the intervals. I no longer gave a thought to Mlle Vinteuil; the name of Lea had brought back to my mind, to make me jealous, the image of Albertine in the Casino watching the two girls. For I possessed in my memory only a series of Albertines, separate from one another, incomplete, a collection of profiles or snapshots, and so my jealousy was restricted to a discontinuous expression, at once fugitive and fixed, and to the people who had caused that expression to appear upon Albertine's face. I remembered her when, at Balbec, she was eyed with undue intensity by the two girls or by women of that sort; I remembered the distress that I felt when I saw her face subjected to an active scrutiny, like that of a painter preparing to make a sketch, entirely enveloped in it, and, doubtless on account of my presence, submitting to this contact without appearing to notice it, with a passivity that was perhaps clandestinely voluptuous. And before she pulled herself together and spoke to me, there was an instant during which Albertine did not move, smiled into the empty air, with the same air of feigned spontaneity and secret pleasure as if she were posing for somebody to take her photograph, or even seeking to assume before the camera a more dashing pose—the one she had adopted at Doncières when we were walking with Saint-Loup, and, laughing and passing her tongue over her lips, she pretended to be teasing a dog. Certainly at such moments she was not at all the same as when it was she who was interested in little girls who passed by. Then, on the contrary, her intense and velvety gaze fastened itself, glued itself to the passer-by, so adhesive, so corrosive, that you felt that, in withdrawing, it must tear away the skin. But that look, which did at least give her a certain gravity, almost as though she were ill, seemed to me a pleasant relief after the vacant, blissful look she had worn in the presence of the two girls, and I should have preferred the sombre expression of the desire that she may perhaps have felt at times to the beaming expression caused by the desire which she aroused. However much she tried to conceal her awareness of it, it bathed her, enveloped her, vaporous, voluptuous, made her whole face glow. But who knows whether, once my back was turned, Albertine would continue to suppress everything that at such moments she held in suspension within herself, that radiated around her and gave me such anguish, whether, now that I was no longer there, she would not respond boldly to the advances of the two girls? Certainly these memories caused me great pain; they were like a complete admission of Albertine's proclivities, a general confession of infidelity, against which the specific pledges that she gave me and that I wanted to believe, the negative results of my incomplete inquiries, the assurances of Andrée, given perhaps with Albertine's connivance, were powerless to prevail. Albertine might deny specific betrayals; but by words that she let fall, more potent than her declarations to the contrary, by those looks alone, she had confessed to what she would have wished to hide far more than any specific facts, to what she would have let herself be killed sooner than admit: her natural tendency. For there is no one who will willingly deliver up his soul.

In spite of the pain that these memories caused me, could I have denied that it was the programme of the matinee at the Trocadéro that had revived my need of Albertine? She was one of those women whose very failings can sometimes take the place of absent charms, and, no less than their failings, the tenderness that follows upon them and brings us that assuagement which, like an invalid who is never well for two days in succession, we are incessantly obliged to recapture in their company. Besides, even more than their faults while we are in love with them, there are their faults before we knew them, and first and foremost their nature. For what makes this sort of love painful is the fact that there pre-exists it a sort of original sin of Woman, a sin which makes us love them, so that, when we forget it, we feel less need of them, and to begin to love again we must begin to suffer again. At this moment, the thought that she must not meet the two girls again and the question whether or not she knew Lea were what was chiefly occupying my mind, in spite of the rule that one ought not to take an interest in particular facts except in relation to their general significance, and notwithstanding the childishness, as great as that of longing to travel or to make friends with women, of splintering one's curiosity against such elements from the invisible torrent of painful realities, which will always remain unknown to one, as have fortuitously crystallised in one's mind. Moreover, even if one succeeded in destroying those elements, they would at once be replaced by others. Yesterday I was afraid lest Albertine should go to see Mme Verdurin. Now my only thought was of Lea. Jealousy, which is blindfold, is not merely powerless to discover anything in the darkness that enshrouds it; it is also one of those tortures where the task must be incessantly repeated, like that of the Danaïdes, or of Ixion. Even if the two girls were not there, what impression might not Lea make on her, beautified by her stage attire, haloed with success,

what thoughts might she not leave in Albertine's mind, what desires, which, even if she repressed them in my company, would give her an aversion for a life in which she was unable to gratify them!

Besides, how could I be certain that she did not already know Lea, and would not pay her a visit in her dressing-room? And even if Lea did not know her, who could assure me that, having certainly seen her at Balbec, she would not recognise her and make a signal to her from the stage that would enable Albertine to gain admission back-stage? A danger seems perfectly avoidable when it has been averted. This one was not yet averted, and because I was afraid that it might never be, it seemed to me all the more terrible. And yet this love for Albertine, which I felt almost vanish when I attempted to realise it, seemed somehow at this moment to acquire a proof of its existence from the intensity of my anguish. I no longer cared about anything else, I thought only of how to prevent her from remaining at the Trocadéro, I would have offered any sum in the world to Lea to persuade her not to go there. If then we prove our predilection by the action that we perform rather than by the idea that we form, I must have been in love with Albertine. But this renewal of my suffering gave no greater consistency to the image of Albertine that I retained within me. She caused my ills like a deity who remains invisible. Making endless conjectures, I sought to ward off my suffering without thereby realising my love.

First of all, I must make certain that Lea was really going to perform at the Trocadéro. After dismissing the dairymaid, I telephoned to Bloch, whom I knew to be on friendly terms with Lea, in order to ask him. He knew nothing about it and seemed surprised that it could be of any interest to me. I decided that I must act quickly, remembered that Françoise was dressed and ready to go out and that I was not, and while I got up and dressed I told her to take a motor-car and go to the Trocadéro, buy a seat, search the auditorium for Albertine and give her a note from me. In this note I told Albertine that I was greatly upset by a letter which I had just received from that same lady on whose account she would remember that I had been so wretched one night at Balbec. I reminded her that, on the following day, she had reproached me for not having sent for her. And so I was taking the liberty, I told her, of asking her to sacrifice her matinee and to join me at home so that we might take the air together, which might help me to recover from the shock. But since it would be some time before I was dressed and ready, she would oblige me, seeing that she had Françoise as an escort, by calling at the Trois-Quartiers (this shop, being smaller, seemed to me less dangerous than the Bon Marché) to buy the white tulle bodice that she required.

My note was probably not superfluous. To tell the truth, I knew nothing that Albertine had done since I had come to know her, or even before. But in her conversation (she might, had I mentioned it to her, have replied that I had misunderstood her) there were certain contradictions, certain embellishments which seemed to me as decisive as catching her red-handed, but less usable against Albertine who, often caught out like a child, had invariably, by dint of sudden, strategic changes of front, stultified my cruel attacks and retrieved the situation. Cruel, most of all, to myself. She employed, not by way of stylistic refinement, but in order to correct her imprudences, abrupt breaches of syntax not unlike that figure which the grammarians call anacoluthon or some such name. Having allowed herself, while discussing women, to say: "I remember, the other day, I ...," she would suddenly, after a "semiquaver rest," change the "I" to "she": it was something that she had witnessed as an innocent spectator, not a thing that she herself had done. It was not she who was the subject of the action. I should have liked to recall exactly how the sentence had begun, in order to decide for myself, since she had broken off in the middle, what the conclusion would have been. But since I had been awaiting that conclusion, I found it hard to remember the beginning, from which perhaps my air of interest had made her deviate, and was left still anxious to know her real thoughts, the actual truth of her recollection. Unfortunately the beginnings of a lie on the part of one's mistress are like the beginnings of one's own love, or of a vocation. They take shape, accumulate, pass unnoticed by oneself. When one wants to remember in what manner one began to love a woman, one is already in love with her; day-dreaming about her beforehand, one did not say to oneself: "This is the prelude to love; be careful!"—and one's day-dreams advanced unobtrusively, scarcely noticed by oneself. In the same way, save in a few comparatively rare cases, it is only for narrative convenience that I have frequently in these pages confronted one of Albertine's false statements with her previous assertion on the same subject. This previous assertion, as often as not, since I could not read the future and did not at the time guess what contradictory affirmation was to form a pendant to it, had slipped past unperceived, heard it is true by my ears, but without my isolating it from the continuous flow of Albertine's speech. Later on, faced with the self-evident lie, or seized by an anxious doubt, I would endeavour to recall it; but in vain; my memory had not been warned in time; it had thought it unnecessary to keep a copy.

I instructed Françoise to let me know by telephone when she had got Albertine out of the theatre, and to bring her home whether she was willing or not.

"It really would be the last straw if she wasn't willing to come and see Monsieur," replied Françoise.

"But I don't know that she's as fond of seeing me as all that."

"Then she must be an ungrateful wretch," went on Françoise, in whom Albertine was renewing after all these years the same torment of envy that Eulalie used at one time to cause her in my aunt's sickroom. Unaware that Albertine's position in my household was not of her own seeking but had been willed by me (a fact which, from motives of self-esteem and to infuriate Françoise, I preferred to conceal from her), she was amazed and incensed by the girl's cunning, called her when she spoke of her to the other servants a "play-actress," a "wily customer" who could twist me round her little finger. She dared not yet declare open war on her, showed her a smiling face and sought to acquire merit in my eyes by the services she did her in her relations with me, deciding that it was useless to say anything to me and that she would gain nothing by doing so, but always on

the look-out for an opportunity, so that if ever she discovered a crack in Albertine's armour, she was determined to enlarge it, and to separate us for good and all.

"Ungrateful? No, Françoise, I think it's I who am ungrateful. You don't know how good she is to me." (It was so comforting to me to appear to be loved!) "Off you go,"

"All right, I'll hop it, double quick."

Her daughter's influence was beginning to contaminate Françoise's vocabulary. So it is that all languages lose their purity by the addition of new words. For this decadence of Françoise's speech, which I had known in its golden period, I was in fact myself indirectly responsible. Françoise's daughter would not have made her mother's classic language degenerate into the vilest slang if she had stuck to conversing with her in dialect. She had never hesitated to do so, and if they had anything private to say to each other when they were both with me, instead of shutting themselves up in the kitchen they provided themselves, right in the middle of my room, with a protective screen more impenetrable than the most carefully closed door, by conversing in dialect. I supposed merely that the mother and daughter were not always on the best of terms, if I was to judge by the frequency with which they employed the only word that I could make out: *m'esasperate* (unless it was myself who was the object of their exasperation). Unfortunately the most unfamiliar tongue becomes intelligible in time when we are always hearing it spoken. I was sorry that it was dialect, for I succeeded in picking it up, and should have been no less successful had Françoise been in the habit of expressing herself in Persian. In vain did Françoise, when she became aware of my progress, accelerate the speed of her delivery, and her daughter likewise; there was nothing to be done. The mother was greatly put out that I understood their dialect, then delighted to hear me speak it. I am bound to admit that her delight was a mocking delight, for although I came in time to pronounce the words more or less as she herself did, she found a gulf between our two pronunciations which gave her infinite joy, and she began to regret that she no longer saw people to whom she had not given a thought for years but who, it appeared, would have rocked with laughter which it would have done her good to hear if they could have listened to me speaking their dialect so badly. The mere idea of it filled her with gaiety and nostalgia, and she enumerated various peasants who would have laughed until they cried. However, no amount of joy could mitigate her sorrow at the fact that, however badly I might pronounce it, I understood it perfectly well. Keys become useless when the person whom we seek to prevent from entering can avail himself of a skeleton key or a jemmy. Dialect having become useless as a means of defence, she took to conversing with her daughter in a French which rapidly became that of the most debased epochs.

I was now ready, but Françoise had not yet telephoned. Should I set out without waiting for a message? But how could I be sure that she would find Albertine, that the latter hadn't gone back-stage, that even if Françoise did find her, she would allow herself to be brought home? Half an hour later the telephone bell began to tinkle and my heart throbbed tumultuously with hope and fear. There came, at the bidding of an operator, a flying squadron of sounds which with an instantaneous speed brought me the voice of the telephonist, not that of Françoise whom an ancestral timidity and melancholy, when she was brought face to face with any object unknown to her fathers, prevented from approaching a telephone receiver, although she would readily visit a person suffering from a contagious disease. She had found Albertine in the lobby by herself, and Albertine, after going off to tell Andrée that she was not going to stay, had come straight back to Françoise.

"She wasn't angry? Oh, I beg your pardon; will you please ask the lady whether the young lady was angry?"

"The lady asks me to say that she wasn't at all angry, quite the contrary, in fact; anyhow, if she wasn't pleased, she didn't show it. They're now going to go to the Trois-Quartiers, and will be home by two o'clock."

I gathered that two o'clock meant three, for it was already past two. But Françoise suffered from one of those peculiar, permanent, incurable defects which we call diseases: she was never able either to read or to express the time correctly. When, after consulting her watch at two o'clock, she said "It's one o'clock" or "It's three o'clock," I was never able to understand whether the phenomenon that occurred was situated in her vision or in her mind or in her speech; the one thing certain is that the phenomenon never failed to occur. Humanity is a very old institution. Heredity and cross-breeding have given insuperable strength to bad habits, faulty reflexes. One person sneezes and gasps because he is passing a rosebush, another breaks out in a rash at the smell of wet paint; others get violent stomach-aches if they have to set out on a journey, and grandchildren of thieves who are themselves rich and generous cannot resist the temptation to rob you of fifty francs. As for discovering the cause of Françoise's incapacity to tell the time correctly, she herself never threw any light upon the problem. For, notwithstanding the fury that her inaccurate replies regularly provoked in me, Françoise never attempted either to apologise for her mistake or to explain it. She remained silent, seeming not to hear, and thereby making me lose my temper altogether. I should have liked to hear a few words of justification, if only to be able to demolish them; but not a word, an indifferent silence. However, as far as today was concerned there could be no doubt; Albertine was coming home with Françoise at three o'clock, Albertine would not be meeting Lea or her friends. Whereupon, the danger of her renewing relations with them having been averted, it at once began to lose its importance in my eyes and I was amazed, seeing with what ease it had been averted, that I should have supposed that I would not succeed in averting it. I felt a keen impulse of gratitude towards Albertine, who, I could see, had not gone to the Trocadéro to meet Léa's friends, and who showed me, by leaving the matinee and coming home at a word from me, that she belonged to me, even for the future, more than I had imagined. My gratitude was even greater when a cyclist brought me a note from her bidding me be patient, and full of the charming expressions that she was in the habit of using. "My darling dear Marcel, I return less quickly than this cyclist, whose bike I should like to borrow in

order to be with you sooner. How could you imagine that I might be angry or that I could enjoy anything better than to be with you? It will be nice to go out, just the two of us together; it would be nicer still if we never went out except together. The ideas you get into your head! What a Marcel! What a Marcel! Always and ever your Albertine."

The dresses that I bought for her, the yacht of which I had spoken to her, the Fortuny gowns—all these things, having in this obedience on Albertine's part not their recompense but their complement, appeared to me now as so many privileges that I exercised; for the duties and expenses of a master are part of his dominion, and define it, prove it, fully as much as his rights. And these rights which she acknowledged were precisely what gave my expenditure its true character: I had a woman of my own, who, at the first word that I sent her out of the blue, informed me deferentially by telephone that she was coming, that she was allowing herself to be brought home, at once. I was more of a master than I had supposed. More of a master, in other words more of a slave. I no longer felt the slightest impatience to see Albertine. The certainty that she was at this moment engaged in shopping with Françoise, that she would return with her at an approaching moment which I would willingly have postponed, lit up like a calm and radiant star a period of time which I would now have been far better pleased to spend alone. My love for Albertine had made me get up and prepare to go out, but it would prevent me from enjoying my outing. I reflected that on a Sunday afternoon like this little shopgirls, *midinettes*, prostitutes must be strolling in the Bois. And with the words *midinettes*, *little shopgirls* (as had often happened to me with a proper name, the name of a girl read in the account of a ball), with the image of a white bodice, a short skirt, since beneath them I placed an unknown person who might perhaps come to love me, I created out of nothing desirable women, and said to myself: "How delightful they must be!" But of what use would it be to me that they were delightful, seeing that I was not going out alone?

Taking advantage of the fact that I still was alone, and drawing the curtains together so that the sun should not prevent me from reading the notes, I sat down at the piano, opened at random Vinteuil's sonata which happened to be lying there, and began to play; seeing that Albertine's arrival was still a matter of some time but was on the other hand certain, I had at once time to spare and peace of mind. Lulled by the confident expectation of her return escorted by Françoise and by the assurance of her docility as by the blessedness of an inner light as warming as the light of the sun, I could dispose of my thoughts, detach them for a moment from Albertine, apply them to the sonata. I did not even go out of my way to notice how, in the latter, the combination of the sensual and the anxious motifs corresponded more closely now to my love for Albertine, from which jealousy had been for so long absent that I had been able to confess to Swann my ignorance of that sentiment. No, approaching the sonata from another point of view, regarding it in itself as the work of a great artist, I was carried back upon the tide of sound to the days at Combray—I do not mean Montjouvain and the Méséglise way, but to my walks along the Guermantes way—when I myself had longed to become an artist. In abandoning that ambition *de facto*, had I forfeited something real? Could life console me for the loss of art? Was there in art a more profound reality, in which our true personality finds an expression that is not afforded it by the activities of life? For every great artist seems so different from all the rest, and gives us so strongly that sensation of individuality for which we seek in vain in our everyday existence! Just as I was thinking thus, I was struck by a passage in the sonata. It was a passage with which I was quite familiar, but sometimes our attention throws a different light upon things which we have known for a long time and we remark in them what we have never seen before. As I played the passage, and although Vinteuil had been trying to express in it a fancy which would have been wholly foreign to Wagner, I could not help murmuring "*Tristan*," with the smile of an old family friend discovering a trace of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who has never set eyes on him. And as the friend then examines a photograph which enables him to specify the likeness, so, on top of Vinteuil's sonata, I set up on the music-rest the score of *Tristan*, a selection from which was being given that afternoon, as it happened, at a Lamoureux concert. In admiring the Bayreuth master, I had none of the scruples of those who, like Nietzsche, are bidden by a sense of duty to shun in art as in life the beauty that tempts them, and who, tearing themselves from *Tristan* as they renounce *Parsifal*, and, in their spiritual asceticism, progressing from one mortification to another, succeed, by following the most bloody of the stations of the cross, in exalting themselves to the pure cognition and perfect adoration of *Le Postillon de Longjumeau*.<sup>6</sup> I was struck by how much reality there is in the work of Wagner as I contemplated once more those insistent, fleeting themes which visit an act, recede only to return again and again, and, sometimes distant, dormant, almost detached, are at other moments, while remaining vague, so pressing and so close, so internal, so organic, so visceral, that they seem like the reprise not so much of a musical motif as of an attack of neuralgia.

Music, very different in this respect from Albertine's society, helped me to descend into myself, to discover new things: the variety that I had sought in vain in life, in travel, but a longing for which was none the less renewed in me by this sonorous tide whose sunlit waves now came to expire at my feet. A twofold diversity. As the spectrum makes visible to us the composition of light, so the harmony of a Wagner, the colour of an Elstir, enable us to know that essential quality of another person's sensations into which love for another person does not allow us to penetrate. Then a diversity inside the work itself, by the sole means that exist of being effectively diverse: to wit, combining diverse individualities. Where a minor composer would claim to be portraying a squire, or a knight, while making them both sing the same music, Wagner on the contrary allots to each separate appellation a different reality, and whenever a squire appears, it is an individual figure, at once complicated and simplified, that, with a joyous, feudal clash of warring sounds, inscribes itself in the vast tonal mass. Whence the plenitude of a music that is indeed filled with so many different strains, each of which is a person. A person or the impression that is given us by a momentary aspect of nature. Even that



which, in this music, is most independent of the emotion that it arouses in us preserves its outward and absolutely precise reality; the song of a bird, the call of a hunter's horn, the air that a shepherd plays upon his pipe, each carves its silhouette of sound against the horizon. True, Wagner would bring them forward, appropriate them, introduce them into an orchestral whole, make them subservient to the highest musical concepts, but always respecting their original nature, as a carpenter respects the grain, the peculiar essence of the wood that he is carving.

But notwithstanding the richness of these works in which the contemplation of nature has its place alongside the action, alongside the individuals who are not merely the names of characters, I thought how markedly, all the same, these works partake of that quality of being—albeit marvellously—always incomplete, which is the characteristic of all the great works of the nineteenth century, that century whose greatest writers somehow botched their books, but, watching themselves work as though they were at once workman and judge, derived from this self-contemplation a new form of beauty, exterior and superior to the work itself, imposing on it a retroactive unity, a grandeur which it does not possess. Without pausing to consider the man who belatedly saw in his novels a *Human Comedy*, or those who entitled heterogeneous poems or essays *The Legend of the Centuries* or *The Bible of Humanity*, can we not say none the less of the last of these that he so admirably personifies the nineteenth century that the greatest beauties in Michelet are to be sought not so much in his work itself as in the attitudes that he adopts towards his work, not in his *History of France* nor in his *History of the Revolution*, but in his prefaces to those books? Prefaces, that is to say pages written after the books themselves, in which he considers the books, and with which we must include here and there certain sentences beginning as a rule with a: "Dare I say?" which is not a scholar's precaution but a musician's cadence. The other musician, he who was delighting me at this moment, Wagner, retrieving some exquisite fragment from a drawer of his writing-table to introduce it, as a retrospectively necessary theme, into a work he had not even thought of at the time he composed it, then having composed a first mythological opera, and a second, and afterwards others still, and perceiving all of a sudden that he had written a tetralogy, must have felt something of the same exhilaration as Balzac when the latter, casting over his books the eye at once of a stranger and of a father, finding in one the purity of Raphael, in another the simplicity of the Gospel, suddenly decided, shedding a retrospective illumination upon them, that they would be better brought together in a cycle in which the same characters would reappear, and touched up his work with a swift brush-stroke, the last and the most sublime. An ulterior unity, but not a factitious one, otherwise it would have crumbled into dust like all the other systematisations of mediocre writers who with copious titles and sub-titles give themselves the appearance of having pursued a single and transcendent design. Not factitious, perhaps indeed all the more real for being ulterior, for being born of a moment of enthusiasm when it is discovered to exist among fragments which need only to be joined together; a unity that was unaware of itself, hence vital and not logical, that did not prohibit variety, dampen invention. It emerges (but applied this time to the work as a whole) like such and such a fragment composed separately, born of an inspiration, not required by the artificial development of a thesis, which comes to be integrated with the rest. Before the great orchestral movement that precedes the return of Isolde, it is the work itself that has attracted towards itself the half-forgotten air of a shepherd's pipe. And, no doubt, just as the orchestra swells and surges at the approach of the ship, when it takes hold of these notes of the pipe, transforms them, imbues them with its own intoxication, breaks their rhythm, clarifies their tonality, accelerates their movement, expands their instrumentation, so no doubt Wagner himself was filled with joy when he discovered in his memory the shepherd's tune, incorporated it in his work, gave it its full wealth of meaning. This joy moreover never forsakes him. In him, however great the melancholy of the poet, it is consoled, transcended—that is to say, alas, to some extent destroyed—by the exhilaration of the fabricator. But then, no less than by the similarity I had remarked just now between Vinteuil's phrase and Wagner's, I was troubled by the thought of this Vulcan-like skill. Could it be this that gave to great artists the illusory aspect of a fundamental, irreducible originality, apparently the reflexion of a more than human reality, actually the result of industrious toil? If art is no more than that, it is no more real than life and I had less cause for regret. I went on playing *Tristan*. Separated from Wagner by the wall of sound, I could hear him exult, invite me to share his joy, I could hear the immortally youthful laughter and the hammer-blows of Siegfried ring out with redoubled vigour; but the more marvellously those phrases were struck, the technical skill of the craftsman served merely to make it easier for them to leave the earth, birds akin not to Lohengrin's swan but to that aeroplane which I had seen at Balbec convert its energy into vertical motion, glide over the sea and vanish in the sky. Perhaps, as the birds that soar highest and fly most swiftly have more powerful wings, one of these frankly material vehicles was needed to explore the infinite, one of these 120 horse-power machines—the *Mystère* model—in which nevertheless, however high one flies, one is prevented to some extent from enjoying the silence of space by the overpowering roar of the engine!

Somehow or other the course of my musings, which hitherto had wandered among musical memories, turned now to those men who have been the best performers of music in our day, among whom, slightly exaggerating his merit, I included Morel. At once my thoughts took a sharp turn, and it was Morel's character, certain peculiarities of that character, that I began to consider. As it happened—and this might be connected though not confused with the neurasthenia to which he was a prey—Morel was in the habit of talking about his life, but always presented so shadowy a picture of it that it was difficult to make anything out. For instance, he placed himself entirely at M. de Charlus's disposal on the understanding that he must keep his evenings free, as he wished to be able after dinner to attend an algebra course. M. de Charlus conceded this, but insisted on seeing him after the lessons.

"Impossible, it's an old Italian painting" (this witticism means nothing when written down like this; but M. de Charlus having made Morel read *L'Education sentimentale*, in the penultimate chapter of which Frederic Moreau uses this expression, it was Morel's idea of a joke never to say the word "impossible" without following it up with "it's an old Italian painting"), "the lessons go on very late, and they're already enough of an inconvenience to the teacher, who would naturally feel hurt ..."

"But there's no need to have lessons, algebra isn't a thing like swimming, or even English, you can learn it equally well from a book," replied M. de Charlus, who had guessed from the first that these algebra lessons were one of those images of which it was impossible to decipher anything at all. It was perhaps some affair with a woman, or, if Morel was seeking to earn money in shady ways and had attached himself to the secret police, an expedition with detectives, or possibly, what was even worse, an engagement as a gigolo whose services may be required in a brothel.

"A great deal more easily from a book," Morel assured M. de Charlus, "for it's impossible to make head or tail of the lessons."

"Then why don't you study it in my house, where you would be far more comfortable?" M. de Charlus might have answered, but took care not to do so, knowing that at once, preserving only the same essential element that the evening hours must be set apart, the imaginary algebra course would change to obligatory lessons in dancing or drawing. In this M. de Charlus could see that he was mistaken, partially at least, for Morel often spent his time at the Baron's in solving equations. M. de Charlus did raise the objection that algebra could be of little use to a violinist. Morel replied that it was a distraction which helped him to pass the time and to combat his neurasthenia. No doubt M. de Charlus might have made inquiries, have tried to find out what actually were these mysterious and inescapable algebra lessons that were given only at night. But M. de Charlus was too caught up in the toils of his own social life to be able to unravel the tangled skein of Morel's occupations. The visits he received or paid, the time he spent at his club, the dinner-parties, the evenings at the theatre, prevented him from thinking about the problem, or for that matter about the malevolence, at once violent and underhand, to which (it was reported) Morel had been wont to give vent and which he had at the same time sought to conceal in the successive circles, the different towns through which he had passed, and where people still spoke of him with a shudder, with bated breath, never daring to say anything about him.

It was unfortunately one of the outbursts of this neurotic venom that I was destined to hear that day when, rising from the piano, I went down to the courtyard to meet Albertine, who had still not arrived. As I passed by Jupien's shop, in which Morel and the girl who, I supposed, was shortly to become his wife were alone together, Morel was screaming at the top of his voice, thereby revealing an accent that I hardly recognised as his, a coarse peasant accent, suppressed as a rule, and very strange indeed. His words were no less strange, and faulty from the point of view of the French language, but his knowledge of everything was imperfect. "Will you get out of here, *grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue,*" he repeated to the poor girl who at first had clearly not understood what he meant, and now, trembling and indignant, stood motionless before him.<sup>7</sup> "Didn't I tell you to get out of here, *grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue.* Go and fetch your uncle till I tell him what you are, you whore." Just at that moment the voice of Jupien, who was returning home with one of his friends, was heard in the courtyard, and as I knew that Morel was an utter coward, I decided that it was unnecessary to add my forces to those of Jupien and his friend, who in another moment would have entered the shop, and retired upstairs again to avoid Morel, who, for all his having pretended (probably in order to frighten and subjugate the girl by a piece of blackmail based perhaps on nothing at all) to be so anxious that Jupien should be fetched, made haste to depart as soon as he heard him in the courtyard. The words I have set down here are nothing, and would not explain why my heart was beating as I went upstairs. These scenes which we witness from time to time in our lives acquire an incalculable element of potency from what soldiers call, in speaking of a military offensive, the advantage of surprise, and however agreeably I might be soothed by the knowledge that Albertine, instead of remaining at the Trocadéro, was coming home to me, I still heard ringing in my ears those words ten times repeated: "*Grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue,*" which had so upset me.

Gradually my agitation subsided. Albertine was on her way home. I would hear her ring the bell in a moment. I felt that my life was no longer even what it could have been, and that to have a woman in the house like this with whom quite naturally, when she returned home, I would go out, to the adornment of whose person the energy and activity of my being were to be more and more diverted, made of me as it were a bough that has blossomed, but is weighed down by the abundant fruit into which all its reserves of strength have passed. In contrast to the anxiety that I had been feeling only an hour earlier, the calm induced in me by the prospect of Albertine's return was even vaster than that which I had felt in the morning before she left the house. Anticipating the future, of which my mistress's docility made me to all intents and purposes master, more resistant, as though it were filled and stabilised by the imminent, importunate, inevitable, gentle

presence, it was the calm (dispensing us from the obligation to seek our happiness in ourselves) that is born of family feeling and domestic bliss. Familial and domestic: such was again, no less than the feeling which had brought me such peace while I was waiting for Albertine, that which I experienced later when I drove out with her. She took off her glove for a moment, either to touch my hand, or to dazzle me by letting me see on her little finger, next to the ring that Mme Bontemps had given her, another upon which was displayed the large and liquid surface of a bright sheet of ruby.

"What, another new ring, Albertine! Your aunt is generous!"

"No, I didn't get this from my aunt," she said with a laugh. "I bought it myself, since thanks to you I can save up ever so much money. I don't even know whose it was before. A visitor who was short of money left it with the proprietor of a hotel where I stayed at Le Mans. He didn't know what to do with it, and would have sold it for much less than it was worth. But it was still far too dear for me. Now that, thanks to you, I'm becoming a smart lady, I wrote to ask him if he still had it. And here it is."

"That makes a great many rings, Albertine. Where will you put the one that I am going to give you? Anyhow, this one's very pretty. I can't quite make out what that is carved round the ruby, it looks like a man's grinning face. But my eyesight isn't good enough."

"Even if it was better than it is it wouldn't get you very far. I can't make it out either."

In the past it had often happened to me, on reading a book of memoirs or a novel in which a man is always going out with a woman, or having tea with her, to long to be able to do likewise. I had thought sometimes that I had succeeded in doing so, as for instance when I took Saint-Loup's mistress out, to go to dine with her. But however much I summoned to my assistance the idea that I was at that moment actually impersonating the character I had envied in the novel, this idea assured me that I ought to find pleasure in Rachel's company and yet afforded me none. For, whenever we attempt to imitate something that has really existed, we forget that this something was brought about not by the desire to imitate but by an unconscious force which itself is also real; but this unique impression, which all my longing to taste a delicate pleasure by going out with Rachel had failed to give me, I was now experiencing, without having looked for it in the slightest, but for quite other reasons, reasons that were sincere and profound; to take a single instance, for the reason that my jealousy prevented me from losing sight of Albertine, and, the moment I was able to leave the house, from letting her go anywhere without me. I was experiencing it only now because our knowledge is not of the external objects which we want to observe, but of involuntary sensations, because in the past, though a woman might indeed be sitting in the same carriage as myself, she was not *really* by my side as long as she was not continually re-created there by a need for her such as I felt for Albertine, as long as the constant caress of my gaze did not incessantly restore to her those tints that need to be perpetually refreshed, as long as my senses, appeased perhaps but still freshly remembering, were not aware of the savour and substance beneath those colours, as long as, combined with the senses and with the imagination that exalts them, jealousy was not maintaining that woman in a state of equilibrium at my side by a compensated attraction as powerful as the law of gravity.

Our motor-car sped along the boulevards and the avenues, whose rows of houses, a pink congelation of sunshine and cold, reminded me of my visits to Mme Swann in the soft light of her chrysanthemums, before it was time to ring for the lamps. I had barely time to make out, being separated from them by the glass of the car as effectively as I should have been by that of my bedroom window, a young fruit-seller, or a dairymaid, standing in the doorway of her shop, illuminated by the sunshine like a heroine whom my desire was sufficient to launch upon exquisite adventures, on the threshold of a romance which I should never know. For I could not ask Albertine to let me stop, and already the young women whose features my eyes had barely distinguished, and whose fresh complexions they had barely caressed, were no longer visible in the golden haze in which they were bathed. The emotion that gripped me when I caught sight of a wine-merchant's girl at her cash-desk or a laundress chatting in the street was the emotion that we feel on recognising a goddess. Now that Olympus no longer exists, its inhabitants dwell upon the earth. And when, in composing a mythological scene, painters have engaged to pose as Venus or Ceres young women of the people following the humblest callings, so far from committing sacrilege they have merely added or restored to them the quality, the divine attributes of which they had been stripped.

"What did you think of the Trocadéro, you little gadabout?"

"I'm jolly glad I came away from it to go out with you. It's by Davioud, I believe."

"But how learned my little Albertine is becoming! It is indeed by Davioud, but I'd forgotten."

"While you're asleep I read your books, you old lazybones. As a building it's pretty lousy, isn't it?"

"I say, little one, you're changing so fast and becoming so intelligent" (this was true, but even had it not been true I was not sorry that she should have the satisfaction, failing others, of saying to herself that at least the time she spent in my house was not being entirely wasted) "that I don't mind telling you things which would generally be regarded as false but which correspond to a truth that I'm searching for. You know what is meant by impressionism?"

"Of course!"

"Very well then, this is what I mean: you remember the church at Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse which Elstir disliked because it was new? Isn't it rather a denial of his own impressionism when he abstracts such buildings from the global impression in which they're included, brings them out of the light in which they're dissolved and scrutinises their intrinsic merit like an archaeologist? When he paints, haven't a hospital, a school, a poster on a hoarding the same value as a matchless cathedral which stands by their side in a single indivisible image? Remember how the façade was baked by the sun, how that carved frieze of saints at

Marcouville floated on the sea of light. What does it matter that a building is new, if it appears old, or even if it doesn't? All the poetry that the old quarters contain has been squeezed out to the last drop, but if you look at some of the houses that have been built lately for well-to-do tradesmen in the new districts, where the stone is all freshly cut and still too white, don't they seem to rend the torrid midday air of July, at the hour when the shopkeepers go home to lunch in the suburbs, with a cry as sharp and acidulous as the smell of the cherries waiting for the meal to begin in the darkened dining-room, where the prismatic glass knife-rests throw off a multicoloured light as beautiful as the windows of Chartres?"

"How wonderful you are! If I ever do become clever, it will be entirely owing to you."

"Why, on a fine day, tear your eyes away from the Trocadéro, whose giraffe-neck towers remind one of the Charter-house of Pavia?"

"It reminded me also, standing up like that on its knoll, of a Mantegna that you have, I think it's of St Sebastian, where in the background there's a terraced city where you'd swear you'd find the Trocadéro."

"There, you see! But how did you come across the Mantegna reproduction? You're absolutely staggering."

We had now reached a more plebeian neighbourhood, and the installation of an ancillary Venus behind each counter made it as it were a suburban altar at the foot of which I would gladly have spent the rest of my life. As one does on the eve of a premature death, I drew up a mental list of the pleasures of which I was deprived by the fact that Albertine had put a full stop to my freedom. At Passy it was in the middle of the street itself, so crowded were the footways, that some girls, their arms encircling one another's waists, enthralled me with their smiles. I had not time to distinguish them clearly, but it is unlikely that I was overrating their charms; in any crowd, after all, in any crowd of young people, it is not unusual to come upon the effigy of a noble profile. So that these assembled masses on public holidays are as precious to the voluptuary as is to the archaeologist the disordered jumble of a site whose excavation will bring ancient medals to light. We arrived at the Bois. I reflected that, if Albertine had not come out with me, I might at this moment, in the enclosure of the Champs-Élysées, have been hearing the Wagnerian storm set all the tackle of the orchestra groaning, draw into its frenzy, like a light spindrift, the tune of the shepherd's pipe which I had just been playing to myself, set it flying, mould it, distort it, divide it, sweep it away in an ever-increasing whirlwind. I was determined, at any rate, that our drive should be short and that we should return home early, for, without having mentioned it to Albertine, I had decided to go that evening to the Verdurins'. They had recently sent me an invitation which I had flung into the waste-paper basket with all the rest. But I had changed my mind as far as this evening was concerned, for I meant to try to find out who Albertine might have been hoping to meet there in the afternoon. To tell the truth, I had reached that stage in my relations with Albertine when, if everything remains the same, if things go on normally, a woman no longer serves any purpose for one except as a transitional stage before another woman. She still retains a corner in one's heart, but a very small corner; one is impatient to go out every evening in search of unknown women, especially unknown women who are known to her and can tell one about her life. Herself, after all, we have possessed, and exhausted everything that she has consented to yield to us of herself. Her life is still herself, but precisely that part of her which we do not know, the things about which we have questioned her in vain and which we shall be able to gather from fresh lips.

If my life with Albertine was to prevent me from going to Venice, from travelling, at least I might this afternoon, had I been alone, have been making the acquaintance of the young midinettes scattered about in the sunlight of this fine Sunday, in the sum total of whose beauty I gave a considerable place to the unknown life that animated them. Are they not, those eyes one sees, shot through with a look behind which we do not know what images, memories, expectations, disdains lie concealed, and from which we cannot separate them? Will not that life, which is that of the woman passing by, impart a different value, according to what it is, to the frown on that forehead, the dilating of those nostrils? Albertine's presence debarred me from approaching them, and perhaps thus ceasing to desire them. The man who would maintain in himself the desire to go on living and a belief in something more delicious than the things of daily life, must go out driving; for the streets, the avenues, are full of goddesses. But the goddesses do not allow us to approach them. Here and there, among the trees, at the entrance to some cafe, a waitress was watching like a nymph on the edge of a sacred grove, while beyond her three girls were seated by the sweeping arc of their bicycles that were stacked beside them, like three immortals leaning against the clouds or the fabulous coursers upon which they perform their mythological journeys. I noticed that, whenever Albertine looked for a moment at these girls with deep attentiveness, she at once turned round towards me. But I was not unduly troubled, either by the intensity of this contemplation, or by its brevity which was compensated by that intensity; indeed, as to the latter, it often happened that Albertine, whether from exhaustion, or because it was an attentive person's way of looking at other people, would gaze thus in a sort of brown study either at my father or at Françoise; and as for the rapidity with which she turned to look at me, it might be due to the fact that Albertine, knowing my suspicions, might wish, even if they were unjustified, to avoid laying herself open to them. This attention, moreover, which would have seemed to me criminal on Albertine's part (and quite as much so if it had been directed at young men), I myself fastened upon all the midinettes without thinking it reprehensible for a moment, almost deciding indeed that it was reprehensible of Albertine to prevent me, by her presence, from stopping the car and going to join them. We consider it innocent to desire, and heinous that the other person should do so. And this contrast between what concerns oneself on the one hand, and on the other the person one loves, is not confined only to desire, but extends also to lying. What is more usual than a lie, whether it is a question of masking the daily weaknesses of a constitution which we wish to be thought strong, of concealing a vice, or of going off, without offending other people, to the thing that we prefer? It is the most

necessary means of self-preservation, and the one that is most widely used. Yet this is the thing that we actually propose to banish from the life of the person we love; we watch for it, scent it, detest it everywhere. It distresses us, it is sufficient to bring about a rupture, it seems to us to conceal the gravest misdemeanours, except when it conceals them so effectively that we do not suspect their existence. A strange state, this, in which we are so inordinately sensitive to a pathogenic agent whose universal proliferation makes it inoffensive to other people and so baneful to the wretch who finds that he is no longer immune to it!

The life of these pretty girls (since, because of my long periods of reclusion, I so rarely met any) appeared to me, as to everyone in whom ease of fulfilment has not deadened the power of imagining, a thing as different from anything that I knew, and as desirable, as the most marvellous cities that travel holds in store for us.

The disappointment I had felt with the women I had known, or in the cities I had visited, did not prevent me from falling for the attraction of others or from believing in their reality. Hence, just as seeing Venice—Venice, for which this spring weather filled me also with longing, and which marriage with Albertine would prevent me from knowing—seeing Venice in a diorama which Ski would perhaps have declared to be more beautiful in tone than the place itself, would to me have been no substitute for the journey to Venice the length of which, determined without my having any hand in it, seemed to me an indispensable preliminary, so in the same way, however pretty she might be, the midinette whom a procuress had artificially provided for me could not possibly be a substitute for the gangling girl who was passing at this moment under the trees, laughing with a friend. Even if the girl I found in the house of assignation were prettier than this one, it could not be the same thing, because we do not look at the eyes of a girl we do not know as we would look at little chunks of opal or agate. We know that the little ray that colours them or the diamond dust that makes them sparkle is all that we can see of a mind, a will, a memory in which is contained the family home that we do not know, the intimate friends whom we envy. The enterprise of gaining possession of all this, of something so difficult, so recalcitrant, is what gives its attraction to that gaze far more than its merely physical beauty (which may serve to explain why the same young man can awaken a whole romance in the imagination of a woman who has heard somebody say that he is the Prince of Wales but pays no further attention to him after learning that she is mistaken). To find the midinette in the house of assignation is to find her emptied of that unknown life which permeates her and which we aspire to possess with her; it is to approach a pair of eyes that have indeed become mere precious stones, a nose whose wrinkling is as devoid of meaning as that of a flower. No, concerning the unknown midinette who was passing at that moment, it seemed to me as indispensable, if I wished to continue to believe in her reality, to face up to her resistance by adapting my mode of approach, challenging a rebuff, returning to the charge, obtaining an assignation, waiting for her outside her place of work, getting to know, episode by episode, everything that constituted the girl's life, experiencing whatever was represented for her by the pleasure I was seeking, and traversing the distance which her different habits, her special mode of life, set between me and the attention, the favour I wished to reach and win over—all this seemed to me as indispensable as making a long journey by train if I wished to believe in the reality of Pisa and not see it simply as a panoramic show in a World Fair. But these very similarities between desire and travel made me vow to myself that one day I would grasp a little more closely the nature of this force, invisible but as powerful as any belief or, in the world of physics, as atmospheric pressure, which exalted cities and women to such a height so long as I did not know them, and, slipping away from beneath them as soon as I had approached them, made them at once collapse and fall flat on to the dead level of the most commonplace reality.

Further on, another little girl was kneeling beside her bicycle, which she was putting to rights. The repair finished, the young racer mounted her machine, but without straddling it as a man would have done. For a moment the bicycle swerved, and the young body seemed to have added to itself a sail, a huge wing; and presently we saw the young creature speed away, half-human, half-winged, angel or peri, pursuing her course.

This was what the presence of Albertine, this was what my life with Albertine, deprived me of. Deprived me, did I say? I say? Should I not have thought rather: what it presented to me? If Albertine had not been living with me, if she had been free, I should have imagined, and with reason, every one of these women as a possible or indeed a probable object of her desire, of her pleasure. They would have appeared to me like dancers in a diabolical ballet, representing the Temptations to one person, and shooting their darts into the heart of another. Midinettes, schoolgirls, actresses, how I should have hated them all! Objects of horror, for me they would have been excluded from the beauty of the universe. Albertine's servitude, by releasing me from suffering on their account, restored them to the beauty of the world. Now that they were harmless, having lost the sting that stabs the heart with jealousy, I was free to admire them, to caress them with my eyes, another day more intimately perhaps. By shutting Albertine away, I had at the same time restored to the universe all those glittering wings that flutter in public gardens, ballrooms, theatres, and which became tempting once more to me because she could no longer succumb to their temptation. They composed the beauty of the world. They had at one time composed that of Albertine. It was because I had seen her first as a mysterious bird, then as a great actress of the beach, desired, perhaps won, that I had thought her wonderful. As soon as she was a captive in my house, the bird that I had seen one afternoon advancing with measured tread along the front, surrounded by a congregation of other girls like seagulls alighted from who knew where, Albertine had lost all her colours, together with all the opportunities that other people had of securing her for themselves. Gradually she had lost her beauty. It required excursions like this, in which I imagined her, but for my presence, accosted by some woman or by some young man, to make me see her again amid the splendour of the beach, although my jealousy was on a different plane from the decline of the pleasures of my

imagination. But in spite of these abrupt reversions in which, desired by other people, she once more became beautiful in my eyes, I might very well have divided her stay with me into two periods, in the first of which she was still, although less so every day, the glittering actress of the beach, and in the second of which, become the grey captive, reduced to her drab self, she needed these flashes in which I remembered the past to restore her colour to her.

Sometimes, in the hours in which I felt most indifferent towards her, there came back to me the memory of a far-off moment on the beach, before I yet knew her, when, not far from a lady with whom I was on bad terms and with whom I was almost certain now that she had had relations, she burst out laughing, staring me in the face in an insolent fashion. All round her hissed the blue and polished sea. In the sunshine of the beach, Albertine, in the midst of her friends, was the most beautiful of them all. It was this magnificent girl, who, in her familiar setting of boundless waters—she, a precious object in the eyes of the admiring lady—had inflicted this insult on me. It was definitive, for the lady had returned perhaps to Balbec, had registered perhaps, on the luminous and echoing beach, the absence of Albertine; but she was unaware that the girl was living with me, was wholly mine. The vast expanse of blue water, her obliviousness of the predilection she had had for this particular girl and had now diverted to others, had closed over the insult that Albertine had offered me, enshrining it in a glittering and unbreakable casket. Then hatred of that woman gnawed my heart; of Albertine too, but a hatred mingled with admiration of the beautiful, adulated girl, with her marvellous hair, whose laughter upon the beach had been an affront. Shame, jealousy, the memory of my first desires and of the brilliant setting, had restored to Albertine her former beauty and worth. And thus there alternated with the somewhat oppressive boredom that I felt in her company a throbbing desire, full of resplendent images and of regrets, according to whether she was by my side in my room or I set her free again in my memory, on the sea-front, in her gay beach clothes, to the sound of the musical instruments of the sea—Albertine, now abstracted from that environment, possessed and of no great value, now plunged back into it, escaping from me into a past which I should never get to know, humiliating me before the lady who was her friend as much as the splashing of the waves or the dizzying heat of the sun—Albertine restored to the beach or brought back again to my room, in a sort of amphibious love.

Elsewhere, a numerous band were playing ball. All these girls had come out to make the most of the sunshine, for these February days, even when they are as dazzling as this one, do not last long, and the splendour of their light does not postpone the hour of its decline. Before that hour drew near, we had a spell of chiaroscuro, because after we had driven as far as the Seine, where Albertine admired, and by her presence prevented me from admiring, the reflexions of red sails upon the wintry blue of the water, and a tiled house nestling in the distance like a single red poppy against the clear horizon of which Saint-Cloud seemed, further off still, to be the fragmentary, friable, ribbed petrification, we left our motor-car and walked a long way. For some moments I even gave her my arm, and it seemed to me that the ring which her arm formed round mine united our two persons in a single self and linked our destinies together.

Our shadows, now parallel, now close together and joined, traced an exquisite pattern at our feet. It seemed to me already wonderful enough, at home, that Albertine should be living with me, that it should be she who came and lay down on my bed. But it was the transportation of that marvel to the outside world, into the heart of nature, by the shore of the lake in the Bois which I loved so much, beneath the trees, that it should be precisely her shadow, the pure and simplified shadow of her leg, of her bust, that the sun delineated in monochrome by the side of mine upon the gravel of the path. And the fusion of our shadows had a charm for me that was doubtless more insubstantial, but no less intimate, than the contiguity, the fusion of our bodies. Then we returned to the car. And it chose, for our homeward journey, a succession of little winding lanes along which the wintry trees, clothed, like ruins, in ivy and brambles, seemed to be pointing the way to the dwelling of some magician. No sooner had we emerged from their shady cover than we found, leaving the Bois, the daylight still so bright that I thought I should still have time to do everything I wanted to do before dinner, when, only a few moments later, as the car approached the Arc de Triomphe, it was with a sudden start of surprise and dismay that I perceived, over Paris, the moon prematurely full, like the face of a clock that has stopped and makes us think that we are late for an engagement. We had told the driver to take us home. For Albertine, this also meant returning to my home. The presence of women, however dear to us, who are obliged to leave us to return home does not bestow that peace which I found in the presence of Albertine seated in the car by my side, a presence that was conveying us not to the emptiness of the hours when lovers are apart, but to an even more stable and more sheltered reunion in my home, which was also hers, the material symbol of my possession of her. True, in order to possess, one must first have desired. We do not possess a line, a surface, a mass unless it is occupied by our love. But Albertine had not been for me during our drive, as Rachel had once been, a meaningless dust of flesh and clothing. At Balbec, the imagination of my eyes, my lips, my hands had so solidly constructed, so tenderly polished her body that now, in this car, in order to touch that body, to contain it, I had no need to press my own body against Albertine, nor even to see her; it was enough for me to hear her, and, if she was silent, to know that she was by my side; my interwoven senses enveloped her completely and when, on our arrival at the house, she quite naturally alighted, I stopped for a moment to tell the chauffeur to call for me later, but my eyes enveloped her still as she passed ahead of me under the arch, and it was still the same inert, domestic calm that I felt as I saw her thus, solid, flushed, opulent and captive, returning home quite naturally with me, like a woman who belonged to me, and, protected by its walls, disappearing into our house. Unfortunately she seemed to feel herself in prison there, and—judging by her mournful, weary look that evening as we dined together in her room—to share the opinion of that Mme de La Rochefoucauld who, when asked whether she was not glad to live in so beautiful a

home as Liancourt, replied: "There is no such thing as a beautiful prison." I did not notice it at first; and it was I who bemoaned the thought that, had it not been for Albertine (for with her I should have suffered too acutely from jealousy in a hotel where all day long she would have been exposed to contact with so many people), I might at that moment be dining in Venice in one of those little low-ceilinged restaurants like a ship's saloon, from which one looks out on the Grand Canal through little curved windows encircled with Moorish mouldings.

I ought to add that Albertine greatly admired a big bronze I had by Barbedienne which with ample justification Bloch considered extremely ugly. He had perhaps less reason to be surprised at my having kept it. I had never sought, like him, to furnish for aesthetic effect, to arrange rooms artistically. I was too lazy for that, too indifferent to the things that I was in the habit of seeing every day. Since my taste was not involved, I had a right not to modulate my interiors. I might perhaps, in spite of this, have discarded the bronze. But ugly and expensive things are extremely useful, for they possess, in the eyes of people who do not understand us, who do not share our taste and with whom we may be in love, a glamour which a fine object that does not reveal its beauty may lack. Now the people who do not understand us are precisely the people with regard to whom it may be useful to us to take advantage of a prestige which our intellect is enough to ensure for us among superior people. Although Albertine was beginning to show some taste, she still had a certain respect for the bronze, and this was reflected back upon me in an esteem which, coming from Albertine, mattered infinitely more to me than the question of keeping a bronze which was a trifle degrading, since I loved Albertine.

But the thought of my bondage ceased of a sudden to weigh upon me and I looked forward to prolonging it still further, because I seemed to perceive that Albertine was sorely conscious of her own. True, whenever I had asked her whether she was unhappy in my house, she had always replied that she did not know where it would be possible for her to be happier. But often these words were contradicted by an air of nostalgia and edginess. Certainly if she had the tastes with which I had credited her, this prevention from ever satisfying them must have been as frustrating to her as it was calming to myself, calming to such an extent that I should have decided that the hypothesis of my having accused her unjustly was the most probable, had it not been so difficult to fit into this hypothesis the extraordinary pains that Albertine took never to be alone, never to be free to go out with anyone, never to stop for a moment outside the front door when she came in, always to insist on being ostentatiously accompanied, whenever she went to the telephone, by someone who would be able to repeat to me what she had said—by Françoise or Andrée—always to leave me alone with the latter (without appearing to be doing so on purpose) after they had been out together, so that I might obtain a detailed report of their outing. Contrasted with this marvellous docility were occasional gestures of impatience, quickly repressed, which made me wonder whether Albertine might not be planning to shake off her chains.

Certain incidental circumstances seemed to corroborate my supposition. Thus, one day when I had gone out by myself, I ran into Gisele in the neighbourhood of Passy, and we chatted about this and that. Presently, not without pride at being able to do so, I informed her that I saw Albertine constantly. Gisele asked me where she could find her, since she *happened* to have something to say to her. "What is it?" "Something to do with some young friends of hers." "What friends? I may perhaps be able to tell you, though that needn't prevent you from seeing her." "Oh, girls she knew years ago, I don't remember their names," Gisele replied vaguely, beating a retreat. She left me, supposing herself to have spoken with such prudence that I could not conceivably have suspected anything. But falsehood is so unexact, needs so little help to make itself manifest! If it had been a question of friends of long ago, whose very names she no longer remembered, why did she "happen" to need to speak to Albertine about them? This "happen," akin to an expression dear to Mme Cottard: "It couldn't be better timed," could be applicable only to something particular, opportune, perhaps urgent, relating to specific persons. Besides, simply the way she opened her mouth, as though about to yawn, with a vague expression, when she said to me (almost retreating bodily, as she went into reverse at this point in our conversation): "Oh, I don't know, I don't remember their names," made her face, and in harmony with it her voice, as clear a picture of falsehood as the wholly different air, keen, animated, forthcoming, of her "I happen to have" was of truth. I did not cross-examine Gisele. Of what use would it have been to me? Of course she did not lie in the same way as Albertine. And of course Albertine's lies pained me more. But they had obviously a point in common: the fact of the lie itself, which in certain cases is self-evident. Not evidence of the reality that the lie conceals. We know that each murderer, individually, imagines that he has arranged everything so cleverly that he will not be caught, but in general, murderers are almost always caught. Liars, on the contrary, are rarely caught, and, among liars, more particularly the woman with whom we are in love. We do not know where she has been, what she has been doing. But as soon as she opens her mouth to speak, to speak of something else beneath which lies hidden the thing that she does not mention, the lie is immediately perceived, and our jealousy increased, since we are conscious of the lie, and cannot succeed in discovering the truth. With Albertine, the impression that she was lying was conveyed by a number of characteristics which we have already observed in the course of this narrative, but especially by the fact that, when she was lying, her story erred either from inadequacy, omission, implausibility, or on the contrary from a surfeit of petty details intended to make it seem plausible. Plausibility, notwithstanding the idea that the liar holds of it, is by no means the same as truth. Whenever, while listening to something that is true, we hear something that is only plausible, that is perhaps more plausible than the truth, that is perhaps too plausible, an ear that is at all musical senses that it is not correct, as with a line that does not scan or a word read aloud in mistake for another. The ear senses it, and if we are in love, the heart takes alarm. Why do we not reflect at the time, when

we change the whole course of our life because we do not know whether a woman went along the Rue de Berri or the Rue Washington, why do we not reflect that these few yards of difference, and the woman herself, will be reduced to the hundred millionth part of themselves (that is to say to dimensions far beneath our perception), if we only have the wisdom to remain for a few years without seeing the woman, and that she who has out-Gullivered Gulliver in our eyes will shrink to a Lilliputian whom no microscope—of the heart, at least, for that of the disinterested memory is more powerful and less fragile—can ever again discern! However that may be, if there was a point in common—mendacity itself—between Albertine's lies and Gisele's, still Gisele did not lie in the same way as Albertine, nor indeed in the same way as Andrée, but their respective lies dovetailed so neatly into one another, while presenting a great variety, that the little band had the impenetrable solidity of certain commercial houses, booksellers for example or newspaper publishers, where the wretched author will never succeed, notwithstanding the diversity of the persons employed in them, in discovering whether or not he is being swindled. The director of the newspaper or review lies with an attitude of sincerity all the more solemn in that he is frequently obliged to conceal the fact that he himself does exactly the same things and indulges in the same commercial practices as he denounced in other newspaper or theatre directors, in other publishers, when he chose as his banner, when he raised against them the standard of Honesty. The fact of a man's having proclaimed (as leader of a political party, or in any other capacity) that it is wicked to lie obliges him as a rule to lie more than other people, without on that account abandoning the solemn mask, doffing the august tiara of sincerity. The "honest" gentleman's partner lies in a different and more ingenuous fashion. He deceives his author as he deceives his wife, with tricks from the vaudeville stage. The sub-editor, a crude, straightforward man, lies quite simply, like an architect who promises that your house will be ready at a date when it will not have been begun. The editor, an angelic soul, flutters from one to another of the three, and without knowing what the matter is, gives them, out of brotherly scruple and affectionate solidarity, the precious support of an unimpeachable word. These four persons live in a state of perpetual dissension to which the arrival of the author puts a stop. Over and above their private quarrels, each of them remembers the paramount military duty of rallying to the support of the threatened "corps." Without realising it, I had long been playing the part of this author in relation to the little band. If Gisele had been thinking, when she used the word "happen," of one of Albertine's friends who was prepared to go away with her as soon as my mistress should have found some pretext or other for leaving me, and had meant to warn Albertine that the hour had now come or would shortly strike, she, Gisele, would have let herself be torn to pieces rather than tell me so; it was quite useless therefore to ply her with questions.

Meetings such as this one with Gisele were not alone in reinforcing my doubts. For instance, I admired Albertine's paintings. The touching pastimes of a captive, they moved me so that I congratulated her upon them. "No, they're dreadfully bad, but I've never had a drawing lesson in my life." "But one evening at Balbec you sent word to me that you had stayed at home to have a drawing lesson." I reminded her of the day and told her that I had realised at the time that people did not have drawing lessons at that hour in the evening. Albertine blushed. "It's true," she said, "I wasn't having drawing lessons. I told you a great many lies at the beginning, that I admit. But I never lie to you now." How I should have loved to know what were the many lies that she had told me at the beginning! But I knew beforehand that her answers would be fresh lies. And so I contented myself with kissing her. I asked her to tell me one only of those lies. She replied: "Oh, well; for instance when I said that the sea air was bad for me." I ceased to insist in the face of this unwillingness to oblige.

Every person we love, indeed to a certain extent every person, is to us like Janus, presenting to us a face that pleases us if the person leaves us, a dreary face if we know him or her to be at our perpetual disposal. In the case of Albertine, the prospect of her continued society was painful to me in another way which I cannot explain in this narrative. It is terrible to have the life of another person attached to one's own like a bomb which one holds in one's hands, unable to get rid of it without committing a crime. But one has only to compare this with the ups and downs, the dangers, the anxieties, the fear that false but probable things will come to be believed when we will no longer be able to explain them—feelings that one experiences if one lives on intimate terms with a madman. For instance, I pitied M. de Charlus for living with Morel (immediately the memory of the scene that afternoon made me feel that the left side of my chest was heavier than the other); leaving aside the relations that may or may not have existed between them, M. de Charlus must have been unaware at the outset that Morel was mad. Morel's beauty, his stupidity, his pride must have deterred the Baron from exploring so deeply, until the days of melancholia when Morel accused M. de Charlus of responsibility for his sorrows, without being able to furnish any explanation, abused him for his want of trust with the help of false but extremely subtle arguments, threatened him with desperate resolutions in the midst of which there persisted the most cunning regard for his own most immediate interests. But all this is only a comparison. Albertine was not mad.

To make her chains appear lighter, the clever thing seemed to me to be to make her believe that I myself was about to break them. But I could not confide this mendacious plan to her at that moment, since she had returned so sweetly from the Trocadéro that afternoon; the most I could do, far from distressing her with the threat of a rupture, was to keep to myself those dreams of a perpetual life together which my grateful heart had formed. As I looked at her, I found it hard to restrain myself from pouring them out to her, and she may perhaps have noticed this. Unfortunately the expression of such feelings is not contagious. The case of an affected old woman like M. de Charlus who, by dint of never seeing in his imagination anything but a proud young man, thinks that he has himself become a proud young man, all the more so the more affected and ridiculous he becomes—this case is more general, and it is the misfortune of an impassioned lover not to



realise that while he sees in front of him a beautiful face, his mistress is seeing his face, which is not made any more beautiful, far from it, when it is distorted by the pleasure that is aroused in it by the sight of beauty. Nor indeed does love exhaust the generality of this case; we do not see our own bodies, which other people see, and we “follow” our own train of thought, the object, invisible to other people, which is before our eyes. At times the artist reveals this object in his work. Whence it arises that the admirers of that work are disappointed in its author, on whose face that inner beauty is imperfectly reflected.

Retaining from my dream of Venice only what could concern Albertine and sweeten the time she spent in my house, I mentioned a Fortuny gown which we ought to go and order one of these days. I was looking for new pleasures with which to distract her. I would have liked to surprise her with a gift of old French silver, had it been possible to find any. As a matter of fact, when we had planned to acquire a yacht, a plan judged unrealisable by Albertine—and by me whenever I thought her virtuous and life with her began to appear as financially ruinous as marriage to her seemed impossible—we had, though without her believing I would buy one, asked advice from Elstir.

I learned that a death had occurred that day which distressed me greatly—that of Bergotte. It was known that he had been ill for a long time past. Not, of course, with the illness from which he had suffered originally and which was natural. Nature scarcely seems capable of giving us any but quite short illnesses. But medicine has developed the art of prolonging them. Remedies, the respite that they procure, the relapses that a temporary cessation of them provokes, produce a simulacrum of illness to which the patient grows so accustomed that he ends by stabilising it, stylising it, just as children have regular fits of coughing long after they have been cured of the whooping cough. Then the remedies begin to have less effect, the doses are increased, they cease to do any good, but they have begun to do harm thanks to this lasting indisposition. Nature would not have offered them so long a tenure. It is a great wonder that medicine can almost rival nature in forcing a man to remain in bed, to continue taking some drug on pain of death. From then on, the artificially grafted illness has taken root, has become a secondary but a genuine illness, with this difference only, that natural illnesses are cured, but never those which medicine creates, for it does not know the secret of their cure.

For years past Bergotte had ceased to go out of doors. In any case he had never cared for society, or had cared for it for a day only, to despise it as he despised everything else, and in the same fashion, which was his own, namely to despise a thing not because it was beyond his reach but as soon as he had attained it. He lived so simply that nobody suspected how rich he was, and anyone who had known would still have been mistaken, having thought him a miser whereas no one was ever more generous. He was generous above all towards women—girls, one ought rather to say—who were ashamed to receive so much in return for so little. He excused himself in his own eyes because he knew that he could never produce such good work as in an atmosphere of amorous feelings. Love is too strong a word, but pleasure that is at all rooted in the flesh is helpful to literary work because it cancels all other pleasures, for instance the pleasures of society, those which are the same for everyone. And even if this love leads to disillusionment, it does at least stir, even by so doing, the surface of the soul which otherwise would be in danger of becoming stagnant. Desire is therefore not without its value to the writer in detaching him first of all from his fellow men and from conforming to their standards, and afterwards in restoring some degree of movement to a spiritual machine which, after a certain age, tends to come to a standstill. We do not achieve happiness but we gain some insights into the reasons which prevent us from being happy and which would have remained invisible to us but for these sudden revelations of disappointment. Dreams, we know, are not realisable; we might not form any, perhaps, were it not for desire, and it is useful to us to form them in order to see them fail and to learn from their failure. And so Bergotte said to himself: “I spend more than a multimillionaire on girls, but the pleasures or disappointments that they give me make me write a book which brings me in money.” Economically, this argument was absurd, but no doubt he found some charm in thus transmuting gold into caresses and caresses into gold. We saw, at the time of my grandmother’s death, how a weary old age loves repose. Now in society there is nothing but conversation. Vapid though it is, it has the capacity to eliminate women, who become nothing more than questions and answers. Removed from society, women become once more what is so reposeful to a weary old man, an object of contemplation. In any case, now there was no longer any question of all this. I have said that Bergotte never went out of doors, and when he got out of bed for an hour in his room, he would be smothered in shawls, rugs, all the things with which a person covers himself before exposing himself to intense cold or going on a railway journey. He would apologise for them to the few friends whom he allowed to penetrate to his sanctuary; pointing to his tartan plaids, his travelling-rugs, he would say merrily: “After all, my dear fellow, life, as Anaxagoras has said, is a journey.” Thus he went on growing steadily colder, a tiny planet offering a prophetic image of the greater, when gradually heat will withdraw from the earth, then life itself. Then the resurrection will have come to an end, for, however far forward into future generations the works of men may shine, there must none the less be men. If certain species hold out longer against the invading cold, when there are no longer any men, and if we suppose Bergotte’s fame to have lasted until then, suddenly it will be extinguished for all time. It will not be the last animals that will read him, for it is scarcely probable that, like the Apostles at Pentecost, they will be able to understand the speech of the various races of mankind without having learned it.

In the months that preceded his death, Bergotte suffered from insomnia, and what was worse, whenever he did fall asleep, from nightmares which, if he awoke, made him reluctant to go to sleep again. He had long been a lover of dreams, even bad dreams, because thanks to them, thanks to the contradiction they present to

the reality which we have before us in our waking state, they give us, at the moment of waking if not before, the profound sensation of having slept. But Bergotte's nightmares were not like that. When he spoke of nightmares, he used in the past to mean unpleasant things that happened in his brain. Latterly, it was as though from somewhere outside himself that he would see a hand armed with a damp cloth which, rubbed over his face by an evil woman, kept trying to wake him; or an intolerable itching in his thighs; or the rage—because Bergotte had murmured in his sleep that he was driving badly—of a raving lunatic of a cabman who flung himself upon the writer, biting and gnawing his fingers. Finally, as soon as it had grown sufficiently dark in his sleep, nature would arrange a sort of undress rehearsal of the apoplectic stroke that was to carry him off. Bergotte would arrive in a carriage beneath the porch of Swann's new house, and would try to get out. A shattering attack of dizziness would pin him to his seat; the concierge would try to help him out; he would remain seated, unable to lift himself up or straighten his legs. He would cling to the stone pillar in front of him, but could not find sufficient support to enable him to stand.

He consulted doctors who, flattered to be summoned by him, saw in his virtues as an incessant worker (he had done nothing for twenty years), in overwork, the cause of his ailments. They advised him not to read frightening stories (he never read anything), to take more advantage of the sunshine, which was "indispensable to life" (he had owed a few years of comparative health only to his rigorous confinement at home), to take more nourishment (which made him thinner, and nourished nothing but his nightmares). One of his doctors was blessed with an argumentative and contrary spirit, and whenever Bergotte saw him in the absence of the others and, in order not to offend him, suggested to him as his own ideas what the others had advised, this doctor, thinking that Bergotte was trying to get him to prescribe something that he liked, would at once forbid it, often for reasons invented so hurriedly to meet the case that, in face of the material objections which Bergotte raised, the doctor, contradicting him, was obliged in the same sentence to contradict himself, but, for fresh reasons, repeated the original prohibition. Bergotte would return to one of the previous doctors, a man who prided himself on his wit, especially in the presence of one of the masters of the pen, and who, if Bergotte insinuated: "I seem to remember, though, that Dr X—told me—long ago, of course—that that might affect my kidneys and my brain ...," would smile mischievously, raise his finger and announce: "I said use, I did not say abuse. Naturally every drug, if one takes it in excess, becomes a double-edged weapon." There is in the human body a certain instinct for what is beneficial to us, as there is in the heart for what is our moral duty, an instinct which no authorisation by a doctor of medicine or divinity can replace. We know that cold baths are bad for us, but we like them: we can always find a doctor to recommend them, not to prevent them from doing us harm. From each of these doctors Bergotte took something which, in his own wisdom, he had forbidden himself for years past. After a few weeks, his old troubles had reappeared and the new ones had become worse. Maddened by uninterrupted pain, to which was added insomnia broken only by brief spells of nightmare, Bergotte called in no more doctors and tried with success, but to excess, different narcotics, trustingly reading the prospectus that accompanied each of them, a prospectus which proclaimed the necessity of sleep but hinted that all the preparations which induce it (except the one contained in the bottle round which the prospectus was wrapped, which never produced any toxic effect) were toxic, and therefore made the remedy worse than the disease. Bergotte tried them all. Some of these drugs may be of a different family from those to which one is accustomed, by-products, for instance, of amyl and ethyl. When one absorbs a new drug, entirely different in composition, it is always with a delicious expectancy of the unknown. One's heart beats as at a first assignation. To what unknown forms of sleep, of dreams, is the newcomer going to lead one? It is inside one now, it is in control of one's thoughts. In what way is one going to fall asleep? And, once asleep, by what strange paths, up to what peaks, into what unfathomed gulfs will this all-powerful master lead one? What new group of sensations will one meet with on this journey? Will it lead to illness? To blissful happiness? To death? Bergotte's death came to him the day after he had thus entrusted himself to one of these friends (a friend? an enemy?) who proved too strong.

The circumstances of his death were as follows. A fairly mild attack of uraemia had led to his being ordered to rest. But, an art critic having written somewhere that in Vermeer's *View of Delft* (lent by the Gallery at The Hague for an exhibition of Dutch painting), a picture which he adored and imagined that he knew by heart, a little patch of yellow wall (which he could not remember) was so well painted that it was, if one looked at it by itself, like some priceless specimen of Chinese art, of a beauty that was sufficient in itself, Bergotte ate a few potatoes, left the house, and went to the exhibition. At the first few steps he had to climb, he was overcome by an attack of dizziness. He walked past several pictures and was struck by the aridity and pointlessness of such an artificial kind of art, which was greatly inferior to the sunshine of a windswept Venetian palazzo, or of an ordinary house by the sea. At last he came to the Vermeer which he remembered as more striking, more different from anything else he knew, but in which, thanks to the critic's article, he noticed for the first time some small figures in blue, that the sand was pink, and, finally, the precious substance of the tiny patch of yellow wall. His dizziness increased; he fixed his gaze, like a child upon a yellow butterfly that it wants to catch, on the precious little patch of wall. "That's how I ought to have written," he said. "My last books are too dry, I ought to have gone over them with a few layers of colour, made my language precious in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall." Meanwhile he was not unconscious of the gravity of his condition. In a celestial pair of scales there appeared to him, weighing down one of the pans, his own life, while the other contained the little patch of wall so beautifully painted in yellow. He felt that he had rashly sacrificed the former for the latter. "All the same," he said to himself, "I shouldn't like to be the headline news of this exhibition for the evening papers."

He repeated to himself: "Little patch of yellow wall, with a sloping roof, little patch of yellow wall." Meanwhile he sank down on to a circular settee; whereupon he suddenly ceased to think that his life was in jeopardy and, reverting to his natural optimism, told himself: "It's nothing, merely a touch of indigestion from those potatoes, which were under-cooked." A fresh attack struck him down; he rolled from the settee to the floor, as visitors and attendants came hurrying to his assistance. He was dead. Dead for ever? Who can say? Certainly, experiments in spiritualism offer us no more proof than the dogmas of religion that the soul survives death. All that we can say is that everything is arranged in this life as though we entered it carrying a burden of obligations contracted in a former life; there is no reason inherent in the conditions of life on this earth that can make us consider ourselves obliged to do good, to be kind and thoughtful, even to be polite, nor for an atheist artist to consider himself obliged to begin over again a score of times a piece of work the admiration aroused by which will matter little to his worm-eaten body, like the patch of yellow wall painted with so much skill and refinement by an artist destined to be for ever unknown and barely identified under the name Vermeer. All these obligations, which have no sanction in our present life, seem to belong to a different world, a world based on kindness, scrupulousness, self-sacrifice, a world entirely different from this one and which we leave in order to be born on this earth, before perhaps returning there to live once again beneath the sway of those unknown laws which we obeyed because we bore their precepts in our hearts, not knowing whose hand had traced them there—those laws to which every profound work of the intellect brings us nearer and which are invisible only—if then!—to fools. So that the idea that Bergotte was not dead for ever is by no means improbable.

They buried him, but all through that night of mourning, in the lighted shop-windows, his books, arranged three by three, kept vigil like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection.

I learned, as I have said, that Bergotte had died that day. And I was amazed at the inaccuracy of the newspapers which—each of them reproducing the same paragraph—stated that he had died the day before. For Albertine had met him the day before, as she informed me that very evening, and indeed she had been a little late in coming home, for he had chatted to her for some time. She was probably the last person to whom he had spoken. She knew him through me, for although I had long ceased to see him, as she had been anxious to be introduced to him I had written a year earlier to ask the old master whether I might bring her to see him. He had granted my request, though he was a trifle hurt, I fancy, that I should be visiting him only to give pleasure to another person, which was a confirmation of my indifference to him. These cases are frequent: sometimes the man or woman whom we approach not for the pleasure of conversing with them again, but on behalf of a third person, refuses so obstinately that our protégé concludes that we have boasted of an influence which we do not possess; more often the man of genius or the famous beauty consents, but, humiliated in their glory, wounded in their affection, they feel for us afterwards only a diminished, sorrowful, slightly contemptuous regard. It was not until long afterwards that I discovered that I had wrongly accused the newspapers of inaccuracy, since on the day in question Albertine had not in fact met Bergotte. At the time I had never suspected this for a single instant, so artlessly had she described the meeting to me, and it was not until much later that I discovered her charming skill in lying naturally. What she said, what she admitted, had to such a degree the same characteristics as the formal evidence of the case—what we see with our own eyes or learn from irrefutable sources—that she sowed thus in the gaps of her life episodes of another life the falsity of which I did not then suspect. I have added "what she admitted" for the following reason. Sometimes odd coincidences would give me jealous suspicions about her in which another person figured by her side in the past, or alas in the future. In order to appear certain of my facts, I would mention the person's name, and Albertine would say: "Yes, I met her a week ago, just outside the house. I acknowledged her greeting out of politeness. I walked a little way with her. But there's never been anything between us. There never will be." Now Albertine had not even met this person, for the simple reason that the person had not been in Paris for the last ten months. But my mistress felt that a complete denial would not sound very probable. Whence this imaginary brief encounter, related so simply that I could see the lady stop, greet her, and walk a little way with her. The evidence of my senses, if I had been in the street at that moment, would perhaps have informed me that the lady had not been with Albertine. But if I had known this to be the case, it was by one of those chains of reasoning in which the words of people in whom we have confidence insert strong links, and not by the evidence of my senses. To invoke this evidence by the senses I should have had to be in the street at that particular moment, and I had not been. One can imagine, however, that such a hypothesis is not improbable: I might have gone out, and have been passing along the street at the time at which Albertine was to tell me in the evening (not having seen me there) that she had walked a few steps with the lady, and I should then have known that Albertine was lying. But is this absolutely certain even then? A strange darkness would have clouded my mind, I should have begun to doubt whether I had seen her alone, I should hardly even have sought to understand by what optical illusion I had failed to perceive the lady, and I should not have been greatly surprised to find myself mistaken, for the stellar universe is not so difficult of comprehension as the real actions of other people, especially of the people we love, fortified as they are against our doubts by fables devised for their protection. For how many years on end can they not allow our apathetic love to believe that they have in some foreign country a sister, a brother, a sister-in-law who have never existed!

The evidence of the senses is also an operation of the mind in which conviction creates the facts. We have often seen her sense of hearing convey to Françoise not the word that was uttered but what she thought to be its correct form, which was enough to prevent her from hearing the implicit correction in a superior

pronunciation. Our butler was cast in a similar mould. M. de Charlus was in the habit of wearing at this time—for he was constantly changing—very light trousers which were recognisable a mile off. Now our butler, who thought that the word *pissoitière* (the word denoting what M. de Rambuteau<sup>8</sup> had been so annoyed to hear the Duc de Guermantes call a Rambuteau convenience) was really *pistièr*, never once in the whole of his life heard a single person say *pissoitière*, albeit the word was frequently pronounced thus in his hearing. But error is more obstinate than faith and does not examine the grounds of its belief. Constantly the butler would say: “I’m sure M. le Baron de Charlus must have caught a disease to stand about as long as he does in a *pistièr*. That’s what comes of chasing the ladies at his age. You can tell what he is by his trousers. This morning, Madame sent me with a message to Neuilly. As I passed the *pistièr* in the Rue de Bourgogne I saw M. le Baron de Charlus go in. When I came back from Neuilly, a good hour later, I saw his yellow trousers in the same *pistièr*, in the same place, in the middle stall where he always stands so that people shan’t see him.” I can think of no one more beautiful, more noble or more youthful than a certain niece of Mme de Guermantes. But I once heard the commissionaire of a restaurant where I used sometimes to dine say as she went by: “Just look at that old trollop, what a fright! And she must be eighty if she’s a day.” As far as age went, I find it difficult to believe that he meant what he said. But the pages clustered round him, who sniggered whenever she went past the hotel on her way to visit her charming great-aunts, Mmes de Fezensac and de Balleroy, who lived not far from there, saw upon the face of the young beauty the four-score years with which, in jest or otherwise, the commissionaire had endowed the “old trollop.” You would have made them shriek with laughter had you told them that she was more distinguished than one of the two cashiers of the hotel, who, devoured by eczema, ridiculously fat, seemed to them a fine-looking woman. Perhaps sexual desire alone, if it had been let loose in the wake of the alleged old trollop, and if the pages had suddenly begun to covet the young goddess, would have been capable of preventing their error from taking shape. But for reasons unknown, which were most probably of a social nature, this desire had not come into play. The point is however highly debatable. The universe is real for us all and dissimilar to each one of us. If we were not obliged, in the interests of narrative tidiness, to confine ourselves to frivolous reasons, how many more serious reasons would enable us to demonstrate the mendacious flimsiness of the opening pages of this volume in which, from my bed, I hear the world awake, now to one sort of weather, now to another! Yes, I have been forced to whittle down the facts, and to be a liar, but it is not one universe, but millions, almost as many as the number of human eyes and brains in existence, that awake every morning.

To return to Albertine, I have never known any woman more amply endowed than herself with the happy aptitude for a lie that is animated, coloured with the very hues of life, unless it be one of her friends—one of my blossoming girls also, rose-pink as Albertine, but one whose irregular profile, concave in one place, then convex again, was exactly like certain clusters of pink flowers the name of which I have forgotten, but which have long and sinuous recesses. This girl was, from the point of view of story-telling, superior to Albertine, for her narrative was never interspersed with those painful moments, those furious innuendoes, which were frequent with my mistress. The latter was however charming, as I have said, when she invented a story which left no room for doubt, for one saw then in front of one the thing—albeit imaginary—which she was describing, through the eyes, as it were, of her words. Verisimilitude alone inspired Albertine, never the desire to make me jealous. For Albertine, not perhaps from motives of self-interest, liked people to be nice to her. And if in the course of this work I have had and shall have many occasions to show how jealousy intensifies love, it is from the lover’s point of view that I write. But if that lover has a little pride, and even though he would die of a separation, he will not respond to a supposed betrayal with kind words or favours, but will turn away or, without withdrawing, will force himself to assume a mask of coldness. And so it is entirely to her own disadvantage that his mistress makes him suffer so acutely. If, on the contrary, she dispels with a tactful word, with loving caresses, the suspicions that have been torturing him for all his show of indifference, no doubt the lover does not feel that despairing increase of love to which jealousy drives him, but ceasing there and then to suffer, happy, mollified, relaxed as one is after a storm when the rain has stopped and one hears only at long intervals under the tall chestnut-trees the splash of the suspended raindrops which already the reappearing sun has dyed with colour, he does not know how to express his gratitude to her who has cured him. Albertine knew that I liked to reward her for being nice to me, and this perhaps explained why she used to invent, in order to exculpate herself, confessions as natural as these stories which I never doubted and one of which was her meeting with Bergotte when he was already dead. Previously I had never known any of Albertine’s lies save those, for instance, which Françoise used to report to me at Balbec and which I have omitted from these pages although they caused me so much pain: “As she didn’t want to come, she said to me: ‘Couldn’t you say to Monsieur that you couldn’t find me, that I had gone out?’ ” But “inferiors” who love us, as Françoise loved me, take pleasure in wounding us in our self-esteem.

After dinner, I told Albertine that I wanted to take advantage of the fact that I was up to go and see some of my friends, Mme de Villeparisis, Mme de Guermantes, the Cambremers, anyone, in short, whom I might find at home. I omitted to mention only the people whom I did intend to visit, the Verdurins. I asked her if she would like to come with me. She pleaded that she had no suitable clothes. “Besides, my hair is so awful. Do you really want me to go on doing it like this?” And by way of farewell she held out her hand to me in that brusque fashion, the arm outstretched, the shoulders thrust back, which she used to adopt on the beach at Balbec and had since entirely abandoned. This forgotten gesture transformed the body which it animated into that of the Albertine who as yet scarcely knew me. It restored to Albertine, ceremonious beneath an air of brusqueness, her initial novelty, her mystery, even her setting. I saw the sea behind this girl whom I had never

seen shake hands with me in this way since I was at the seaside. "My aunt thinks it ages me," she added glumly. "Would that her aunt were right!" thought I. "That Albertine by looking like a child should make Mme Bontemps appear younger than she is, is all that her aunt would ask, and also that Albertine should cost her nothing between now and the day when, by marrying me, she will bring her in money." But that Albertine should appear less young, less pretty, should turn fewer heads in the street, that is what I, on the contrary, hoped. For the agedness of a duenna is less reassuring to a jealous lover than that of the face of the woman he loves. I regretted only that the style in which I had asked her to do her hair should appear to Albertine an additional bolt on the door of her prison. And it was again this new domestic feeling that never ceased, even when I was away from Albertine, to bind me to her.

I said to Albertine, who was disinclined, as she had told me, to accompany me to the Guermantes' or the Cambremers', that I was not quite sure where I might go, and set off for the Verdurins'. At the moment when, on leaving the house, the thought of the concert that I was going to hear brought back to my mind the scene that afternoon: "*grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue*"—a scene of disappointed love, of jealous love perhaps, but if so as bestial as the scene to which (minus the words) a woman might be subjected by an orang-outang that was, if one may so say, enamoured of her—at the moment when, having reached the street, I was about to hail a cab, I heard the sound of sobs which a man who was sitting upon a curbstone was endeavouring to stifle. I came nearer; the man, whose face was buried in his hands, appeared to be quite young, and I was surprised to see, from the gleam of white in the opening of his cloak, that he was wearing evening clothes and a white tie. On hearing me he uncovered a face bathed in tears, but at once, having recognised me, turned away. It was Morel. He saw that I had recognised him and, checking his tears with an effort, told me that he had stopped for a moment because he was in such anguish.

"I have grossly insulted, this very day," he said, "a person for whom I had the strongest feelings. It was a vile thing to do, for she loves me."

"She will forget perhaps, in time," I replied, without realising that by speaking thus I made it apparent that I had overheard the scene that afternoon. But he was so absorbed in his grief that it never even occurred to him that I might know something about the affair.

"She may forget, perhaps," he said. "But I myself can never forget. I feel such a sense of shame, I'm so disgusted with myself! However, what I have said I have said, and nothing can unsay it. When people make me lose my temper, I don't know what I'm doing. And it's so bad for me, my nerves are all tied up in knots"—for, like all neurotics, he was keenly interested in his own health. If, during the afternoon, I had witnessed the amorous rage of an infuriated animal, this evening, within a few hours, centuries had elapsed and a new sentiment, a sentiment of shame, regret, grief, showed that an important stage had been reached in the evolution of the beast destined to be transformed into a human being. Nevertheless, I still heard ringing in my ears his "*grand pied de grue*" and feared an imminent return to the savage state. I had only a very vague idea, however, of what had happened, and this was all the more natural in that M. de Charlus himself was totally unaware that for some days past, and especially that day, even before the shameful episode which had no direct connexion with the violinist's condition, Morel had been suffering from a recurrence of his neurasthenia. He had, in the previous month, proceeded as rapidly as he had been able, which was a great deal less rapidly than he would have liked, towards the seduction of Jupien's niece, with whom he was at liberty, now that they were engaged, to go out whenever he chose. But as soon as he had gone a little too far in his attempts at rape, and especially when he suggested to his betrothed that she might make friends with other girls whom she would then procure for him, he had met with a resistance that had enraged him. All at once (either because she had proved too chaste, or on the contrary had finally given herself) his desire had subsided. He had decided to break with her, but feeling that the Baron, depraved though he might be, was far more moral than himself, he was afraid lest, in the event of a rupture, M. de Charlus might throw him out. And so he had decided, a fortnight ago, that he would not see the girl again, would leave M. de Charlus and Jupien to clean up the mess (he employed a more scatological term) by themselves, and, before announcing the rupture, to "bugger off" to an unknown destination.

This outcome had left him a little sad, and it is therefore probable that although his conduct towards Jupien's niece coincided exactly, down to the minutest details, with the plan of conduct which he had outlined to the Baron as they were dining together at Saint-Mars-le-Vétu, in reality it had been somewhat different, and that sentiments of a less heinous nature, which he had not foreseen in his theoretical conduct, had embellished and softened it in practice. The sole point in which the reality was worse than the theory was this, that in the original plan it had not appeared to him possible that he could remain in Paris after such an act of betrayal. Now, on the contrary, actually to "bugger off" for so small a matter seemed to him excessive. It meant leaving the Baron, who would probably be furious, and forfeiting his position. He would lose all the money that the Baron was now giving him. The thought that this was inevitable made him hysterical; he whimpered for hours on end, and to take his mind off the subject dosed himself cautiously with morphine. Then suddenly he hit upon an idea which no doubt had gradually been taking shape in his mind and gaining strength there for some time, and this was that a rupture with the girl would not inevitably mean a complete break with M. de Charlus. To lose all the Baron's money was a serious thing. Morel in his uncertainty remained for some days a prey to black thoughts, such as came to him at the sight of Bloch. Then he decided that Jupien and his niece had been trying to set a trap for him, that they might consider themselves lucky to be rid of him so cheaply. He found in short that the girl had been in the wrong in having been so maladroit in failing to keep him attached to her through the senses. Not only did the sacrifice of his position with M. de Charlus seem to him absurd, but he even regretted the expensive dinners he had given the girl since they had

become engaged, the exact cost of which he knew by heart, being a true son of the valet who used to bring his "book" every month for my uncle's inspection. For the word book, in the singular, which means a printed volume to humanity in general, loses that meaning among royalty and servants. To the latter it means their account-book, to the former the register in which we inscribe our names. (At Balbec one day when the Princesse de Luxembourg told me that she had not brought a book with her, I was about to offer her *Le Pêcheur d'Islande* and *Tartarin de Tarascon*, when I realised that she had meant not that she would pass the time less agreeably, but that it would be more difficult for me to get on to her list.)

Notwithstanding the change in Morel's point of view with regard to the consequences of his behaviour, although that behaviour would have seemed to him abominable two months earlier when he was passionately in love with Jupien's niece, whereas during the last fortnight he had never ceased to assure himself that the same behaviour was natural and praiseworthy, it could not fail to intensify the state of nervous tension in which, finally, he had served notice of the rupture that afternoon. And he was quite prepared to vent his rage, if not (except in a momentary outburst) upon the girl, for whom he still felt that lingering fear which is the last trace of love, at any rate upon the Baron. He took care, however, not to say anything to him before dinner, for, valuing his own professional virtuosity above everything, whenever he had any difficult music to play (as this evening at the Verdurins') he avoided (as far as possible, and the scene that afternoon was already more than ample) anything that might make his movements at all jerky. Similarly, a surgeon who is an enthusiastic motorist does not drive when he has an operation to perform. This explained to me why, as he was speaking to me, he kept bending his fingers gently one after another to see whether they had regained their suppleness. A slight frown seemed to indicate that there was still a trace of nervous stiffness. But in order not to aggravate it, he relaxed his features, as we try to prevent ourselves from getting agitated about not being able to sleep or to persuade a woman to give herself, for fear lest our phobia itself may retard the moment of sleep or of pleasure. And so, anxious to regain his serenity in order to be able to concentrate, as usual, on what he was going to play at the Verdurins', and anxious, so long as I was watching him, to let me see how unhappy he was, he decided that the simplest course was to entreat me to leave him immediately. The entreaty was superfluous, for it was a relief to me to get away from him. I had trembled lest, as we were due at the same house within a few minutes of one another, he might ask me to take him with me, my memory of the scene that afternoon being too vivid not to give me a certain distaste for the idea of having Morel by my side during the drive. It is quite possible that the love, and afterwards the indifference or hatred, felt by Morel for Jupien's niece had been sincere. Unfortunately, it was not the first time (nor would it be the last) that he had behaved thus, that he had suddenly "ditched" a girl to whom he had sworn undying love, going so far as to produce a loaded revolver and telling her that he would blow out his brains if ever he was vile enough to desert her. He would nevertheless desert her in time, and feel, instead of remorse, a sort of rancour against her. It was not the first time that he had behaved thus, and it was not to be the last, with the result that many young girls—girls less forgetful of him than he was of them—suffered—as Jupien's niece, continuing to love Morel while despising him, was to suffer for a long time—their heads ready to burst with the stabbing of an inner pain, because in each of them, like a fragment of a Greek sculpture, an aspect of Morel's face, hard as marble and beautiful as the art of antiquity, was embedded in the brain, with his blossoming hair, his fine eyes, his straight nose—forming a protuberance in a cranium not shaped to receive it, and on which no one could operate. But in the fullness of time these stony fragments end by slipping into a place where they cause no undue laceration, from which they never stir again; their presence is no longer felt: the pain has been forgotten, or is remembered with indifference.

Meanwhile I had gained two things in the course of the day. On the one hand, thanks to the calm induced by Albertine's docility, there was the possibility, and in consequence the resolve, to break with her; on the other—the fruit of my reflexions during the interval that I had spent waiting for her, seated at the piano—the idea that Art, to which I would try to devote my reconquered liberty, was not something that was worth a sacrifice, something above and beyond life, that did not share in its fatuity and futility; the appearance of genuine individuality achieved in works of art being due merely to the illusion produced by technical skill. If my afternoon had left behind it other deposits, possibly more profound, they were not to impinge upon my consciousness until much later. As for the two which I was able thus to ponder, they were not to be long-lived; for, from that very evening, my ideas about art were to recover from the diminution that they had suffered in the afternoon, while on the other hand my calm, and consequently the freedom that would enable me to devote myself to it, was once again to be withdrawn from me.

As my cab, driving along the riverside, was approaching the Verdurins' house, I made the driver pull up. I had just seen Brichot alighting from a tram at the corner of the Rue Bonaparte, after which he dusted his shoes with an old newspaper and put on a pair of pearl-grey gloves. I went up to him on foot. For some time past, his sight having grown steadily worse, he had been equipped—as richly as an observatory—with new spectacles of a powerful and complicated kind, which, like astronomical instruments, seemed to be screwed into his eyes; he focused their exaggerated beams upon myself and recognised me. They—the spectacles—were in marvellous condition. But behind them I could see, minute, pallid convulsive, expiring, a remote gaze placed under this powerful apparatus, as, in a laboratory too richly endowed for the work that is done in it, you may watch the last throes of some tiny insignificant beast under the latest and most advanced type of microscope. I offered the purblind man my arm to steady his steps. "This time it is not by great Cherbourg that we meet," he said to me, "but by little Dunkirk," a remark which I found extremely tiresome, as I did not understand what it meant; and yet I dared not ask Brichot, dreading not so much his scorn as his explanations.

I replied that I was longing to see the drawing-room in which Swann used to meet Odette every evening. "What, so you know that old story, do you?" he said.

Swann's death had deeply distressed me at the time. Swann's death! Swann's, in this phrase, is something more than a mere genitive. I mean thereby his own particular death, the death assigned by destiny to the service of Swann. For we talk of "death" for convenience, but there are almost as many deaths as there are people. We do not possess a sense that would enable us to see, moving at full speed in every direction, these deaths, the active deaths aimed by destiny at this person or that. Often they are deaths that will not be entirely relieved of their duties until two or even three years later. They come in haste to plant a tumour in the side of a Swann, then depart to attend to other tasks, returning only when, the surgeons having performed their operations, it is necessary to plant the tumour there afresh. Then comes the moment when we read in the *Gaulois* that Swann's health has been causing anxiety but that he is now making an excellent recovery. Then, a few minutes before the last gasp, death, like a sister of charity who has come to nurse rather than to destroy us, enters to preside over our last moments, and crowns with a final aureole the cold and stiffening creature whose heart has ceased to beat. And it is this diversity of deaths, the mystery of their circuits, the colour of their fatal badge, that makes so moving a paragraph in the newspapers such as this:

"We learn with deep regret that M. Charles Swann passed away yesterday at his residence in Paris after a long and painful illness. A Parisian whose wit was widely appreciated, a discriminating but steadfastly loyal friend, he will be universally mourned, not only in those literary and artistic circles where the rare discernment of his taste made him a willing and a welcome guest, but also at the Jockey Club of which he was one of the oldest and most respected members. He belonged also to the Union and the Agricole. He had recently resigned his membership of the Rue Royale. His witty and striking personality never failed to arouse the interest of the public at all the great events of the musical and artistic seasons, notably at private views, where he was a regular attendant until the last few years, when he rarely left his house. The funeral will take place, etc."

From this standpoint, if one is not "somebody," the absence of a well-known title makes the process of decomposition even more rapid. No doubt it is more or less anonymously, without any individual identity, that a dead man remains the Duc d'Uzès. But the ducal coronet does for some time hold the elements of him together, as their moulds held together those artistically designed ices which Albertine admired, whereas the names of ultra-fashionable commoners, as soon as they are dead, melt and disintegrate, "turned out" of their moulds. We have seen Mme de Guermantes speak of Cartier as the most intimate friend of the Duc de La Trémoille, as a man highly sought after in aristocratic circles. To a later generation, Cartier has become something so amorphous that it would almost be aggrandising him to link him with the jeweller Cartier, with whom he would have smiled to think that anybody could be so ignorant as to confuse him! Swann on the contrary was a remarkable intellectual and artistic personality, and although he had "produced" nothing, still he was lucky enough to survive a little longer. And yet, my dear Charles Swann, whom I used to know when I was still so young and you were nearing your grave, it is because he whom you must have regarded as a young idiot has made you the hero of one of his novels that people are beginning to speak of you again and that your name will perhaps live. If, in Tissot's picture representing the balcony of the Rue Royale club, where you figure with Gallifet, Edmond de Polignac and Saint-Maurice, people are always drawing attention to you, it is because they see that there are some traces of you in the character of Swann.

To return to more general realities, it was of this death of his, foretold and yet unforeseen, that I had heard Swann speak himself to the Duchesse de Guermantes, on the evening of her cousin's party. It was the same death whose striking and specific strangeness had recurred to me one evening when, as I ran my eye over the newspaper, my attention was suddenly arrested by the announcement of it, as though traced in mysterious lines inopportunely interpolated there. They had sufficed to make of a living man someone who could never again respond to what one said to him, to reduce him to a mere name, a written name, that had suddenly passed from the real world to the realm of silence. It was they that even now gave me a desire to get to know the house in which the Verdurins had formerly lived, and where Swann, who at that time was not merely a row of letters printed in a newspaper, had dined so often with Odette. I must also add (and this is what for a long time made Swann's death more painful than any other, although these reasons bore no relation to the individual strangeness of *his* death) that I had never gone to see Gilberte as I promised him at the Princesse de Guermantes's; that he had never told me what the "other reason" was, to which he had alluded that evening, for his choosing me as the recipient of his conversation with the Prince; that countless questions occurred to me (as bubbles rise from the bottom of a pond) which I longed to ask him about the most disparate subjects: Vermeer, M. de Mouchy, Swann himself, a Boucher tapestry, Combray—questions which were doubtless not very urgent since I had put off asking them from day to day, but which seemed to me of cardinal importance now that, his lips being sealed, no answer would ever come. The death of others is like a journey one might oneself make, when, already sixty miles out of Paris, one remembers that one has left two dozen handkerchiefs behind, forgotten to leave a key with the cook, to say good-bye to one's uncle, to ask the name of the town where the old fountain is that you want to see. While all these oversights which assail you, and which you relate aloud and purely for form's sake to your travelling companion, are getting as sole response a blank disregard from the seat opposite, the name of the station, called out by the guard, only takes you further away from henceforth impossible realisations, so much so that you cease to think about irremediable omissions, and you unpack your lunch and exchange papers and magazines.

"No," Brichot went on, "it wasn't here that Swann used to meet his future wife, or rather it was here only in the very latest period, after the fire that partially destroyed Mme Verdurin's former home."

Unfortunately, in my fear of displaying before the eyes of Brichot a luxury which seemed to me out of place, since the professor had no share in it, I had alighted too hastily from the carriage and the driver had not understood the words I had flung at him over my shoulder in order that I might be well clear of the carriage before Brichot caught sight of me. The consequence was that the driver drew alongside us and asked me whether he was to call for me later. I answered hurriedly in the affirmative and intensified all the more my respectful attentions to the professor who had come by omnibus.

"Ah! so you were in a carriage," he said gravely.

"Only by the purest accident. I never take one as a rule. I always travel by omnibus or on foot. However, it may perhaps earn me the great honour of taking you home tonight if you will oblige me by consenting to travel in that rattle-trap. We shall be packed rather tight. But you are always so kind to me."

Alas, in making him this offer, I am depriving myself of nothing, I reflected, since in any case I shall be obliged to go home because of Albertine. Her presence in my house, at an hour when nobody could possibly call to see her, allowed me to dispose as freely of my time as I had that afternoon, when I knew that she was on her way back from the Trocadéro and I was in no hurry to see her again. But at the same time, as also that afternoon, I felt that I had a woman in the house and that on returning home I would not taste the fortifying thrill of solitude.

"I heartily accept," replied Brichot. "At the period to which you allude, our friends occupied a magnificent ground-floor apartment in the Rue Montalivet with an entresol and a garden behind, less sumptuous of course, and yet to my mind preferable to the old Venetian Embassy."

Brichot informed me that this evening there was to be at the "Quai Conti" (thus it was that the faithful spoke of the Verdurin salon since it had been transferred to that address) a great musical "jamboree" organised by M. de Charlus. He went on to say that in the old days to which I had referred, the little nucleus had been different and its tone not at all the same, not only because the faithful had then been younger. He told me of elaborate practical jokes played by Elstir (what he called "pure buffooneries"), as for instance one day when the painter, having pretended to "defect" at the last moment, had come disguised as an extra waiter and, as he handed round the dishes, murmured ribald remarks in the ear of the extremely prudish Baroness Putbus, who was crimson with anger and alarm; then, disappearing before the end of dinner, he had had a hip-bath carried into the drawing-room, out of which, when the party left the dinner-table, he had emerged stark naked uttering fearful oaths; and also of supper parties to which the guests came in paper costumes designed, cut out and painted by Elstir, which were veritable masterpieces, Brichot having worn on one occasion that of a nobleman of the court of Charles VII, with long pointed shoes, and another time that of Napoleon I, for which Elstir had fashioned a Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour out of sealing-wax. In short Brichot, seeing again with the eyes of memory the salon of those days, the drawing-room with its high windows, its low settees bleached by the midday sun which had had to be replaced, declared that he preferred it to the drawing-room of today. Of course, I quite understood that by "salon" Brichot meant—as the word church implies not merely the religious edifice but the congregation of worshippers—not merely the apartment, but the people who frequented it, and the special pleasures that they came to enjoy there, and that were symbolised in his memory by those settees upon which, when you called to see Mme Verdurin in the afternoon, you waited until she was ready, while the blossom on the chestnut-trees outside, and the carnations in vases on the mantelpiece, seemed to offer a graceful and kindly thought for the visitor, expressed in the smiling welcome of their rosy hues, as they watched unblinkingly for the tardy appearance of the lady of the house. But if that salon seemed to him superior to the present one, it was perhaps because one's mind is an old Proteus who cannot remain the slave of any one shape and, even in the social world, suddenly transfers its allegiance from a salon which has slowly and arduously climbed to a pitch of perfection to another that is less brilliant, just as the "touched-up" photographs which Odette had had taken at Otto's, in which she queued it in a "princess" gown, her hair waved by Lenthéric, appealed less to Swann than a little snapshot taken at Nice, in which, in a plain cloth cape, her loosely dressed hair protruding beneath a straw hat trimmed with pansies and a black velvet bow, though a woman of fashion twenty years younger, she looked (for the earlier a photograph the older a woman looks in it) like a little maidservant twenty years older. Perhaps too Brichot derived some pleasure from praising to me what I myself had never known, from showing me that he had enjoyed pleasures that I could never have. He succeeded, moreover, merely by citing the names of two or three people who were no longer alive and whom he invested with a kind of mysterious charm by the way he spoke of them. I felt that everything that had been told me about the Verdurins was far too crude; and indeed in the case of Swann, whom I had known, I reproached myself for not having paid sufficient attention to him, for not having paid attention to him in a sufficiently disinterested spirit, for not having listened to him properly when he used to entertain me while we waited for his wife to come home for lunch and he showed me his treasures, now that I knew that he was to be classed with the most brilliant talkers of the past.

Just as we were coming to Mme Verdurin's doorstep, I caught sight of M. de Charlus, steering towards us the bulk of his huge body, drawing unwillingly in his wake one of those ruffians or beggars who nowadays when he passed sprang out without fail from even the most apparently deserted corners, and by whom this powerful monster was, despite himself, invariably escorted, although at a certain distance, as a shark is by its pilot—in short, contrasting so markedly with the haughty stranger of my first visit to Balbec, with his stern aspect, his affectation of virility, that I seemed to be discovering, accompanied by its satellite, a planet at a wholly different period of its revolution, when one begins to see it full, or a sick man devoured by the malady that a few years ago was but a tiny spot which was easily concealed and the gravity of which was never



suspected. Although an operation that Brichot had undergone had restored to some small extent the sight which he had thought to be lost for ever, I do not know whether he had observed the ruffian following in the Baron's footsteps. Not that this mattered much, for since La Raspelière, and notwithstanding the professor's friendly regard for M. de Charlus, the sight of the latter always made him feel somehow uneasy. No doubt to every man the life of every other extends along shadowy paths of which he has no inkling. Lying, though it is so often deceptive and is the basis of all conversation, conceals less thoroughly a feeling of hostility, or of self-interest, or a visit which one wants to appear not to have paid, or a short-lived escapade with a mistress which one is anxious to keep from one's wife, than a good reputation covers up—to the extent of not letting its existence be guessed—sexual depravity. It may remain unsuspected for a lifetime; an accidental encounter on a pier, at night, discloses it; even then this accidental discovery is frequently misunderstood and a third person who is in the know must supply the elusive clue of which everyone is unaware. But, once known, it scares one by making one feel that that way madness lies, far more than by its immorality. Mme de Surgis le Duc could not be said to have a highly developed moral sense, and would have tolerated in her sons anything, however base, that could be explained by material interest, which is comprehensible to all mankind. But she forbade them to go on visiting M. de Charlus when she learned that, by a sort of internal clockwork, he was inevitably drawn upon each of their visits to pinch their chins and to make each of them pinch his brother's. She felt that uneasy sense of a physical mystery which makes us wonder whether the neighbour with whom we have been on friendly terms is not tainted with cannibalism, and to the Baron's repeated inquiry: "When am I going to see the young men?" she would reply, conscious of the wrath she was bringing down on herself, that they were very busy working for examinations, preparing to go abroad, and so forth. Irresponsibility aggravates faults, and even crimes, whatever may be said. Landru (assuming that he really did kill his women) may be pardoned if he did so from financial motives, which it is possible to resist, but not if it was from irresistible sadism.

The coarse pleasantries in which Brichot had indulged in the early days of his friendship with the Baron had given place, as soon as it was a question not of uttering commonplaces but of trying to understand, to an awkward feeling which was cloaked by gaiety. He reassured himself by recalling pages of Plato, lines of Virgil, because, being mentally as well as physically blind, he did not understand that in their day to love a young man was the equivalent (Socrates's jokes reveal this more clearly than Plato's theories) of keeping a dancing girl before getting engaged to be married in ours. M. de Charlus himself would not have understood, he who confused his ruling passion with friendship, which does not resemble it in the least, and the athletes of Praxiteles with obliging boxers. He refused to see that for nineteen hundred years ("a pious courtier under a pious prince would have been an atheist under an atheist prince," as La Bruyère reminds us) all conventional homosexuality—that of Plato's young friends as well as that of Virgil's shepherds—has disappeared, that what survives and increases is only the involuntary, the neurotic kind, which one conceals from other people and misrepresents to oneself. And M. de Charlus would have been wrong in not disowning frankly the pagan genealogy. In exchange for a little plastic beauty, how vast the moral superiority! The shepherd in Theocritus who sighs for love of a boy will have no reason later on to be less hard of heart, less dull of wit than the other shepherd whose flute sounds for Amaryllis. For the former is not suffering from a disease; he is conforming to the customs of his time. It is the homosexuality that survives in spite of obstacles, shameful, execrated, that is the only true form, the only form that corresponds in one and the same person to an intensification of the intellectual qualities. One is dismayed at the relationship that can exist between these and a person's bodily attributes when one thinks of the tiny dislocation of a purely physical taste, the slight blemish in one of the senses, that explains why the world of poets and musicians, so firmly barred against the Duc de Guermantes, opens its portals to M. de Charlus. That the latter should show taste in the furnishing of his home, which is that of a housewife with a taste for curios, need not surprise us; but the narrow loophole that opens upon Beethoven and Veronese! But this does not exempt the sane from a feeling of alarm when a madman who has composed a sublime poem, after explaining to them in the most logical fashion that he has been shut up by mistake through his wife's machinations, imploring them to intercede for him with the governor of the asylum, complaining of the promiscuous company that is forced upon him, concludes as follows: "You see that man in the courtyard, who I'm obliged to put up with; he thinks he's Jesus Christ. That should give you an idea of the sort of lunatics I've been shut up with; he *can't* be Jesus Christ, because *I'm* Jesus Christ!" A moment earlier, you were on the point of going to assure the psychiatrist that a mistake had been made. On hearing these words, even if you bear in mind the admirable poem at which this same man is working every day, you shrink from him, as Mme de Surgis's sons shrank from M. de Charlus, not because he had done them any harm, but because of the ceaseless invitations which ended up with his pinching their chins. The poet is to be pitied who must, with no Virgil to guide him, pass through the circles of an inferno of sulphur and brimstone, who must cast himself into the fire that falls from heaven in order to rescue a few of the inhabitants of Sodom! No charm in his work; the same severity in his life as in those of the unfrocked priests who follow the strictest rule of celibacy so that no one may be able to ascribe to anything but loss of faith their discarding of the cassock. Even then, it is not always so with these writers. What asylum doctor has not had his own attack of madness by dint of continual association with madmen? He is lucky if he is able to affirm that it is not a previous latent madness that had predestined him to look after them. The subject of a psychiatrist's study often rebounds on him. But before that, what obscure inclination, what dreadful fascination had made him choose that subject?

Pretending not to see the shady individual who was gliding in his wake (whenever the Baron ventured on to the boulevards or crossed the main hall of the Gare Saint-Lazare, these hangers-on who dogged his heels in

the hope of touching him for a few francs could be counted by the dozen), and fearful lest the man might be bold enough to accost him, the Baron had devoutly lowered his mascara'ed eyelids which, contrasting with his powdered cheeks, gave him the appearance of a Grand Inquisitor painted by El Greco. But this priest was frightening and looked like an excommunicate, the various compromises to which he had been driven by the need to indulge his taste and to keep it secret having had the effect of bringing to the surface of his face precisely what the Baron sought to conceal, a debauched life betrayed by moral degeneration. This last, indeed, whatever be its cause, is easily detected, for it is never slow to materialise and proliferates upon a face, especially on the cheeks and round the eyes, as physically as the ochreous yellows of jaundice or the repulsive reds of a skin disease. Nor was it merely in the cheeks, or rather the chaps, of this painted face, in the mammiferous chest, the fleshy rump of this body abandoned to self-indulgence and invaded by obesity, that there now lingered, spreading like a film of oil, the vice at one time so jealously confined by M. de Charlus in the most secret recesses of his being. Now it overflowed into his speech.

"So this is how you prowl the streets at night, Brichot, with a good-looking young man," he said on joining us, while the disappointed ruffian made off. "A fine example. We must tell your young pupils at the Sorbonne that this is how you behave. But I must say the society of youth seems to agree with you, Monsieur le Professeur, you're as fresh as a rosebud. I've interrupted you though: you looked as though you were enjoying yourselves like a pair of giddy girls, and had no need of an old Granny Killjoy like me. But I shan't go to confession for it, since you were almost at your destination." The Baron's mood was all the more blithe since he was totally ignorant of the scene that afternoon, Jupien having decided that he would be better advised to protect his niece against a renewed onslaught than to go and inform M. de Charlus. And so the Baron still looked forward to the marriage and was delighted at the thought of it. One may suppose that it is a consolation to these great solitaires to alleviate their tragic celibacy with a fictitious fatherhood.

"But, upon my word, Brichot," he went on, turning towards us with a laugh, "I feel quite embarrassed to see you in such gallant company. You looked like a pair of lovers, going along arm in arm. I say, Brichot, you do go the pace!" Ought these remarks to have been ascribed to the ageing of a mind less master of its reflexes than in the past, which in moments of automatism lets out a secret that has been so carefully hidden for forty years? Or rather to that contempt for the opinion of commoners which all the Guermantes felt in their hearts, and which M. de Charlus's brother, the Duke, displayed in a different form when, heedless of the fact that my mother could see him, he used to shave by his bedroom window in his unbuttoned nightshirt? Had M. de Charlus contracted, during those stimulating journeys between Doncières and Douville, the dangerous habit of putting himself at his ease and, just as he would push back his straw hat in order to cool his huge forehead, of loosening—for a few moments only at first—the mask that for too long had been rigorously imposed upon his true face? His conjugal attitude towards Morel might well have astonished anyone who was aware that he no longer loved him. But M. de Charlus had reached the stage when the monotony of the pleasures that his vice has to offer had become wearying. He had instinctively sought after new exploits, and tiring of the strangers whom he picked up, had gone to the opposite extreme, to what he used to imagine that he would always loathe, the imitation of "a household" or of "fatherhood." Sometimes even this did not suffice him; he required novelty, and would go and spend the night with a woman, just as a normal man may once in his life have wished to go to bed with a boy, from a similar though inverse curiosity, in either case equally unhealthy. The Baron's existence as one of the "faithful," living, for Charlie's sake, exclusively among the little clan, by undermining the efforts he had made for years to keep up lying appearances, had had the same influence as a voyage of exploration or residence in the colonies has upon certain Europeans who discard the ruling principles by which they were guided at home. And yet, the internal revolution of a mind ignorant at first of the anomaly it carried within it, then—having recognised it—horrified by it, and finally becoming so accustomed to it as to fail to perceive that one cannot with impunity confess to other people what one has come round to confessing without shame to oneself, had been even more effective in liberating M. de Charlus from the last vestiges of social constraint than the time that he spent at the Verdurins'. No banishment, indeed, to the South Pole, or to the summit of Mont Blanc, can separate us so entirely from our fellow creatures as a prolonged sojourn in the bosom of an inner vice, that is to say of a way of thinking different from theirs. A vice (so M. de Charlus used at one time to style it) to which the Baron now gave the genial aspect of a mere failing, extremely common, attractive on the whole and almost amusing, like laziness, absent-mindedness or greed. Conscious of the curiosity that his peculiar characteristics aroused, M. de Charlus derived a certain pleasure from satisfying, whetting, sustaining it. Just as a Jewish journalist will come forward day after day as the champion of Catholicism, probably not with any hope of being taken seriously, but simply in order not to thwart the expectation of a good-natured laugh, M. de Charlus would jokingly denounce sexual depravity in the company of the little clan, as he might have mimicked an English accent or imitated Mounet-Sully,<sup>9</sup> without waiting to be asked, simply to do his bit with good grace, by displaying an amateur talent in society; so that when he now threatened Brichot that he would report to the Sorbonne that he was in the habit of walking about with young men, it was in exactly the same way as the circumcised scribe keeps referring in and out of season to the "Eldest Daughter of the Church" and the "Sacred Heart of Jesus," that is to say without the least trace of hypocrisy, but with more than a hint of play-acting. It was not only the change in the words themselves, so different from those that he allowed himself to use in the past, that seemed to require some explanation, there was also the change that had occurred in his intonation and his gestures, which now singularly resembled what M. de Charlus used most fiercely to castigate; he would now utter involuntarily almost the same little squeaks (involuntary in his case and all the more deep-rooted) as are uttered voluntarily by those inverters who hail one another as "my dear!"—as though this deliberate "camping,"

against which M. de Charlus had for so long set his face, were after all merely a brilliant and faithful imitation of the manner that men of the Charlus type, whatever they may say, are compelled to adopt when they have reached a certain stage in their malady, just as sufferers from general paralysis or locomotor ataxia inevitably end by displaying certain symptoms. As a matter of fact—and this is what this purely unconscious “camping” revealed—the difference between the stern, black-clad Charlus with his hair *en brosse* whom I had known, and the painted and bejewelled young men, was no more than the purely apparent difference that exists between an excited person who talks fast and keeps fidgeting all the time, and a neurotic who talks slowly, preserves a perpetual phlegm, but is tainted with the same neurasthenia in the eyes of the physician who knows that each of the two is devoured by the same anxieties and marred by the same defects. At the same time one could tell that M. de Charlus had aged from wholly different signs, such as the extraordinary frequency in his conversation of certain expressions that had taken root in it and used now to crop up at every moment (for instance: “the concatenation of circumstances”) and upon which the Baron’s speech leaned in sentence after sentence as upon a necessary prop.

“Is Charlie already here?” Brichot asked M. de Charlus as we were about to ring the door-bell.

“Ah! I really don’t know,” said the Baron, raising his arms and half-shutting his eyes with the air of a person who does not wish to be accused of indiscretion, all the more so as he had probably been reproached by Morel for things which he had said and which the other, as cowardly as he was vain, and as ready to disown M. de Charlus as he was to boast of his friendship, had considered serious although they were quite trivial. “You know, I’ve no idea what he does.”

If the conversations of two people bound by a tie of intimacy are full of lies, these crop up no less spontaneously in the conversations that a third person holds with a lover about the person with whom the latter is in love, whatever the sex of that person.

“Have you seen him lately?” I asked M. de Charlus, in order to appear at the same time not to be afraid of mentioning Morel to him and not to believe that they were actually living together.

“He came in, as it happened, for five minutes this morning while I was still half asleep, and sat down on the side of my bed, as though he wanted to ravish me.”

I guessed at once that M. de Charlus had seen Charlie within the last hour, for if one asks a woman when she last saw the man whom one knows to be—and whom she may perhaps suppose that one suspects of being—her lover, if she has just had tea with him she replies: “I saw him for a minute before lunch.” Between these two facts the only difference is that one is false and the other true. But both are equally innocent, or, if you prefer it, equally guilty. Hence one would be unable to understand why the mistress (and in this case, M. de Charlus) always chooses the false version, were one not aware that such replies are determined, unbeknown to the person who makes them, by a number of factors which appear so out of proportion to the triviality of the incident that one does not bother to raise them. But to a physicist the space occupied by the tiniest ball of pith is explained by the clash or the equilibrium of laws of attraction or repulsion which govern far bigger worlds. Here we need merely record, as a matter of interest, the desire to appear natural and fearless, the instinctive impulse to conceal a secret assignation, a blend of modesty and ostentation, the need to confess what one finds so delightful and to show that one is loved, a divination of what one’s interlocutor knows or guesses—but does not say—a divination which, exceeding or falling short of his, makes one now exaggerate, now underestimate it, the unwitting desire to play with fire and the determination to rescue something from the blaze. Just as many different laws acting in opposite directions dictate the more general responses with regard to the innocence, the “platonic” nature, or on the contrary the carnal reality, of one’s relations with the person whom one says one saw in the morning when one has seen him or her in the evening. However, on the whole it must be said that M. de Charlus, notwithstanding the aggravation of his malady which perpetually urged him to reveal, to insinuate, sometimes quite simply to invent compromising details, sought, during this period in his life, to maintain that Charlie was not a man of the same kind as himself and that they were friends and nothing more. This (though it may quite possibly have been true) did not prevent him from contradicting himself at times (as with regard to the hour at which they had last met), either because he forgot himself at such moments and told the truth, or proffered a lie out of boastfulness or a sentimental affectation or because he thought it amusing to mislead his interlocutor.

“You know that he is to me,” the Baron went on, “a nice little friend, for whom I have the greatest affection, as I am sure” (did he doubt it, then, if he felt the need to say that he was sure?) “he has for me, but there’s nothing else between us, nothing of that sort, you understand, nothing of that sort,” said the Baron, as naturally as though he had been speaking of a woman. “Yes, he came in this morning to pull me out of bed. Though he knows that I hate being seen first thing in the morning, don’t you? Oh, it’s horrible, it flusters one so, one looks so perfectly hideous. Of course I’m no longer five-and-twenty, they won’t choose me to be Queen of the May, but still one does like to feel that one’s looking one’s best.”

It is possible that the Baron was sincere when he spoke of Morel as a nice little friend, and that he was being even more truthful than he supposed when he said: “I’ve no idea what he does; I know nothing about his life.”

Indeed we may mention (to anticipate by a few weeks before resuming our narrative at the point where M. de Charlus, Brichot and myself are arriving at Mme Verdurin’s front door), we may mention that shortly after this evening the Baron was plunged into a state of grief and stupefaction by a letter addressed to Morel which he had opened by mistake. This letter, which was also indirectly to cause me acute distress, was written by the actress Lea, notorious for her exclusive taste for women. And yet her letter to Morel (whom M. de Charlus had never even suspected of knowing her) was written in the most passionate terms. Its indelicacy prevents us

from reproducing it here, but we may mention that Lea addressed him throughout in the feminine gender, with such expressions as "Go on with you, naughty girl!" or "Of course you're one of us, you pretty sweetheart." And in this letter reference was made to various other women who seemed to be no less Morel's friends than Lea's. At the same time, Morel's sarcasm at the Baron's expense and Lea's at that of an officer who was keeping her, and of whom she said: "He keeps writing me letters begging me to be good! You bet! eh, my little white puss," revealed to M. de Charlus a state of things no less unsuspected by him than were Morel's peculiar and intimate relations with Lea. What most disturbed the Baron was the phrase "one of us." Ignorant at first of its application, he had eventually, now many moons ago, learned that he himself was "one of them." And now this notion that he had acquired was thrown back into question. When he had discovered that he was "one of them," he had supposed this to mean that his tastes, as Saint-Simon says, did not lie in the direction of women. And here was this expression taking on, for Morel, an extension of meaning of which M. de Charlus was unaware, so much so that Morel gave proof, according to this letter, of being "one of them" by having the same taste as certain women for other women. From then on the Baron's jealousy could no longer confine itself to the men of Morel's acquaintance, but would have to extend to the women also. So, to be "one of them" meant not simply what he had hitherto assumed, but to belong to a whole vast section of the inhabitants of the planet, consisting of women as well as of men, of men loving not merely men but women also, and the Baron, in the face of this novel meaning of a phrase that was so familiar to him, felt himself tormented by an anxiety of the mind as well as of the heart, born of this twofold mystery which combined an enlargement of the field of his jealousy with the sudden inadequacy of a definition.

M. de Charlus had never in his life been anything but an amateur. That is to say that incidents of this sort could never be of any use to him. He worked off the painful impression that they might make upon him in violent scenes in which he was a past-master of eloquence, or in crafty intrigues. But to a person endowed with the qualities of a Bergotte, for instance, they might have been of inestimable value. This may indeed explain to a certain extent (since we act blindly, but choose, like the lower animals, the plant that is good for us) why men like Bergotte generally surround themselves with women who are inferior, false and ill-natured. Their beauty is sufficient for the writer's imagination, and excites his generosity, but does not in any way alter the nature of his mistresses, whose lives, situated thousands of feet below the level of his own, whose improbable connexions, whose lies, carried further and moreover in a different direction from what might have been expected, appear in occasional flashes. The lie, the perfect lie, about people we know, about the relations we have had with them, about our motive for some action, formulated in totally different terms, the lie as to what we are, whom we love, what we feel with regard to people who love us and believe that they have fashioned us in their own image because they keep on kissing us morning, noon and night—that lie is one of the few things in the world that can open windows for us on to what is new and unknown, that can awaken in us sleeping senses for the contemplation of universes that otherwise we should never have known. As far as M. de Charlus is concerned, it must be said that if he was stupefied to learn with regard to Morel a certain number of things which the latter had carefully concealed from him, he was not justified in concluding from this that it is a mistake to make friends with the lower orders. Indeed, in the concluding section of this work, we shall see M. de Charlus himself engaged in doing things which would have stupefied the members of his family and his friends far more than he could possibly have been stupefied by Léa's revelations. (The revelation that he had found most painful had been that of a trip which Morel had made with Lea at a time when he had assured M. de Charlus that he was studying music in Germany. To build up his alibi he had made use of some obliging people to whom he had sent his letters in Germany, whence they were forwarded to M. de Charlus who, as it happened, was so positive that Morel was there that he had not even looked at the postmark.)

But it is time to rejoin the Baron as he advances with Brichot and myself towards the Verdurins' door.

"And what," he went on, turning to me, "has become of your young Hebrew friend whom we met at Douville? It occurred to me that, if you liked, one might perhaps invite him to the house one evening." For M. de Charlus, who did not shrink from employing a private detective agency to spy on Morel's every movement, for all the world like a husband or a lover, had not ceased to pay attention to other young men. The surveillance which he instructed one of his old servants to arrange for the agency to maintain over Morel was so indiscreet that his footmen thought they were being shadowed, and one of the housemaids lived in terror, no longer daring to go out into the street for fear of finding a detective at her heels. "She can do whatever she likes! Who'd waste time and money tailing her? As if her doings were of the slightest interest to us!" the old servant ironically exclaimed, for he was so passionately devoted to his master that although he in no way shared the Baron's tastes, he had come in time, with such ardour did he employ himself in their service, to speak of them as though they were his own. "He is the very best of good fellows," M. de Charlus would say of this old servant, for there is no one we appreciate more than a person who combines with other great virtues that of placing those virtues wholeheartedly at the service of our vices. It was of men alone that M. de Charlus was capable of feeling any jealousy so far as Morel was concerned. Women inspired in him none whatever. This is indeed an almost universal rule with the Charluses of this world. The love of the man they love for a woman is something else, which occurs in another animal species (a lion leaves tigers in peace), does not bother them, and if anything reassures them. Sometimes, it is true, in the case of those who exalt their inversion to the level of a priesthood, this love arouses disgust. These men resent their friends' having succumbed to it, not as a betrayal but as a fall from grace. A Charlus of a different variety from the Baron would have been as indignant to find Morel having relations with a woman as to read in a newspaper that he, the interpreter of Bach and Handel, was going to play Puccini. This is in fact why the young men who

acquiesce in the love of Charlus for mercenary reasons assure them that women inspire them only with disgust, just as they would tell a doctor that they never touch alcohol and care only for spring water. But M. de Charlus, in this respect, departed to some extent from the general rule. Since he admired everything about Morel, the latter's successes with women, causing him no offence, gave him the same joy as his successes on the concert platform or at cards. "But do you know, my dear fellow, he has women," he would say, with an air of revelation, of scandal, possibly of envy, above all of admiration. "He's extraordinary," he would continue. "Wherever he goes, the most prominent whores have eyes for him alone. One notices it everywhere, whether it's on the underground or in the theatre. It's becoming such a bore! I can't go out with him to a restaurant without the waiter bringing him notes from at least three women. And always pretty women too. Not that it's anything to be wondered at. I was looking at him only yesterday, and I can quite understand them. He's become so beautiful, he looks like a sort of Bronzino; he's really marvellous." But M. de Charlus liked to show that he loved Morel, and to persuade other people, possibly to persuade himself, that Morel loved him. He took a sort of pride in having Morel always with him, in spite of the damage the young man might do to his social position. For (and this is often the case with men of some social standing and snobbish to boot, who, in their vanity, sever all their social ties in order to be seen everywhere with a mistress, a *demi-mondaine* or a lady of tarnished reputation who is no longer received in society but with whom nevertheless it seems to them flattering to be associated) he had arrived at the stage at which self-esteem devotes all its energy to destroying the goals to which it has attained, whether because, under the influence of love, a man sees a sort of glamour, which he is alone in perceiving, in ostentatious relations with the beloved object, or because, by the waning of social ambitions that have been gratified, and the rising tide of ancillary curiosities that are all the more absorbing for being platonic, the latter have not only reached but have passed the level at which the former found it difficult to sustain themselves.

As for other young men, M. de Charlus found that the existence of Morel was no obstacle to his taste for them, and that indeed his brilliant reputation as a violinist or his growing fame as a composer and journalist might in certain instances provide a bait. If a young composer of pleasing appearance was introduced to the Baron, it was in Morel's talents that he sought an opportunity of doing the newcomer a favour. "You must," he would tell him, "bring me some of your work so that Morel can play it at a concert or on tour. There's so little decent music written for the violin. It's a godsend to find something new. And abroad they appreciate that sort of thing enormously. Even in the provinces there are little musical societies where they love music with a fervour and intelligence that are quite admirable." Without any greater sincerity (for all this served only as bait and it was seldom that Morel condescended to fulfil these promises), Bloch having confessed that he was something of a poet ("in my idle moments," he had added with the sarcastic laugh with which he would accompany a trite remark when he could think of nothing original), M. de Charlus said to me: "You must tell your young Hebrew, since he writes verse, that he really must bring me some for Morel. For a composer that's always the stumbling-block, finding something decent to set to music. One might even consider a libretto. It mightn't be uninteresting, and would acquire a certain value from the distinction of the poet, from my patronage, from a whole concatenation of auxiliary circumstances, among which Morel's talent would take the chief place. For he's composing a lot just now, and writing too, and very nicely—I must talk to you about it. As for his talent as an executant (there, as you know, he's already a real master), you shall see this evening how well the lad plays Vinteuil's music. He staggers me; at his age, to have such understanding while remaining such a schoolboy, such an urchin! Oh, this evening is only to be a little rehearsal. The big affair is to come off in two or three days. But it will be much more distinguished this evening. And so we're delighted that you've come," he went on, using the royal plural. "The programme is so magnificent that I've advised Mme Verdurin to give two parties: one in a few days' time, at which she will have all her own acquaintances, the other tonight at which the hostess is, as they say in legal parlance, 'disseized.' It is I who have issued the invitations, and I have collected a few people from another sphere, who may be useful to Charlie and whom it will be nice for the Verdurins to meet. It's all very well, don't you agree, to have the finest music played by the greatest artists, but the effect of the performance remains muffled, as though in cotton-wool, if the audience is composed of the milliner from across the way and the grocer from round the corner. You know what I think of the intellectual level of society people, but there are certain quite important roles which they can perform, among others the role which in public events devolves upon the press, and which is that of being an organ of dissemination. You understand what I mean: I have for instance invited my sister-in-law Oriane; it is not certain that she will come, but it is on the other hand certain that, if she does come, she will understand absolutely nothing. But one doesn't ask her to understand, which is beyond her capacity, but to talk, a task for which she is admirably suited, and which she never fails to perform. The result? Tomorrow as ever is, instead of the silence of the milliner and the grocer, an animated conversation at the Mortemarts' with Oriane telling everyone that she has heard the most marvellous music, that a certain Morel, and so forth, and indescribable rage among the people not invited, who will say: Palamède obviously thought we were not worth asking; but in any case, who are these people in whose house it happened?"—a counterblast quite as useful as Oriane's praises, because Morel's name keeps cropping up all the time and is finally engraved in the memory like a lesson one has read over a dozen times. All this forms a concatenation of circumstances which may be of value to the artist, and to the hostess, may serve as a sort of megaphone for an event which will thus be made audible to a wide public. It really is worth the trouble; you shall see what progress Charlie has made. And what is more, we've discovered a new talent in him, my dear fellow: he writes like an angel. Like an angel, I tell you."

M. de Charlus omitted to say that for some time past he had been employing Morel, like those great noblemen of the seventeenth century who scorned to sign and even to write their own lampoons, to compose certain vilely calumnious little paragraphs at the expense of Comtesse Mole. Their effrontery being apparent even to those who merely glanced at them, how much more cruel were they to the young woman herself, who found in them, so slyly introduced that nobody but herself saw the point, certain passages from her own letters, quoted verbatim but twisted in a way that made them as deadly as the cruellest revenge. They killed the young woman. But there is published every day in Paris, Balzac would tell us, a sort of spoken newspaper, more terrible than its printed rivals. We shall see later on that this oral press reduced to nothing the power of a Charlus who had fallen out of fashion, and exalted far above him a Morel who was not worth the millionth part of his former patron. But at least this intellectual fashion is naive and genuinely believes in the nullity of a gifted Charlus and in the incontestable authority of a crass Morel. The Baron was not so innocent in his implacable vindictiveness. Whence, no doubt, that bitter venom on his tongue the irruption of which seemed to dye his cheeks with jaundice when he was in a rage.

"Since you know Bergotte,"<sup>10</sup> M. de Charlus went on, "I thought that you might perhaps, by refreshing his memory with regard to the stripling's writings, as it were collaborate with me, help me to create a concatenation of circumstances capable of fostering a twofold talent, that of a musician and a writer, which might one day acquire the prestige of that of Berlioz. As you know, the illustrious have often other things to think about, they are smothered in flattery, they take little interest except in themselves. But Bergotte, who is genuinely unpretentious and obliging, promised me that he would arrange for the *Gaulois*, or some such paper, to publish these little articles, a blend of the humorist and the musician, which are really very nicely done, and I should be so pleased if Charlie could combine with his violin this extra little hobby. I know I'm prone to exaggeration where he is concerned, like all the old sugar-mammies of the Conservatoire. What, my dear fellow, didn't you know that? You've clearly never noticed my gullible side. I pace up and down for hours on end outside the examination hall. I'm as happy as a queen. As for Charlie's prose, Bergotte assured me that it was really very good indeed."

M. de Charlus, who had long been acquainted with Bergotte through Swann, had indeed gone to see him to ask him to find an opening on some newspaper for a sort of half-humorous column by Morel about music. In doing so, M. de Charlus had felt some remorse, for, a great admirer of Bergotte, he was conscious that he never went to see him for his own sake, but in order—thanks to the respect, partly intellectual, partly social, that Bergotte had for him—to be able to do Morel or Mme Mole or others of his friends a good turn. That he no longer made use of the social world except for such purposes did not shock him, but to treat Bergotte thus seemed to him more reprehensible, because he felt that Bergotte was not at all calculating like society people, and deserved better. But his life was fully occupied and he could never find the time to spare unless he wanted something very badly, for instance when it affected Morel. Moreover, though he was himself extremely intelligent, the conversation of an intelligent man left him comparatively cold, especially that of Bergotte who was too much the man of letters for his liking, belonged to another clan and did not see things from his point of view. Bergotte for his part was well aware of the utilitarian motive for M. de Charlus's visits, but bore him no grudge; for though he was incapable of sustained kindness, he was anxious to give pleasure, tolerant, and impervious to the pleasure of administering a snub. As for M. de Charlus's vice, he had never to the smallest degree shared it, but found in it rather an element of colour in the person affected, *fas et nefas*, for an artist, consisting not in moral examples but in memories of Plato or of Il Sodoma.

"I should have very much liked him to come this evening, for he would have heard Charlie in the things he plays best. But I gather he doesn't go out, that he doesn't want to be bothered, and he's quite right. But you, fair youth, we never see you at the Quai Conti. You don't abuse their hospitality!"

I explained that I went out as a rule with my cousin.

"Do you hear that! He goes out with his cousin! What a most particularly pure young man!" said M. de Charlus to Brichot. Then, turning again to me: "But we are not asking you to give an account of your life, my boy. You are free to do anything that amuses you. We merely regret that we have no share in it. You have very good taste, by the way: your cousin is charming. Ask Brichot, she quite turned his head at Douville. Shall we be seeing her this evening? She really is extremely pretty. And she would be even prettier if she cultivated a little more the rare art, which she possesses naturally, of dressing well."

Here I must remark that M. de Charlus "possessed"—and this made him the exact opposite, the antithesis of me—the gift of observing minutely and distinguishing the details of a woman's clothes as much as of a painting. As regards dresses and hats, certain scandalmongers or certain over-dogmatic theorists will aver that, in a man, a fondness for male attractions is balanced by an innate taste, a knowledge and feeling for female dress. And this is indeed sometimes the case, as though, men having monopolised all the physical desire, all the deep tenderness of a Charlus, the other sex were to be favoured with what comes under the heading of "platonism" (a highly inappropriate adjective) taste, or quite simply everything that comes under the heading of taste, with the most subtle and assured discrimination. In this respect M. de Charlus merited the nickname which was given to him later on, "the dressmaker." But his taste and his gift for observation extended to many other things. The reader will have seen how, on the evening I went to see him after a dinner-party at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, I had not noticed the masterpieces he had in his house until he pointed them out to me one by one. He recognised immediately things to which no one would ever have paid any attention, and this not only in works of art but in the dishes at a dinner-party (and everything else between painting and cooking). I always regretted that M. de Charlus, instead of restricting his artistic talents to the painting of a fan as a present for his sister-in-law (we have seen the Duchesse de Guermantes holding it in her hand and

spreading it out not so much to fan herself with it as to show it off and parade Palamède's friendship for her) and to the improvement of his pianistic technique in order to accompany Morel's violin flourishes without playing wrong notes—I always regretted, as I say, and I still regret, that M. de Charlus never wrote anything. Of course one cannot draw from the eloquence of his conversation or even of his correspondence the conclusion that he would have been a talented writer. Those merits are not on the same plane. One has come across purveyors of conversational banality who have written masterpieces, and supreme talkers who have proved inferior to the most mediocre hack as soon as they turned to writing. Nevertheless I believe that if M. de Charlus had tried his hand at prose, to begin with on those artistic subjects about which he knew so much, the fire would have blazed, the lightning would have flashed, and the society dilettante would have become a master of the pen. I often told him so, but he never wished to try his hand, perhaps simply from laziness, or because his time was taken up with dazzling entertainments and sordid diversions, or from a Guermantes need to go on gossiping indefinitely. I regret it all the more because in his most brilliant conversation the wit was never divorced from the character, the inspired invention of the one from the arrogance of the other. If he had written books, instead of being admired and hated as he was in drawing-rooms where, in his most remarkable moments of inventive intelligence, he at the same time trampled down the weak, took revenge on people who had not insulted him, basely sought to sow discord between friends—if he had written books, one would have had his spiritual qualities in isolation, drained of evil, the admiration would have been unalloyed, and friendship kindled by many a trait.

In any case, even if I am mistaken about what he might have achieved with the merest page of prose, he would have performed a rare service by writing, for, while he observed and distinguished everything, he also knew the name of everything he distinguished. Certain it is that by talking to him, if I did not learn to see (the natural tendency of my mind and sensibility lying elsewhere), at least I glimpsed things that without him would have remained invisible to me, though their names, which would have helped me to recall their design or their colour, I always forgot fairly quickly. If he had written books, even bad ones (though I do not believe they would have been bad), what a delightful dictionary, what an inexhaustible inventory they would have been! But after all, who knows? Instead of bringing to the task his knowledge and his taste, perhaps, through that daemon that so often thwarts our destinies, he would have written insipid romances or pointless books of travel and adventure.

"Yes, she knows how to dress, or more precisely how to wear clothes," M. de Charlus went on apropos of Albertine. "My only doubt is whether she dresses in conformity with her particular style of beauty, and I am in fact to some extent responsible for this, as a result of some rather ill-considered advice I gave her. What I often used to tell her on the way to La Raspelière, which was perhaps dictated—I regret to say—by the nature of the countryside, the proximity of the beaches, rather than by your cousin's distinctive type of looks, has made her err slightly on the side of flimsiness. I have seen her, I admit, in some very pretty muslins, some charming gauze scarves, and a certain pink toque by no means disfigured by a little pink feather. But I feel that her beauty, which is real and solid, demands more than dainty chiffons. Does a toque really suit that enormous head of hair which a kakochnyk would set off to full advantage? Very few women are suited by old-fashioned dresses which give an impression of theatre or fancy dress. But the beauty of this young girl who is already a woman is an exception, worthy of some old dress in Genoese velvet" (I thought at once of Elstir and of Fortunio's dresses) "which I would not be afraid of weighing down even more with incrustations or pendants of stones, marvellous and outmoded—I can think of no higher praise—such as the peridot, the marcasite and the incomparable labradorite. Moreover she herself seems to have an instinct for the counter-balance that a somewhat heavy beauty calls for. Remember, on the way to dinner at La Raspelière, all that accompaniment of pretty cases and weighty bags, into which, when she is married, she will be able to put more than the whiteness of face-powder or the crimson of cosmetics but—in a casket of lapis lazuli not too tinged with indigo—those of pearls and rubies, not imitation ones, I suspect, for she may well marry into money."

"Well, well, Baron," interrupted Brichot, fearing that I might be distressed by these last words, for he had some doubts as to the purity of my relations and the authenticity of my cousinage with Albertine, "you *do* take an interest in young ladies!"

"Will you please hold your tongue in front of this child, you nasty thing," M. de Charlus replied with a giggle, raising and lowering, in the gesture of imposing silence on Brichot, a hand which he did not fail to let fall on my shoulder. "We shall regret your cousin's absence this evening. But you did just as well, perhaps, not to bring her with you. Vinteuil's music is admirable. But I heard from Charlie this morning that there'll be the composer's daughter and her friend, who both have a terrible reputation. That sort of thing is always awkward for a young girl. I'm even a trifle worried about my guests. But since they're practically all of advanced years it's of no consequence to them. They'll be there, unless the two young ladies haven't been able to come, because they were to have been present without fail all afternoon at a rehearsal Mme Verdurin was giving earlier and to which she had invited only the bores, the family, the people who were not to be invited this evening. But just before dinner, Charlie told me that the Misses Vinteuil, as we call them, though positively expected, had failed to turn up."

In spite of the intense pain I felt at this sudden association (as of the cause, at last discovered, with the effect, which I had already known) of Albertine's desire to be there that afternoon with the expected presence (unknown to me) of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, I still had the presence of mind to notice that M. de Charlus, who had told us a few minutes earlier that he had not seen Charlie since the morning, was now brazenly admitting that he had seen him before dinner. But my anguish was becoming visible.

"Why, what's the matter with you?" said the Baron, "you've turned quite green. Come, let's go in; you'll catch cold, you don't look at all well."

It was not my first doubt as to Albertine's virtue that M. de Charlus's words had awakened in me. Many others had penetrated my mind already. Each new doubt makes us feel that the limit has been reached, that we cannot cope with it; then we manage to find room for it all the same, and once it is introduced into the fabric of our lives it enters into competition there with so many longings to believe, so many reasons to forget, that we speedily become accustomed to it, and end by ceasing to pay attention to it. It lies there dormant like a half-healed pain, a mere threat of suffering which, the reverse side of desire, a feeling of the same order that has become, like it, the focus of our thoughts, irradiates them from infinite distances with wisps of sadness, as desire irradiates them with unidentifiable pleasures, wherever anything can be associated with the person we love. But the pain revives as soon as a new doubt enters our mind intact; even if we assure ourselves almost at once: "I shall deal with this, there'll be some way of avoiding suffering, it can't be true," nevertheless there has been a first moment in which we suffered as though we believed it. If we had merely limbs, such as legs and arms, life would be endurable. Unfortunately we carry inside us that little organ which we call the heart, which is subject to certain maladies in the course of which it is infinitely impressionable as regards everything that concerns the life of a certain person, so that a lie—that most harmless of things, in the midst of which we live so unconcernedly, whether the lie be told by ourselves or by others—coming from that person, causes that little heart, which we ought to be able to have surgically removed, intolerable spasms. Let us not speak of the brain, for our mind may go on reasoning interminably in the course of these spasms, but it does no more to mitigate them than by taking thought we can soothe an aching tooth. It is true that this person is blameworthy for having lied to us, for she had sworn to us that she would always tell us the truth. But we know, from our own shortcomings towards other people, how little such vows are worth. And we wanted to give credence to them when they came from her, the very person in whose interest it has always been to lie to us, and whom, moreover, we did not choose for her virtues. It is true that, later on, she would almost cease to have any need to lie to us—precisely when our heart will have grown indifferent to her lying—because then we shall no longer take an interest in her life. We know this, and, notwithstanding, we deliberately sacrifice our own life, either by killing ourselves for her sake, or by getting ourselves sentenced to death for having murdered her, or simply by spending our whole fortune on her in a few years and then being obliged to commit suicide because we have nothing left in the world. Moreover, however easy in one's mind one may imagine oneself to be when one loves, one always has love in one's heart in a state of precarious balance. The smallest thing is enough to place it in the position of happiness; one glows with it, one smothers with affection not her whom we love but those who have raised one in her esteem, who have protected her from every evil temptation; one feels easy in one's mind, and a single word is enough—"Gilberte is not coming," "Mademoiselle Vinteuil is expected"—for all the preconceived happiness towards which we were reaching out to collapse, for the sun to hide its face, for the compass card to revolve and let loose the inner tempest which one day we shall be incapable of resisting. On that day, the day on which the heart has become so fragile, friends who admire us will grieve that such trifles, that certain persons, can so affect us, can bring us to death's door. But what can they do? If a poet is dying of septic pneumonia, can one imagine his friends explaining to the pneumococcus that the poet is a man of talent and that it ought to let him recover? My doubt, in so far as it referred to Mlle Vinteuil, was not entirely new. But even to that extent, my jealousy of the afternoon, inspired by Lea and her friends, had abolished it. The danger of the Trocadéro once removed, I had felt, I had believed that I had recaptured for ever complete peace of mind. But what was entirely new to me was a certain excursion as to which Andrée had told me: "We went to this place and that, and we didn't meet anyone," but during which, on the contrary, Mlle Vinteuil had evidently arranged to meet Albertine at Mme Verdurin's. At this moment I would gladly have allowed Albertine to go out by herself, to go wherever she might choose, provided that I might lock up Mlle Vinteuil and her friend somewhere and be certain that Albertine would not meet them. The fact is that jealousy is as a rule partial, intermittent and localised, whether because it is the painful extension of an anxiety which is provoked now by one person, now by another of whom one's mistress may be enamoured, or because of the exiguity of one's thought which is able to realise only what it can represent to itself and leaves everything else in a vague penumbra from which one can suffer relatively little.

Just as we were about to enter the courtyard we were overtaken by Saniette, who had not at first recognised us. "And yet I contemplated you for some time," he told us breathlessly. "Is not it curious that I should have hesitated?"

To say "Is it not curious" would have seemed to him wrong, and he had acquired a familiarity with obsolete forms of speech that was becoming exasperating. "Albeit you are people whom one may acknowledge as friends." His grey complexion seemed to be illuminated by the livid glow of a storm. His breathlessness, which had been noticeable, as recently as last summer, only when M. Verdurin "jumped down his throat," was now continuous.

"I understand that an unknown work of Vinteuil is to be performed by excellent artists, and singularly by Morel."

"Why singularly?" inquired the Baron, who detected a criticism in the adverb.

"Our friend Saniette," Brichot made haste to explain, playing the part of interpreter, "is prone to speak, like the excellent scholar that he is, the language of an age in which 'singularly' was equivalent to our 'in particular.'"



As we entered the Verdurins' hall, M. de Charlus asked me whether I was engaged upon any work, and as I told him that I was not, but that I was greatly interested at the moment in old dinner-services of silver and porcelain, he assured me that I could not see any finer than those that the Verdurins had; that indeed I might have seen them at La Raspelière, since, on the pretext that one's possessions are also one's friends, they were foolish enough to take everything down there with them; that it would be less convenient to bring everything out for my benefit on the evening of a party, but that he would nevertheless ask them to show me anything I wished to see. I begged him not to do anything of the sort. M. de Charlus unbuttoned his overcoat and took off his hat, and I saw that the top of his head had now turned silver in patches. But like a precious shrub which is not only coloured with autumn tints but certain leaves of which are protected with cotton-wool or incrustations of plaster, M. de Charlus received from these few white hairs at his crest only a further variegation added to those of his face. And yet, even beneath the layers of different expressions, of paint and of hypocrisy which formed such a bad "make-up," his face continued to hide from almost everyone the secret that it seemed to me to be crying aloud. I was almost embarrassed by his eyes, for I was afraid of his surprising me in the act of reading it therein as in an open book, and by his voice which seemed to me to repeat it in every conceivable key, with unrelenting indecency. But secrets are well kept by such people, for everyone who comes in contact with them is deaf and blind. The people who learned the truth from someone else, from the Verdurins for instance, believed it, but only for so long as they had not met M. de Charlus. His face, so far from disseminating, dispelled every scandalous rumour. For we have so extravagant a notion of certain entities that we cannot identify it with the familiar features of a person of our acquaintance. And we find it difficult to believe in such a person's vices, just as we can never believe in the genius of a person with whom we went to the Opera only last night.

M. de Charlus was engaged in handing over his overcoat with the instructions of a familiar guest. But the footman to whom he was handing it was a newcomer, and quite young. Now M. de Charlus was inclined these days sometimes to "lose his bearings," as they say, and did not always remember what was or was not "done." The praiseworthy desire that he had had at Balbec to show that certain topics did not alarm him, that he was not afraid to say of someone or other: "He's a nice-looking boy," to say, in a word, the same things as might have been said by somebody who was not like himself, this desire he had now begun to express by saying on the contrary things which nobody who was not like him could ever have said, things upon which his mind was so constantly fixed that he forgot that they do not form part of the habitual preoccupation of people in general. And so, looking at the new footman, he raised his forefinger in the air in a menacing fashion and, thinking that he was making an excellent joke, said: "You are not to make eyes at me like that, do you hear?" and, turning to Brichot: "He has a quaint little face, that boy, his nose is rather fun," then, rounding off his pleasantry, or yielding to a desire, he lowered his forefinger horizontally, hesitated for an instant, and, unable to control himself any longer, thrust it irresistibly towards the footman and touched the tip of his nose, saying "Pif!", then walked into the drawing-room followed by Brichot, myself and Saniette, who told us that Princess Sherbatoff had died at six o'clock. "That's a rum card," the footman said to himself, and inquired of his companions whether the Baron was a joker or a madman. "It's just a way he has," said the butler (who regarded the Baron as slightly "touched," "a bit barmy"), "but he's one of Madame's friends for whom I've always had the greatest respect, he has a good heart."

"Will you be returning to Incarville this year?" Brichot asked me. "I believe that our hostess has taken La Raspelière again, although she had some trouble with her landlords. But that's nothing, a mere passing cloud," he added in the optimistic tone of the newspapers that say: "Mistakes have been made, it is true, but who does not make mistakes at times?" But I remembered the state of anguish in which I had left Balbec, and felt no desire to return there. I kept putting off to the morrow my plans for Albertine.

"Why, of course he's coming back, we need him, he's indispensable to us," declared M. de Charlus with the dictatorial and uncomprehending egoism of benevolence.

M. Verdurin, to whom we expressed our sympathy over Princess Sherbatoff, said: "Yes, I believe she is rather ill."

"No, no, she died at six o'clock," exclaimed Saniette.

"Oh you, you exaggerate everything," was M. Verdurin's brutal retort, for, the evening not having been cancelled, he preferred the hypothesis of illness, thereby unconsciously imitating the Duc de Guermantes.

Saniette, fearful of catching cold, for the outer door was continually being opened, stood waiting resignedly for someone to take his hat and coat.

"What are you hanging about there for like a whipped dog?" M. Verdurin asked him.

"I am waiting until one of the persons who are charged with the cloakroom can take my coat and give me a number."

"What's that you say?" demanded M. Verdurin with a stern expression. " 'Charged with the cloakroom'? Are you going gaga? 'In charge of the cloakroom' is what we say. Have we got to teach you to speak your own language, like someone who's had a stroke?"

"Charged with a thing is the correct form," murmured Saniette in a wheezy tone; "the abbé Le Batteux ..."

"You madden me, you do," cried M. Verdurin in a voice of thunder. "How you do wheeze! Have you just walked up six flights of stairs?"

The effect of M. Verdurin's rudeness was that the servants in the cloakroom allowed other guests to take precedence over Saniette and, when he tried to hand over his things, said to him: "Wait for your turn, Sir, don't be in such a hurry."

"There's system for you, there's competence. That's right, my lads," said M. Verdurin with an approving smile, in order to encourage them in their inclination to keep Saniette waiting till last. "Come along," he said to us, "the creature wants us all to catch our death hanging about in his beloved draught. Come and warm up in the drawing-room. 'Charged with the cloakroom,' indeed. What an idiot!"

"He is inclined to be a little precious, but he's not a bad fellow," said Brichot.

"I never said he was a bad fellow, I said he was an idiot," M. Verdurin retorted sourly.

Meanwhile Mme Verdurin was in deep conclave with Cottard and Ski. Morel had just declined (because M. de Charlus could not be present) an invitation from some friends of hers to whom she had promised the services of the violinist. The reason for Morel's refusal, which we shall presently see reinforced by others of a far more serious kind, might have found its justification in a habit peculiar to the leisured classes in general but more particularly to the little nucleus. To be sure, if Mme Verdurin intercepted between a newcomer and one of the faithful a whispered remark which might let it be supposed that they knew each other or wished to become better acquainted ("On Friday, then, at So-and-so's," or "Come to the studio any day you like. I'm always there until five o'clock, I shall look forward to seeing you"), she would become restless and excited, assuming that the newcomer occupied a "position" which would make him a brilliant recruit to the little clan, and while pretending not to have heard anything, and preserving in her fine eyes, ringed with dark shadows by addiction to Debussy more than they would have been by addiction to cocaine, the exhausted look induced by musical intoxication alone, would revolve nevertheless behind her splendid brow, bulging with all those quartets and the resultant headaches, thoughts which were not exclusively polyphonic; and unable to contain herself any longer, unable to postpone the injection for another instant, would fling herself upon the speakers, draw them apart, and say to the newcomer, pointing to the "faithful" one: "You wouldn't care to come and dine with *him*, next Saturday, shall we say, or any day you like, with some really nice people? Don't speak too loud, as I don't want to invite all this mob" (a term used to designate for five minutes the little nucleus, disdained for the moment in favour of the newcomer in whom so many hopes were placed).

But this need for new enthusiasms, and also for bringing people together, had its reverse side. Assiduous attendance at their Wednesdays aroused in the Verdurins an opposite tendency. This was the desire to set people at odds, to estrange them from one another. It had been strengthened, had almost been carried to a frenzy during the months spent at La Raspelière, where they were all together morning, noon and night. M. Verdurin would go out of his way to catch someone out, to spin webs in which he might hand over to his spider mate some innocent fly. Failing a grievance, he would try ridicule. As soon as one of the faithful had been out of the house for half an hour, the Verdurins would make fun of him in front of the others, would feign surprise that their guests had not noticed how his teeth were never clean, or how on the contrary he had a mania for brushing them twenty times a day. If anyone took the liberty of opening a window, this want of breeding would cause host and hostess to exchange a glance of disgust. A moment later Mme Verdurin would ask for a shawl, which gave M. Verdurin an excuse for saying in a tone of fury: "No, I shall close the window. I wonder who had the impertinence to open it," in the hearing of the guilty wretch who blushed to the roots of his hair. You were rebuked indirectly for the quantity of wine you had drunk. "Doesn't it make you ill? It's all right for navvies!" If two of the faithful went for walks together without first obtaining permission from the Mistress, these walks were the subject of endless comment, however innocent they might be. Those of M. de Charlus with Morel were not innocent. It was only the fact that M. de Charlus was not staying at La Raspelière (because of Morel's garrison life) that retarded the hour of satiety, disgust, nausea. That hour was, however, about to strike.

Mme Verdurin was furious and determined to "enlighten" Morel as to the ridiculous and detestable role that M. de Charlus was making him play. "I must add," she went on (for when she felt that she owed someone a debt of gratitude which would weigh upon her, and was unable to rid herself of it by killing him, she would discover a serious defect in him which would honourably dispense her from showing her gratitude), "I must add that he gives himself airs in my house which I do not at all like." The truth was that Mme Verdurin had another reason more serious than Morel's refusal to play at her friends' party for resentment against M. de Charlus. The latter, highly conscious of the honour he was doing the Mistress by bringing to the Quai Conti people who after all would never have come there for her sake, had, on hearing the first few names put forward by Mme Verdurin of people who ought to be invited, pronounced the most categorical veto on them in a peremptory tone which blended the rancorous arrogance of a crotchety nobleman with the dogmatism of the artist who is an expert in questions of entertainment and who would withdraw his piece and withhold his collaboration sooner than agree to concessions which in his opinion would ruin the overall effect. M. de Charlus had given his approval, hedging it round with reservations, to Saintine alone, with whom, in order not to be lumbered with his wife, Mme de Guermantes had passed from a daily intimacy to a complete severance of relations, but whom M. de Charlus, finding him intelligent, continued to see. True, it was in a middle-class circle cross-bred with minor nobility, where people are merely very rich and connected by marriage with an aristocracy which the higher aristocracy does not know, that Saintine, at one time the flower of the Guermantes set, had gone to seek his fortune and, he imagined, a social foothold. But Mme Verdurin, knowing the blue-blooded pretensions of the wife's circle, and unaware of the husband's position (for it is what is immediately above our head that gives us the impression of altitude and not what is almost invisible to us, so far is it lost in the clouds), thought to justify an invitation for Saintine by pointing out that he knew a great many people, "having married Mlle—." The ignorance which this assertion, the direct opposite of the truth, revealed in Mme Verdurin caused the Baron's painted lips to part in a smile of indulgent scorn and generous understanding. He did not deign to reply directly, but as he was always ready, in social matters, to elaborate

theories in which his fertile intelligence and lordly pride were combined with the hereditary frivolity of his preoccupations, "Saintine ought to have consulted me before marrying," he said. "There's such a thing as social as well as physiological eugenics, in which I am perhaps the only specialist in existence. There could be no argument about Saintine's case: it was clear that, in marrying as he did, he was tying a stone round his neck, and hiding his light under a bushel. His social career was at an end. I should have explained this to him, and he would have understood me, for he is intelligent. Conversely, there was a certain person who had everything that he required to make his position exalted, predominant, world-wide, only a terrible cable bound him to the earth. I helped him, partly by pressure, partly by force, to break his moorings and now he has won, with a triumphant joy, the freedom, the omnipotence that he owes to me. It required, perhaps, a little determination on his part, but what a reward! Thus a man can himself, when he has the sense to listen to me, become the artificer of his destiny." (It was only too clear that M. de Charlus had not been able to influence his own; action is a different thing from words, however eloquent, and from thought, however ingenious.) "But, so far as I am concerned, I live the life of a philosopher who looks on with interest at the social reactions which he has foretold, but does not assist them. And so I have continued to see Saintine, who has always shown me the cordial deference which is my due. I have even dined with him in his new abode, where one is as heavily bored, in the midst of the most sumptuous splendour, as one used to be amused in the old days when, living from hand to mouth, he used to assemble the best society in a little attic. Him, therefore, you may invite; I authorise it. But I must impose a veto on all the other names that you have proposed. And you will thank me for it, for if I am an expert in the matter of marriages, I am no less an expert in the matter of festivities. I know the rising personalities who can lift a gathering, give it tone and distinction; and I know also the names that will bring it down to the ground, make it fall flat."

These exclusions of the Baron's were not always based on the resentments of a crackpot or the subtleties of an artist, but on the wiles of an actor. When he brought off, at the expense of somebody or something, an entirely successful tirade, he was anxious to let it be heard by the largest possible audience, but took care not to admit to the second performance the audience of the first who could have borne witness that the piece had not changed. He reconstituted his audience precisely because he did not alter his programme, and, when he had scored a success in conversation, would willingly have organised a tour and given performances in the provinces. Whatever the various motives for these exclusions, they did not merely annoy Mme Verdurin, who felt her authority as a hostess impaired; they also did her great damage socially, and for two reasons. The first was that M. de Charlus, even more touchy than Jupien, used to quarrel for no apparent reason with the people who were most suited to be his friends. Naturally, one of the first punishments that he could inflict upon them was that of not allowing them to be invited to a reception which he was organising at the Verdurins'. Now these pariahs were often people who ruled the roost, as the saying is, but who in M. de Charlus's eyes had ceased to rule it from the day on which he had quarrelled with them. For his imagination, in addition to manufacturing faults in people in order to quarrel with them, was no less ingenious in stripping them of all importance as soon as they ceased to be his friends. If, for instance, the guilty person came of an extremely old family whose dukedom, however, dates only from the nineteenth century—the Montesquiou for instance—from that moment all that counted for M. de Charlus was the seniority of the dukedom, the family becoming nothing. "They're not even dukes," he would exclaim. "It's the title of the Abbé de Montesquiou which passed most irregularly to a collateral, less than eighty years ago. The present duke, if duke he can be called, is the third. You may talk to me if you like of people like the Uzès, the La Trémoilles, the Luynes, who are tenth or fourteenth dukes, or my brother who is twelfth Duc de Guermantes and seventeenth Prince de Condom. Even if the Montesquiou are descended from an old family, what would that prove, supposing that it *were* proved? They have descended so far that they've reached the fourteenth storey below stairs." Had he on the contrary quarrelled with a gentleman who possessed an ancient dukedom, who boasted the most magnificent connexions, was related to ruling princes, but to whose line this distinction had come quite suddenly without any great length of pedigree, a Luynes for instance, the case was altered, pedigree alone counted. "I ask you—Monsieur Alberti, who does not emerge from the mire until Louis XIII! Why should we be impressed because court favour allowed them to pick up dukedoms to which they had no right?" What was more, with M. de Charlus the fall followed close upon the high favour because of that tendency peculiar to the Guermantes family to expect from conversation, from friendship, something that these are incapable of giving, as well as the symptomatic fear of becoming the object of slander. And the fall was all the greater the higher the favour had been. Now nobody had ever found such favour with the Baron as he had ostentatiously shown to Comtesse Mole. By what sign of indifference did she prove one fine day that she had been unworthy of it? The Countess herself always declared that she had never been able to discover. The fact remains that the mere sound of her name aroused in the Baron the most violent rage, provoked the most eloquent but the most terrible philippics. Mme Verdurin, to whom Mme Mole had been extremely amiable and who, as we shall see, was founding great hopes upon her, had rejoiced in anticipation at the thought that the Countess would meet in her house all the noblest names, as the Mistress said, "of France and of Navarre": she at once proposed inviting "Madame de Mole." "Goodness gracious me! I suppose it takes all sorts to make a world," M. de Charlus had replied, "and if you, Madame, feel a desire to converse with Mme Pipelet, Mme Gibout and Mme Joseph Prudhomme,"<sup>11</sup> I'm only too delighted, but let it be on an evening when I am not present. I could see as soon as you opened your mouth that we don't speak the same language, since I was talking of aristocratic names and you come up with the most obscure names of lawyers, of crooked little commoners, evil-minded tittle-tattles, and of little ladies who imagine themselves patronesses of the arts because they echo an octave lower the manners of my Guermantes sister-in-law, like a jay trying to imitate a peacock. I must add that it

would be positively indecent to admit to a celebration which I am pleased to give at Mme Verdurin's a person whom I have with good reason excluded from my society, a goose of a woman devoid of birth, loyalty or wit who is foolish enough to suppose that she is capable of playing the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes, a combination which is in itself idiotic, since the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes are poles apart. It is as though a person should pretend to be at once Reichenberg and Sarah Bernhardt. In any case, even if it were not wholly incompatible, it would be extremely ridiculous. Even though I myself may smile at times at the exaggerations of the one and regret the limitations of the other, that is my right. But that little middle-class toad trying to inflate herself to the magnitude of two great ladies who at least always exhibit the incomparable distinction of blood, it's enough, as the saying is, to make a cat laugh. The Mole! That is a name which must not be uttered in my hearing, or I shall be obliged to withdraw," he concluded with a smile, in the tone of a doctor who, having the good of his patient at heart in spite of the patient himself, lets it be understood that he will not tolerate the collaboration of a homoeopath.

In addition to this, certain persons whom M. de Charlus regarded as negligible might indeed be so for him but not for Mme Verdurin. M. de Charlus, from the height of his exalted birth, could afford to dispense with the most elegant people, the assemblage of whom would have made Mme Verdurin's drawing-room one of the first in Paris. But Mme Verdurin was beginning to feel that she had already on more than one occasion missed the bus, not to mention the enormous setback that the social error of the Dreyfus case had inflicted upon her —though it had not been an unmixed bane. "I forget whether I've told you," I might ask the reader, as one might ask a friend with regard to whom one has forgotten, after so many conversations, whether one has remembered or had a chance to tell him something, "how disapproving the Duchesse de Guermantes had been of certain persons of her world who, subordinating everything else to the Affair, excluded fashionable women from their drawing-rooms and admitted others who were not fashionable, because they were in favour of a retrial or against it, and had then been criticised in her turn by those same ladies as being lukewarm, unsound in her views, and guilty of placing social formalities above the national interest?" Whether I have done so or not, the attitude of the Duchesse de Guermantes at that time can easily be imagined, and indeed if we look at it in the light of subsequent history may appear, from the social point of view, perfectly correct. M. de Cambremer regarded the Dreyfus case as a foreign machination intended to destroy the Intelligence Service, to undermine discipline, to weaken the army, to divide the French people, to pave the way for invasion. Literature being, apart from a few of La Fontaine's fables, a closed book to the Marquis, he left it to his wife to show that the cruelly probing literature of the day had, by creating a spirit of disrespect, brought about a parallel upheaval. "M. Reinach and M. Hervieu are in league," she would say. Nobody will accuse the Dreyfus case of having premeditated such dark designs upon Society. But there it certainly broke down barriers. Society people who refuse to allow politics into their world are as far-sighted as soldiers who refuse to allow politics to permeate the army. Society is like sexual behaviour, in that no one knows what perversions it may develop once aesthetic considerations are allowed to dictate its choices. The reason that they were nationalists gave the Faubourg Saint-Germain the habit of entertaining ladies from another class of society; the reason vanished with nationalism, but the habit remained. Mme Verdurin, thanks to Dreyfusism, had attracted to her house certain writers of distinction who for the moment were of no use to her socially, because they were Dreyfusards. But political passions are like all the rest, they do not last. New generations arise which no longer understand them; even the generation that experienced them changes, experiences new political passions which, not being modelled exactly upon their predecessors, rehabilitate some of the excluded, the reason for exclusion having altered. Monarchists no longer cared, at the time of the Dreyfus case, whether a man had been republican, or even radical, or even indeed anti-clerical, provided he was anti-semitic and nationalist. Should a war ever come, patriotism would assume another form and if a writer was chauvinistic enough nobody would stop to think whether he had or had not been a Dreyfusard.

It was thus that, from each political crisis, from each artistic revival, Mme Verdurin had picked up one by one, like a bird building its nest, the several scraps, temporarily unusable, of what would one day be her salon. The Dreyfus case had passed, Anatole France remained. Mme Verdurin's strength lay in her genuine love of art, the trouble she took for her faithful, the marvellous dinners that she gave for them alone, without inviting anyone from fashionable society. Each of the faithful was treated at her table as Bergotte had been treated at Mme Swann's. When a familiar guest of this sort becomes one fine day a famous man whom everyone wants to come and see, his presence in the house of a Mme Verdurin has none of the artificial, adulterated quality of an official banquet or a college feast with a menu by Potel and Chabot,<sup>12</sup> but is like a delicious everyday meal which you would have found there in the same perfection on a day when there was no party at all. At Mme Verdurin's, the cast was trained to perfection, the repertory most select; all that was lacking was an audience. And now that the public taste had begun to turn from the rational Gallic art of Bergotte and was developing a taste for exotic forms of music, Mme Verdurin, a sort of accredited representative in Paris of all foreign artists, would soon be making her appearance, by the side of the exquisite Princess Yourbeletieff, as an aged Fairy Godmother, grim but all-powerful, to the Russian dancers. This charming invasion, against whose seductions only the stupidest of critics protested, infected Paris, as we know, with a fever of curiosity less agonising, more purely aesthetic, but quite as intense perhaps as that aroused by the Dreyfus case. There too Mme Verdurin, but with a very different result socially, was to be in the vanguard. Just as she had been seen by the side of Mme Zola, immediately below the judges' bench, during the trial in the Assize Court, so when the new generation, in their enthusiasm for the Russian ballet, thronged to the Opera, they invariably saw in a stage box Mme Verdurin, crowned with fantastic aigrettes, by the side of Princess Yourbeletieff. And just as, after the excitements of the law courts, people used to go in the

evening to Mme Verdurin's to meet Picquart or Labori in the flesh, and above all to hear the latest news, to learn what hopes might be placed in Zurlinden, Lou-bet, Colonel Jouaust, so years later, little inclined for sleep after the enthusiasm aroused by *Sheherazade* or the dances from *Prince Igor*, they would again repair to Mme Verdurin's, where, under the auspices of Princess Yourbeletieff and their hostess, an exquisite supper brought together every night the dancers themselves, who had abstained from dinner in order to remain more elastic, their director, their designers, the great composers Igor Stravinsky and Richard Strauss, a permanent little nucleus around which, as round the supper-table of M. and Mme Helvétius, the greatest ladies in Paris and foreign royalty were not too proud to gather. Even those society people who professed to be endowed with taste and drew otiose distinctions between the various Russian ballets, regarding the production of *Les Sylphides* as somehow more "delicate" than that of *Sheherazade*, which they were almost prepared to attribute to the inspiration of Negro art, were enchanted to meet face to face these great theatrical innovators who, in an art that is perhaps a little more artificial than painting, had created a revolution as profound as Impressionism itself.

To revert to M. de Charlus, Mme Verdurin would not have minded so much if he had placed on his Index only Mme Bontemps, whom she had picked out at Odette's on the strength of her love of the arts, and who during the Dreyfus case had come to dinner occasionally with her husband, whom Mme Verdurin called "lukewarm" because he was not making any move for a fresh trial but who, being extremely intelligent, and glad to form relations in every camp, was delighted to show his independence by dining at the same table as Labori, to whom he listened without uttering a word that might compromise himself, but slipping in at the right moment a tribute to the honesty, recognised by all parties, of Jaurès. But the Baron had similarly proscribed several ladies of the aristocracy with whom Mme Verdurin, on the occasion of some musical festivity or fashion show, had recently formed an acquaintanceship and who, whatever M. de Charlus might think of them, would have been, far more than himself, essential ingredients in the formation of a fresh nucleus, this time aristocratic. Mme Verdurin had indeed been counting on this party to mingle her new friends with ladies of the same set whom M. de Charlus would be bringing, and had been relishing in advance the surprise of the former on meeting at the Quai Conti their own friends or relations invited there by the Baron. She was disappointed and furious at his veto. It remained to be seen whether, in these circumstances, the evening would result in profit or loss to herself. The loss would not be too serious if, at least, M. de Charlus's guests proved so well-disposed towards her that they would become her friends in the future. In this case no great harm would be done, and sooner or later these two sections of the fashionable world, which the Baron had insisted upon keeping apart, could be brought together even if it meant excluding him on the evening in question. And so Mme Verdurin was awaiting the Baron's guests with a certain trepidation. It would not be long before she discovered the frame of mind in which they were coming and could judge what sort of relationship she could hope to have with them. In the meantime she was taking counsel with the faithful, but, on seeing M. de Charlus enter the room with Brichot and myself, stopped short.

Greatly to our astonishment, when Brichot told her how sorry he was to learn that her dear friend was so seriously ill, Mme Verdurin replied: "You know, I'm bound to confess that I feel no regret at all. It's no use feigning emotions one doesn't feel ..." No doubt she spoke thus from want of energy, because she shrank from the idea of wearing a long face throughout her reception; from pride, in order not to appear to be seeking excuses for not having cancelled it; yet also from fear of what people might think of her and from social shrewdness, because the absence of grief which she displayed was more honourable if it could be attributed to a particular antipathy, suddenly revealed, for the Princess, rather than to a general insensitivity, and because her hearers could not fail to be disarmed by a sincerity as to which there could be no doubt: for if Mme Verdurin had not been genuinely indifferent to the death of the Princess, would she, in order to explain why she was entertaining, have gone so far as to accuse herself of a far more serious fault? This was to forget that Mme Verdurin would have had to admit, at the same time as confessing her grief, that she had not had the strength of mind to forgo a pleasure; whereas the indifference of the friend was something more shocking, more immoral, but less humiliating and consequently easier to confess than the frivolity of the hostess. In matters of crime, where there is danger for the culprit, it is self-interest that dictates confessions; where the offence incurs no penalty, it is self-esteem. Whether it was that, doubtless finding rather hackneyed the excuse of people who, in order not to allow a bereavement to interrupt their life of pleasure, go about saying that it seems to them futile to wear on their sleeves a grief which they feel in their hearts, she preferred to imitate those intelligent culprits who are repelled by the clichés of innocence and whose defence—a partial admission, though they do not know it—consists in saying that they would see no harm in doing what they are accused of doing, although, as it happens, they have had no occasion to do it, or whether, having adopted the theory of indifference in order to explain her conduct, she found, once she had started on the downward slope of her unnatural feeling, that there was some originality in having felt it, a rare perspicacity in having managed to diagnose it, and a certain "nerve" in proclaiming it, Mme Verdurin kept dwelling upon her want of grief, not without something of the complacent pride of a paradoxical psychologist and daring dramatist.

"Yes, it's very odd," she said, "it made scarcely any impression on me. Of course, I don't mean to say that I wouldn't rather she were still alive, she wasn't a bad person."

"Yes she was," put in M. Verdurin.

"Ah! he doesn't approve of her because he thought I was doing myself harm by having her here, but he's rather pig-headed about that."

"Do me the justice to admit," said M. Verdurin, "that I never approved of the association. I always told you that she had a bad reputation."

“But I’ve never heard a thing against her,” protested Saniette.

“What!” exclaimed Mme. Verdurin, “everybody knew; bad isn’t the word, it was shameful, degrading. No, but it has nothing to do with that. I couldn’t myself explain what I feel. I didn’t dislike her, but she meant so little to me that when we heard that she was seriously ill my husband himself was quite surprised and said: ‘Anyone would think you didn’t mind.’ Why, earlier this evening he offered to put off the rehearsal, and I insisted upon having it because I should have thought it a farce to show a grief which I don’t feel.”

She said this because she felt that it had an intriguing smack of the “independent theatre,” and was at the same time singularly convenient; for avowed insensitivity or immorality simplifies life as much as does easy virtue; it converts reprehensible actions, for which one no longer need seek excuses, into a duty imposed by sincerity. And the faithful listened to Mme Verdurin’s words with the mixture of admiration and uneasiness which certain cruelly realistic and painfully observant plays used at one time to cause; and while they marvelled to see their beloved Mistress display her rectitude and independence in a new form, more than one of them, although he assured himself that after all it would not be the same thing, thought of his own death, and wondered whether, on the day it occurred, they would drop a tear or give a party at the Quai Conti.

"I'm very glad for my guests' sake that the evening hasn't been cancelled," said M. de Charlus, not realising that in expressing himself thus he was offending Mme Verdurin.

Meanwhile I was struck, as was everybody who approached Mme Verdurin that evening, by a far from pleasant odour of rhino-gomenol. This was how it came about. We know that Mme Verdurin never expressed her artistic emotions in a mental but always in a physical way, so that they might appear more inescapable and more profound. Now, if one spoke to her of Vinteuil's music, her favourite, she would remain unmoved, as though she expected to derive no emotion from it. But after looking at you for a few moments with a fixed, almost abstracted gaze, she would answer you in a sharp, matter of fact, scarcely civil tone (as though she had said to you: "I don't in the least mind your smoking, but it's because of the carpet; it's a very fine one—not that that matters either—but it's highly inflammable, I'm dreadfully afraid of fire, and I shouldn't like to see you all roasted because someone had carelessly dropped a lighted cigarette end on it"), not professing any admiration, but coldly expressing her regret that something of his was being played that evening: "I have nothing against Vinteuil; to my mind, he's the greatest composer of the age. Only, I can never listen to that sort of stuff without weeping all the time" (there was not the slightest suggestion of pathos in the way she said "weeping;" she would have used precisely the same tone for "sleeping;" certain slanderers used indeed to insist that the latter verb would have been more applicable, though no one could ever be certain, for she listened to the music with her face buried in her hands, and certain snoring sounds might after all have been sobs). "I don't mind weeping, not in the least; only I get the most appalling sniffles afterwards. It stuffs up my mucous membrane, and forty-eight hours later I look like an old drunk. I have to inhale for days on end to get my vocal cords functioning. However, one of Cottard's pupils ..." "Oh, by the way, I never offered you my condolences: he was carried off very quickly, poor fellow!" "Ah, yes, there we are, he died, as everyone has to. He'd killed enough people for it to be his turn to have a bit of his own medicine."<sup>13</sup> Anyhow, I was saying that one of his pupils, a delightful creature, has been treating me for it. He goes by quite an original rule: 'Prevention is better than cure.' And he greases my nose before the music begins. The effect is radical. I can weep like all the mothers who ever lost a child, and not a trace of a cold. Sometimes a little conjunctivitis, that's all. It's completely efficacious. Otherwise I could never have gone on listening to Vinteuil. I was just going from one bronchial attack to another."

I could not refrain from mentioning Mlle Vinteuil. "Isn't the composer's daughter to be here," I asked Mme Verdurin, "with one of her friends?"

"No, I've just had a telegram," Mme Verdurin said evasively, "they were obliged to remain in the country."

I had a momentary hope that there might never have been any question of their coming and that Mme Verdurin had announced the presence of these representatives of the composer only in order to make a favourable impression on the performers and their audience.

"What, so they didn't even come to the rehearsal this afternoon?" said the Baron with feigned curiosity, anxious to appear not to have seen Charlie.

The latter came up to greet me. I whispered a question in his ear about Mlle Vinteuil's non-appearance; he seemed to me to know little or nothing about the matter. I signed to him to keep his voice down and told him we would talk again later. He bowed, and assured me that he would be entirely at my disposal. I observed that he was far more polite, far more respectful, than he had been in the past. I spoke warmly of him—since he might perhaps be able to help me to clear up my suspicions—to M. de Charlus who replied: "He only does what he should: there would be no point in his living among respectable people if he didn't learn good manners." These, according to M. de Charlus, were the old manners of France, without a hint of British stiffness. Thus when Charlie, returning from a tour in the provinces or abroad, arrived in his travelling suit at the Baron's, the latter, if there were not too many people present, would kiss him without ceremony on both cheeks, perhaps a little in order to banish by so ostentatious a display of his affection any idea of its being criminal, perhaps because he could not deny himself a pleasure, but still more, no doubt, for literary reasons, as upholding and illustrating the traditional manners of France, and, just as he would have protested against the Munich or modern style of furniture by keeping old armchairs that had come to him from a great-grandmother, countering British phlegm with the affection of a warmhearted eighteenth-century father who does not conceal his joy at seeing his son again. Was there indeed a trace of incest in this paternal affection? It is more probable that the way in which M. de Charlus habitually appeased his vice—as to which we shall learn something in due course—did not meet his emotional needs, which had remained unsatisfied since the death of his wife; certain it is that after having thought more than once of remarrying, he was now devoured by a maniacal desire to adopt an heir, and certain persons close to him feared that it might be fulfilled in favour of Morel. And there is nothing extraordinary in this. The invert who has been able to feed his passion only on a literature written for women-loving men, who used to think of men when he read Musset's *Nuits*, feels the need to enter in the same way into all the social activities of the man who is not an invert, to keep a lover, as the old frequenter of the Opera keeps ballet-girls, to settle down, to marry or form a permanent tie, to become a father.

M. de Charlus took Morel aside, on the pretext of getting him to explain what was going to be played, but above all taking a sweet delight, while Charlie showed him his music, in displaying thus publicly their secret intimacy. In the meantime I was surrounded by enchantment. For although the little clan included few girls, a fair number were invited on big occasions. There were several present, very pretty ones, whom I knew. They sent smiles of greeting to me across the room. The air was thus continually embellished with charming girlish smiles. They are the multifarious scattered adornment of evenings as of days. One remembers an atmosphere because girls were smiling in it.

On the other hand, people might have been greatly surprised had they overheard the furtive remarks which M. de Charlus exchanged with a number of important men at this party. These were two dukes, a distinguished general, a celebrated author, an eminent physician and a great lawyer. And the remarks in question were: "By the way, did you notice that footman, no, I mean the little fellow they take on the carriage ... And at your cousin Guermentes's, you don't know of anyone?" "At the moment, no." "I say, though, outside the door, where the carriages stop, there was a little blonde person in short breeches, who seemed to me most attractive. She called my carriage most charmingly. I'd gladly have prolonged the conversation." "Yes, but I believe she's altogether hostile, and besides, she makes such a fuss! Since you like to get down to business at once, you'd be fed up. Anyhow, I know there's nothing doing, a friend of mine tried." "That's a pity, I thought the profile very fine, and the hair superb." "Really, you found her as nice as that? I think if you'd seen a little more of her you would have been disillusioned. No, in the supper-room only two months ago you would have seen a real marvel, a big strapping fellow over six feet tall, with a perfect skin, and loves it, too. But he's



gone off to Poland." "Ah, that's a bit far." "You never know, he may come back. One always meets again somewhere." There is no great social function that does not, if one takes a cross-section of it and cuts sufficiently deep, resemble those parties to which doctors invite their patients, who utter the most intelligent remarks, have perfect manners, and would never show that they were mad if they did not whisper in your ear, pointing to some old gentleman going past: "That's Joan of Arc."

"I feel it's our duty to enlighten him," Mme Verdurin said to Brichot. "I don't mean any harm to Charlus, far from it. He's an agreeable man, and as for his reputation, I may say that it isn't of the kind that can do me any harm! You know how much, in the interests of our little clan and our table talk, I detest flirting, men talking nonsense to a woman in a corner instead of discussing interesting topics, but with Charlus I've never been afraid of what happened to me with Swann, and Elstir, and lots of others. With him I felt no need to worry; he would come to my dinners, all the women in the world might be there, yet you could be certain that the general conversation wouldn't be disturbed by flirting and whispering. Charlus is a special case, one doesn't have to worry, it's like having a priest. But he simply can't be allowed to take charge of the young men he meets here and cause trouble in our little nucleus, otherwise it will be even worse than having a womaniser." And Mme Verdurin was sincere in thus proclaiming her tolerance of Charlusism. Like every ecclesiastical power, she regarded human frailties as less dangerous than anything that might undermine the principle of authority, impair the orthodoxy, modify the ancient creed of her little Church. "Otherwise," she went on, "I shall bare my teeth. What do you say to a gentleman who prevents Charlie from coming to a recital because he himself hasn't been invited? So he's going to be taught a lesson, and I hope he'll profit by it, otherwise he can simply take his hat and go. Upon my word, he keeps the boy cooped up!" And, using exactly the same expressions that almost anyone else might have used, for there are certain phrases not in common currency which some particular subject, some given circumstance, will recall almost infallibly to the mind of the talker who imagines he is speaking his mind freely when he is merely repeating mechanically the universal version, she continued: "It's impossible to see Morel nowadays without that great spindle-shanks hanging round him like a bodyguard."

M. Verdurin offered to take Charlie out of the room for a minute to talk to him, on the pretext of asking him something. Mme Verdurin was afraid that this might upset him, and that he would play badly in consequence. "It would be better to postpone this performance until after the other. Perhaps even until a later occasion." For however much Mme Verdurin might look forward to the delicious emotion that she would feel when she knew that her husband was engaged in enlightening Charlie in the next room, she was afraid, if the plan misfired, that he would lose his temper and fail to appear on the 16th.

What caused M. de Charlus's downfall that evening was the ill-breeding—so common in those circles—of the people whom he had invited and who were now beginning to arrive. Having come there partly out of friendship for M. de Charlus and also out of curiosity to explore these novel surroundings, each duchess made straight for the Baron as though it were he who was giving the party, and then said to me, within a yard of the Verdurins, who could hear every word: "Show me which is Mother Verdurin. Do you think I really need to get myself introduced to her? I do hope, at least, that she won't put my name in the paper tomorrow; nobody in my family would ever speak to me again. What, that woman with the white hair? But she looks quite presentable." Hearing some mention of Mlle Vinteuil, who, however, was not in the room, several of them said: "Ah! the sonata-man's daughter? Show me her." And, each of them finding a number of her friends, they formed a group by themselves, watched, bubbling over with ironical curiosity, the arrival of the faithful, but were able at the most to point a finger at the somewhat peculiar hair-style of a person who, a few years later, was to make this the fashion in the highest society, and, in short, regretted that they did not find this salon as different from the salons they knew as they had hoped to find it, feeling the same disappointment that they might have felt if, having gone to Bruant's nightclub in the hope that the *chansonnier* would make a butt of them, they found themselves greeted on their arrival with a polite bow instead of the expected refrain: "Ah! look at that mug, look at that phizog. There's a sight for sore eyes."

M. de Charlus had, at Balbec, given me a perspicacious criticism of Mme de Vaugoubert who, in spite of her considerable intelligence, and after her husband's unexpected success, had brought about his irremediable disgrace. The rulers to whose court M. de Vaugoubert was accredited, King Theodosius and Queen Eudoxia, having returned to Paris, but this time for a prolonged visit, daily festivities had been held in their honour in the course of which the Queen, on friendly terms with Mme de Vaugoubert whom she had seen for the last ten years in her own capital, and knowing neither the wife of the President of the Republic nor the wives of his ministers, had neglected these ladies and kept entirely aloof with the Ambassador. The latter, believing her own position to be unassailable—M. de Vaugoubert having been responsible for the alliance between King Theodosius and France—had derived from the preference that the Queen showed for her society a self-satisfied pride but no anxiety at the danger which threatened her and which took shape a few months later in M. de Vaugoubert's brutal retirement from the service, an event wrongly considered impossible by the over-confident couple. M. de Charlus, remarking in the "twister" upon the downfall of his childhood friend, expressed his astonishment that an intelligent woman had not in such circumstances used all her influence with the King and Queen to persuade them to behave as though she had none, and to transfer their civility to the wives of the President and his ministers who would have been all the more flattered by it, that is to say all the more inclined in their self-contentedness to be grateful to the Vaugouberts, inasmuch as they would have supposed that civility to be spontaneous and not dictated by them. But the man who can see other people's errors often succumbs to them himself if sufficiently intoxicated by circumstances. And M. de Charlus, while his guests elbowed their way towards him to congratulate him and thank him as though he were the master of the house, never thought of asking them to say a few words to Mme Verdurin. Only the Queen of Naples, in whom survived the same noble blood that had flowed in the veins of her sisters the Empress Elisabeth and the Duchesse d'Alençon, made a point of talking to Mme Verdurin as though she had come for the pleasure of meeting her rather than for the music and for M. de Charlus, made endless gracious speeches to her hostess, never stopped telling her how much she had always wanted to make her acquaintance, complimented her on her house and spoke to her on all manner of subjects as though she were paying a call. She would so much have liked to bring her niece Elisabeth, she said (the niece who shortly afterwards was to marry Prince Albert of Belgium), who would be so disappointed! She stopped talking when she saw the musicians mount the platform, and asked which of them was Morel. She could scarcely have been under any illusion as to the motives that led M. de Charlus to desire that the young virtuoso should be surrounded with so much glory. But the venerable wisdom of a sovereign in whose veins flowed the blood of one of the noblest families in history, one of the richest in experience,



scepticism and pride, made her merely regard the inevitable blemishes of the people whom she loved best, such as her cousin Charlus (whose mother had been a Duchess of Bavaria like herself), as misfortunes that rendered more precious to them the support that they might find in her and consequently gave her all the more pleasure in providing it. She knew that M. de Charlus would be doubly touched by her having taken the trouble to come in these circumstances. Only, being as kind as she had long ago shown herself brave, this heroic woman who, a soldier-queen, had herself fired her musket from the ramparts of Gaeta, always ready to place herself chivalrously on the side of the weak, seeing Mme Verdurin alone and abandoned, and moreover unaware that she ought not to leave the Queen, had sought to pretend that for her, the Queen of Naples, the centre of the evening, the focal point of attraction that had brought her there, was Mme Verdurin. She apologised endlessly for not being able to stay until the end, since, although she never went anywhere, she had to go on to another reception, and begged that by no means, when she had to go, should any fuss be made on her account, thus discharging Mme Verdurin from the honours which the latter did not even know that she ought to render her.

It must however be said in fairness to M. de Charlus that if he entirely forgot Mme Verdurin and allowed her to be ignored to a scandalous degree by the people "of his own world" whom he had invited, he did, on the other hand, realise that he must not allow them to display, during the "musical presentation" itself, the bad manners they were exhibiting towards the Mistress. Morel had already mounted the platform, and the musicians were assembling, but one could still hear conversations, not to say laughter, and remarks such as "Apparently you have to be initiated in order to understand it." Immediately M. de Charlus, drawing himself erect as though he had entered a different body from the one I had seen, a short while before, dragging itself towards Mme Verdurin's door, assumed a prophetic expression and glared at the assembly with a severity which signified that this was no time for laughter, thus bringing a sudden blush to the cheeks of more than one lady caught out like a schoolgirl by her teacher in front of the whole class. To my mind, M. de Charlus's attitude, so noble in other respects, was somehow slightly comic; for at one moment he withered the guests with his blazing eyes, and at the next, in order to indicate to them with a sort of vade-mecum the religious silence it was proper to observe, the detachment from any worldly preoccupation, he himself presented, raising his white-gloved hands to his handsome forehead, a model (to which they were expected to conform) of gravity, already almost of ecstasy, ignoring the greetings of latecomers so indelicate as not to realise that it was now the time for High Art. They were all hypnotised; no one dared to utter another sound, to move a chair; respect for music—by virtue of Palamède's prestige—had been instantaneously inculcated in a crowd as ill-bred as it was elegant.

When I saw not only Morel and a pianist but other instrumentalists too line up on the little platform, I supposed that the programme was to begin with works of composers other than Vinteuil. For I imagined that the only work of his in existence was his sonata for piano and violin.

Mme Verdurin sat alone, the twin hemispheres of her pale, slightly roseate brow magnificently bulging, her hair drawn back, partly in imitation of an eighteenth-century portrait, partly from the need for coolness of a feverish person reluctant to reveal her condition, aloof, a deity presiding over the musical rites, goddess of Wagnerism and sick-headaches, a sort of almost tragic Norn, conjured up by the spell of genius in the midst of all these "bores," in whose presence she would scorn even more than usual to express her feelings upon hearing a piece of music which she knew better than they. The concert began; I did not know what was being played; I found myself in a strange land. Where was I to place it? Who was the composer? I longed to know, and, seeing nobody near me whom I could ask, I should have liked to be a character in those *Arabian Nights* which I never tired of reading and in which, in moments of uncertainty, there appears a genie, or a maiden of ravishing beauty, invisible to everyone else but not to the perplexed hero to whom she reveals exactly what he wishes to learn. And indeed at that very moment I was favoured with just such a magical apparition. As when, in a stretch of country which one thinks one does not know and which in fact one has approached from a new direction, after turning a corner one finds oneself suddenly emerging on to a road every inch of which is familiar, but one had simply not been in the habit of approaching it that way, one suddenly says to oneself: "Why, this is the lane that leads to the garden gate of my friends the X—s; I'm only two minutes from their house," and there, indeed, is their daughter who has come out to greet one as one goes by; so, all of a sudden, I found myself, in the midst of this music that was new to me, right in the heart of Vinteuil's sonata; and, more marvellous than any girl, the little phrase, sheathed, harnessed in silver, glittering with brilliant sonorities, as light and soft as silken scarves, came to me, recognisable in this new guise. My joy at having rediscovered it was enhanced by the tone, so friendly and familiar, which it adopted in addressing me, so persuasive, so simple, and yet without subduing the shimmering beauty with which it glowed. Its intention, however, this time was merely to show me the way, which was not the way of the sonata, for this was an unpublished work of Vinteuil in which he had merely amused himself, by an allusion that was explained at this point by a sentence in the programme which one ought to have been reading simultaneously, by reintroducing the little phrase for a moment. No sooner was it thus recalled than it vanished, and I found myself once more in an unknown world, but I knew now, and everything that followed only confirmed my knowledge, that this world was one of those which I had never even been capable of imagining that Vinteuil could have created, for when, weary of the sonata which was to me a universe thoroughly explored, I tried to imagine others equally beautiful but different, I was merely doing what those poets do who fill their artificial paradise with meadows, flowers and streams which duplicate those existing already upon earth. What was now before me made me feel as keen a joy as the sonata would have given me if I had not already known it, and consequently, while no less beautiful, was different. Whereas the sonata opened upon a lily-white pastoral dawn, dividing its fragile purity only to hover in the delicate yet compact entanglement of a rustic bower of honeysuckle against white geraniums, it was upon flat, unbroken surfaces like those of the sea on a morning that threatens storm, in the midst of an eerie silence, in an infinite void, that this new work began, and it was into a rose-red daybreak that this unknown universe was drawn from the silence and the night to build up gradually before me. This redness, so new, so absent from the tender, pastoral, unadorned sonata, tinged all the sky, as dawn does, with a mysterious hope. And a song already pierced the air, a song on seven notes, but the strangest, the most remote from anything I had ever imagined, at once ineffable and strident, no longer the cooing of a dove as in the sonata, but rending the air, as vivid as the scarlet tint in which the opening bars had been bathed, something like a mystical cock-crow, the ineffable but ear-piercing call of eternal morning. The atmosphere, cold, rain-washed, electric—of a quality so different, subject to quite other pressures, in a world so remote from the virginal, plant-strewn world of the sonata—changed continually, eclipsing the crimson promise of the dawn. At noon, however, in a burst of scorching but transitory sunlight, it seemed to reach fulfilment in a heavy, rustic, almost cloddish gaiety in which the lurching,

riotous clangour of bells (like those which set the church square of Combray aglow and which Vinteuil, who must often have heard them, had perhaps discovered at that moment in his memory like a colour which a painter has at hand on his palette) seemed the material representation of the coarsest joy. Truth to tell, this joyous motif did not appeal to me aesthetically; I found it almost ugly, its rhythm was so laboriously earth-bound that one could have imitated almost all its essentials simply with the noises made by rapping on a table with drumsticks in a particular way. It seemed to me that Vinteuil had been lacking, here, in inspiration, and consequently I was a little lacking also in the power of attention.

I looked at the Mistress, whose fierce immobility seemed to be a protest against the rhythmic noddings of the ignorant heads of the ladies of the Faubourg. She did not say: "You realise, of course, that I know a thing or two about this music! If I were to express all that I feel, you'd never hear the end of it!" She did not say this. But her upright, motionless body, her expressionless eyes, her straying locks said it for her. They spoke also of her courage, said that the musicians could carry on, that they need not spare her nerves, that she would not flinch at the *andante*, would not cry out at the *allegro*. I looked at the musicians. The cellist was hunched over the instrument which he clutched between his knees, his head bowed forward, his coarse features assuming an involuntary expression of disgust at the more mannerist moments; another leaned over his double bass, fingering it with the same domestic patience with which he might have peeled a cabbage, while by his side the harpist, a mere child in a short skirt, framed behind the diagonal rays of her golden quadrilateral, recalling those which, in the magic chamber of a sibyl, arbitrarily denote the ether according to the traditional forms, seemed to be picking out exquisite sounds here and there at designated points, just as though, a tiny allegorical goddess poised before the golden trellis of the heavenly vault, she were gathering, one by one, its stars. As for Morel, a lock, hitherto invisible and submerged in the rest of his hair, had fallen loose and formed a curl on his forehead.

I turned my head slightly towards the audience to discover what M. de Charlus might be feeling at the sight of this curl. But my eyes encountered only Mme Verdurin's face, or rather the hands, for the former was entirely buried in the latter. Did the Mistress wish to indicate by this meditative attitude that she considered herself as though in church, and regarded this music as no different from the most sublime of prayers? Did she wish, as some people do in church, to hide from prying eyes, out of modesty or shame, their presumed fervour or their culpable inattention or an irresistible sleepiness? A regular noise which was not musical gave me momentarily to think that this last hypothesis was the correct one, but I realised later that it was produced by the snores, not of Mme Verdurin, but of her dog.

But very soon, the triumphant motif of the bells having been banished, dispersed by others, I succumbed once again to the music; and I began to realise that if, in the body of this septet, different elements presented themselves one after another to combine at the close, so also Vinteuil's sonata and, as I later discovered, his other works as well, had been no more than timid essays, exquisite but very slight, beside the triumphal and consummate masterpiece now being revealed to me. And I could not help recalling by comparison that, in the same way too, I had thought of the other worlds that Vinteuil had created as being self-enclosed as each of my loves had been; whereas in reality I was obliged to admit that just as, within the context of the last of these—my love for Albertine—my first faint stirrings of love for her (at Balbec at the very beginning, then after the game of ferret, then on the night when she slept at the hotel, then in Paris on the foggy Sunday, then on the night of the Guermantes party, then at Balbec again, and finally in Paris where my life was now closely linked to hers) had been, so, if I now considered not my love for Albertine but my whole life, my other loves too had been no more than slight and timid essays that were paving the way, appeals that were unconsciously clamouring, for this vaster love: my love for Albertine. And I ceased to follow the music, in order to ask myself once again whether Albertine had or had not seen Mlle Vinteuil during the last few days, as one interrogates anew an inner pain from which one has been distracted for a moment. For it was in myself that Albertine's possible actions were performed. Of every person we know we possess a double; but, being habitually situated on the horizon of our imagination, of our memory, it remains more or less extraneous to us, and what it has done or may have done has no greater capacity to cause us pain than an object situated at a certain distance which provides us with only the painless sensations of vision. The things that affect these people we perceive in a contemplative fashion; we are able to deplore them in appropriate language which gives other people a sense of our kindness of heart, but we do not feel them. But ever since the wound I had received at Balbec, it was deep in my heart, and very difficult to extricate, that Albertine's double was lodged. What I saw of her hurt me, as a sick man would be hurt whose senses were so seriously deranged that the sight of a colour would be felt by him internally like an incision in his living flesh. It was fortunate that I had not already yielded to the temptation to break with Albertine; the tedium of having to rejoin her presently, when I went home, was a trifling matter compared with the anxiety that I should have felt if the separation had occurred when I still had a doubt about her and before I had had time to grow indifferent to her. And at the moment when I thus pictured her waiting for me at home like a beloved wife, finding the time of waiting long, perhaps having fallen asleep for a while in her room, my ears were caressed by a passing phrase, tender, homely and domestic, of the septet. Perhaps—everything being so interwoven and superimposed in our inner life—it had been inspired in Vinteuil by his daughter's sleep (that daughter who was today the cause of all my distress) when it enveloped the composer's work on peaceful evenings with its quiet sweetness, this phrase which had so much power to calm me by virtue of the same soft background of silence that gives a hushed serenity to certain of Schumann's reveries, during which, even when "the Poet speaks," one can tell that "the child sleeps." Asleep or awake, I should find her again this evening, Albertine, my little child, when I chose to return home. And yet, I said to myself, something more mysterious than Albertine's love seemed to be promised at the outset of this work, in those first cries of dawn. I tried to banish the thought of my mistress and to think only of the musician. Indeed, he seemed to be present. It was as though, reincarnate, the composer lived for all time in his music; one could feel the joy with which he chose the colour of some timbre, harmonising it with the others. For with other and more profound gifts Vinteuil combined that which few composers, and indeed few painters, have possessed, of using colours not merely so lasting but so personal that, just as time has been powerless to spoil their freshness, so the disciples who imitate their discoverer, and even the masters who surpass him, do not dim their originality. The revolution that their apparition has effected does not see its results merge unacknowledged in the work of subsequent generations; it is unleashed, it explodes anew, when, and only when, the works of the once-for-all-time innovator are performed again. Each tone was identified by a colour which all the rules in the world could not have taught the most learned composers to imitate, with the result that Vinteuil, although he had appeared at his appointed hour and had his appointed place in the evolution of music, would always leave that

place to stand in the forefront whenever any of his compositions was performed, compositions which would owe their appearance of having originated after the works of more recent composers to this apparently paradoxical and indeed deceptive quality of permanent novelty. A page of symphonic music by Vinteuil, familiar already on the piano, revealed, when one heard it played by an orchestra—like a ray of summer sunlight which the prism of the window decomposes before it enters a dark dining-room—all the jewels of the *Arabian Nights* in unsuspected, multicoloured splendour. But how could one compare to that motionless dazzle of light what was life, perpetual and blissful motion? This Vinteuil, whom I had known so timid and sad, had been capable—when he had to choose a timbre and to blend another with it—of an audacity, and in the full sense of the word a felicity, as to which the hearing of any of his works left one in no doubt. The joy that certain sonorities had caused him, the increase of strength they had given him wherewith to discover others, led the listener on too from one discovery to another, or rather it was the creator himself who guided him, deriving, from the colours he had just hit upon, a wild joy which gave him the strength to discover, to fling himself upon others which they seemed to call for, enraptured, quivering as though from the shock of an electric spark when the sublime came spontaneously to life at the clang of the brass, panting, intoxicated, unbridled, vertiginous, while he painted his great musical fresco, like Michelangelo strapped to his scaffold and from his upside-down position hurling tumultuous brush-strokes on to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Vinteuil had been dead for a number of years; but in the sound of these instruments which he had loved, it had been given him to go on living, for an unlimited time, a part at least of his life. Of his life as a man solely? If art was indeed but a prolongation of life, was it worth while to sacrifice anything to it? Was it not as unreal as life itself? The more I listened to this septet, the less I could believe this to be so. No doubt the glowing septet differed singularly from the lily-white sonata; the timid question to which the little phrase replied, from the breathless supplication to find the fulfilment of the strange promise that had resounded, so harsh, so supernatural, so brief, causing the still inert crimson of the morning sky above the sea to vibrate. And yet these very different phrases were composed of the same elements; for, just as there was a certain world, perceptible to us in those fragments scattered here and there, in private houses, in public galleries, which was Elstir's world, the world he saw, the world in which he lived, so too the music of Vinteuil extended, note by note, stroke by stroke, the unknown, incalculable colourings of an unsuspected world, fragmented by the gaps between the different occasions of hearing his work performed; those two very dissimilar questions that governed the very different movement of the sonata and the septet, the former interrupting a pure, continuous line with brief calls, the latter welding together into an indivisible structure a medley of scattered fragments—one so calm and shy, almost detached and as if philosophical, the other so urgent, anxious, imploring—were nevertheless the same prayer, bursting forth like different inner sunrises, and merely refracted through the different mediums of other thoughts, of artistic researches carried on through the years in which he had sought to create something new. A prayer, a hope which was at heart the same, distinguishable beneath these disguises in the various works of Vinteuil, and at the same time not to be found elsewhere than in his works. For those phrases, historians of music could no doubt find affinities and pedigrees in the works of other great composers, but only for secondary reasons, external resemblances, analogies ingeniously discovered by reasoning rather than felt as the result of a direct impression. The impression conveyed by these Vinteuil phrases was different from any other, as though, in spite of the conclusions which seem to emerge from science, the individual did exist. And it was precisely when he was striving with all his might to create something new that one recognised, beneath the apparent differences, the profound similarities and the deliberate resemblances that existed in the body of a work; when Vinteuil took up the same phrase again and again, diversified it, amused himself by altering its rhythm, by making it reappear in its original form, those deliberate resemblances, the work of his intellect, necessarily superficial, never succeeded in being as striking as the disguised, involuntary resemblances, which broke out in different colours, between the two separate masterpieces; for then Vinteuil, striving to do something new, interrogated himself, with all the power of his creative energy, reached down to his essential self at those depths where, whatever the question asked, it is in the same accent, that is to say its own, that it replies. Such an accent, the accent of Vinteuil, is separated from the accents of other composers by a difference far greater than that which we perceive between the voices of two people, even between the bellowings and the squeals of two animal species; by the real difference that exists between the thought of this or that other composer and the eternal investigations of Vinteuil, the question that he put to himself in so many forms, his habitual speculation, but as free from analytical forms of reasoning as if it were being carried out in the world of the angels, so that we can gauge its depth, but no more translate it into human speech than can disembodied spirits when, evoked by a medium, they are questioned by him about the secrets of death. And even when I bore in mind that acquired originality which had struck me that afternoon, that kinship, too, which musicologists might discover between composers, it is indeed a unique accent, an unmistakable voice, to which in spite of themselves those great singers that original composers are rise and return, and which is a proof of the irreducibly individual existence of the soul. Though Vinteuil might try to make more solemn, more grandiose, or to make more sprightly and gay, to re-create what he saw reflected in the mind of the public, in spite of himself he submerged it all beneath a ground-swell which makes his song eternal and at once recognisable. Where had he learned this song, different from those of other singers, similar to all his own, where had he heard it? Each artist seems thus to be the native of an unknown country, which he himself has forgotten, and which is different from that whence another great artist, setting sail for the earth, will eventually emerge. Certain it was that Vinteuil, in his latest works, seemed to have drawn nearer to that unknown country. The atmosphere was no longer the same as in the sonata, the questioning phrases had become more pressing, more unquiet, the answers more mysterious; the washed-out air of morning and evening seemed to affect the very strings of the instruments. Marvellously though Morel played, the sounds that came from his violin seemed to me singularly piercing, almost shrill. This harshness was pleasing, and, as in certain voices, one felt in it a sort of moral quality and intellectual superiority. But it could shock. When his vision of the universe is modified, purified, becomes more adapted to his memory of his inner homeland, it is only natural that this should be expressed by a musician in a general alteration of sonorities, as of colours by a painter. In any case, the more intelligent section of the public is not misled, since Vinteuil's last compositions were ultimately declared to be his most profound. And yet no programme, no subject matter, supplied any intellectual basis for judgment. One simply sensed that it was a question of the transposition of profundity into terms of sound.

Composers do not remember this lost fatherland, but each of them remains all his life unconsciously attuned to it; he is delirious with joy when he sings in harmony with his native land, betrays it at times in his thirst for fame, but then, in seeking fame, turns his back on it, and it is only by scorning fame that he finds it when he breaks out into that

distinctive strain the sameness of which—for whatever its subject it remains identical with itself—proves the permanence of the elements that compose his soul. But in that case is it not true that those elements—all the residuum of reality which we are obliged to keep to ourselves, which cannot be transmitted in talk, even from friend to friend, from master to disciple, from lover to mistress, that ineffable something which differentiates qualitatively what each of us has felt and what he is obliged to leave behind at the threshold of the phrases in which he can communicate with others only by limiting himself to externals, common to all and of no interest—are brought out by art, the art of a Vinteuil like that of an Elstir, which exteriorises in the colours of the spectrum the intimate composition of those worlds which we call individuals and which, but for art, we should never know? A pair of wings, a different respiratory system, which enabled us to travel through space, would in no way help us, for if we visited Mars or Venus while keeping the same senses, they would clothe everything we could see in the same aspect as the things of Earth. The only true voyage, the only bath in the Fountain of Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is; and this we can do with an Elstir, with a Vinteuil; with men like these we do really fly from star to star.

The andante had just ended on a phrase filled with a tenderness to which I had entirely surrendered. There followed, before the next movement, a short interval during which the performers laid down their instruments and the audience exchanged impressions. A duke, in order to show that he knew what he was talking about, declared: "It's a difficult thing to play well." Other more agreeable people chatted for a moment with me. But what were their words, which like every human and external word left me so indifferent, compared with the heavenly phrase of music with which I had just been communing? I was truly like an angel who, fallen from the inebriating bliss of paradise, subsides into the most humdrum reality. And, just as certain creatures are the last surviving testimony to a form of life which nature has discarded, I wondered whether music might not be the unique example of what might have been—if the invention of language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas had not intervened—the means of communication between souls. It is like a possibility that has come to nothing; humanity has developed along other lines, those of spoken and written language. But this return to the unanalysed was so intoxicating that, on emerging from that paradise, contact with more or less intelligent people seemed to me of an extraordinary insignificance. I had been able, while the music was playing, to remember people, to associate them with it; or rather I had associated with the music scarcely more than the memory of one person only, which was Albertine. And the phrase that ended the andante seemed to me so sublime that I told myself that it was a pity that Albertine did not know, and if she had known had not understood, what an honour it was to be associated with something so great as this which reunited us, and the heartbreaking voice of which she seemed to have assumed. But once the music was interrupted, the people who were there seemed too insipid. Refreshments were handed round. M. de Charlus hailed a footman now and then with: "How are you? Did you get my note? Can you come?" No doubt there was in these salutations the freedom of the great nobleman who thinks he is flattering his interlocutor and is more one of the people than the bourgeois, but there was also the cunning of the delinquent who imagines that anything one flaunts is on that account considered innocent. And he added, in the Guermantes tone of Mme de Villeparisis: "He's a good boy, a friendly soul, I often employ him at home." But his adroitness turned against the Baron, for people thought his intimate courtesies and correspondence with footmen extraordinary. The footmen themselves were not so much flattered as embarrassed in the presence of their comrades.

Meanwhile the septet, which had begun again, was moving towards its close; again and again one phrase or another from the sonata recurred, but altered each time, its rhythm and harmony different, the same and yet something else, as things recur in life; and they were phrases of the sort which, without our being able to understand what affinity assigns to them as their sole and necessary abode the past of a certain composer, are to be found only in his work, and appear constantly in his work, of which they are the spirits, the dryads, the familiar deities; I had at first distinguished in the septet two or three which reminded me of the sonata. Presently—bathed in the violet mist which was wont to rise particularly in Vinteuil's later work, so much so that, even when he introduced a dance measure, it remained captive in the heart of an opal—I caught a hint of another phrase from the sonata, still so distant that I scarcely recognised it; hesitantly it approached, vanished as though in alarm, then returned, intertwined with others that had come, as I later learned, from other works, summoned yet others which became in their turn seductive and persuasive as soon as they were tamed, and took their places in the round, the divine round that yet remained invisible to the bulk of the audience, who, having before their eyes only a dim veil through which they saw nothing, punctuated arbitrarily with admiring exclamations a continuous boredom of which they thought they would die. Then the phrases withdrew, save one which I saw reappear five times or six without being able to distinguish its features, but so caressing, so different—as no doubt the little phrase from the sonata had been for Swann—from anything that any woman had ever made me desire, that this phrase—this invisible creature whose language I did not know but whom I understood so well—which offered me in so sweet a voice a happiness that it would really have been worth the struggle to obtain, is perhaps the only Unknown Woman that it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Then this phrase broke up, was transformed, like the little phrase in the sonata, and became the mysterious call of the start. A phrase of a plaintive kind rose in answer to it, but so profound, so vague, so internal, almost so organic and visceral, that one could not tell at each of its re-entries whether it was a theme or an attack of neuralgia. Presently these two motifs were wrestling together in a close embrace in which at times one of them would disappear entirely, and then only a fragment of the other could be glimpsed. A wrestling match of disembodied energies only, to tell the truth; for if these creatures confronted one another, they did so stripped of their physical bodies, of their appearance, of their names, finding in me an inward spectator—himself indifferent, too, to names and particulars—to appreciate their immaterial and dynamic combat and follow passionately its sonorous vicissitudes. In the end the joyous motif was left triumphant; it was no longer an almost anxious appeal addressed to an empty sky, it was an ineffable joy which seemed to come from paradise, a joy as different from that of the sonata as some scarlet-clad Mantegna archangel sounding a trumpet from a grave and gentle Bellini seraph strumming a theorbo. I knew that this new tone of joy, this summons to a supraterrrestrial joy, was a thing that I would never forget. But would it ever be attainable to me? This question seemed to me all the more important inasmuch as this phrase was what might have seemed most eloquently to characterise—as contrasting so sharply with all the rest of my life, with the visible world—those impressions which at remote intervals I experienced in my life as starting-points, foundation-stones for the construction of a true life: the impression I had felt at the sight of the steeples of Martinville, or of a line of trees near Balbec. In any case, to return to the particular accent of this phrase, how strange it was that the presentiment most different from what life assigns to us on earth, the boldest approximation to

the bliss of the Beyond, should have materialised precisely in the melancholy, respectable little bourgeois whom we used to meet in the Month of Mary at Combray! But above all, how was it possible that this revelation, the strangest that I had yet received, of an unknown type of joy, should have come to me from him, since, it was said, when he died he had left nothing but his sonata, everything else existing only as indecipherable scribbles. Indecipherable they may have been, but they had nevertheless been in the end deciphered, by dint of patience, intelligence and respect, by the only person who had been sufficiently close to Vinteuil to understand his method of working, to interpret his orchestral indications: Mlle Vinteuil's friend. Even in the lifetime of the great composer, she had acquired from his daughter the veneration that the latter felt for her father. It was because of this veneration that, in those moments in which people run counter to their true inclinations, the two girls had been able to take an insane pleasure in the profanations which have already been narrated. (Her adoration of her father was the very condition of his daughter's sacrilege. And no doubt they ought to have forgone the voluptuous pleasure of that sacrilege, but it did not express the whole of their natures.) And, moreover, the profanations had become rarer until they disappeared altogether, as those morbidly carnal relations, that troubled, smouldering conflagration, had gradually given way to the flame of a pure and lofty friendship. Mlle Vinteuil's friend was sometimes tormented by the nagging thought that she might have hastened Vinteuil's death. At any rate, by spending years unravelling the scribbles left by him, by establishing the correct reading of those secret hieroglyphs, she had the consolation of ensuring an immortal and compensatory glory for the composer over whose last years she had cast such a shadow. Relations which are not sanctioned by the law establish bonds of kinship as manifold, as complex, and even more solid, than those which spring from marriage. Indeed, without pausing to consider relations of so special a nature, do we not find every day that adultery, when it is based on genuine love, does not weaken family feelings and the duties of kinship, but rather revivifies them? Adultery then brings the spirit into what marriage would often have left a dead letter. A good daughter who will wear mourning for her mother's second husband for reasons of propriety has not tears enough to shed for the man whom her mother singled out as her lover. In any case Mlle Vinteuil had acted only out of sadism, which did not excuse her, though it gave me a certain consolation to think so later on. No doubt she must have realised, I told myself, at the moment when she and her friend had profaned her father's photograph, that what they were doing was merely morbidity, silliness, and not the true and joyous wickedness which she would have liked to feel. This idea that it was merely a pretence of wickedness spoiled her pleasure. But if this idea recurred to her later on, since it had spoiled her pleasure so it must have diminished her grief. "It wasn't me," she must have told herself, "I was out of my mind. I can still pray for my father's soul, and not despair of his forgiveness." Only it is possible that this idea, which had certainly occurred to her in her pleasure, may not have occurred to her in her grief. I would have liked to be able to put it into her mind. I am sure that I would have done her good and that I could have re-established between her and the memory of her father a more comforting relationship.

As in the illegible note-books in which a chemist of genius, who does not know that death is at hand, jots down discoveries which will perhaps remain for ever unknown, Mlle Vinteuil's friend had disentangled, from papers more illegible than strips of papyrus dotted with a cuneiform script, the formula, eternally true and for ever fertile, of this unknown joy, the mystic hope of the crimson Angel of the Dawn. And I for whom, albeit not so much, perhaps, as for Vinteuil, she had also been, had just been once more this very evening by reawakening my jealousy of Albertine, was to be above all in the future, the cause of so many sufferings, it was thanks to her, in compensation, that I had been able to apprehend the strange summons which I should henceforth never cease to hear, as the promise and proof that there existed something other, realisable no doubt through art, than the nullity that I had found in all my pleasures and in love itself, and that if my life seemed to me so futile, at least it had not yet accomplished everything.

What she had enabled us, thanks to her labour, to know of Vinteuil was to all intents and purposes the whole of Vinteuil's work. Compared with this septet, certain phrases from the sonata which were all that the public knew appeared so commonplace that it was difficult to understand how they could have aroused so much admiration. Similarly we are surprised that, for years past, pieces as trivial as the *Song to the Evening Star* or *Elisabeth's Prayer* can have aroused in the concert-hall fanatical worshippers who wore themselves out applauding and shouting *encore* at the end of what after all seems poor and trite to us who know *Tristan*, the *Rhinegold* and the *Mastersingers*. One must assume that those featureless melodies nevertheless already contained, in infinitesimal and for that reason perhaps more easily assimilable quantities, something of the originality of the masterpieces which alone matter to us in retrospect, but whose very perfection might perhaps have prevented them from being understood; those earlier melodies may have prepared the way for them in people's hearts. But the fact remains that, if they gave a vague presentiment of the beauties to come, they left these in complete obscurity. The same was true of Vinteuil; if at his death he had left behind him—excepting certain parts of the sonata—only what he had been able to complete, what we should have known of him would have been, in relation to his true greatness, as inconsiderable as in the case of, say, Victor Hugo if he had died after the *Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean*, the *Fiancée du Timbalier* and *Sarah la Baigneuse*, without having written a line of the *Légende des Siècles* or the *Contemplations*: what is to us his real achievement would have remained purely potential, as unknown as those universes to which our perception does not reach, of which we shall never have any idea.

Moreover this apparent contrast and profound union between genius (talent too and even virtue) and the sheath of vices in which, as had happened in the case of Vinteuil, it is so frequently contained and preserved, was detectable, as in a popular allegory, in the very assembly of the guests among whom I found myself once again when the music had come to an end. This assembly, albeit limited this time to Mme Verdurin's salon, resembled many others, the ingredients of which are unknown to the general public, and which journalist-philosophers, if they are at all well-informed, call Parisian, or Panamist, or Dreyfusard, never suspecting that they may equally well be found in Petersburg, Berlin, Madrid, and in every epoch; if as a matter of fact the Under Secretary of State for Fine Arts, an artist to his fingertips, wellborn and snobby, several duchesses and three ambassadors with their wives were present this evening at Mme Verdurin's, the proximate, immediate cause of their presence lay in the relations that existed between M. de Charlus and Morel, relations which made the Baron anxious to give as wide a celebrity as possible to the artistic triumphs of his young idol, and to obtain for him the cross of the Legion of Honour; the remoter cause which had made this assembly possible was that a girl who enjoyed a relationship with Mlle Vinteuil analogous to that of Charlie and the Baron had brought to light a whole series of works of genius which had been such a revelation that before long a subscription was to be opened under the patronage of the Minister of Education, with the object of erecting a statue to Vinteuil. Moreover, these works had been assisted, no less than by Mlle Vinteuil's relations with her friend, by the Baron's relations with Charlie, a sort of short cut, as it were, thanks to which the world was enabled to catch up with

these works without the detour, if not of an incomprehension which would long persist, at least of a complete ignorance which might have lasted for years. Whenever an event occurs which is within the range of the vulgar mind of the journalist-philosopher, a political event as a rule, the journalist-philosophers are convinced that there has been some great change in France, that we shall never see such evenings again, that no one will ever again admire Ibsen, Renan, Dostoievsky, D'Annunzio, Tolstoy, Wagner, Strauss. For the journalist-philosophers take their cue from the equivocal undercurrents of these official manifestations, in order to find something decadent in the art which is there celebrated and which as often as not is more austere than any other. There is not a name, among those most revered by these journalist-philosophers, which has not quite naturally given rise to some such strange gathering, although its strangeness may have been less flagrant and better concealed. In the case of this gathering, the impure elements that came together therein struck me from another aspect; true, I was as well able as anyone to dissociate them, having learned to know them separately; but those which concerned Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, speaking to me of Combray, spoke to me also of Albertine, that is to say of Balbec, since it was because I had long ago seen Mlle Vinteuil at Montjouvain and had learned of her friend's intimacy with Albertine that I was presently, when I returned home, to find, instead of solitude, Albertine awaiting me; and those which concerned Morel and M. de Charlus, speaking to me of Balbec, where I had seen, on the platform at Doncières, their intimacy begin, spoke to me of Combray and of its two "ways," for M. de Charlus was one of those Guermantes, Counts of Combray, inhabiting Combray without having any dwelling there, suspended in mid-air, like Gilbert the Bad in his window, while Morel was the son of that old valet who had introduced me to the lady in pink and enabled me, years after, to identify her as Mme Swann.\*

At the moment when, the music having come to an end, his guests came to take leave of him, M. de Charlus committed the same error as on their arrival. He did not ask them to shake hands with their hostess, to include her and her husband in the gratitude that was being showered on himself. There was a long procession, a procession which led to the Baron alone, and of which he was clearly aware, for as he said to me a little later: "The form of the artistic celebration ended in a 'few-words-in-the-vestry' touch that was quite amusing." The guests even prolonged their expressions of gratitude with various remarks which enabled them to remain for a moment longer in the Baron's presence, while those who had not yet congratulated him on the success of his party hung around impatiently in the rear. (Several husbands wanted to go; but their wives, snobs even though duchesses, protested: "No, no, even if we have to wait for an hour, we can't go away without thanking Palamède, who has gone to so much trouble. There's nobody else these days who can give entertainments like this." Nobody would have thought of asking to be introduced to Mme Verdurin any more than to the attendant in a theatre to which some great lady has for one evening brought the entire aristocracy.)

"Were you at Eliane de Montmorency's yesterday, cousin?" asked Mme de Mortemart, seeking an excuse to prolong their conversation.

"As a matter of fact, no; I'm fond of Eliane, but I never can understand her invitations. I must be very dense, I'm afraid," he went on with a beaming smile, while Mme de Mortemart realised that she was to be made the first recipient of "one of Palamède's" as she had often been of "one of Oriane's." "I did indeed receive a card a fortnight ago from the charming Eliane. Above the questionably authentic name of 'Montmorency' was the following kind invitation: 'My dear cousin, will you do me the honour of thinking of me next Friday at halfpast nine.' Underneath were written the two less gracious words: 'Czech Quartet.' These seemed to me to be unintelligible, and in any case to have no more connexion with the sentence above than in those letters on the back of which one sees that the writer had begun another with the words 'My dear—' and nothing else, and failed to take a fresh sheet, either from absentmindedness or in order to save paper. I'm fond of Eliane, and so I bore her no ill-will; I merely ignored the strange and inappropriate allusion to a Czech Quartet, and, as I am a methodical man, I placed on my chimney-piece the invitation to think of Madame de Montmorency on Friday at half past nine. Although renowned for my obedient, punctual and meek nature, as Buffon says of the camel"—at this, laughter seemed to radiate from M. de Charlus, who knew that on the contrary he was regarded as the most impossibly difficult man—"I was a few minutes late (the time that it took me to change my clothes), though without feeling undue remorse, thinking that half past nine meant ten. At the stroke of ten, in a comfortable dressing-gown, with warm slippers on my feet, I sat down in my chimney corner to think of Eliane as she had requested me, and with an intensity which did not begin to falter until half past ten. Do tell her, if you will, that I complied strictly with her audacious request. I am sure she will be gratified."

Mme de Mortemart swooned with laughter, in which M. de Charlus joined. "And tomorrow," she went on, oblivious of the fact that she had already long exceeded the time that could reasonably be allotted to her, "are you going to our La Rochefoucauld cousins?"

"Oh, that, now, is quite impossible. They have invited me, and you too, I see, to a thing it is utterly impossible to imagine, which is called, if I am to believe the invitation card, a '*the dansant*.' I used to be considered pretty nimble when I was young, but I doubt whether I could ever decently have drunk a cup of tea while dancing. And I have never cared to eat or drink in an unseemly fashion. You will remind me that my dancing days are done. But even sitting down comfortably drinking my tea—of the quality of which I am in any case suspicious since it is called 'dancing'—I should be afraid lest other guests younger than myself, and less nimble possibly than I was at their age, might spill their cups over my tails and thus interfere with my pleasure in draining my own."

Nor was M. de Charlus content with leaving Mme Verdurin out of the conversation while he spoke of all manner of subjects (which he seemed to take a delight in developing and varying, for the cruel pleasure which he had always enjoyed of keeping indefinitely "queuing up" on their feet the friends who were waiting with excruciating patience for their turn to come); he even criticised all that part of the entertainment for which Mme Verdurin was responsible. "But, talking of cups, what in the world are those strange little bowls which remind me of the vessels in which, when I was a young man, people used to get sorbets from Poiré Blanche? Somebody said to me just now that they were for 'iced coffee.' But I have seen neither coffee nor ice. What curious little objects, with so ill-defined a purpose!"

While saying this M. de Charlus had placed his white-gloved hands vertically over his lips and cautiously swivelled his eyes with a meaning look as though he were afraid of being heard and even seen by his host and hostess. But this was only a pretence, for in a few minutes he would be offering the same criticisms to the Mistress herself, and a little later would be insolently enjoining her: "No more iced-coffee cups, remember! Give them to one of your friends whose house you wish to disfigure. But warn her not to have them in the drawing-room, or people might think that they had come into the wrong room, the things are so exactly like chamberpots."

"But, cousin," said the guest, lowering her voice too and casting a questioning glance at M. de Charlus, for fear of offending not Mme Verdurin but the Baron himself, "perhaps she doesn't yet quite know these things ..."

"She shall be taught."

"Oh!" laughed the guest, "she couldn't have a better teacher! She is lucky! If you're in charge one can be sure there won't be a false note."

"There wasn't one, if it comes to that, in the music."

"Oh! it was sublime. One of those pleasures which can never be forgotten. Talking of that marvellous violinist," she went on, imagining in her innocence that M. de Charlus was interested in the violin for its own sake, "do you happen to know one whom I heard the other day playing a Fauré sonata wonderfully well. He's called Frank ..."

"Oh, he's ghastly," replied M. de Charlus, oblivious of the rudeness of a contradiction which implied that his cousin was lacking in taste. "As far as violinists are concerned, I advise you to confine yourself to mine."

This led to a fresh exchange of glances, at once furtive and watchful, between M. de Charlus and his cousin, for, blushing and seeking by her zeal to repair her blunder, Mme de Mortemart was about to suggest to M. de Charlus that she might organise an evening to hear Morel play. Now, for her the object of the evening was not to bring an unknown talent into prominence, though this was the object which she would pretend to have in mind and which was indeed that of M. de Charlus. She regarded it simply as an opportunity for giving a particularly elegant reception and was calculating already whom she would invite and whom she would leave out. This process of selection, the chief preoccupation of people who give parties (the people whom "society" journalists have the nerve or the stupidity to call "the elite"), alters at once the expression—and the handwriting—of a hostess more profoundly than any hypnotic suggestion. Before she had even thought of what Morel was to play (which she rightly regarded as a secondary consideration, for even if everybody observed a polite silence during the music, from fear of M. de Charlus, nobody would even think of listening to it), Mme de Mortemart, having decided that Mme de Valcourt was not to be one of the "chosen," had automatically assumed that secretive, conspiratorial air which so degrades even those society women who can most easily afford to ignore what "people will say."

"Might it be possible for me to give a party for people to hear your friend play?" murmured Mme de Mortemart, who, while addressing herself exclusively to M. de Charlus, could not refrain, as though mesmerised, from casting a glance at Mme de Valcourt (the excluded one) in order to make certain that she was sufficiently far away not to hear her. "No, she can't possibly hear what I'm saying," Mme de Mortemart concluded inwardly, reassured by her own glance which in fact had had a totally different effect upon Mme de Valcourt from that intended: "Why," Mme de Valcourt had said to herself when she caught this glance, "Marie-Therese is arranging something with Palamède to which I'm not to be invited."

"You mean my protégé," M. de Charlus corrected, as merciless to his cousin's choice of words as he was to her musical endowments. Then, without paying the slightest attention to her mute entreaties, for which she herself apologised with a smile, "Why, yes ..." he said in a voice loud enough to be heard throughout the room, "although there is always a risk in that sort of exportation of a fascinating personality into surroundings that must inevitably diminish his transcendent gifts and would in any case have to be adapted to them."

Mme de Mortemart told herself that the mezza voce, the pianissimo of her question had been a waste of effort, after the megaphone through which the answer had issued. She was mistaken: Mme de Valcourt heard nothing, for the simple reason that she did not understand a single word. Her anxiety subsided, and would quickly have evaporated entirely, had not Mme de Mortemart, afraid that she might have been given away and might have to invite Mme de Valcourt, with whom she was on too intimate terms to be able to leave her out if the other knew about her party beforehand, raised her eyelids once again in Edith's direction, as though not to lose sight of a threatening peril, lowering them again briskly so as not to commit herself too far. She intended, on the morning after the party, to write her one of those letters, the complement of the revealing glance, letters which are meant to be subtle but are tantamount to a full and signed confession. For instance: "Dear Edith, I've been missing you. I did not really expect you last night" ("How could she have expected me," Edith would say to herself, "since she never invited me?") "as I know that you're not very fond of gatherings of that sort which rather bore you. We should have been greatly honoured, all the same, by your company" (Mme de Mortemart never used the word "honoured," except in letters in which she attempted to cloak a lie in the semblance of truth). "You know that you are always welcome in our house. In any case you were quite right, as it was a complete failure, like everything that is got up at a moment's notice." But already the second furtive glance darted at her had enabled Edith to grasp everything that was concealed by the complicated language of M. de Charlus. This glance was indeed so potent that, after it had struck Mme de Valcourt, the obvious secrecy and intention to conceal that it betrayed rebounded upon a young Peruvian whom Mme de Mortemart intended, on the contrary, to invite. But being of a suspicious nature, seeing all too plainly the mystery that was being made without realising that it was not intended to mystify him, he at once conceived a violent hatred for Mme de Mortemart and vowed to play all sorts of disagreeable hoaxes on her, such as ordering fifty iced coffees to be sent to her house on a day when she was not entertaining, or, on a day when she was, inserting a notice in the papers to the effect that the party was postponed, and publishing mendacious accounts of subsequent parties in which would appear the notorious names of all the people whom for various reasons a hostess does not invite or even allow to be introduced to her.

Mme de Mortemart need not have bothered herself about Mme de Valcourt. M. de Charlus was about to take it upon himself to denature the projected entertainment far more than that lady's presence would have done. "But, my dear cousin," she said in response to the remark about "adapting the surroundings," the meaning of which her momentary state of hyperaesthesia had enabled her to discern, "we shall spare you the least trouble. I undertake to ask Gilbert to arrange everything."

"Not on any account, and moreover he will not be invited. Nothing will be done except through me. The first thing is to exclude all those who have ears and hear not."

M. de Charlus's cousin, who had been reckoning on Morel as an attraction in order to give a party at which she could say that, unlike so many of her kinswomen, she had "had Palamède," abruptly switched her thoughts from this prestige of M. de Charlus's to all the people with whom he would get her into trouble if he took it upon himself to do the inviting and excluding. The thought that the Prince de Guermantes (on whose account, partly, she was anxious to exclude Mme de Valcourt, whom he declined to meet) was not to be invited alarmed her. Her eyes assumed an uneasy expression.

"Is this rather bright light bothering you?" inquired M. de Charlus with an apparent seriousness the underlying irony of which she failed to perceive.

"No, not at all. I was thinking of the difficulty, not because of me of course, but because of my family, if Gilbert were to hear that I had given a party without inviting him, when he never has half a dozen people in without ..."

"But precisely, we must begin by eliminating the half-dozen people, who would only jabber. I'm afraid that the din of talk has prevented you from realising that it was a question not of doing the honours as a hostess but of conducting the rites appropriate to every true celebration."

Then, having decided, not that the next person had been kept waiting too long, but that it did not do to exaggerate the favours shown to one who had in mind not so much Morel as her own visiting-list, M. de Charlus, like a doctor cutting short a consultation when he considers that it has lasted long enough, served notice on his cousin to withdraw, not by bidding her good-night but by turning to the person immediately behind her.

"Good evening, Madame de Montesquiou. It was marvellous, wasn't it? I didn't see Helene. Tell her that any policy of general abstention, even the most noble, that is to say hers, must allow exceptions, if they are dazzling enough, as has been the case tonight. To show that one is rare is good, but to subordinate one's rarity, which is only negative, to what is precious is better still. In your sister's case—and I value more than anyone her systematic *absence* from places where what is in store for her is not worthy of her—here tonight, on the contrary, her presence at so memorable an occasion as this would have been a precedence, and would have given your sister, already so prestigious, an additional prestige."

Then he turned to a third lady.

I was greatly astonished to see there, as friendly and flattering towards M. de Charlus as he had been curt with him in the past, insisting on being introduced to Charlie and telling him that he hoped he would come and see him, M. d'Argencourt, that terrible scourge of the species of men to which M. de Charlus belonged. At the moment he was living in the thick of them. It was certainly not because he had become one of them himself. But for some time past he had more or less deserted his wife for a young society woman whom he adored. Being intelligent herself, she made him share her taste for intelligent people, and was most anxious to have M. de Charlus to her house. But above all M. d'Argencourt, extremely jealous and somewhat impotent, feeling that he was failing to satisfy his conquest and anxious to keep her amused, could do so without risk to himself only by surrounding her with innocuous men, whom he thus cast in the role of guardians of his seraglio. The latter found that he had become quite pleasant and declared that he was a great deal more intelligent than they had supposed, a discovery that delighted him and his mistress.

The remainder of M. de Charlus's guests drifted away fairly rapidly. Several of them said: "I don't want to go to the sacristy" (the little room in which the Baron, with Charlie by his side, was receiving congratulations), "but I must let Palamède see me so that he knows that I stayed to the end." Nobody paid the slightest attention to Mme Verdurin. Some pretended not to recognise her and deliberately said good-night to Mme Cottard, appealing to me for confirmation with a "That is Mme Verdurin, isn't it?" Mme d'Arpajon asked me in our hostess's hearing: "Tell me, has there ever been a Monsieur Verdurin?" The duchesses who still lingered, finding none of the oddities they had expected in this place which they had hoped to find more different from what they were used to, made the best of a bad job by going into fits of laughter in front of Elstir's paintings; for everything else, which they found more in keeping than they had expected with what they were already familiar with, they gave the credit to M. de Charlus, saying: "How clever Palamède is at arranging things! If he were to stage a pantomime in a shed or a bathroom, it would still be perfectly ravishing." The most noble ladies were those who showed most fervour in congratulating M. de Charlus upon the success of a party of the secret motive for which some of them were not unaware, without however being embarrassed by the knowledge, this class of society—remembering perhaps certain epochs in history when their own families had already arrived in full consciousness at a similar effrontery—carrying their contempt for scruples almost as far as their respect for etiquette. Several of them engaged Charlie on the spot for different evenings on which he was to come and play them Vinteuil's septet, but it never occurred to any of them to invite Mme Verdurin.

The latter was already blind with fury when M. de Charlus who, his head in the clouds, was incapable of noticing her state, decided that it was only seemly to invite the Mistress to share his joy. And it was perhaps to indulge his taste for literature rather than from an overflow of pride that this specialist in artistic entertainments said to Mme Verdurin: "Well, are you satisfied? I think you have reason to be. You see that when I take it upon myself to organise a festivity there are no half-measures. I don't know whether your heraldic notions enable you to gauge the precise importance of the event, the weight that I have lifted, the volume of air that I have displaced for you. You have had the Queen of Naples, the brother of the King of Bavaria, the three premier peers. If Vinteuil is Muhammad, we may say that we have brought to him some of the least movable of mountains. Bear in mind that to attend your party the Queen of Naples came up from Neuilly, which is a great deal more difficult for her than it was to leave the Two Sicilies," he added with malicious intent, notwithstanding his admiration for the Queen. "It's a historic event. Just think that it's perhaps the first time she has gone anywhere since the fall of Gaeta. It may well be that the history books will record as climactic dates the day of the fall of Gaeta and that of the Verdurin reception. The fan that she laid down the better to applaud Vinteuil deserves to become more famous than the fan that Mme de Metternich broke because the audience hissed Wagner."

"In fact she left it here," said Mme Verdurin, momentarily appeased by the memory of the Queen's kindness to her, and she showed M. de Charlus the fan which was lying on a chair.

"Oh, how moving!" exclaimed M. de Charlus, approaching the relic with veneration. "It is all the more touching for being so hideous; the little violet is incredible!" And spasms of emotion and irony ran through him by turns. "Oh dear, I don't know whether you feel these things as I do. Swann would positively have died of convulsions if he had seen it. I know that whatever price it fetches, I shall buy that fan at the sale of the Queen's belongings, for she's bound to be sold up, she hasn't a penny," he went on, for he never ceased to intersperse the cruellest gossip with the most sincere veneration, although they sprang from two opposing natures, which, however, were combined in him. (They might even be brought to bear alternately on the same fact. For the M. de Charlus who from his comfortable position as a rich man jeered at the poverty of the Queen was the same who was often to be heard extolling that poverty and who, when anyone spoke of Princess Murat, Queen of the Two Sicilies, would reply: "I don't know who you mean. There is only one Queen of Naples, a sublime person who does not keep a carriage. But from her omnibus she annihilates every carriage in the street and one could kneel down in the dust on seeing her drive past.") "I shall bequeath it to a museum. In the meantime, it must be sent back to her, so that she need not hire a cab to come and fetch it. The wisest thing, in



view of the historical interest of such an object, would be to steal the fan. But that would be awkward for her—since it is probable that she does not possess another!” he added with a shout of laughter. “Anyhow, you see that for my sake she came. And that is not the only miracle I have performed. I don’t believe that anyone at the present day has the power to shift the people whom I persuaded to come. However, everyone must be given his due. Charlie and the rest of the musicians played divinely. And, my dear hostess,” he added condescendingly, “you yourself have played your part on this occasion. Your name will not go unrecorded. History has preserved that of the page who armed Joan of Arc when she set out for battle. In sum, you served as a connecting link, you made possible the fusion between Vinteuil’s music and its inspired interpreter, you had the intelligence to appreciate the cardinal importance of the whole concatenation of circumstances which would enable the interpreter to benefit from the whole weight of a considerable—if I were not referring to myself I might almost say providential—personage, whom you had the good sense to ask to ensure the success of the gathering, to bring before Morel’s violin the ears directly attached to the tongues that have the widest hearing; no, no, it’s by no means negligible. Nothing is negligible in so complete a realisation. Everything has its part. The Duras was marvellous. In fact, everything; that is why,” he concluded, for he could not resist admonishing people, “I set my face against your inviting those human divisors who, among the superior people whom I brought you, would have played the part of the decimal points in a sum, reducing the others to a merely fractional value. I have a very exact appreciation of that sort of thing. You realise that we must avoid social blunders when we are giving a party which is to be worthy of Vinteuil, of his inspired interpreter, of yourself, and, I venture to say, of me. If you had invited the Mole woman, everything would have been spoiled. It would have been the tiny counteracting, neutralising drop which deprives a potion of its virtue. The electric lights would have fused, the pastries would not have arrived in time, the orangeade would have given everybody a stomach-ache. She was the one person not to have here. At the mere sound of her name, as in a fairy-tale, not a note would have issued from the brass; the flute and the oboe would have suddenly lost their voices. Morel himself, even if he had succeeded in playing a few bars, would not have been in tune, and instead of Vinteuil’s septet you would have had a parody of it by Beckmesser, ending amid catcalls. I who believe strongly in the influence of personalities could feel quite plainly in the blossoming of a certain largo, which opened out like a flower, and in the supreme fulfilment of the finale, which was not merely allegro but incomparably lively,<sup>14</sup> that the absence of the Mole was inspiring the musicians and causing the very instruments to swell with joy. In any case, when one is at home to queens one does not invite one’s concierge.”

In calling her “the Mole” (as for that matter he said quite affectionately “the Duras”) M. de Charlus was doing the lady justice. For all these women were the actresses of society, and it is true that, even regarding her from this point of view, the Comtesse Mole did not live up to the extraordinary reputation for intelligence that she had acquired, which reminded one of those mediocre actors or novelists who at certain periods are hailed as men of genius, either because of the mediocrity of their competitors, among whom there is no supreme artist capable of showing what is meant by true talent, or because of the mediocrity of the public, which, if any extraordinary individuality existed, would be incapable of understanding it. In Mme Molé’s case it is preferable, if not entirely accurate, to settle for the former explanation. The social world being the realm of nullity, there exist between the merits of different society women only the most insignificant degrees, which can however be crazily exaggerated by the rancours or the imagination of a M. de Charlus. And certainly, if he spoke as he had just been speaking in this language which was an affected mixture of artistic and social elements, it was because his old-womanly rages and his culture as a man of society provided the genuine eloquence that he possessed with only the most trivial themes. Since the world of differentials does not exist on the surface of the earth among all the countries which our perception renders uniform, all the more reason why it should not exist in the social “world.” But does it exist anywhere? Vinteuil’s septet had seemed to tell me that it did. But where?

Since M. de Charlus also enjoyed repeating what one person had said of another, seeking to stir up trouble, to divide and rule, he added: “You have, by not inviting her, deprived Mme Mole of the opportunity of saying: ‘I can’t think why this Mme Verdurin should have invited me. I can’t imagine who these people are, I don’t know them.’ She was already saying a year ago that you were wearying her with your advances. She’s a fool; never invite her again. After all, she’s nothing so very wonderful. She can perfectly well come to your house without making a fuss about it, seeing that I come here. In short,” he concluded, “it seems to me that you have every reason to thank me, for, as far as it went, the whole thing was perfect. The Duchesse de Guermantes didn’t come, but one never knows, perhaps it was better that she didn’t. We shan’t hold it against her, we’ll think of her all the same another time, not that one can help remembering her, her very eyes say to us ‘Forget me not!’ for they remind one of those flowers” (here I thought to myself how strong the Guermantes spirit—the decision to go to one house and not to another—must be, to have outweighed in the Duchess’s mind her fear of Palamède). “Faced with so complete a success, one is tempted like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to see everywhere the hand of Providence. The Duchesse de Duras was enchanted. She even asked me to tell you so,” added M. de Charlus, dwelling upon the words as though Mme Verdurin must regard this as a sufficient honour. Sufficient and indeed scarcely credible, for he thought it necessary, in order to be believed, to add “Yes, indeed,” completely carried away by the madness of those whom Jupiter has decided to destroy. “She has engaged Morel to come to her house, where the same programme will be repeated, and I’m even thinking of asking her for an invitation for M. Verdurin.” This civility to the husband alone was, although no such idea even occurred to M. de Charlus, the most cruel insult to the wife, who, believing herself to possess with regard to the violinist, by virtue of a sort of ukase which prevailed in the little clan, the right to forbid him to perform elsewhere without her express authorisation, was absolutely determined to forbid his appearance at Mme de Duras’s party.

The Baron’s volubility was in itself an irritation to Mme Verdurin, who did not like people to form separate conversational groups within the little clan. How often, even at La Raspelière, hearing M. de Charlus talking incessantly to Charlie instead of being content with taking his part in the concerted ensemble of the clan, had she not pointed to him and exclaimed: “What a windbag he is! What a windbag! He really is the most colossal windbag?”<sup>15</sup> But this time it was far worse. Intoxicated by the sound of his own voice, M. de Charlus failed to realise that by acknowledging Mme Verdurin’s role and confining it within narrow limits, he was unleashing that feeling of hatred which was in her only a special, social form of jealousy. Mme Verdurin was genuinely fond of her regular visitors, the faithful of the little clan, but wished them to be entirely devoted to their Mistress. Cutting her losses, like those jealous lovers who will tolerate unfaithfulness, but only under their own roof and even in front of their eyes, that is to say when it scarcely counts as unfaithfulness, she would allow the men to have mistresses or male lovers, on condition that the affair had no social

consequence outside her own house, that the tie was formed and perpetuated in the shelter of her Wednesdays. In the old days, every furtive giggle that came from Odette when she was with Swann had gnawed at Mme Verdurin, and so of late had every aside exchanged by Morel and the Baron; she found one consolation alone for her vexations, which was to destroy the happiness of others. She would have been unable to endure the Baron's for long. And here was that rash individual precipitating the catastrophe by appearing to restrict the Mistress's position in her little clan. Already she could see Morel going into society, without her, under the Baron's aegis. There was only one remedy, to make Morel choose between the Baron and herself, and, taking advantage of the ascendancy that she had acquired over Morel by giving him proof of her extraordinary perspicacity thanks to reports which she commissioned and lies which she herself concocted, all of which served to corroborate what he himself was inclined to believe, and what would in time be made plain to him thanks to the booby-traps which she was preparing and into which her unsuspecting victims would fall—taking advantage of this ascendancy, to make him choose herself in preference to the Baron. As for the society ladies who had been present and had not even asked to be introduced to her, as soon as she grasped their hesitations or indifference, she had said: "Ah! I see what they are, the sort of old frumps that don't fit in with us. It's the last time they'll set foot in this house." For she would have died rather than admit that anyone had been less civil to her than she had hoped.

"Ah! my dear General," M. de Charlus suddenly exclaimed, abandoning Mme Verdurin on catching sight of General Deltour, Secretary to the Presidency of the Republic, who might be of great value in securing Charlie his medal, and who, after asking Cottard for a piece of advice, was slipping away. "Good evening, my dear, delightful friend. Trying to get away without saying good-bye to me, eh?" said the Baron with a genial, self-satisfied smile, for he knew quite well that people were always glad to stay a little longer to talk to him. And as, in his present state of exhilaration, he would answer his own questions in a shrill tone: "Well, did you enjoy it? Wasn't it really beautiful? The andante, what? It's the most touching thing that was ever written. I defy anyone to listen to the end without tears in his eyes. Charming of you to have come. By the way, I had the most excellent telegram this morning from Froberville, who tells me that as far as the Chancellery of the Legion goes the difficulties have been smoothed over, as they say." M. de Charlus's voice continued to rise, as piercing, as different from his normal voice, as that of a barrister grandiloquently addressing the court: a phenomenon of vocal amplification through over-excitement and nervous euphoria analogous to that which, at her own dinner-parties, raised to so high a pitch the voice and gaze alike of Mme de Guermantes.

"I intended to send you a note tomorrow by messenger to tell you of my enthusiasm, until I could find an opportunity to speak to you, but you were so popular! Froberville's support is not to be despised, but for my own part, I have the Minister's promise," said the General.

"Ah! excellent. Anyhow you've seen for yourself that it's no more than what such talent deserves. Hoyos was delighted. I didn't manage to see the Ambassadress. Was she pleased? Who would not have been, except those that have ears and hear not, which doesn't matter so long as they have tongues and can speak."

Taking advantage of the Baron's having moved away to speak to the General, Mme Verdurin beckoned to Brichot. The latter, who did not know what she was about to say, sought to amuse her, and without suspecting the anguish that he was causing me, said to the Mistress: "The Baron is delighted that Mlle Vinteuil and her friend didn't come. They shock him terribly. He declares that their morals are appalling. You can't imagine how prudish and severe the Baron is on moral questions." Contrary to Brichot's expectation, Mme Verdurin was not amused: "He's unspeakable," was her answer. "Suggest to him that he should come and smoke a cigarette with you, so that my husband can get hold of his Dulcinea without his noticing and warn him of the abyss at his feet."

Brichot seemed to hesitate.

"I don't mind telling you," Mme Verdurin went on, to remove his final scruples, "that I don't feel at all safe with a man like that in the house. I know he's been involved in some nasty business and the police have their eye on him." And, as she had a certain talent for improvisation when inspired by malice, Mme Verdurin did not stop at this: "Apparently he's been in prison. Yes, yes, I've been told by people who knew all about it. In any case I know from a person who lives in his street that you can't imagine the ruffians he brings to his house." And as Brichot, who often went to the Baron's, began to protest, Mme Verdurin, growing more and more animated, exclaimed: "But I assure you! You can take my word for it," an expression with which she habitually sought to give weight to an assertion flung out more or less at random. "He'll be found murdered in his bed one of these days, as those people always are. It may not quite come to that, perhaps, because he's in the clutches of that Jupien whom he had the impudence to send to me and who's an ex-convict—yes, really, I know it for a positive fact. He has a hold on him because of some letters which are perfectly dreadful, it seems. I got it from somebody who has seen them and who told me: 'You'd be sick on the spot if you saw them.' That's how Jupien gets him to toe the line and makes him cough up all the money he wants. I'd sooner die than live in the state of terror Charlus lives in. In any case, if Morel's family decides to bring an action against him, I've no desire to be dragged in as an accessory. If he goes on, it will be at his own risk, but I shall have done my duty. What is one to do? It's no joke, I can tell you."

And, already agreeably excited at the thought of her husband's impending conversation with the violinist, Mme Verdurin said to me: "Ask Brichot whether I'm not a courageous friend, and whether I'm not capable of sacrificing myself to save my comrades." (She was alluding to the circumstances in which she had forced him in the nick of time to break first of all with his laundress and then with Mme de Cambremer, as a result of which Brichot had gone almost completely blind and, people said, had taken to morphine.)

"An incomparable friend, farsighted and valiant," replied the Professor with ingenuous fervour.

"Mme Verdurin prevented me from doing something extremely foolish," Brichot told me when she had left us. "She doesn't hesitate to strike at the roots. She's an interventionist, as our friend Cottard would say. I admit, however, that the thought that the poor Baron is still unconscious of the blow that is about to fall upon him distresses me deeply. He's completely mad about that boy. If Mme Verdurin succeeds, there's a man who is going to be very miserable. However, I'm not at all sure she won't fail. I fear that she may only succeed in sowing discord between them, which in the end, without separating them, will only make them break with her."

It was often thus with Mme Verdurin and her faithful. But it was evident that the need she felt to preserve their friendship was more and more dominated by the requirement that this friendship should never be thwarted by the friendship they might feel for one another. She had no objection to homosexuality so long as it did not tamper with the orthodoxy of the little clan, but, like the Church, she preferred any sacrifice rather than a concession on orthodoxy. I

was beginning to be afraid that her irritation with myself might be due to her having heard that I had prevented Albertine from going to her that day, and that she might presently set to work, if she had not already begun, upon the same task of separating her from me which her husband, in the case of Charlus, was now going to attempt with the violinist.

"Come along, get hold of Charlus, find some excuse, there's no time to lose," said Mme Verdurin, "and whatever you do, don't let him come back here until I send for you. Ah! what an evening," she added, revealing the true cause of her rage. "Performing a masterpiece in front of those nitwits. I don't include the Queen of Naples, she's intelligent, she's a nice woman" (which meant: "She was nice to me"). "But the others. Ah! it's enough to drive you mad. After all, I'm no longer a schoolgirl. When I was young, people used to tell me that one had to put up with a bit of boredom, so I made an effort; but now, ah! no, I just can't help it, I'm old enough to do as I please, life's too short. Allow myself to be bored stiff, listen to idiots, smile, pretend to think them intelligent—no, I simply can't do it. Go along, Brichot, there's no time to lose."

"I'm going, Madame, I'm going," said Brichot, as General Deltour moved away. But first of all the Professor took me aside for a moment: "Moral Duty," he said, "is less clearly imperative than our Ethics teach us. Whatever the theosophical coffee-houses and the Kantian beer-cellars may say, we are deplorably ignorant of the nature of the Good. I myself who, without wishing to boast, have lectured to my pupils, in all innocence, on the philosophy of the aforesaid Immanuel Kant, can see no precise directive for the case of social casuistry with which I am now confronted in that *Critique of Practical Reason* in which the great unfrocked priest of Protestantism platonised in the Teutonic manner for a prehistorically sentimental and aulic Germany, in the obscure interests of a Pomeranian mysticism. It's the *Symposium* once again, but held this time at Königsberg, in the local style, indigestible and sanitised, with sauerkraut and without gigolos. It is obvious on the one hand that I cannot refuse our excellent hostess the small service that she asks of me, in fully orthodox conformity with traditional Morality. One must avoid above all else—for there are few things that engender more inanities than that one—letting oneself be duped by words. But after all, one cannot but admit that if mothers were entitled to vote, the Baron would run the risk of being lamentably blackballed for the Chair of Virtue. It is unfortunately with the temperament of a rake that he pursues the vocation of a pedagogue. Mind you, I don't wish to speak ill of the Baron. He can be as amusing as a superior clown, whereas with the average colleague of mine, Academician though he be, I am bored, as Xenophon would say, at a hundred drachmas to the hour. Moreover this gentle man, who can carve a joint like nobody else, combines with a genius for anathema a wealth of kindness. But I fear that he is expending upon Morel rather more than a wholesome morality would enjoin, and without knowing to what extent the young penitent shows himself docile or recalcitrant to the special exercises which his catechist imposes upon him by way of mortification, one does not need to be a mastermind to be aware that we should be erring, as they say, on the side of mansuetude with regard to this Rosicrucian who seems to have come down to us from Petronius by way of Saint-Simon, if we granted him with our eyes shut, duly signed and sealed, a licence to satanise. And yet, in keeping this man occupied while Mme Verdurin, for the sinner's good and indeed justly tempted by such a cure of souls, proceeds—by speaking unequivocally to the young harum-scarum—to remove from him all that he loves, to deal him perhaps a fatal blow, it seems to me that I am leading him into what might be termed an ambush, and I recoil from it as though from an act of treachery."

This said, he did not hesitate to commit it, but, taking me by the arm, approached M. de Charlus: "Shall we go and smoke a cigarette, Baron. This young man hasn't yet seen all the marvels of the house." I made the excuse that I was obliged to go home. "Wait just another minute," said Brichot. "You know you're supposed to be giving me a lift, and I haven't forgotten your promise." "Are you sure you wouldn't like me to get them to show you the silver plate? Nothing could be simpler," said M. de Charlus. "You promised me, remember, not a word about Morel's decoration. I mean to give him a surprise by announcing it presently when people have begun to leave, although he says that it is of no importance to an artist, but that his uncle would like him to have it" (I blushed, for the Verdurins knew through my grandfather who Morel's uncle was). "Then you wouldn't like me to get them to bring out the best pieces?" said M. de Charlus. "But you know them already, you've seen them a dozen times at La Raspelière."

I did not venture to tell him that what might have interested me was not the mediocre glitter of even the most opulent bourgeois silver, but some specimen, were it only reproduced in a fine engraving, of Mme du Barry's. I was far too preoccupied and—even without this revelation as to Mlle Vinteuil's expected presence—always, in society, far too distracted and agitated to fasten my attention on objects, however beautiful. It could have been arrested only by the appeal of some reality that addressed itself to my imagination, as might have done, this evening, a picture of that Venice of which I had thought so much during the afternoon, or some general element, common to several aspects and truer than they, which, of its own accord, never failed to awake in me an inner spirit, habitually dormant, the ascent of which to the surface of my consciousness filled me with joy. Now, as I emerged from the room known as the concert-room and crossed the other drawing-rooms with Brichot and M. de Charlus, on discovering, transposed among others, certain pieces of furniture which I had seen at La Raspelière and to which I had paid no attention, I perceived, between the arrangement of the town house and that of the country house, a certain family resemblance, a permanent identity, and I understood what Brichot meant when he said to me with a smile: "There, look at this room, it may perhaps give you an idea of what things were like in the Rue Montalivet, twenty-five years ago, *grande mortalis aevi spatium*." From his smile, a tribute to the defunct salon which he saw with his mind's eye, I understood that what Brichot, perhaps without realising it, preferred in the old drawing-room, more than the large windows, more than the gay youth of his hosts and their faithful, was that unreal aspect (which I myself could discern from certain similarities between La Raspelière and the Quai Conti) of which, in a drawing-room as in everything else, the actual, external aspect, verifiable by everyone, is but the prolongation, the aspect which has detached itself from the outer world to take refuge in our soul, to which it gives as it were a surplus-value, in which it is absorbed into its habitual substance, transforming itself—houses that have been pulled down, people long dead, bowls of fruit at suppers which we recall—into that translucent alabaster of our memories of which we are incapable of conveying the colour which we alone can see, so that we can truthfully say to other people, when speaking of these things of the past, that they can have no conception of them, that they are unlike anything they have seen, and that we ourselves cannot inwardly contemplate without a certain emotion, reflecting that it is on the existence of our thoughts that their survival for a little longer depends, the gleam of lamps that have been extinguished and the fragrance of arbours that will never bloom again. And doubtless for this reason, the drawing-room in the Rue Montalivet diminished, for Brichot, the Verdurins' present home. But on the other hand it added to this

home, in the Professor's eyes, a beauty which it could not have in those of a newcomer. Those pieces of the original furniture that had been transplanted here, and sometimes arranged in the same groups, and which I myself remembered from La Raspelière, introduced into the new drawing-room fragments of the old which recalled it at moments to the point of hallucination and then seemed themselves scarcely real from having evoked in the midst of the surrounding reality fragments of a vanished world which one seemed to see elsewhere. A sofa that had risen up from dreamland between a pair of new and thoroughly substantial armchairs, little chairs upholstered in pink silk, the brocaded covering of a card-table raised to the dignity of a person since, like a person, it had a past, a memory, retaining in the chill and gloom of the Quai Conti the tan of its sun-warming through the windows of the Rue Montalivet (where it could tell the time of day as accurately as Mme Verdurin herself) and through the glass doors at La Raspelière, where they had taken it and where it used to gaze out all day long over the flower-beds of the garden at the valley below, until it was time for Cottard and the violinist to sit down to their game; a bouquet of violets and pansies in pastel, the gift of a painter friend, now dead, the sole surviving fragment of a life that had vanished without leaving any trace, epitomising a great talent and a long friendship, recalling his gentle, searching eyes, his shapely, plump and melancholy hand as he painted it; the attractively disordered clutter of the presents from the faithful which had followed the lady of the house from place to place and had come in time to assume the fixity of a trait of character, of a line of destiny; the profusion of cut flowers, of chocolate-boxes, which here as in the country systematised their efflorescence in accordance with an identical mode of blossoming; the curious interpolation of those singular and superfluous objects which still appear to have just been taken from the box in which they were offered and remain for ever what they were at first, New Year presents; all those things, in short, which one could not have isolated from the rest but which for Brichot, an old habitué of Verdurin festivities, had that patina, that velvety bloom of things to which, giving them a sort of depth, a spiritual *Doppelgänger* has come to be attached—all this sent echoing round him so many scattered chords, as it were, awakening in his heart cherished resemblances, confused reminiscences which, here in this actual drawing-room that was speckled with them, cut out, defined, delimited—as on a fine day a shaft of sunlight cuts a section in the atmosphere—the furniture and carpets, pursued, from a cushion to a flower-stand, from a footstool to a lingering scent, from a lighting arrangement to a colour scheme, sculpted, evoked, spiritualised, called to life, a form which was as it were the idealisation, immanent in each of their successive homes, of the Verdurin drawing-room.

"We must try," Brichot whispered in my ear, "to get the Baron on to his favourite topic. He's prodigious." Now on the one hand I was glad of an opportunity to try to obtain from M. de Charlus information as to the movements of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, information for which I had decided to leave Albertine that evening. On the other hand, I did not wish to leave the latter too long alone, not that she could (being uncertain of the moment of my return, not to mention that, at so late an hour, she could not have received a visitor or left the house herself without being noticed) make any nefarious use of my absence, but simply so that she might not find it too prolonged. And so I told Brichot and M. de Charlus that I must shortly leave them.

"Come with us all the same," said the Baron, whose social excitement was beginning to flag, but feeling that need to prolong, to spin out a conversation, which I had already observed in the Duchesse de Guermantes as well as in himself, and which, while peculiarly characteristic of their family, extends in a more general fashion to all those who, offering their minds no other fulfilment than talk, that is to say an imperfect fulfilment, remain unsatisfied even after hours in company and attach themselves more and more hungrily to their exhausted interlocutor, from whom they mistakenly expect a satiety which social pleasures are incapable of giving. "Come, won't you," he repeated. "This is the pleasant moment at a party, the moment when all the guests have gone, the hour of Doña Sol; let us hope that it will end less tragically.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately you're in a hurry, in a hurry, no doubt, to go and do things which you would much better leave undone. People are always in a hurry, and leave at the moment when they ought to be arriving. We're like Couture's philosophers,<sup>17</sup> this is the time to go over the events of the evening, to carry out what is called in military parlance a review of operations. We might ask Mme Verdurin to send us in a little supper to which we should take care not to invite her, and we might request Charlie—still *Hernani*—to play for us alone the sublime adagio. Isn't it simply beautiful, that adagio? But where is the young violinist, I should like to congratulate him; this is the moment for tender words and embraces. Do admit, Brichot, that they played like gods, Morel especially. Did you notice the moment when that lock of hair came loose? Ah, my dear fellow, then you saw nothing at all. There was an F sharp which was enough to make Enesco, Capet and Thibaud die of jealousy. Calm though I am, I don't mind telling you that at the sound of it I had such a lump in the throat I could scarcely control my tears. The whole room sat breathless. Brichot, my dear fellow," cried the Baron, gripping the other's arm and shaking it violently, "it was sublime. Only young Charlie preserved a stony immobility, you couldn't even see him breathe, he looked like one of those objects of the inanimate world of which Theodore Rousseau speaks, which make us think but do not think themselves. And then all of a sudden," cried M. de Charlus with a grandiloquent gesture as though miming a *coup de théâtre*, "then, the Forelock! And meanwhile, the graceful little quadrille of the allegro vivace. You know, that lock was a revelatory sign even for the most obtuse. The Princess of Taormina, deaf until then, for there are none so deaf as those that have ears and hear not, the Princess of Taormina, confronted by the message of the miraculous forelock, suddenly realised that it was music they were playing and not poker. Oh, that was indeed a solemn moment."

"Forgive me for interrupting you, Monsieur," I said to M. de Charlus, to bring him to the subject in which I was interested, "you told me that the composer's daughter was to be present. I should have been most interested to meet her. Are you certain she was expected?"

"Oh, that I couldn't say."

M. de Charlus thus complied, perhaps involuntarily, with that universal rule by which one withholds information from a jealous lover, whether with the absurd intention of proving oneself a "good pal"—as a point of honour, and even if one hates her—to the woman who has excited his jealousy, or out of malice towards her because one guesses that jealousy would only intensify his love, or from that need to be disagreeable to other people which consists in telling the truth to the rest of the world but concealing it from the jealous, ignorance increasing their torment, or so at least they suppose—and in order to cause people pain one is guided by what they themselves believe, wrongly perhaps, to be most painful.

"You know," he went on, "in this house they're a trifle prone to exaggerate. They're charming people, but still they do like to entice celebrities of one sort or another. But you're not looking well, and you'll catch cold in this damp room," he said, pushing a chair towards me. "Since you haven't been well, you must take care of yourself. Let me go and fetch

your coat. No, don't go for it yourself, you'll lose your way and catch cold. How careless people are; you might be an infant in arms, you want an old nanny like me to look after you." "Don't worry, Baron, I'll go," said Brichot, and went off at once: not being precisely aware perhaps of the very warm affection that M. de Charlus had for me and of the charming lapses into simplicity and devotedness that alternated with his frenzied outbursts of arrogance and persecution mania, he was afraid lest the Baron, whom Mme Verdurin had entrusted like a prisoner to his vigilance, might simply be seeking, under the pretext of asking for my overcoat, to return to Morel, and thus upset the Mistress's plan.

Meanwhile Ski had sat down, uninvited, at the piano, and assuming—with a playful knitting of his brows, a distant gaze and a slight twist of his lips—what he imagined to be an artistic air, was insisting that Morel should play something by Bizet. "What, you don't like it, that boyish side to Bizet's music? Why, my dearr fellow," he said, with that rolling of the r which was one of his peculiarities, "it's rravishing." Morel, who did not like Bizet, said so in exaggerated terms and (as he had the reputation in the little clan of being, though it seems incredible, a wit) Ski, pretending to take the violinist's diatribes as paradoxes, burst out laughing. His laugh was not, like M. Verdurin's, the choking fit of a smoker. Ski first of all assumed a subtle air, then let out, as though in spite of himself, a single note of laughter, like the first clang from a belfry, followed by a silence in which the subtle look seemed to be judiciously examining the comic quality of what was said; then a second peal of laughter shook the air, followed presently by a merry angelus.

I expressed to M. de Charlus my regret that M. Brichot should have put himself out. "Not at all, he's delighted. He's very fond of you, everyone's fond of you. Somebody was saying only the other day: 'But we never see him now, he's cut himself off.' Besides, he's such a good fellow, Brichot," M. de Charlus went on, doubtless never suspecting, in view of the frank and affectionate manner in which the Professor of Moral Philosophy conversed with him, that he had no hesitation in pulling him to pieces behind his back. "He is a man of great merit, immensely learned, and his learning hasn't shrivelled him up, hasn't turned him into a pedantic bookworm like so many others, who smell of ink. He has retained a breadth of outlook, a tolerance, rare in his kind. Sometimes, when one sees how well he understands life, with what a natural grace he renders everyone his due, one wonders where a humble little Sorbonne professor, a former school-master, can have picked it all up. I'm astonished at it myself."

I was even more astonished to see the conversation of this Brichot, which the least discriminating of Mme de Guermantes's guests would have found so dull and heavy, impressing the most critical of them all, M. de Charlus. Among the influences that had contributed towards this result were those, in other respects different, by virtue of which Swann had on the one hand so long enjoyed the company of the little clan, when he was in love with Odette, and on the other hand, after he married, seen an attraction in Mme Bontemps who, pretending to adore the Swanns, came constantly to call on the wife, revelled in the husband's stories, and spoke of them with scorn. Like a writer who gives the palm for intelligence, not to the most intelligent man, but to the worldling who utters a bold and tolerant comment on the passion of a man for a woman, a comment which makes the writer's blue-stocking mistress agree with him in deciding that of all the people who come to her house the least stupid is after all this old beau who is experienced in matters of love, so M. de Charlus found Brichot more intelligent than the rest of his friends, Brichot who was not merely kind to Morel, but would cull from the Greek philosophers, the Latin poets, the oriental storytellers, appropriate texts which decorated the Baron's propensity with a strange and charming florilegium. M. de Charlus had reached the age at which a Victor Hugo chooses to surround himself mainly with Vacqueries and Meurices.<sup>18</sup> He preferred to all others those men who tolerated his outlook upon life. "I see a great deal of him," he went on in a measured squeak, allowing no movement save of his lips to disturb the grave, powdered mask of his face, over which his ecclesiastical eyelids were deliberately lowered. "I attend his lectures: that Latin Quarter atmosphere refreshes me: there's a studious, thoughtful breed of young bourgeois, more intelligent, better read than were, in a different milieu, my own contemporaries. It's another world, which you know probably better than I do: they're young *bourgeois*," he said, detaching the last word to which he prefixed a string of *bs*, and emphasising it from a sort of elocutionary habit, itself corresponding to a taste for fine shades of meaning that was peculiar to him, but perhaps also from inability to resist the pleasure of giving me a flick of his insolence. This did not in any way diminish the great and affectionate pity that M. de Charlus inspired in me (after Mme Verdurin had revealed her plan in my hearing); it merely amused me, and, even in circumstances when I did not feel so kindly disposed towards him, would not have offended me. I derived from my grandmother such a want of self-importance as could easily make me seem lacking in dignity. Doubtless I was little aware of this, and by dint of having seen and heard, from my schooldays onwards, my most highly regarded companions refuse to tolerate an affront, refuse to overlook disloyal behaviour, I had come in time to exhibit in my speech and actions a second nature which was tolerably proud. It was indeed considered to be extremely proud, because, being not in the least timorous, I was easily provoked into duels, the moral prestige of which, however, I diminished by making little of them, which easily persuaded other people that they were absurd. But the true nature which we repress continues nevertheless to abide within us. Thus it is that at times, if we read the latest masterpiece of a man of genius, we are delighted to find in it all those of our own reflexions which we have despised, joys and sorrows which we have repressed, a whole world of feelings we have scorned, and whose value the book in which we discover them afresh suddenly teaches us. I had come to learn from my experience of life that it was a mistake to smile a friendly smile when somebody made fun of me, instead of getting angry. But this absence of self-importance and resentment, if I had so far ceased to express it as to have become almost entirely unaware that it existed in me, was nevertheless the primordial vital element in which I was steeped. Anger and spite came to me only in a wholly different manner, in fits of rage. What was more, the notion of justice, to the extent of a complete absence of moral sense, was unknown to me. I was in my heart of hearts entirely on the side of the weaker party, and of anyone who was in trouble. I had no opinion as to the proportion in which good and evil might be blended in the relations between Morel and M. de Charlus, but the thought of the sufferings that were in store for M. de Charlus was intolerable to me. I would have liked to warn him, but did not know how to do so.

"The spectacle of that industrious little world is very pleasing to an old stick like myself. I do not know them," he went on, raising his hand with a depreciatory air, in order not to appear to be boasting, to testify to his own purity and not to allow any suspicion to hover over that of the students—"but they are most polite, they often go so far as to keep a place for me, since I'm a very old gentleman. Yes indeed, my dear boy, do not protest, I'm past forty," said the Baron, who was past sixty. "It's a trifle stuffy in the hall in which Brichot lectures, but it's always an interesting experience."



Although the Baron preferred to mingle with the scholarly young and indeed to be jostled by them, sometimes, to save him a long wait in the lecture-room, Brichot took him in by his own door. For all that Brichot was at home in the Sorbonne, at the moment when the beadle, loaded with his chains of office, stepped out before him, and the master so admired by his young students followed, he could not overcome a certain shyness, and much as he desired to profit by that moment in which he felt himself so important to display his affability towards Charlus, he was nevertheless slightly embarrassed; so that the beadle should allow him in, he said to him in an artificial tone and with a busy air: "Follow me, Baron, they'll find a place for you," then, without paying any further attention to him, to make his own entry he advanced briskly and alone down the aisle. On either side, a double hedge of young lecturers bowed to him; Brichot, anxious not to appear to be posing in front of these young men, in whose eyes he knew that he was a great pundit, bestowed on them countless winks, countless little nods of complicity, to which his desire to remain martial and thoroughly French gave the effect of a sort of cordial encouragement, the *sursum corda* of an old soldier saying: "We'll fight them, God damn it!" Then the applause of the students broke out. Brichot sometimes extracted from this attendance by M. de Charlus at his lectures an opportunity for giving pleasure, almost for returning hospitality. He would say to some parent, or to one of his bourgeois friends: "If it would interest your wife or daughter, I may tell you that the Baron de Charlus, Prince d'Agrigente, a scion of the House of Condé, will be attending my lecture. For a young person, to have seen one of the last descendants of our aristocracy who preserves the type will be a memory to cherish. If they care to come, they will recognise him from the fact that he'll be seated next to my rostrum. Besides, he'll be the only one, a stout man, with white hair and black moustaches, wearing the military medal." "Oh, thank you," the father would say; and although his wife had other things to do, in order not to offend Brichot he would force her to attend the lecture, while the daughter, troubled by the heat and the crowd, nevertheless gazed intently at the descendant of Condé, surprised that he was not wearing a ruff and that he looked just like a man of the present day. He, meanwhile, had no eyes for her, but more than one student, who did not know who he was, would be astonished at his friendly glances and become self-conscious and stiff, and the Baron would depart full of dreams and melancholy.

"Forgive me if I return to the subject," I said quickly to M. de Charlus, for I could hear Brichot returning, "but could you let me know by wire if you should hear that Mlle Vinteuil or her friend is expected in Paris, letting me know exactly how long they will be staying and without telling anybody that I asked you."

I had almost ceased to believe that she had been expected, but I wanted thus to be forewarned for the future.

"Yes, I will do that for you. First of all because I owe you a great debt of gratitude. By not accepting what I proposed to you long ago, you rendered me, to your own loss, an immense service: you left me my liberty. It is true that I have abdicated it in another fashion," he added in a melancholy tone which betrayed a desire to confide in me. "But it's something that I continue to regard as a major factor, a whole combination of circumstances which you failed to turn to your own account, possibly because fate warned you at that precise minute not to obstruct my path. For always man proposes and God disposes. If, that day when we came away together from Mme de Villeparisis's, you had accepted, perhaps—who knows?—many things that have since happened would never have occurred."

In some embarrassment, I turned the conversation by seizing on the name of Mme de Villeparisis, and saying how sad I had been to hear of her death.<sup>19</sup> "Ah, yes," M. de Charlus muttered drily and insolently, taking note of my condolences without appearing to believe in their sincerity for a moment. Seeing that in any case the subject of Mme de Villeparisis was not painful to him, I sought to find out from him, since he was so well qualified in every respect, for what reasons she had been held at arm's length by the aristocratic world. Not only did he not give me the solution to this little social problem, he did not even appear to be aware of it. I then realised that the position of Mme de Villeparisis, which was in later years to appear great to posterity, and even in the Marquise's lifetime to the ignorant commonalty, had appeared no less great—at the opposite extremity of society, that which touched Mme de Villeparisis—to the Guermantes family. She was their aunt; they saw first and foremost birth, connexions by marriage, the opportunity of impressing this or that sister-in-law with the importance of their family. They saw it all less from the social than from the family point of view. Now this was more lustrous in the case of Mme de Villeparisis than I had supposed. I had been struck when I heard that the title Villeparisis was falsely assumed. But there are other examples of great ladies who have married beneath them and preserved a leading position in society. M. de Charlus began by informing me that Mme de Villeparisis was a niece of the famous Duchesse de—, the most celebrated member of the higher aristocracy during the July Monarchy, who had nevertheless refused to associate with the Citizen King and his family. I had so longed to hear stories about this duchess! And Mme de Villeparisis, the kind Mme de Villeparisis, with those cheeks that for me had represented the cheeks of a middle-class lady, Mme de Villeparisis who sent me so many presents and whom I could so easily have seen every day, Mme de Villeparisis was her niece, brought up by her, in her very home, in the Hotel de—.

"She asked the Duc de Doudeauville," M. de Charlus told me, "speaking of the three sisters, 'Which of the sisters do you prefer?' And when Doudeauville said: 'Mme de Villeparisis,' the Duchesse de—replied 'Pig!' For the Duchess was extremely witty," said M. de Charlus, giving the word the importance and the special emphasis that was customary among the Guermantes. That he should find the expression so "witty" did not moreover surprise me, for I had on many other occasions remarked the centrifugal, objective tendency which leads men to abjure, when they are relishing the wit of others, the severity with which they would judge their own, and to observe and treasure what they would have scorned to create.

"But what on earth is he doing? That's my overcoat he's bringing," he said, on seeing that Brichot had made so long a search to no better effect. "I would have done better to go myself. However, you can put it over your shoulders. Are you aware that it's highly compromising, my dear boy, it's like drinking out of the same glass: I shall be able to read your thoughts. No, not like that, come, let me do it," and arranging his overcoat round me, he smoothed it over my shoulders, fastened it round my throat, and brushed my chin with his hand apologetically. "At his age, he doesn't know how to put on a coat, one has to cosset him. I've missed my vocation, Brichot, I was born to be a nanny."

I wanted to leave, but M. de Charlus having expressed his intention of going in search of Morel, Brichot detained us both. Moreover, the certainty that when I went home I should find Albertine there, a certainty as absolute as that which I had felt in the afternoon that she would return home from the Trocadéro, made me at this moment as little impatient to see her as I had been then, while sitting at the piano after Françoise had telephoned me. And it was this sense of security that enabled me, whenever, in the course of this conversation, I attempted to rise, to obey the injunctions of Brichot who was afraid that my departure might prevent Charlus from remaining until Mme Verdurin came to fetch us.

"Come," he said to the Baron, "stay with us a little longer, you shall give him the accolade presently." Brichot focused upon me as he spoke his almost sightless eyes, to which the many operations that he had undergone had restored some degree of life, but which no longer had the mobility necessary to the sidelong expression of malice.

"The accolade, how absurd!" cried the Baron, in a shrill and rapturous tone. "I tell you, dear boy, he always imagines he's at a prize-giving, he day-dreams about his young pupils. I often wonder whether he doesn't sleep with them."

"You wish to meet Mlle Vinteuil," said Brichot, who had overheard the last words of our conversation. "I promise to let you know if she comes. I shall hear of it from Mme Verdurin." For he doubtless foresaw that the Baron was in grave danger of imminent expulsion from the little clan.

"I see, so you think that I have less claim than yourself upon Mme Verdurin," said M. de Charlus, "to be informed of the arrival of these terribly disreputable persons. They're quite notorious, you know. Mme Verdurin is wrong to allow them to come here, they're only fit for low company. They're friends with a terrible gang, and they must meet in the most appalling places."

At each of these words, my anguish was augmented by a new anguish, and its aspect constantly changed. And, suddenly remembering certain gestures of impatience which Albertine instantly repressed, I was terrified that she had already conceived a plan to leave me. This suspicion made it all the more necessary for me to prolong our life together until such time as I should have recovered my serenity. And in order to rid Albertine of the idea, if she entertained it, of forestalling my plan to break with her, in order to make her chains seem lighter until I could put my intention into practice without too much pain, the shrewd thing to do (perhaps I was infected by the presence of M. de Charlus, by the unconscious memory of the play-acting he liked to indulge in), the shrewd thing to do seemed to be to give Albertine to understand that I myself intended to leave her. As soon as I returned home, I would simulate farewells, a final rupture.

"Of course I don't think I have more influence with Mme Verdurin than you do," Brichot emphatically declared, afraid that he might have aroused the Baron's suspicions. And seeing that I was anxious to leave, he sought to detain me with the bait of the promised entertainment: "There is one thing which the Baron seems to me not to have taken into account when he speaks of the reputation of these two ladies, namely that a person's reputation may be at the same time appalling and undeserved. Thus for instance, in the more notorious of these groups which I may venture to call unofficial, it is certain that miscarriages of justice are many and that history has recorded convictions for sodomy against illustrious men who were wholly innocent of the charge. The recent discovery of Michelangelo's passionate love for a woman is a fresh fact which should entitle the friend of Leo X to the benefit of a posthumous retrial. The Michelangelo case seems to me to be eminently calculated to excite the snobs and mobilise the underworld when another case, in which anarchy was all the rage and became the fashionable sin of our worthy dilettantes, but which must not even be mentioned now for fear of stirring up quarrels, shall have run its course."

From the moment Brichot had begun to speak of masculine reputations, M. de Charlus had betrayed all over his features that special sort of impatience which one sees on the face of a medical or military expert when society people who know nothing about the subject begin to talk nonsense about points of therapeutics or strategy.

"You don't know the first thing about these matters," he finally said to Brichot. "Give me a single example of an undeserved reputation. Mention a few names ... Yes, I know it all," he retorted vehemently to a timid interruption by Brichot, "the people who tried it once long ago out of curiosity, or out of affection for a dead friend, and the person who's afraid he has gone too far, and if you speak to him of the beauty of a man, replies that it's all Greek to him, that he can no more distinguish between a beautiful man and an ugly one than between the engines of two motor-cars, mechanics not being in his line. That's all stuff and nonsense. Mind you, I don't mean to say that a bad (or what is conventionally so called) and yet undeserved reputation is absolutely impossible. But it's so exceptional, so rare, that for practical purposes it doesn't exist. At the same time, I who am by nature inquisitive and enjoy ferreting things out, have known cases which were not mythical. Yes, in the course of my life I have verified (I mean scientifically verified—I'm not talking hot air) two unjustified reputations. They generally arise from a similarity of names, or from certain outward signs, a profusion of rings, for instance, which persons who are not qualified to judge imagine to be characteristic of what you were mentioning, just as they think that a peasant never utters a sentence without adding *jarnigüé*, 'I d'ny God,' or an Englishman 'Goddam.' It's the conventionalism of the boulevard theatre."

M. de Charlus surprised me greatly when he cited among the inverts the "friend of the actress" whom I had seen at Balbec and who was the leader of the little society of the four friends.

"But this actress, then?"

"She serves him as a cover, and besides he has relations with her, perhaps more than with men, with whom he has hardly any."

"Does he have relations with the other three?"

"No, not at all! They're not at all friends in that way! Two are entirely for women. One of them is, but isn't sure about his friend, and in any case they hide their doings from each other. What will surprise you is that the unjustified reputations are those most firmly established in the eyes of the public. You yourself, Brichot, who would stake your life on the virtue of some man or other who comes to this house and whom the initiated would recognise a mile away, you feel obliged to believe like everyone else what is said about someone in the public eye who is the incarnation of those propensities to the common herd, when as a matter of fact he doesn't care a sou for that sort of thing. I say a sou, because if we were to offer twenty-five louis, we should see the number of plaster saints dwindle down to nothing. As things are, the average rate of sanctity, if you see any sanctity in that sort of thing, is somewhere between three and four out of ten."

If Brichot had transferred to the male sex the question of bad reputations, in my case, conversely, it was to the female sex that, thinking of Albertine, I applied the Baron's words. I was appalled at his statistic, even when I bore in mind that he probably inflated his figures in accordance with what he himself would have wished, and based them moreover on the reports of persons who were scandalmongers and possibly liars, and had in any case been led astray by their own desire, which, added to that of M. de Charlus himself, doubtless falsified his calculations.

"Three out of ten!" exclaimed Brichot. "Why, even if the proportions were reversed I should still have to multiply the guilty a hundredfold. If it is as you say, Baron, and you are not mistaken, then we must confess that you are one of those rare visionaries who discern a truth which nobody round them has ever suspected. Just as Barrès made discoveries as to parliamentary corruption the truth of which was afterwards established, like the existence of

Leverrier's planet. Mme Verdurin would cite for preference men whom I would rather not name who detected in the Intelligence Bureau, in the General Staff, activities inspired, I'm sure, by patriotic zeal but which I had never imagined. On freemasonry, German espionage, drug addiction, Leon Daudet concocts day by day a fantastic fairy-tale which turns out to be the barest truth. Three out of ten!" Brichot repeated in stupefaction. And it is true to say that M. de Charlus taxed the great majority of his contemporaries with inversion, excepting, however, the men with whom he himself had had relations, their case, provided there had been some element of romance in those relations, appearing to him more complex. So it is that we see Lotharios who refuse to believe in women's honour making an exception in the case of one who has been their mistress and of whom they protest sincerely and with an air of mystery: "No, no, you're mistaken, she isn't a whore." This unlooked-for tribute is dictated partly by their own vanity for which it is more flattering that such favours should have been reserved for them alone, partly by their gullibility which all too easily swallows everything that their mistress has led them to believe, partly from that sense of the complexity of life whereby, as soon as one gets close to other people, other lives, ready-made labels and classifications appear unduly crude. "Three out of ten! But have a care, Baron: less fortunate than the historians whose conclusions the future will justify, if you were to present to posterity the statistics that you offer us, it might find them erroneous. Posterity judges only on documentary evidence, and will insist on being shown your files. But as no document would be forthcoming to authenticate this sort of collective phenomenon which the initiated are only too concerned to leave in obscurity, the tender-hearted would be moved to indignation, and you would be regarded as nothing more than a slanderer or a lunatic. After having won top marks and unquestioned supremacy in the social examinations on this earth, you would taste the sorrows of being blackballed beyond the grave. The game is not worth the candle, to quote—may God forgive me—our friend Bossuet."

"I'm not interested in history," replied M. de Charlus, "this life is sufficient for me, it's quite interesting enough, as poor Swann used to say."

"What, you knew Swann, Baron? I didn't know that. Tell me, was he that way inclined?" Brichot inquired with an air of misgiving.

"What a mind the man has! So you think I only know men of that sort? No, I don't think so," said Charlus, looking at the ground and trying to weigh the pros and cons. And deciding that, since he was dealing with Swann whose contrary tendencies had always been so notorious, a half-admission could only be harmless to him who was its object and flattering to him who let it out in an insinuation: "I don't deny that long ago in our schooldays, once in a while," said the Baron, as though in spite of himself and thinking aloud; then pulling himself up: "But that was centuries ago. How do you expect me to remember? You're embarrassing me," he concluded with a laugh.

"In any case he was never what you'd call a beauty!" said Brichot who, himself hideous, thought himself good-looking and was always ready to pronounce other men ugly.

"Hold your tongue," said the Baron, "you don't know what you're talking about. In those days he had a peaches-and-cream complexion, and," he added, finding a fresh note for each syllable, "he was as pretty as a cherub. Besides he was always charming. The women were madly in love with him."

"But did you ever know his wife?"

"Why, it was through me that he came to know her. I had thought her charming in her boyish get-up one evening when she played Miss Sacripant; I was with some club-mates, and each of us took a woman home with him, and although all I wanted was to go to sleep, slanderous tongues alleged—it's terrible how malicious people are—that I went to bed with Odette. In any case she took advantage of the slanders to come and bother me, and I thought I might get rid of her by introducing her to Swann. From that moment on she never let me go. She couldn't spell the simplest word, it was I who wrote all her letters for her. And it was I who, later on, was responsible for taking her out. That, my boy, is what comes of having a good reputation, you see. Though I only half deserved it. She used to force me to get up the most dreadful orgies for her, with five or six men."

And the lovers whom Odette had had in succession (she had been with this, that and the other man, not one of whose names had ever been guessed by poor Swann, blinded by jealousy and by love, by turns weighing up the chances and believing in oaths, more affirmative than a contradiction which the guilty woman lets slip, a contradiction far more elusive and yet far more significant, of which the jealous lover might take advantage more logically than of the information which he falsely pretends to have received, in the hope of alarming his mistress), these lovers M. de Charlus began to enumerate with as absolute a certainty as if he had been reciting the list of the Kings of France. And indeed the jealous lover, like the contemporaries of a historical event, is too close, he knows nothing, and it is for strangers that the chronicle of adultery assumes the precision of history, and prolongs itself in lists which are a matter of indifference to them and become painful only to another jealous lover, such as I was, who cannot help comparing his own case with that which he hears spoken of and wonders whether the woman he suspects cannot boast an equally illustrious list. But he can never find out; it is a sort of universal conspiracy, a "blind man's buff" in which everyone cruelly participates, and which consists, while his mistress flits from one to another, in holding over his eyes a bandage which he is perpetually trying to tear off without success, for everyone keeps him blindfold, poor wretch, the kind out of kindness, the cruel out of cruelty, the coarse-minded out of their love of coarse jokes, the well-bred out of politeness and good-breeding, and all alike respecting one of those conventions which are called principles.

"But did Swann ever know that you had enjoyed her favours?"

"What an idea! Confess such a thing to Charles! It's enough to make one's hair stand on end. Why, my dear fellow, he would have killed me on the spot, he was as jealous as a tiger. Any more than I ever confessed to Odette, not that she would have minded in the least, that ... But you mustn't make my tongue run away with me. And the joke of it is that it was she who fired a revolver at him, and nearly hit me. Oh! I used to have a fine time with that couple; and naturally it was I who was obliged to act as his second against d'Osmond, who never forgave me. D'Osmond had carried off Odette, and Swann, to console himself, had taken as his mistress, or make-believe mistress, Odette's sister. But really you mustn't start making me tell you Swann's story, or we should be here all night—nobody knows more about it than I do. It was I who used to take Odette out when she didn't want to see Charles. It was all the more awkward for me as I have a very close kinsman who bears the name Cr  cy, without of course having any sort of right to it, but still he was none too well pleased. For she went by the name of Odette de Cr  cy, as she perfectly well could, being merely separated from a Cr  cy whose wife she still was—an extremely authentic one, he, a most estimable gentleman out of whom she had drained his last farthing. But why should I have to tell you about this Cr  cy? I've seen you with him on the twister, you used to have him to dinner at Balbec. He must have needed it, poor fellow, for he lived on a tiny allowance that



Swann made him, and I'm very much afraid that, since my friend's death, that income must have stopped altogether. What I do not understand," M. de Charlus said to me, "is that, since you used often to go to Charles's, you didn't ask me this evening to present you to the Queen of Naples. In fact I can see that you're not interested in *people* as curiosities, and that always surprises me in someone who knew Swann, in whom that sort of interest was so highly developed that it's impossible to say whether it was I who initiated him in these matters or he me. It surprises me as much as if I met a person who had known Whistler and remained ignorant of what is meant by taste. However, it was chiefly important for Morel to meet her. He was passionately keen to as well, for he's nothing if not intelligent. It's a nuisance that she's gone. However, I shall effect the conjunction one of these days. It's inevitable that he'll get to know her. The only possible obstacle would be if she were to die in the night. Well, it's to be hoped that that won't happen."

All of a sudden Brichot, who was still suffering from the shock of the proportion "three out of ten" which M. de Charlus had revealed to him, and had continued to pursue the idea all this time, burst out with an abruptness which was reminiscent of an examining magistrate seeking to make a prisoner confess but which was in reality the result of the Professor's desire to appear perspicacious and of the misgivings that he felt about launching so grave an accusation: "Isn't Ski like that?" he inquired of M. de Charlus with a sombre air. He had chosen Ski in order to show off his alleged intuitive powers, telling himself that since there were only three innocents in every ten, he ran little risk of being mistaken if he named Ski, who seemed to him a trifle odd, suffered from insomnia, used scent, in short was not entirely normal.

"But not in the *least*!" exclaimed the Baron with bitter, dogmatic, exasperated irony. "What you say is so wrong, so absurd, so wide of the mark! Ski is like that precisely to the people who know nothing about it. If he was, he wouldn't look so like it, be it said without any intention to criticise, for he has a certain charm, indeed I find there's something very engaging about him."

"But give us a few names, then," Brichot persisted. M. de Charlus drew himself up with a haughty air.

"Ah! my dear Sir, I, as you know, live in the world of the abstract; all this interests me only from a transcendental point of view," he replied with the querulous touchiness peculiar to men of his kind, and the affectation of grandiloquence that characterised his conversation. "To me, you understand, it's only general principles that are of any interest. I speak to you of this as I might of the law of gravity." But these moments of irritable retraction in which the Baron sought to conceal his true life lasted but a short time compared with the hours of continual progression in which he allowed it to betray itself, flaunted it with an irritating complacency, the need to confide being stronger in him than the fear of disclosure. "What I meant to say," he went on, "is that for one bad reputation that is unjustified there are hundreds of good ones which are no less so. Obviously, the number of those who don't deserve their reputations varies according to whether you rely on what is said by their own kind or by others. And it is true that if the malevolence of the latter is limited by the extreme difficulty they would find in believing that a vice as horrible to them as robbery or murder can be practised by people whom they know to be sensitive and kind, the malevolence of the former is stimulated to excess by the desire to regard as—how shall I put it?—accessible, men who attract them, on the strength of information given them by people who have been led astray by a similar desire, in fact by the very aloofness with which they are generally regarded. I've heard a man who was somewhat ill thought of on account of these tastes say that he supposed that a certain society figure shared them. And his sole reason for believing it was that this society figure had been polite to him! All the more reason for *optimism*," said the Baron artlessly, "in the computation of the number. But the true reason for the enormous disparity between the number calculated by the layman and the number calculated by the initiated arises from the mystery with which the latter surround their actions, in order to conceal them from the rest, who, lacking any means of knowing, would be literally stupefied if they were to learn merely a quarter of the truth."

"So in our day things are as they were among the Greeks," said Brichot.

"What do you mean, among the Greeks? Do you suppose that it hasn't been going on ever since? Take the reign of Louis XIV. You have Monsieur, young Vermandois, Molière, Prince Louis of Baden, Brunswick, Charolais, Boufflers, the Great Condé, the Duc de Brissac."

"Stop a moment. I knew about Monsieur, I knew about Brissac from Saint-Simon, Vendôme of course, and many others as well. But that old pest Saint-Simon often refers to the Great Condé and Prince Louis of Baden and never mentions it."

"It seems rather deplorable, I must say, that I should have to teach a Professor of the Sorbonne his history. But, my dear fellow, you're as ignorant as a carp."

"You are harsh, Baron, but just. But wait a moment, now this will please you: I've just remembered a song of the period composed in macaronic verse about a storm in which the Great Condé was caught as he was going down the Rhone in the company of his friend the Marquis de La Moussaye. Condé says:

*Carus Amicus Mussaeus,  
Ah! Deus bonus, quod tempus! Landerirette,  
Imbre sumus perituri.*

And La Moussaye reassures him with:

*Securae sunt nostrae vitae,  
Sumus enim Sodomitae,  
Igne tantum perituri,  
Landeriri."*<sup>20</sup>

"I take back what I said," said Charlus in a shrill and mannered tone, "you are a well of learning. You'll write it down for me, won't you? I must preserve it in my family archives, since my great-great-grandmother was a sister of M. le Prince."

"Yes, but, Baron, with regard to Prince Louis of Baden I can think of nothing. However, I suppose that generally speaking the art of war ..."

"What nonsense! In that period alone you have Vendôme, Villars, Prince Eugene, the Prince de Conti, and if I were to tell you of all our heroes of Tonkin, of Morocco—and I'm thinking of the ones who are truly sublime, and pious, and 'new generation'—you'd be amazed. Ah! I could teach them a thing or two, the people who conduct inquiries into the new generation, which has rejected the futile complications of its elders, M. Bourget tells us! I have a young friend out

there, who's highly spoken of, who has done great things ... However, I'm not going to tell tales out of school; let's get back to the seventeenth century. You know that Saint-Simon says of the Maréchal d'Huxelles—one among many: 'Voluptuous in Grecian debaucheries which he made no attempt to conceal, he would hook young officers whom he trained to his purpose, not to mention stalwart young valets, and this openly, in the army and at Strasbourg.' You've probably read Madame's *Letters*: all his men called him 'Putana.' She's fairly explicit about it."

"And she was in a good position to judge, with her husband."

"Such an interesting character, Madame," said M. de Charlus. "One might take her as model for the definitive portrait, the lyrical synthesis of the 'Wife of an Auntie.' First of all, the masculine type; generally the wife of an Auntie is a man—that's what makes it so easy for him to give her children. Then Madame doesn't talk about Monsieur's vices, but she does talk incessantly about the same vice in other men, writing as someone in the know and from that habit which makes us enjoy finding in other people's families the same defects as afflict us in our own, in order to prove to ourselves that there's nothing exceptional or degrading in them. I was saying that things have been much the same in every age. Nevertheless, our own is especially remarkable in that respect. And notwithstanding the instances I've borrowed from the seventeenth century, if my great ancestor François de La Rochefoucauld were alive in our day, he might say of it with even more justification than of his own—come, Brichot, help me out: 'Vices are common to every age; but if certain persons whom everyone knows had appeared in the first centuries of our era, would anyone speak today of the prostitutions of Heliogabalus?' 'Whom everyone knows' appeals to me immensely. I see that my sagacious kinsman understood the tricks of his most illustrious contemporaries as I understand those of my own. But men of that sort are not only far more numerous today. There's also something special about them."

I could see that M. de Charlus was about to tell us in what fashion these habits had evolved. And not for a moment while he was speaking, or while Brichot was speaking, was the semi-conscious image of my home, where Albertine awaited me—an image associated with the intimate and caressing motif of Vinteuil—absent from my mind. I kept coming back to Albertine, just as I would be obliged in fact to go back to her presently as to a sort of ball and chain to which I was somehow attached, which prevented me from leaving Paris and which at this moment, while from the Verdurin salon I pictured my home, made me think of it not as an empty space, exalting to the personality if a little melancholy, but as being filled—alike in this to the hotel in Balbec on a certain evening—with that immutable presence, which lingered there for me and which I was sure to find there whenever I chose. The insistence with which M. de Charlus kept reverting to this topic—into which his mind, constantly exercised in the same direction, had indeed acquired a certain penetration—was in a rather complex way distinctly trying. He was as boring as a specialist who can see nothing outside his own subject, as irritating as an initiate who prides himself on the secrets which he possesses and is burning to divulge, as repellent as those people who, whenever their own weaknesses are in question, blossom and expatiate without noticing that they are giving offence, as obsessed as a maniac and as uncontrollably imprudent as a criminal. These characteristics, which at certain moments became as striking as those that stamp a madman or a felon, brought me, as it happened, a certain consolation. For, subjecting them to the necessary transposition in order to be able to draw from them deductions with regard to Albertine, and remembering her attitude towards Saint-Loup and towards me, I said to myself, painful as one of these memories and melancholy as the other was to me, I said to myself that they seemed to preclude the kind of deformation, so distinctive and pronounced, the kind of specialisation, inevitably exclusive it seemed, that emanated so powerfully from the conversation as from the person of M. de Charlus. But the latter, unfortunately, made haste to destroy these grounds for hope in the same way as he had furnished me with them, that is to say unwittingly.

"Yes," he said, "I'm no longer a stripling, and I've already seen many things change round about me. I no longer recognise either society, in which all the barriers have been broken down, in which a mob devoid of elegance or decency dance the tango even in my own family, or fashion, or politics, or the arts, or religion, or anything. But I must admit that the thing that has changed most of all is what the Germans call homosexuality. Good heavens, in my day, leaving aside the men who loathed women, and those who, caring only for women, did the other thing merely with an eye to profit, homosexuals were sound family men and never kept mistresses except as a cover. Had I had a daughter to give away, it's among them that I should have looked for my son-in-law if I'd wanted to be certain that she wouldn't be unhappy. Alas! things have changed. Nowadays they're also recruited from among the most rabid womanisers. I thought I had a certain flair, and that when I said to myself: 'Certainly not,' I couldn't have been mistaken. Well, now I give up. One of my friends who is well-known for it had a coachman whom my sister-in-law Oriane found for him, a lad from Combray who had dabbled in all sorts of trades but particularly that of chasing skirts, and who, I would have sworn, was as hostile as possible to that sort of thing. He broke his mistress's heart by deceiving her with two women whom he adored, not to mention the others, an actress and a barmaid. My cousin the Prince de Guermantes, who has the irritating mind of people who are too ready to believe anything, said to me one day: 'But why in the world doesn't X—sleep with his coachman? It might give pleasure to Théodore' (which is the coachman's name) 'and he may even be rather hurt that his master doesn't make advances to him.' I couldn't help telling Gilbert to hold his tongue; I was irritated by that would-be perspicacity which, when exercised indiscriminately, is a want of perspicacity, and also by the blatant guile of my cousin who would have liked X—to test the ground so that he himself could follow if the going was good."

"Then the Prince de Guermantes has those tastes too?" asked Brichot with a mixture of astonishment and dismay.

"Good lord," replied M. de Charlus, highly delighted, "it's so notorious that I don't think I'm being guilty of an indiscretion if I tell you that he does. Well, the following year I went to Balbec, where I heard from a sailor who used to take me out fishing occasionally that my Theodore, whose sister, I may mention, is the maid of a friend of Mme Verdurin, Baroness Putbus, used to come down to the harbour to pick up this or that sailor, with the most infernal cheek, to go for a boat-trip 'with extras.'"

It was now my turn to inquire whether the coachman's employer, whom I had identified as the gentleman who at Balbec used to play cards all day long with his mistress, was like the Prince de Guermantes.

"Why, of course, everyone knows. He doesn't even make any attempt to conceal it."

"But he had his mistress there with him."

"Well, and what difference does that make? How innocent these children are," he said to me in a fatherly tone, little suspecting the grief that I extracted from his words when I thought of Albertine. "She's charming, his mistress."

"So then his three friends are like himself?"

"Not at all," he cried, stopping his ears as though, in playing some instrument, I had struck a wrong note.

"Now he's gone to the other extreme. So a man no longer has the right to have friends? Ah! youth; it gets everything wrong. We shall have to begin your education over again, my boy. Now," he went on, "I admit that this case—and I know of many others—however open a mind I may try to keep for every form of effrontery, does embarrass me. I may be very old-fashioned, but I fail to understand," he said in the tone of an old Gallican speaking of certain forms of Ultramontanism, of a liberal royalist speaking of the *Action Française* or of a disciple of Claude Monet speaking of the Cubists. "I don't condemn these innovators. I envy them if anything. I try to understand them, but I simply can't. If they're so passionately fond of women, why, and especially in this working-class world where it's frowned upon, where they conceal it from a sense of shame, have they any need of what they call 'a bit of brown'? It's because it represents something else to them. What?"

"What else can a woman represent to Albertine," I thought, and there indeed lay the cause of my anguish.

"Decidedly, Baron," said Brichot, "should the University Council ever think of founding a Chair of Homosexuality, I shall see that your name is the first to be submitted. Or rather, no; an Institute of Special Psychophysiology would suit you better. And I can see you, best of all, provided with a Chair in the College de France, which would enable you to devote yourself to personal researches the results of which you would deliver, like the Professor of Tamil or Sanskrit, to the handful of people who are interested in them. You would have an audience of two, with your beadle, not that I mean to cast the slightest aspersion upon our corps of ushers, whom I believe to be above suspicion."

"You know nothing about it," the Baron retorted in a harsh and cutting tone. "Besides you're wrong in thinking that so few people are interested in the subject. It's just the opposite." And without stopping to consider the incompatibility between the invariable trend of his own conversation and the reproaches he was about to level at others, "It is, on the contrary, most alarming," said the Baron with a shocked and contrite air, "people talk about nothing else. It's a disgrace, but I'm not exaggerating, my dear fellow! It appears that the day before yesterday, at the Duchesse d'Ayen's, they talked about nothing else for two hours on end. Just imagine, if women have taken to discussing that sort of thing, it's a positive scandal! The most revolting thing about it," he went on with extraordinary fire and vigour, "is that they get their information from pests, real scoundrels like young Châtellerault, about whom there's more to be told than anyone, who tell them stories about other men. I gather he's been vilifying me, but I don't care; I'm convinced that the mud and filth flung by an individual who barely escaped being turned out of the Jockey for cheating at cards can only rebound on him. I know that if I were Jane d'Ayen, I should have sufficient respect for my salon not to allow such subjects to be discussed there, nor to allow my own flesh and blood to be dragged through the mire in my house. But society's finished, there are no longer any rules, any proprieties, in conversation any more than in dress. Ah, my dear fellow, it's the end of the world. Everyone has become so malicious. People vie with one another in speaking ill of their fellows. It's appalling!"

As cowardly still as I had been long ago in my boyhood at Combray when I used to run away in order not to see my grandfather tempted with brandy and the vain efforts of my grandmother imploring him not to drink it, I had but one thought, which was to leave the Verdurins' house before the execution of M. de Charlus occurred.

"I simply must go," I said to Brichot.

"I'm coming with you," he replied, "but we can't just slip away, English fashion. Come and say good-bye to Mme Verdurin," the Professor concluded, as he made his way to the drawing-room with the air of a man who, in a parlour game, goes to find out whether he may "come back."

While we had been talking, M. Verdurin, at a signal from his wife, had taken Morel aside. Even if Mme Verdurin had decided on reflexion that it was wiser to postpone Morel's enlightenment, she was powerless now to prevent it. There are certain desires, sometimes confined to the mouth, which, as soon as we have allowed them to grow, insist upon being gratified, whatever the consequences may be; one can no longer resist the temptation to kiss a bare shoulder at which one has been gazing for too long and on which one's lips pounce like a snake upon a bird, or to bury one's sweet tooth in a tempting cake; nor can one deny oneself the satisfaction of seeing the amazement, anxiety, grief or mirth to which one can move another person by some unexpected communication. So, drunk with melodrama, Mme Verdurin had ordered her husband to take Morel out of the room and at all costs to explain matters to him. The violinist had begun by deploring the departure of the Queen of Naples before he had had a chance of being presented to her. M. de Charlus had told him so often that she was the sister of the Empress Elizabeth and of the Duchesse d'Alençon that the sovereign had assumed an extraordinary importance in his eyes. But the Master explained to him that they were not there to talk about the Queen of Naples, and then went straight to the point. "Listen," he had concluded after a long explanation, "if you like, we can go and ask my wife what she thinks. I give you my word of honour, I've said nothing to her about it. We'll see what she thinks of it all. My advice may not be right, but you know how sound her judgment is, and besides, she has an immense affection for you; let's go and submit the case to her." And as Mme Verdurin, impatiently looking forward to the excitement that she would presently be relishing when she talked to the musician, and then, after he had gone, when she made her husband give her a full report of their conversation, went on repeating to herself: "But what in the world can they be doing? I do hope that Gustave, in keeping him all this time, has managed to give him his cue," M. Verdurin reappeared with Morel, who seemed extremely agitated.

"He'd like to ask your advice," M. Verdurin said to his wife, in the tone of a man who does not know whether his request will be granted. Instead of replying to M. Verdurin, it was to Morel that, in the heat of her passion, Mme Verdurin addressed herself.

"I agree entirely with my husband. I consider that you cannot put up with it any longer," she exclaimed vehemently, discarding as a useless fiction her agreement with her husband that she was supposed to know nothing of what he had been saying to the violinist.

"How do you mean? Put up with what?" stammered M. Verdurin, endeavouring to feign astonishment and seeking, with an awkwardness that was explained by his dismay, to defend his falsehood.

"I guessed what you'd been saying to him," replied Mme Verdurin, undisturbed by the improbability of this explanation, and caring little what the violinist might think of her veracity when he recalled this scene. "No," Mme Verdurin continued, "I feel that you cannot possibly persist in this degrading promiscuity with a tainted person whom nobody will have in their house," she went on, regardless of the fact that this was untrue and forgetting that she herself entertained him almost daily. "You're the talk of the Conservatoire," she added, feeling that this was the argument that

would carry most weight. "Another month of this life and your artistic future will be shattered, whereas without Charlus you ought to be making at least a hundred thousand francs a year."

"But I'd never heard a thing, I'm astounded, I'm very grateful to you," Morel murmured, the tears starting to his eyes. But, being obliged at once to feign astonishment and to conceal his shame, he had turned redder and was sweating more abundantly than if he had played all Beethoven's sonatas in succession, and tears welled from his eyes which the Bonn Master would certainly not have drawn from him.

"If you've never heard anything, you're unique in that respect. He is a gentleman with a vile reputation and has been mixed up in some very nasty doings. I know that the police have their eye on him and that is perhaps the best thing for him if he's not to end up like all such men, murdered by ruffians," she went on, for as she thought of Charlus the memory of Mme de Duras recurred to her, and in the intoxication of her rage she sought to aggravate still further the wounds that she was inflicting on the unfortunate Charlie, and to avenge those that she herself had received in the course of the evening. "Anyhow, even financially he can be of no use to you; he's completely ruined since he has become the prey of people who are blackmailing him, and who can't even extract from him the price of the tune they call, any more than you can extract the price for yours, because everything's mortgaged up to the hilt, town house, country house, everything."

Morel was all the more inclined to believe this lie since M. de Charlus liked to confide in him his relations with ruffians, a race for which the son of a valet, however villainous himself, professes a feeling of horror as strong as his attachment to Bonapartist principles.

Already, in his cunning mind, a scheme had begun to take shape analogous to what was called in the eighteenth century a reversal of alliances. Resolving never to speak to M. de Charlus again, he would return on the following evening to Jupien's niece, and see that everything was put right with her. Unfortunately for him this plan was doomed to failure, M. de Charlus having made an appointment for that same evening with Jupien, which the ex-tailor dared not fail to keep in spite of recent events. Other events, as we shall see, having occurred as regards Morel, when Jupien in tears told his tale of woe to the Baron, the latter, no less woeful, assured him that he would adopt the forsaken girl, that she could take one of the titles that were at his disposal, probably that of Mlle d'Oloron, that he would see that she received a thorough finishing and married a rich husband. Promises which filled Jupien with joy but left his niece unmoved, for she still loved Morel, who, from stupidity or cynicism, would come into the shop and tease her in Jupien's absence. "What's the matter with you," he would say with a laugh, "with those big circles under your eyes? A broken heart? Dammit, time passes and things change. After all, a man has a right to try on a shoe, and all the more so a woman, and if she doesn't fit him ..." He lost his temper once only, because she cried, which he considered cowardly, unworthy of her. People are not always very tolerant of the tears which they themselves have provoked.

But we have looked too far ahead, for all this did not happen until after the Verdurin reception which we interrupted, and which we must take up again at the point where we left off.

"I'd never have suspected," Morel groaned, in answer to Mme Verdurin.

"Naturally people don't say it to your face, but that doesn't prevent your being the talk of the Conservatoire," Mme Verdurin went on spitefully, seeking to make it plain to Morel that it was not only M. de Charlus who was being criticised, but himself too. "I'm quite prepared to believe that you know nothing about it; all the same, people are talking freely. Ask Ski what they were saying the other day at Chevillard's concert within a few feet of us when you came into my box. In other words, people are pointing a finger at you. Personally I don't pay the slightest attention, but what I do feel is that it makes a man supremely ridiculous and that he becomes a public laughing-stock for the rest of his life."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Charlie in the tone in which one speaks to a dentist who has just caused one the most excruciating pain without one's daring to show it, or to a too bloodthirsty second who has forced one into a duel on account of some casual remark of which he has said: "You can't swallow that."

"I believe that you have plenty of character, that you're a man," replied Mme Verdurin, "and that you will be capable of speaking out boldly, although he tells everybody that you'd never dare, that he's got you under his thumb."

Charlie, seeking a borrowed dignity in which to cloak the tatters of his own, found in his memory something that he had read or, more probably, heard quoted, and at once proclaimed: "I wasn't brought up to stomach such an affront. This very evening I shall break with M. de Charlus. The Queen of Naples has gone, hasn't she? Otherwise, before breaking with him, I'd have asked him ..."

"It isn't necessary to break with him altogether," said Mme Verdurin, anxious to avoid a disruption of the little nucleus. "There's no harm in your seeing him here, among our little group, where you are appreciated, where no one speaks ill of you. But you must insist upon your freedom, and not let him drag you about among all those silly women who are friendly to your face; I wish you could have heard what they were saying behind your back. Anyhow, you need feel no regret. Not only are you getting rid of a stain which would have marked you for the rest of your life, but from the artistic point of view, even without this scandalous presentation by Charlus, I don't mind telling you that debasing yourself like this in these sham society circles would give the impression that you aren't serious, would earn you the reputation of being an amateur, a mere salon performer, which is a terrible thing at your age. I can understand that to all those fine ladies it's highly convenient to be able to return their friends' hospitality by making you come and play for nothing, but it's your future as an artist that would foot the bill. I don't say that there aren't one or two. You mentioned the Queen of Naples—who has left, for she had to go on to another party—now she's a nice woman, and I may tell you that I think she has a poor opinion of Charlus. I'm sure she came here chiefly to please me. Yes, yes, I know she was longing to meet M. Verdurin and myself. That is a house in which you might play. And then of course if I take you—because the artists all know me, you understand, they've always been very sweet to me, and regard me almost as one of themselves, as their Mistress—that's quite a different matter. But whatever you do, you must never go near Mme de Duras! Don't go and make a bloomer like that! I know several artists who have come here and told me all about her. They know they can trust me," she said, in the sweet and simple tone which she knew how to adopt instantaneously, imparting an appropriate air of modesty to her features, an appropriate charm to her eyes, "they come here, just like that, to tell me all their little troubles; the ones who are said to be most taciturn go on chatting to me sometimes for hours on end, and I can't tell you how interesting they are. Poor Chabrier always used to say: 'There's nobody like Mme Verdurin for getting them to talk.' Well, do you know, I've seen them all, every one of them without exception, literally in tears after having gone to play for Mme de Duras. It's not only the way she enjoys making her

servants humiliate them, but they could never get an engagement anywhere else again. The agents would say: 'Oh yes, the fellow who plays at Mme de Duras's.' That settled it. There's nothing like that for ruining a man's future. You see, with society people it doesn't seem serious; you may have all the talent in the world, it's a sad thing to have to say, but one Mme de Duras is enough to give you the reputation of an amateur. And artists, you realise—and after all I know them, I've been moving among them for forty years, launching them, taking an interest in them—well, when they say that somebody's an amateur, that's the end of it. And people were beginning to say it of you. Indeed, the number of times I've been obliged to take up the cudgels on your behalf, to assure them that you wouldn't play in some absurd drawing-room! Do you know what the answer was: 'But he'll be forced to. Charlus won't even consult him, he never asks him for his opinion.' Somebody wanted to pay him a compliment by saying: 'We greatly admire your friend Morel.' Do you know the answer he gave, with that insolent air which you know so well? 'But what do you mean by calling him my friend. We're not of the same class. Say rather that he is my creature, my protégé.' ”

At this moment there stirred beneath the domed forehead of the musical goddess the one thing that certain people cannot keep to themselves, a word which it is not merely abject but imprudent to repeat. But the need to repeat it is stronger than honour or prudence. It was to this need that, after a few convulsive twitches of her spherical and sorrowful brow, the Mistress succumbed: "Someone actually told my husband that he had said 'my servant,' but for that I cannot vouch," she added. It was a similar need that had impelled M. de Charlus, shortly after he had sworn to Morel that nobody should ever know the story of his birth, to say to Mme Verdurin: "His father was a valet." A similar need again, now that the word had been said, would make it circulate from one person to another, each of whom would confide it under the seal of a secrecy which would be promised and not kept by the hearer, as by the informant himself. These words would end, as in the game called hunt-the-thimble, by being traced back to Mme Verdurin, bringing down upon her the wrath of the person concerned, who would finally have heard them. She knew this, but could not repress the word that was burning her tongue. "Servant" could not but offend Morel. She said "servant" nevertheless, and if she added that she could not vouch for the word, this was so as to appear certain of the rest, thanks to this hint of uncertainty, and to show her impartiality. She herself found this impartiality so touching that she began to speak tenderly to Charlie: "Because, don't you see, I don't blame him. He's dragging you down into his abyss, it is true, but it's not his fault since he wallows in it himself, since he wallows in it," she repeated in a louder tone, having been struck by the aptness of the image which had taken shape so quickly that her attention only now caught up with it and sought to make the most of it. "No, what I do reproach him for," she went on in a melting tone—like a woman drunk with her own success—"is a want of delicacy towards you. There are certain things that one doesn't say in public. For instance, this evening he was betting that he would make you blush with joy by telling you (stuff and nonsense, of course, for his recommendation would be enough to prevent your getting it) that you were to have the Cross of the Legion of Honour. Even that I could overlook, although I've never much liked," she went on with a delicate and dignified air, "seeing someone make a fool of his friends, but, don't you know, there are certain little things that do stick in one's gullet. Such as when he told us, with screams of laughter, that if you want the Cross it's to please your uncle and that your uncle was a flunkey."

"He told you that!" cried Charlie, believing, on the strength of this adroitly interpolated remark, in the truth of everything that Mme Verdurin had said. Mme Verdurin was overwhelmed with the joy of an old mistress who, just as her young lover is on the point of deserting her, succeeds in breaking up his marriage. And perhaps the lie had not been a calculated one, perhaps she had not even consciously lied. A sort of sentimental logic, or perhaps, more elementary still, a sort of nervous reflex, that impelled her, in order to brighten up her life and preserve her happiness, to sow discord in the little clan, may have brought impulsively to her lips, without giving her time to check their veracity, these assertions that were so diabolically effective if not strictly accurate.

"If he had only said it to us it wouldn't matter," the Mistress went on, "we know better than to pay any attention to what he says, and besides, what does a man's origin matter, you have your worth, you're what you make yourself, but that he should use it to make Mme de Portefin laugh" (Mme Verdurin named this lady on purpose because she knew that Charlie admired her) "that's what makes us sick. My husband said to me when he heard him: 'I'd sooner he had struck me in the face.' For he's as fond of you as I am, you know, is Gustave" (it was thus that one learned that M. Verdurin's name was Gustave). "He's really very sensitive."

"But I never told you I was fond of him," muttered M. Verdurin, acting the kind-hearted curmudgeon. "It's Charlus who's fond of him."

"Oh, no! Now I realise the difference. I was betrayed by a wretch and you, you're good," Charlie fervently exclaimed.

"No, no," murmured Mme Verdurin, seeking to safeguard her victory (for she felt that her Wednesdays were safe) but not to abuse it, "wretch is too strong; he does harm, a great deal of harm, unwittingly; you know that tale about the Legion of Honour was only a momentary squib. And it would be painful to me to repeat all that he said about your family," she added, although she would have been greatly embarrassed had she been asked to do so.

"Oh, even if it was only momentary, it proves that he's a traitor," cried Morel.

It was at this moment that we returned to the drawing-room. "Ah!" exclaimed M. de Charlus when he saw that Morel was in the room, and, advancing upon the musician with the alacrity of a man who has skilfully organised a whole evening's entertainment for the purpose of an assignation with a woman, and in his excitement never imagines that he has with his own hands set the snare in which he will be caught and publicly thrashed by bravoës stationed in readiness by her husband, "so here you are at last. Well, are you pleased, young hero, and presently young knight of the Legion of Honour? For very soon you will be able to sport your Cross," he said to Morel with a tender and triumphant air, but by the very mention of the decoration endorsing Mme Verdurin's lies, which appeared to Morel to be indisputable truth.

"Leave me alone. I forbid you to come near me," Morel shouted at the Baron. "You know what I mean all right. I'm not the first person you've tried to pervert!"

My sole consolation lay in the thought that I was about to see Morel and the Verdurins pulverised by M. de Charlus. For a thousand times less than that I had been visited with his furious rage; no one was safe from it; a king would not have intimidated him. Instead of which, an extraordinary thing happened. M. de Charlus stood speechless, dumbfounded, measuring the depths of his misery without understanding its cause, unable to think of a word to say, raising his eyes to gaze at each of the company in turn, with a questioning, outraged, suppliant air, which seemed to be asking them not so much what had happened as what answer he ought to make. And yet M. de Charlus possessed all the

resources, not merely of eloquence but of audacity, when, seized by a rage which had been simmering for a long time, he reduced someone to despair with the most cruel words in front of a shocked society group which had never imagined that anyone could go so far. M. de Charlus, on these occasions, almost foamed at the mouth, working himself up into a veritable frenzy which left everyone trembling. But in these instances he had the initiative, he was on the attack, he said whatever came into his head (just as Bloch was able to make fun of the Jews yet blushed if the word Jew was uttered in his hearing). These people whom he hated, he hated because he thought they looked down on him. Had they been civil to him, instead of flying into a furious rage with them he would have taken them to his bosom. Perhaps what now struck him speechless was—when he saw that M. and Mme Verdurin turned their eyes away from him and that no one was coming to his rescue—his present anguish and, still more, his dread of greater anguish to come; or else the fact that, not having worked himself up and concocted an imaginary rage in advance, having no ready-made thunderbolt at hand, he had been seized and struck down suddenly at a moment when he was unarmed (for, sensitive, neurotic, hysterical, he was genuinely impulsive but pseudo-brave—indeed, as I had always thought, and it was something that had rather endeared him to me, pseudo-cruel—and did not have the normal reactions of an outraged man of honour); or else that, in a milieu that was not his own, he felt less at ease and less courageous than he would in the Faubourg. The fact remains that, in this salon which he despised, this great nobleman (in whom superiority over commoners was no more essentially inherent than it had been in this or that ancestor of his trembling before the revolutionary tribunal) could do nothing, in the paralysis of his every limb as well as his tongue, but cast around him terror-stricken, suppliant, bewildered glances, outraged by the violence that was being done to him. In a situation so cruelly unforeseen, this great talker could do no more than stammer: “What does it all mean? What’s wrong?” His question was not even heard. And the eternal pantomime of panic terror has so little changed that this elderly gentleman to whom a disagreeable incident had occurred in a Parisian drawing-room unconsciously re-enacted the basic formal attitudes in which the Greek sculptors of the earliest times symbolised the terror of nymphs pursued by the god Pan.

The disgraced ambassador, the under-secretary placed suddenly on the retired list, the man about town who finds himself cold-shouldered, the lover who has been shown the door, examine, sometimes for months on end, the event that has shattered their hopes; they turn it over and over like a projectile fired at them they know not from whence or by whom, almost as though it were a meteorite. They long to know the constituent elements of this strange missile which has burst upon them, to learn what animosities may be detected therein. Chemists have at least the means of analysis; sick men suffering from a disease the origin of which they do not know can send for the doctor; criminal mysteries are more or less unravelled by the examining magistrate. But for the disconcerting actions of our fellow-men we rarely discover the motives. Thus M. de Charlus—to anticipate the days that followed this evening to which we shall presently return—could see in Charlie’s attitude one thing alone that was self-evident. Charlie, who had often threatened the Baron that he would tell people of the passion that he inspired in him, must have seized the opportunity to do so when he considered that he had now sufficiently “arrived” to be able to stand on his own feet. And he must, out of sheer ingratitude, have told Mme Verdurin everything. But how had she allowed herself to be taken in (for the Baron, having made up his mind to deny the story, had already persuaded himself that the sentiments of which he would be accused were imaginary)? Friends of Mme Verdurin’s, themselves perhaps with a passion for Charlie, must have prepared the ground. Accordingly, during the next few days M. de Charlus wrote ferocious letters to a number of the faithful, who were entirely innocent and concluded that he must be mad; then he went to Mme Verdurin with a long and affecting tale, which had not at all the effect that he had hoped. For in the first place Mme Verdurin simply said to him: “All you need do is pay no more attention to him, treat him with scorn, he’s a mere boy.” Now the Baron longed only for a reconciliation, and to bring this about by depriving Charlie of everything he had felt assured of, he asked Mme Verdurin not to invite him again; a request which she met with a refusal that brought her angry and sarcastic letters from M. de Charlus. Flitting from one supposition to another, the Baron never hit upon the truth, which was that the blow had not come from Morel. It is true that he could have learned this by asking him if they could have a few minutes’ talk. But he felt that this would be prejudicial to his dignity and to the interests of his love. He had been insulted; he awaited an explanation. In any case, almost invariably, attached to the idea of a talk which might clear up a misunderstanding, there is another idea which, for whatever reason, prevents us from agreeing to that talk. The man who has abased himself and shown his weakness on a score of occasions will make a show of pride on the twenty-first, the only occasion on which it would be advisable not to persist in an arrogant attitude but to dispel an error which is taking root in his adversary failing a denial. As for the social side of the incident, the rumour spread abroad that M. de Charlus had been turned out of the Verdurins’ house when he had attempted to rape a young musician. The effect of this rumour was that nobody was surprised when M. de Charlus did not appear again at the Verdurins’, and whenever he chanced to meet somewhere else one of the faithful whom he had suspected and insulted, as this person bore a grudge against the Baron who himself abstained from greeting him, people were not surprised, realising that no member of the little clan would ever wish to speak to the Baron again.

While M. de Charlus, momentarily stunned by Morel’s words and by the attitude of the Mistress, stood there in the pose of a nymph seized with Panic terror, M. and Mme Verdurin had retired to the outer drawing-room, as a sign of diplomatic rupture, leaving M. de Charlus by himself, while on the platform Morel was putting his violin in its case: “Now you must tell us exactly what happened,” Mme Verdurin exclaimed avidly to her husband.

“I don’t know what you can have said to him,” said Ski. “He looked quite upset; there were tears in his eyes.”

Pretending not to have understood, “I’m sure nothing that I said could have affected him,” said Mme Verdurin, employing one of those stratagems which deceive no one, so as to force the sculptor to repeat that Charlie was in tears, tears which excited the Mistress’s pride too much for her to be willing to run the risk that one or other of the faithful, who might have misheard, remained in ignorance of them.

“Oh, but it must have: I saw big tears glistening in his eyes,” said the sculptor in a low voice with a smile of malicious connivance and a sidelong glance to make sure that Morel was still on the platform and could not overhear the conversation. But there was somebody who did overhear and whose presence, as soon as it was observed, would restore to Morel one of the hopes that he had forfeited. This was the Queen of Naples, who, having left her fan behind, had thought it more polite, on coming away from another party to which she had gone on, to call back for it in person. She had entered the room quietly, as though she were a little embarrassed, prepared to make apologies for her presence,

and not to outstay her welcome now that the other guests had gone. But no one had heard her enter in the heat of the incident, the meaning of which she had at once gathered and which set her ablaze with indignation.

"Ski says he had tears in his eyes. Did you notice that?" said Mme Verdurin. "I didn't see any tears. Ah, yes, I remember now," she corrected herself, afraid that her denial might be believed. "As for Charlus, he's almost done in, he ought to take a chair, he's tottering on his feet, he'll be on the floor in another minute," she said with a pitiless laugh.

At that moment Morel hastened towards her: "Isn't that lady the Queen of Naples?" he asked (although he knew quite well that she was), pointing to the sovereign who was making her way towards Charlus. "After what has just happened, I can no longer, I'm afraid, ask the Baron to introduce me."

"Wait, I shall take you to her myself," said Mme Verdurin, and, followed by a few of the faithful, but not by myself and Brichot who made haste to go and collect our hats and coats, she advanced upon the Queen who was chatting to M. de Charlus. The latter had imagined that the fulfilment of his great desire that Morel should be presented to the Queen of Naples could be prevented only by the improbable demise of that lady. But we picture the future as a reflexion of the present projected into an empty space, whereas it is the result, often almost immediate, of causes which for the most part escape our notice. Not an hour had passed, and now M. de Charlus would have given anything to prevent Morel from being presented to the Queen. Mme Verdurin made the Queen a curtsy. Seeing that the other appeared not to recognise her, "I am Mme Verdurin," she said. "Your Majesty doesn't remember me."

"Quite well," said the Queen, continuing to talk to M. de Charlus so naturally and with such a casual air that Mme Verdurin doubted whether it was to herself that this "Quite well" was addressed, uttered as it was in a marvellously off-hand tone, which wrung from M. de Charlus, despite his lover's anguish, the grateful and epicurean smile of an expert in the art of rudeness. Morel, who had watched from the distance the preparations for his presentation, now approached. The Queen offered her arm to M. de Charlus. With him, too, she was vexed, but only because he did not make a more energetic stand against vile detractors. She was crimson with shame on his behalf that the Verdurins should dare to treat him in this fashion. The unaffected civility which she had shown them a few hours earlier, and the arrogant pride with which she now confronted them, had their source in the same region of her heart. The Queen was a woman of great kindness, but she conceived of kindness first and foremost in the form of an unshakeable attachment to the people she loved, to her own family, to all the princes of her race, among whom was M. de Charlus, and, after them, to all the people of the middle classes or of the humblest populace who knew how to respect those whom she loved and were well-disposed towards them. It was as to a woman endowed with these sound instincts that she had shown kindness to Mme Verdurin. And no doubt this is a narrow conception of kindness, somewhat Tory and increasingly obsolete. But this does not mean that her kindness was any less genuine or ardent. The ancients were no less strongly attached to the human group to which they devoted themselves because it did not go beyond the limits of their city, nor are the men of today to their country, than those who in the future will love the United States of the World. In my own immediate surroundings, I had the example of my mother, whom Mme de Cambremer and Mme de Guermantes could never persuade to take part in any philanthropic undertaking, to join any patriotic ladies' work party, to sell raffle tickets or sponsor charity shows. I do not say that she was right in acting only when her heart had first spoken, and in reserving for her own family, for her servants, for the unfortunate whom chance brought in her way, the riches of her love and generosity, but I do know that these, like those of my grandmother, were inexhaustible and exceeded by far anything that Mme de Guermantes or Mme de Cambremer ever could have done or did. The case of the Queen of Naples was altogether different, but it must be admitted that lovable people were conceived of by her not at all as in those novels of Dostoevsky which Albertine had taken from my shelves and hoarded, that is to say in the guise of wheedling parasites, thieves, drunkards, obsequious one minute, insolent the next, debauchees, even murderers. Extremes, however, meet, since the noble man, the close relative, the outraged kinsman whom the Queen sought to defend was M. de Charlus, that is to say, notwithstanding his birth and all the family ties that bound him to the Queen, a man whose virtue was hedged round by many vices. "You don't look at all well, my dear cousin," she said to M. de Charlus. "Lean on my arm. You may be sure that it will always support you. It is strong enough for that." Then, raising her eyes proudly in front of her (where, Ski later told me, Mme Verdurin and Morel were standing): "You know how in the past, at Gaeta, it held the mob at bay. It will be a shield to you." And it was thus, taking the Baron on her arm and without having allowed Morel to be presented to her, that the glorious sister of the Empress Elisabeth left the house.

It might have been assumed, in view of M. de Charlus's ferocious temper and the persecutions with which he terrorised even his own family, that after the events of this evening he would have unleashed his fury and taken reprisals upon the Verdurins. Nothing of the sort happened, and the principle reason was certainly that the Baron, having caught cold a few days later, and contracted the septic pneumonia which was very rife that winter, was for long regarded by his doctors, and regarded himself, as being at the point of death, and lay for many months suspended between it and life. Was there simply a physical metastasis, and the substitution of a different malady for the neurosis that had previously made him lose all control of himself in veritable orgies of rage? For it is too simple to suppose that, never having taken the Verdurins seriously from the social point of view, he was unable to feel the same resentment against them as he would have felt against his equals; too simple also to recall that neurotics, irritated at the slightest provocation by imaginary and inoffensive enemies, become on the contrary inoffensive as soon as anyone takes the offensive against them, and that they are more easily calmed by flinging cold water in their faces than by attempting to prove to them the inanity of their grievances. But it is probably not in a metastasis that we ought to seek the explanation of this absence of rancour, but far more in the disease itself. It exhausted the Baron so completely that he had little leisure left in which to think about the Verdurins. He was almost moribund. We mentioned offensives; even those that will have only a posthumous effect require, if they are to be properly "staged," the sacrifice of a part of one's strength. M. de Charlus had too little strength left for the activity of preparation required. We hear often of mortal enemies who open their eyes to gaze on one another in the hour of death and close them again, satisfied. This must be a rare occurrence, except when death surprises us in the midst of life. It is, on the contrary, when we have nothing left to lose that we do not embark upon the risks which, when full of life, we would have undertaken lightly. The spirit of vengeance forms part of life; it deserts us as a rule—in spite of exceptions which, in one and the same character, as we shall see, are human contradictions—on the threshold of death. After having thought for a moment about the Verdurins, M. de Charlus felt that he was too weak, turned his face to the wall, and ceased to think about anything. It was not that he had lost his eloquence, which demanded little effort. It still flowed freely, but it had changed. Detached from the violence which it had so often adorned, it was now a quasi-mystical eloquence, embellished with words of meekness,

parables from the Gospel, an apparent resignation to death. He talked especially on the days when he thought that he would live. A relapse made him silent. This Christian meekness into which his splendid violence had been transposed (as into *Esther* the so different genius of *Andromaque*) provoked the admiration of those who came to his bedside. It would have provoked that of the Verdurins themselves, who could not have helped adoring a man whose weaknesses had made them hate him. It is true that thoughts which were Christian only in appearance rose to the surface. He would implore the Archangel Gabriel to appear and announce to him, as to the Prophet, precisely when the Messiah would come. And, breaking off with a sweet and sorrowful smile, he would add: "But the Archangel mustn't ask me, as he asked Daniel, to have patience for 'seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks,' for I should be dead before then." The person whom he awaited thus was Morel. And so he asked the Archangel Raphael to bring him to him, as he had brought the young Tobias. And, introducing more human measures (like sick Popes who, while ordering masses to be said, do not neglect to send for their doctors), he insinuated to his visitors that if Brichot were to bring him without delay his young Tobias, perhaps the Archangel Raphael would consent to restore Brichot's sight, as he had done to the father of Tobias, or as had happened in the purifying waters of Bethesda. But, notwithstanding these human lapses, the moral purity of M. de Charlus's conversation had none the less become charming. Vanity, slander, the madness of malevolence and pride, had alike disappeared. Morally M. de Charlus had risen far above the level at which he had lived in the past. But this moral improvement, as to the reality of which, it must be said, his oratorical skill was capable of deceiving somewhat his impressionable audience, vanished with the malady which had laboured on its behalf. M. de Charlus redescended the downward slope with a speed which, as we shall see, continued steadily to increase. But the Verdurins' attitude towards him was by that time no more than a somewhat distant memory which more immediate outbursts prevented from reviving.

To turn back to the Verdurin reception, when the host and hostess were alone, M. Verdurin said to his wife: "You know why Cottard didn't come? He's with Saniette, whose attempt to recover his losses on the Stock Exchange has failed. Learning that he hadn't a penny in the world and nearly a million francs of debts, Saniette had a stroke."



"But then why did he gamble? It's idiotic, he was the last person in the world to succeed at that game. Cleverer men than he get plucked at it, and he was born to let himself be swindled by every Tom, Dick and Harry."

"But of course, we've always known he was an idiot," said M. Verdurin. "Anyhow, this is the result. Here you have a man who will be turned out of house and home tomorrow by his landlord, and who's going to find himself in utter penury; his relations don't like him, Forcheville is the last man in the world who would do anything for him. And so it occurred to me—I don't wish to do anything that doesn't meet with your approval, but we might perhaps be able to scrape up a small income for him so that he shan't be too conscious of his ruin, so that he can keep a roof over his head."

"I entirely agree with you, it's very good of you to have thought of it. But you say 'a roof; the fool has kept on an apartment beyond his means, he can't remain in it, we shall have to find him a couple of rooms somewhere. I understand that at present he's still paying six or seven thousand francs.'"

"Six thousand five hundred. But he's greatly attached to his home. And after all, he's had a first stroke, he can scarcely live more than two or three years. Suppose we were to spend ten thousand francs on his behalf for three years. It seems to me that we should be able to afford that. We might for instance this year, instead of renting La Raspelière again, take somewhere more modest. With our income, it seems to me that to write off ten thousand francs for three years isn't out of the question."

"So be it. The only trouble is that people will get to know about it, and we'll be expected to do it for others."

"You can imagine that I thought of that. I shall do it only on the express condition that nobody knows about it. I've no wish for us to become the benefactors of the human race, thank you very much. No philanthropy! What we might do is to tell him that the money has been left to him by Princess Sherbatoff."

"But will he believe it? She consulted Cottard about her will."

"If the worst comes to the worst, we might take Cottard into our confidence. He's used to professional secrecy, he makes an enormous amount of money, he won't be like one of those busybodies for whom one's obliged to cough up. He may even perhaps be willing to say that the Princess appointed him as her executor. In that way we wouldn't even appear. That would avoid all the nuisance of scenes of gratitude, effusions and speeches."

M. Verdurin added an expression which made quite plain the kind of touching scenes and speeches which they were anxious to avoid. But it could not be reported to me precisely, for it was not a French expression, but one of those terms that are employed in certain families to denote certain things, annoying things especially, probably because people wish to be able to refer to them in the hearing of the persons concerned without being understood. An expression of this sort is generally a survival from an earlier condition of the family. In a Jewish family, for instance, it will be a ritual term diverted from its true meaning, and perhaps the only Hebrew word with which the family, now thoroughly Gallicised, is still acquainted. In a family that is strongly provincial, it will be a term of local dialect, albeit the family no longer speaks or even understands that dialect. In a family that has come from South America and no longer speaks anything but French, it will be a Spanish word. And, in the next generation, the word will no longer exist save as a childhood memory. It will be remembered perfectly well that the parents used to allude to the servants who were waiting at table by employing some such word, but the children have no idea what the word meant, whether it was Spanish, Hebrew, German, dialect, if indeed it ever belonged to any language and was not a proper name or a word entirely made up. The uncertainty can be cleared up only if they have a great-uncle or an old cousin still alive who must have used the same expression. As I never knew any relations of the Verdurins, I was never able to reconstruct the word. All I know is that it certainly drew a smile from Mme Verdurin, for the use of such a vocabulary, less general, more personal, more secret, than everyday speech, inspires in those who use it among themselves an egocentric feeling which is always accompanied by a certain self-satisfaction. After this moment of mirth, "But if Cottard talks," Mme Verdurin objected. "He won't talk." He did talk, to myself at least, for it was from him that I learned the story a few years later, actually at Saniette's funeral. I was sorry that I had not known of it earlier. For one thing the knowledge would have brought me more rapidly to the idea that we ought never to bear a grudge against people, ought never to judge them by some memory of an unkind action, for we do not know all the good that, at other moments, their hearts may have sincerely desired and realised. And thus, even simply from the point of view of prediction, one is mistaken. For doubtless the evil aspect which we have noted once and for all will recur; but the heart is richer than that, has many other aspects which will recur also in the same person and which we refuse to acknowledge because of his earlier bad behaviour. But from a more personal point of view, this revelation of Cottard's, if it had been made to me earlier, would have dispelled the suspicions I had formed as to the part that the Verdurins might be playing between Albertine and myself—would have dispelled them wrongly perhaps as it happened, for if M. Verdurin had virtues, he nevertheless teased and bullied to the point of the most savage persecution, and was so jealous of his position of dominance in the little clan as not to shrink from the basest falsehoods, from the fomentation of the most unjustified hatreds, in order to sever any ties among the faithful which had not as their sole object the strengthening of the little group. He was a man capable of disinterestedness, of unostentatious generosity, but that does not necessarily mean a man of feeling, or a likeable man, or a scrupulous or a truthful or always a kind man. A partial kindness—in which there subsisted, perhaps, a trace of the family whom my great-aunt had known—probably existed in him before I discovered it through this fact, as America or the North Pole existed before Columbus or Peary. Nevertheless, at the moment of my discovery, M. Verdurin's nature offered me a new and unsuspected facet; and I concluded that it is as difficult to present a fixed image of a character as of societies and passions. For a character alters no less than they do, and if one tries to take a snapshot of what is relatively immutable in it, one finds it presenting a succession of different aspects (implying that it is incapable of keeping still but keeps moving) to the disconcerted lens.

Seeing how late it was, and fearing that Albertine might be growing impatient, I asked Brichot, as we left the Verdurins' party, to be so kind as to drop me home first, and my carriage would then take him on. He commended me for going straight home like this (unaware that a girl was waiting for me in the house) and for ending the evening so early and so wisely, when in fact all I had done was postpone its real beginning. Then he spoke to me about M. de Charlus. The latter would doubtless have been amazed had he heard the Professor, who was so amiable to him, the Professor who always assured him: "I never repeat anything," speaking of him and of his life without the slightest reticence. And Brichot's indignant amazement would perhaps have been no less sincere if M. de Charlus had said to him: "I'm told you've been speaking ill of me." Brichot did indeed have an affection for M. de Charlus, and if he had had to call to mind some conversation that had turned upon him, would have been far more likely to remember the friendly feelings he had had for the Baron, while saying the same things about him as everyone else, than those things themselves. He would not have

thought that he was lying if he had said: "I who speak of you with such friendliness," since he did feel friendly when he was speaking about M. de Charlus. The Baron had for Brichot the charm which he demanded above all else from the world of society—that of offering him real specimens of what he had long supposed to be an invention of the poets. Brichot, who had often expounded the second *Eclogue* of Virgil without really knowing whether its fiction had any basis in reality, belatedly found, in conversing with Charlus, some of the pleasure which he knew that his masters, M. Mérimée and M. Renan, and his colleague M. Maspéro, had felt when travelling in Spain, Palestine and Egypt on recognising in the landscapes and the present inhabitants of Spain, Palestine and Egypt the settings and the selfsame actors of the ancient scenes which they themselves had expounded in their books.

"Be it said without offence to that knight of noble lineage," Brichot declared to me in the carriage that was taking us home, "he is quite simply prodigious when he illustrates his satanic catechism with a dash of Bedlamite verve and the obsessiveness, I was going to say the candour, of a *blanc d'Espagne*<sup>21</sup> or an émigré. I can assure you, if I dare express myself like Mgr d'Hulst, I am by no means bored on the days when I receive a visit from that feudal lord who, seeking to defend Adonis against our age of miscreants, has followed the instincts of his race, and, in all sodomist innocence, has gone crusading."

I listened to Brichot, and I was not alone with him. As, for that matter, I had never ceased to feel since I left home that evening, I felt myself, in however obscure a fashion, tied fast to the girl who was at that moment in her bedroom. Even when I was talking to someone or other at the Verdurins', I had somehow felt that she was by my side, I had that vague impression of her that we have of our own limbs, and if I happened to think of her it was as we think, with annoyance at being bound to it in complete subjection, of our own body.

"And what a fund of scandal," Brichot went on, "enough to supply all the appendixes of the *Causeries du Lundi*, is the conversation of that apostle! Just imagine, I learned from him that the treatise on ethics which I had always admired as the most splendid moral edifice of our age was inspired in our venerable colleague X by a young telegraph messenger. Needless to say, my eminent friend omitted to give us the name of this ephebe in the course of his demonstrations. In this he showed more circumspection, or, if you prefer, less gratitude, than Phidias, who inscribed the name of the athlete whom he loved upon the ring of his Olympian Zeus. The Baron had not heard this last story. Needless to say, it appealed to his orthodoxy. You can readily imagine that whenever I have to discuss with my colleague a candidate's thesis, I find in his dialectic, which for that matter is extremely subtle, the additional savour which spicy revelations added, for Sainte-Beuve, to the insufficiently confidential writings of Chateaubriand. From our colleague, whose wisdom is golden but who had little money, the telegraph-boy passed into the hands of the Baron, 'with the most honourable intentions' (you should have heard his voice when he said it). And as this Satan is the most obliging of men, he found his protégé a post in the Colonies, from which the young man, who has a sense of gratitude, sends him from time to time the most excellent fruit. The Baron offers these to his distinguished friends; some of the young man's pineapples appeared quite recently on the table at the Quai Conti, causing Mme Verdurin to remark, with no malicious intent: 'You must have an uncle or a nephew in America, M. de Charlus, to get pineapples like these!' I admit that I ate them with a certain gaiety, reciting to myself the opening lines of a Horatian ode which Diderot loved to recall. In fact, like my colleague Boissier, strolling from the Palatine to Tibur, I derive from the Baron's conversation a singularly more vivid and more savoury idea of the writers of the Augustan age, without mentioning those of the Decadence, or harking back to the Greeks, although I once said to the excellent Baron that in his company I felt like Plato in the house of Aspasia. To tell the truth, I had considerably enlarged the scale of the two characters and, as La Fontaine says, my example was taken 'from smaller animals.' However that may be, you do not, I imagine, suppose that the Baron took offence. Never have I seen him so ingeniously delighted. A childish excitement caused him to depart from his aristocratic phlegm. 'What flatterers all these Sorbonnards are!' he exclaimed with rapture. 'To think that I should have had to wait until my age before being compared to Aspasia! An old fright like me! Oh, my youth!' I should have loved you to see him as he said this, outrageously powdered as he always is, and, at his age, scented like a young fop. All the same, beneath his genealogical obsessions, the best fellow in the world. For all these reasons, I should be distressed were this evening's rupture to prove final. What did surprise me was the way in which the young man turned on him. His manner towards the Baron has been, for some time past, that of a henchman, of a feudal vassal, which scarcely betokened such an insurrection. I hope that, in any event, even if (*quod di omen avertant*) the Baron were never to return to the Quai Conti, this schism will not extend to me. Each of us derives too much benefit from the exchange that we make of my feeble stock of learning with his experience." (We shall see that if M. de Charlus showed no violent rancour towards Brichot, at any rate his affection for the Professor vanished so completely as to allow him to judge him without indulgence.) "And I swear to you that the exchange is so much in my favour that when the Baron yields up to me what his life has taught him, I am unable to endorse the opinion of Sylvestre Bonnard that a library is still the best place in which to ponder the dream of life."

We had now reached my door. I got out of the carriage to give the driver Brichot's address. From the pavement, I could see the window of Albertine's room, that window, formerly quite black at night when she had not been staying in the house, which the electric light from inside, segmented by the slats of the shutters, striped from top to bottom with parallel bars of gold. This magic scroll, clear as it was to myself, tracing before my tranquil mind precise images, near at hand, of which I should presently be taking possession, was invisible to Brichot who had remained in the carriage and was almost blind, and would in any case have been incomprehensible to him since, like the friends who called on me before dinner, when Albertine had returned from her drive, the Professor was unaware that a girl who was all my own was waiting for me in a bedroom adjoining mine. The carriage drove off. I remained for a moment alone on the pavement. It was true that I endowed those luminous streaks which I could see from below, and which to anyone else would have seemed quite superficial, with the utmost plenitude, solidity and volume, because of all the significance that I placed behind them, in a treasure unsuspected by the rest of the world which I had hidden there and from which those horizontal rays emanated, but a treasure in exchange for which I had forfeited my freedom, my solitude, my thought. If Albertine had not been up there, and indeed if I had merely been in search of pleasure, I would have gone to demand it of unknown women, into whose life I should have attempted to penetrate, in Venice perhaps, or at least in some corner of nocturnal Paris. But now what I had to do when the time came for love-making was not to set out on a journey, was not even to leave my own house, but to return there. And to return there not to find myself alone and, after taking leave of the friends who provide one from the outside with food for one's thoughts, to find myself at any rate compelled to seek it in myself, but to be on the contrary less alone than when I was at the Verdurins', welcomed as I was about to be by the person to whom I had abdicated, to whom I had handed over most completely my own person, without having for an instant the leisure to think of myself nor even requiring the effort, since she would be by my side, to think of her. So that,

as I raised my eyes for one last look from the outside at the window of the room in which I should presently find myself, I seemed to behold the luminous gates which were about to close behind me and of which I myself had forged, for an eternal slavery, the inflexible bars of gold.

Albertine had never told me that she suspected me of being jealous of her, preoccupied with everything that she did. The only words we had exchanged—fairly long ago, it must be said—on the subject of jealousy seemed to prove the opposite. I remembered that, on a fine moonlight evening towards the beginning of our relationship, on one of the first occasions when I had accompanied her home and would have been just as glad not to do so and to leave her in order to run after other girls, I had said to her: “You know, if I’m offering to take you home, it’s not from jealousy; if you have anything else to do, I shall slip discreetly away.” And she had replied: “Oh, I know quite well that you aren’t jealous and that you don’t care a fig, but I’ve nothing else to do except to stay with you.” Another occasion was at La Raspelière, when M. de Charlus, not without casting a covert glance at Morel, had made a display of friendly gallantry towards Albertine; I had said to her: “Well, he gave you a good hug, I hope.” And as I had added half ironically: “I suffered all the torments of jealousy,” Albertine, employing the language proper either to the vulgar background from which she sprang or to that other, more vulgar still, which she frequented, replied: “What a kiddie you are! I know quite well you’re not jealous. For one thing, you told me so, and besides, it’s perfectly obvious, get along with you!” She had never told me since then that she had changed her mind; but she must have formed a number of fresh ideas on the subject, which she concealed from me but which an accident might betray willy-nilly, for that evening when, on reaching home, after going to fetch her from her own room and taking her to mine, I said to her (with a certain awkwardness which I did not myself understand, for I had indeed told Albertine that I was going to pay a call and had said that I did not know where, perhaps on Mme de Villeparisis, perhaps on Mme de Guermantes, perhaps on Mme de Cambremer; it is true that I had not actually mentioned the Verdurins): “Guess where I’ve been—at the Verdurins’,” I had barely had time to utter the words before Albertine, a look of utter consternation on her face, had answered me in words which seemed to explode of their own accord with a force which she was unable to contain: “I thought as much.”

“I didn’t know that you’d be annoyed by my going to see the Verdurins.” (It is true that she had not told me that she was annoyed, but it was obvious. It is true also that I had not said to myself that she would be annoyed. And yet, faced with the explosion of her wrath, as with one of those events which a sort of retrospective second sight makes us imagine that we have already experienced in the past, it seemed to me that I could never have expected anything else.)

“Annoyed? What difference does it make to me? I couldn’t care less. Wasn’t Mlle Vinteuil to be there?”

Beside myself at these words, “You never told me you’d met her the other day,” I said to her, to show her that I was better informed than she knew.

Believing that the person whom I reproached her for having met without telling me was Mme Verdurin and not, as I meant to imply, Mlle Vinteuil, “Did I meet her?” she inquired with a pensive air, addressing both herself, as though she were seeking to collect her fugitive memories, and me, as though it was I who could have enlightened her; and no doubt in order that I might indeed say what I knew, and perhaps also in order to gain time before making a difficult reply. But I was far less preoccupied with the thought of Mlle Vinteuil than with a fear which had already crossed my mind but which now gripped me more forcibly. Indeed I imagined that Mme Verdurin had purely and simply invented the story of having expected Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, in order to enhance her own prestige, so that I was quite calm on arriving home. Only Albertine, by saying: “Wasn’t Mlle Vinteuil to be there?” had shown me that I had not been mistaken in my original suspicion; but anyhow my mind was at rest in that quarter as far as the future was concerned, since by giving up her plan of visiting the Verdurins’ Albertine had sacrificed Mlle Vinteuil for my sake.

“Besides,” I said to her angrily, “there are plenty of other things which you hide from me, even the most trivial things, such as for instance when you went for three days to Balbec—I mention it by the way.” I had added the words “I mention it by the way” as a complement to “even the most trivial things” so that if Albertine said to me “What was there wrong about my trip to Balbec?” I might be able to answer: “Why, I’ve quite forgotten. The things people tell me get muddled up in my mind, I attach so little importance to them.” And indeed if I referred to that three-day excursion she had made with the chauffeur to Balbec, from where her postcards had reached me after so long a delay, I did so purely at random, and regretted that I had chosen so bad an example, for in fact, as they had barely had time to go there and return, it was certainly the one excursion in which there had not even been time for the interpolation of a meeting that was at all protracted with anybody. But Albertine supposed, from what I had just said, that I knew the real truth and had merely concealed my knowledge from her. She had in any case been convinced, for some time past, that in one way or another, by having her followed, or in some such fashion, I was, as she had said the week before to Andrée, better informed about her life than she was herself. And so she interrupted me with a wholly unnecessary admission, for certainly I suspected nothing of what she now told me, and I was on the other hand shattered by it, so vast can the disparity be between the truth which a liar has travestied and the idea which, from her lies, the man who is in love with the said liar has formed of that truth. Scarcely had I uttered the words: “When you went for three days to Balbec, I mention it by the way,” than Albertine, cutting me short, declared to me as something quite natural: “You mean I never went to Balbec at all? Of course I didn’t! And I’ve always wondered why you pretended to believe that I did. All the same, there was no harm in it. The driver had some business of his own for three days. He didn’t dare to mention it to you. And so out of kindness to him (it’s typical of me, and I’m the one who always gets the blame), I invented a trip to Balbec. He simply put me down at Auteuil, at the house of a girlfriend of mine in the Rue de l’Assomption, where I spent the three days bored to tears. You see it’s not very serious, no great harm done. I did begin to think that you perhaps knew all about it, when I saw how you laughed when the postcards began to arrive, a week late. I quite see that it was absurd, and that it would have been better not to send any cards at all. But that wasn’t my fault. I’d bought them in advance and given them to the driver before he dropped me at Auteuil, and then the fathead put them in his pocket and forgot about them instead of sending them on in an envelope to a friend of his near Balbec who was to forward them to you. I kept on imagining they were about to arrive. He only remembered them after five days, and instead of telling me, the idiot sent them on at once to Balbec. When he did tell me, I really let him have it, I can tell you! To go and worry you unnecessarily, the great fool, as a reward for my shutting myself up for three whole days, so that he could go and look after his family affairs! I didn’t even venture out into Auteuil for fear of being seen. The only time I did go out, I was dressed as a man, just for a joke, really. And it was just my luck that the first person I came across was your Yid friend Bloch. But I don’t believe it was from him that you learned that my trip to Balbec never existed except in my imagination, for he seemed not to recognise me.”

I did not know what to say, not wishing to appear surprised, and shattered by all these lies. A feeling of horror, which gave me no desire to turn Albertine out of the house, far from it, was combined with a strong inclination to burst into tears. This last was caused not by the lie itself and by the annihilation of everything that I had so firmly believed to be true that I felt as though I were in a town that had been razed to the ground, where not a house remained standing, where the bare soil was merely heaped with rubble—but by the melancholy thought that, during those three days when she had been bored to tears in her friend's house at Auteuil, Albertine had never once felt the desire, that the idea had perhaps not even occurred to her, to come and pay me a visit one day on the quiet, or to send a message asking me to go and see her at Auteuil. But I had no time to give myself up to these reflexions. Whatever happened, I did not wish to appear surprised. I smiled with the air of man who knows far more than he is prepared to say: "But that's only one thing out of hundreds. For instance, only this evening, at the Verdurins', I learned that what you had told me about Mlle Vinteuil ..."

Albertine gazed at me fixedly with a tormented air, seeking to read in my eyes how much I knew. Now, what I knew and what I was about to tell her was the truth about Mlle Vinteuil. It is true that it was not at the Verdurins' that I had learned it, but at Montjouvain long ago. But since I had always refrained, deliberately, from mentioning it to Albertine, I could now appear to have learned it only this evening. And I had a feeling almost of joy—after having felt such anguish in the little train—at possessing this memory of Montjouvain, which I would postdate, but which would nevertheless be the unanswerable proof, a crushing blow to Albertine. This time at least, I had no need to "seem to know" and to "make Albertine talk": I *knew*, I had *seen* through the lighted window at Montjouvain. It had been all very well for Albertine to tell me that her relations with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend had been perfectly pure, but how could she, when I swore to her (and swore without lying) that I knew the habits of these two women, how could she maintain any longer that, having lived in daily intimacy with them, calling them "my big sisters," she had not been the object of approaches on their part which would have made her break with them, if on the contrary she had not acquiesced in them? But I had no time to tell her what I knew. Albertine, imagining, as in the case of the pretended excursion to Balbec, that I had learned the truth either from Mlle Vinteuil, if she had been at the Verdurins', or simply from Mme Verdurin herself, who might have mentioned her to Mlle Vinteuil, did not allow me the chance to speak but made a confession, precisely contrary to what I should have imagined, which nevertheless, by showing me that she had never ceased to lie to me, caused me perhaps just as much pain (especially since I was no longer, as I said a moment ago, jealous of Mlle Vinteuil). Taking the initiative, she spoke as follows: "You mean that you found out this evening that I lied to you when I pretended that I had been more or less brought up by Mlle Vinteuil's friend. It's true that I did lie to you a little. But I felt so looked down on by you, and I saw that you were so keen on that man Vinteuil's music, that as one of my schoolfriends—this is true, I swear to you—had been a friend of Mlle Vinteuil's friend, I stupidly thought that I might make myself seem interesting to you by inventing the story that I had known the girls quite well. I felt that I bored you, that you thought me a goose; I thought that if I told you that those people used to see a lot of me, that I could easily tell you all sorts of things about Vinteuil's work, you'd think more highly of me, that it would bring us closer together. When I lie to you, it's always out of affection for you. And it needed this fatal Verdurin party to open your eyes to the truth, which perhaps they exaggerated a bit, incidentally. I bet Mlle Vinteuil's friend told you that she didn't know me. She met me at least twice at my friend's house. But of course, I'm not smart enough for people who've become so famous. They prefer to say that they've never met me."

Poor Albertine, when she had thought that to tell me that she had been on such intimate terms with Mlle Vinteuil's friend would postpone her being "ditched," would bring her closer to me, she had, as so often happens, reached the truth by a different road from that which she had intended to take. Her showing herself better informed about music than I had supposed would never have prevented me from breaking with her that evening in the little train; and yet it was indeed that speech, which she had made with that object, that had immediately brought about far more than the impossibility of a rupture. Only she made an error of interpretation, not about the effect which that speech was to have, but about the cause by virtue of which it was to produce that effect—that cause being my discovery not of her musical culture but of her disreputable associations. What had abruptly drawn me closer to her—far more, fused indissolubly with her—was not the expectation of a pleasure—and pleasure is too strong a word, a mildly agreeable interest—but the grip of an agonising pain.

Once again I had to be careful not to keep too long a silence which might have led her to suppose that I was surprised. And so, touched by the discovery that she was so modest and had thought herself despised in the Verdurin circle, I said to her tenderly: "But, my darling, I'd gladly give you several hundred francs to let you go and play the fashionable lady wherever you please and invite M. and Mme Verdurin to a grand dinner."

Alas! Albertine was several persons in one. The most mysterious, most simple, most loathsome of these revealed herself in the answer which she made me with an air of disgust, and the exact words of which, to tell the truth, I could not quite make out (even the opening words, for she did not finish her sentence). I did not succeed in reconstituting them until some time later when I had guessed what was in her mind. We hear things retrospectively when we have understood them.

"Thank you for nothing! Spend money on them! I'd a great deal rather you left me free for once in a way to go and get myself b ... (*me faire casser*) ..."

At once her face flushed crimson, she looked appalled, and she put her hand over her mouth as though she could have thrust back the words which she had just uttered and which I had quite failed to catch.

"What did you say, Albertine?"

"Nothing, I was half asleep and talking to myself."

"Not a bit of it, you were wide awake."

"I was thinking about asking the Verdurins to dinner, it's very good of you."

"No, I mean what you said just now."

She gave me endless versions, none of which tallied in the least, not simply with her words which, having been interrupted, remained obscure to me, but with the interruption itself and the sudden flush that had accompanied it.

"Come, my darling, that's not what you were going to say, otherwise why did you stop short?"

"Because I felt that my request was presumptuous."

"What request?"

"To be allowed to give a dinner-party."

"No, no, that's not it, there's no need for ceremony between you and me."

"Indeed there is, we ought never to take advantage of the people we love. In any case, I swear to you that that was all."

On the one hand it was still impossible for me to doubt her sworn word; on the other hand her explanations did not satisfy my reason. I continued to press her. "Anyhow, you might at least have the courage to finish what you were saying, you stopped short at *casser*."

"No, leave me alone!"

"But why?"

"Because it's dreadfully vulgar, I'd be ashamed to say such a thing in front of you. I don't know what I was thinking of. The words—I don't even know what they mean, I heard them used in the street one day by some very low people—just came into my head without rhyme or reason. It had nothing to do with me or anybody else, I was simply dreaming aloud."

I felt that I would extract nothing more from Albertine. She had lied to me when she had sworn a moment ago that what had cut her short had been a social fear of being over-presumptuous, since it had now become the shame of using a vulgar expression in front of me. Now this was certainly another lie. For when we were alone together there was no expression too perverse, no word too coarse for us to utter during our embraces. However, it was useless to insist at that moment. But my memory remained obsessed by the word *casser*. Albertine often used expressions such as *casser du bois* or *casser du sucre*, meaning "to run someone down," or would say *Ah! ce que je lui en ai cassé!*, meaning "I fairly gave it to him!" But she would say this quite freely in my presence, and if it was this that she had meant to say, why had she suddenly stopped short, why had she blushed so deeply, placed her hands over her mouth, tried to refashion her sentence, and, when she saw that I had heard the word *casser*, offered a false explanation? Meanwhile, abandoning the pursuit of an interrogation from which I would get no response, the best thing to do was to appear to have lost interest in the matter, and, retracing my thoughts to Albertine's reproaches to me for having gone to the Mistress's, I said to her, somewhat clumsily, making indeed a sort of stupid excuse for my conduct: "Actually I'd been meaning to ask you to come to the Verdurins' party this evening," a remark that was doubly maladroit, for if I meant it, since I saw her all the time, why wouldn't I have suggested it? Furious at my lie and emboldened by my timidity: "You could have gone on asking me for a thousand years," she said, "and I'd never have consented. Those people have always been against me, they've done everything they could to mortify me. There was nothing I didn't do for Mme Verdurin at Balbec, and look at the thanks I get. If she summoned me to her deathbed, I wouldn't go. There are some things it's impossible to forgive. As for you, it's the first time you've behaved badly to me. When Françoise told me you'd gone out (and she enjoyed telling me all right), I'd sooner have had my skull split down the middle. I tried not to show any sign, but never in my life have I felt so grossly insulted."

But while she was speaking there continued within me, in that curiously alive and creative sleep of the unconscious (a sleep in which the things that have barely touched us succeed in carving an impression, in which our sleeping hands take hold of the key that turns the lock, the key for which we have sought in vain), the quest for what it was that she had meant by that interrupted sentence, the missing end of which I was so anxious to know. And all of a sudden an appalling word, of which I had never dreamed, burst upon me: *le pot*.<sup>22</sup> I cannot say that it came to me in a single flash, as when, in a long passive submission to an incomplete recollection, while one tries gently and cautiously to unfold it, one remains ravelled in it, glued to it. No, in contrast to my habitual method of recall, there were, I think, two parallel lines of search: the first took into account not merely Albertine's words, but her look of exasperation when I had offered her a sum of money with which to give a grand dinner, a look which seemed to say: "Thank you, the idea of spending money upon things that bore me, when without money I could do things that I enjoy doing!" And it was perhaps the memory of the look she had given me that made me alter my method in order to discover the end of her unfinished sentence. Until then I had been hypnotised by the last word, *casser*. What was it she meant by *break*? *Casser du bois*? No. *Du sucre*? No. *Break*, *break*, *break*. And all at once her look, and her shrug, when I had suggested that she should give a dinner-party sent me back to the words that had preceded. And immediately I saw that she had not simply said *casser* but *me faire casser*. Horror! It was this that she would have preferred. Twofold horror! For even the vilest of prostitutes, who consents to such a thing, or even desires it, does not use that hideous expression to the man who indulges in it. She would feel it too degrading. To a woman alone, if she loves women, she might say it, to excuse herself for giving herself presently to a man. Albertine had not been lying when she told me that she was half dreaming. Her mind elsewhere, forgetting that she was with me, impulsively she had shrugged her shoulders and begun to speak as she would have spoken to one of those women, perhaps to one of my budding girls. And abruptly recalled to reality, crimson with shame, pushing back into her mouth what she was about to say, desperately ashamed, she had refused to utter another word. I had not a moment to lose if I was not to let her see the despair I was in. But already, after my first impulse of rage, the tears were coming to my eyes. As at Balbec, on the night that followed her revelation of her friendship with the Vinteuil pair, I must immediately invent a plausible reason for my grief, and one that was at the same time capable of having so profound an effect on Albertine as to give me a few days' respite before coming to a decision. And so, just as she was telling me that she had never felt so affronted as when she had heard that I had gone out alone, that she would sooner have died than be told this by Françoise, and just as, irritated by her absurd susceptibility, I was on the point of telling her that what I had done was trivial, that there was nothing wounding to her in my having gone out, my unconscious parallel search for what she had meant to say had come to fruition, and the despair into which my discovery plunged me could not be completely hidden, so that instead of defending, I accused myself. "My little Albertine," I said to her in a gentle voice which was drowned in my first tears, "I could tell you that you're mistaken, that what I did this evening was nothing, but I should be lying; it's you who are right, you have realised the truth, my poor sweet, which is that six months ago, three months ago, when I was still so fond of you, I should never have done such a thing. It's a mere nothing, and yet it's enormous, because of the immense change in my heart of which it is the sign. And since you have detected this change which I hoped to conceal from you, I feel impelled to say this to you: My little Albertine" (I went on in a tone of profound gentleness and sorrow), "don't you see that the life you're leading here is boring for you. It is better that we should part, and as the best partings are those that are effected most swiftly, I ask you, to cut short the great sorrow that I am bound to feel, to say good-bye to me tonight and to leave in the morning without my seeing you again, while I'm asleep."

She appeared stunned, incredulous and desolate: "Tomorrow? You really mean it?"

And in spite of the anguish that I felt in speaking of our parting as though it were already in the past—partly perhaps because of that very anguish—I began to give Albertine the most precise instructions as to certain things which she would have to do after she left the house. And passing from one request to another, I soon found myself entering into the minutest details.

"Be so kind," I said with infinite sadness, "as to send me back that book of Bergotte's which is at your aunt's. There's no hurry about it, in three days, in a week, whenever you like, but remember that I don't want to have to write and ask you for it: that would be too painful. We have been happy together, but now we feel that we should be unhappy."

"Don't say that we feel that we'd be unhappy," Albertine interrupted me, "don't say 'we,' it's only you who feel that."

"Yes, very well, you or I, as you like, for one reason or another. But it's absurdly late, you must go to bed—we've decided to part tonight."

"Excuse me, *you've* decided, and I obey you because I don't want to upset you."

"Very well, it's I who have decided, but that doesn't make it any less painful for me. I don't say that it will be painful for long, you know that I'm not capable of remembering things for long, but for the first few days I shall be so miserable without you. And so I feel that it's no use stirring up the memory with letters, we must end everything at once."

"Yes, you're right," she said to me with a crushed air, which was enhanced by the signs of fatigue on her features due to the lateness of the hour, "rather than have one finger chopped off and then another, I prefer to lay my head on the block at once."

"Heavens, I'm appalled when I think how late I'm keeping you out of bed, it's madness. However, it's the last night! You'll have plenty of time to sleep for the rest of your life."

And thus while telling her that it was time to say good-night I sought to postpone the moment when she would have said it: "Would you like me, in order to take your mind off things during the first few days, to ask Bloch to send his cousin Esther to the place where you'll be staying? He'll do that for me."

"I don't know why you say that" (I had said it in an attempt to wrest a confession from Albertine), "there's only one person I care about, and that's you," Albertine said to me, and her words were infinitely sweet to me. But, the next moment, what a blow she dealt me! "I remember, of course, that I did give this Esther my photograph because she kept on asking me for it and I saw that it would give her pleasure, but as for having any great liking for her or wanting to see her again, never!" And yet Albertine was of so frivolous a nature that she went on: "If she wants to see me, it's all the same to me. She's very nice, but I don't care in the least either way."

Thus, when I had spoken to her of the photograph of Esther which Bloch had sent me (and which I had not even received when I mentioned it to her) Albertine had gathered that Bloch had shown me a photograph of herself which she had given to Esther. In my worst suppositions, I had never imagined that any such intimacy could have existed between Albertine and Esther. Albertine had been at a loss for words when I mentioned the photograph. And now, wrongly, supposing me to be in the know, she thought it advisable to confess. I was shattered.

"And, Albertine, let me ask you to do me one more favour: never attempt to see me again. If at any time, as may happen in a year, in two years, in three years, we should find ourselves in the same town, avoid me." And seeing that she did not answer my request in the affirmative, I went on: "My Albertine, don't do it, don't ever see me again in this life. It would hurt me too much. For I was really fond of you, you know. Of course, when I told you the other day that I wanted to see the friend I mentioned to you at Balbec again, you thought it was all settled. Not at all, I assure you, it was quite immaterial to me. You're convinced that I had long made up my mind to leave you, that my affection was all make-believe."

"Not at all, you're crazy, I never thought so," she said sadly.

"You're right, you must never think so, I did genuinely feel for you, not love perhaps, but a great, a very great affection, more than you can imagine."

"Of course I can imagine. And do you suppose that I don't love you!"

"It hurts me terribly to have to leave you."

"It hurts me a thousand times more," replied Albertine.

Already for some little time I had felt that I could no longer hold back the tears that came welling up in my eyes. And these tears did not spring from at all the same sort of misery which I had felt long ago when I said to Gilberte: "It is better that we should not see one another again; life is dividing us." No doubt when I wrote this to Gilberte, I said to myself that when I was in love not with her but with another, the excess of my love would diminish that which I might perhaps have been able to inspire, as though two people must inevitably have only a certain quantity of love at their disposal, of which the surplus taken by one is subtracted from the other, and that from her too, as from Gilberte, I should be doomed to part. But the situation was entirely different for several reasons, the first of which (and it had, in its turn, given rise to the others) was that the lack of will-power which my grandmother and my mother had observed in me with alarm, at Combray, and before which each of them, so great is the energy with which an invalid imposes his weakness upon others, had capitulated in turn, this lack of will-power had gone on increasing at an ever accelerated pace. When I felt that my presence bored Gilberte, I had still enough strength left to give her up; I had no longer the same strength when I had made a similar discovery with regard to Albertine, and could think only of keeping her by force. With the result that, whereas I wrote to Gilberte saying that I would not see her again and really meant it, I said this to Albertine quite untruthfully and in the hope of bringing about a reconciliation. Thus we presented each to the other an appearance which was very different from the reality. And no doubt it is always so when two people are face to face, since each of them is ignorant of a part of what exists in the other (even what he knows, he can understand only in part) and both of them reveal what is least personal to them, either because they have themselves not properly untangled and regard as negligible what is most personal or because insignificant advantages which do not belong to them particularly seem more important and more flattering to themselves, and at the same time they pretend not to care about certain things they admire, in order not to be despised for not having them, and these are precisely the things that they appear to scorn above all else and even to abhor. But in love this misunderstanding is carried to its supreme pitch because, except perhaps in childhood, we try to see to it that the appearance we assume, instead of reflecting exactly what is in our thoughts, is what is best calculated to enable us to obtain what we desire, and this, in my case, since I had come in, was to be able to keep Albertine as docile as she had been in the past, and to ensure that she did not in her irritation ask me for greater freedom, which I wanted to grant her some day but which at this moment, when I was afraid of her hankerings after independence, would have made me too jealous. After a certain age, from self-esteem and from sagacity, it is to the things we most desire that we pretend to attach no importance. But in love, mere sagacity—which in any case is probably not true wisdom—drives us all too quickly to this kind of duplicity. What I had dreamed of, as a child, as being the sweetest thing in love, what had seemed to me to be the very essence of love, was to pour out freely, to the one I loved, my tenderness, my gratitude for her kindness, my longing for an everlasting life together. But I had become only too well aware, from my own experience and from that of my friends, that the expression of such sentiments is far from being

contagious. The case of an affected old woman like M. de Charlus who, as a result of seeing in his mind's eye only a handsome young man, thinks he himself has become a handsome young man, and betrays more and more effeminacy in his risible affectations of virility—such a case falls under a law which applies far more widely than to the Charluses alone, a law so generalised that not even love itself exhausts it entirely; we do not see our bodies, though others do, and we “follow” our thoughts, the object that is in front of us, invisible to others (made visible at times in a work of art, whence the frequent disillusionment of its admirers when they are admitted into the presence of the artist, whose inner beauty is so imperfectly reflected in his face). Once one has noticed this, one no longer “lets oneself go;” I had taken good care that afternoon not to tell Albertine how grateful I was to her that she had not remained at the Trocadéro. And tonight, having been afraid that she might leave me, I had feigned a desire to leave her, a pretence which moreover, as we shall see presently, had not been dictated solely by the experience I believed myself to have gained from my former loves and was seeking to turn to the profit of this one.

The fear that Albertine was perhaps going to say to me: “I want to be allowed to go out by myself at certain hours, I want to be able to stay away for twenty-four hours,” or some such request for freedom which I did not attempt to define, but which alarmed me, this fear had crossed my mind for a moment during the Verdurin reception. But it had been dispelled, contradicted moreover by the memory of Albertine's constant assurances of how happy she was with me. The intention to leave me, if it existed in Albertine, manifested itself only in an obscure fashion, in certain mournful glances, certain gestures of impatience, remarks which meant nothing of the sort but which, if one analysed them (and there was not even any need for analysis, for one understands at once this language of passion, even the most uneducated understand these remarks which can be explained only by vanity, rancour, jealousy, unexpressed as it happens, but detectable at once by the interlocutor through an intuitive faculty which, like the “good sense” of which Descartes speaks, is “the most evenly distributed thing in the world”), could only be explained by the presence in her of a sentiment which she concealed and which might lead her to form plans for another life without me. Just as this intention did not express itself in her speech in a logical fashion, so the presentiment of this intention, which I had felt tonight, remained just as vague in me. I continued to live by the hypothesis which accepted as true everything that Albertine told me. But it may be that during this time a wholly contrary hypothesis, of which I refused to think, never left me; this is all the more probable since otherwise I should not have felt uncomfortable about telling Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins', and my lack of astonishment at her anger would not have been comprehensible. So that what probably existed in me was an idea of Albertine entirely contrary to that which my reason formed of her, and also to that which her own words suggested, an Albertine who was none the less not wholly invented, since she was like an internal mirror of certain impulses that occurred in her, such as her ill-humour at my having gone to the Verdurins'. Besides, for a long time past, my constant anxieties, my fear of telling Albertine that I loved her, all this corresponded to another hypothesis which explained far more things and had also this to be said for it, that if one adopted the first hypothesis the second became more probable, for by allowing myself to give way to effusions of tenderness for Albertine, I obtained from her nothing but irritation (to which moreover she assigned a different cause).

I may say that what had seemed to me most serious and had struck me most forcibly as a symptom of the fact that she anticipated my accusation was that she had said to me: “I believe Mlle Vinteuil was to be there,” to which I had replied in the cruelest possible way: “You didn't tell me you'd met her.” As soon as I found Albertine less than nice, instead of telling her I was sad, I became nasty.

Analysing my feelings on the basis of this, on the basis of the unvarying system of ripostes expressing the opposite of what I felt, I can be quite certain that if, that night, I told her that I was going to leave her, it was because—even before I had realised it—I was afraid that she might desire some freedom (I should have been hard put to it to say what this freedom was that made me tremble, but anyhow a freedom which might have given her an opportunity of being unfaithful to me, or at least which was such that I should no longer have been able to be certain that she was not) and because I wanted to show her, from pride and from cunning, that I was very far from fearing anything of the sort, as I had already shown at Balbec, when I was anxious that she should have a good opinion of me, and later on, when I was anxious that she should not have time to feel bored with me.

Finally, the objection that might be offered to this second, unformulated hypothesis, that everything that Albertine said to me indicated on the contrary that the life which she preferred was the life she led in my house, rest, quiet, reading, solitude, a loathing for Sapphic loves, and so forth, need not be considered seriously. For if on her part Albertine had wanted to gauge what I felt from what I said to her, she would have learned the exact opposite of the truth, since I never expressed a desire to part from her except when I was unable to do without her, and at Balbec I had twice confessed to her that I was in love with another woman, first Andrée, then a mysterious stranger, on the two occasions when jealousy had revived my love for her. My words, therefore, did not in the least reflect my feelings. If the reader has no more than a faint impression of these, that is because, as narrator, I expose my feelings to him at the same time as I repeat my words. But if I concealed the former and he were acquainted only with the latter, my actions, so little in keeping with them, would so often give him the impression of strange reversals that he would think me more or less mad. A procedure which would not, for that matter, be much more false than the one I adopted, for the images which prompted me to action, so opposed to those which were portrayed in my words, were at that moment extremely obscure; I was but imperfectly aware of the nature which guided my actions; today, I have a clear conception of its subjective truth. As for its objective truth, that is to say whether the intuitions of that nature grasped more exactly than my reason Albertine's true intentions, whether I was right to trust to that nature or whether on the contrary it did not alter Albertine's intentions instead of making them plain—that I find difficult to say.

That vague fear which I had felt at the Verdurins' that Albertine might leave me had at first subsided. When I returned home, it had been with the feeling that I myself was a captive, not with that of finding a captive in the house. But the fear that had subsided had gripped me even more violently when, as soon as I informed Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins', I saw her face veiled with a look of enigmatic irritation which moreover was not making itself visible for the first time. I knew perfectly well that it was only the crystallisation in the flesh of reasoned grievances, of ideas clear to the person who forms but does not express them, a synthesis rendered visible but not therefore rational, which he who gathers its precious residue from the face of the beloved endeavours in his turn, so that he may understand what is occurring in her, to reduce by analysis to its intellectual elements. The approximate equation of that unknown quantity which Albertine's thoughts were to me had given me, more or less, the following: “I knew his suspicions, I was sure that he would attempt to verify them, and so that I might not hinder him, he has worked out his little plan in secret.” But if this was the state of mind (which she had never expressed to me) in which Albertine was living, must she not regard with



horror, no longer have the strength to lead, might she not at any moment decide to terminate, a life in which, if she was, in desire at any rate, guilty, she must feel herself suspected, hunted, prevented from ever yielding to her desires, without thereby disarming my jealousy, and in which, if she was innocent in intention and fact, she had had every right, for some time past, to feel discouraged, seeing that, ever since Balbec, where she had shown so much perseverance in avoiding the risk of ever being alone with Andrée, until this very day when she had given up the idea of going to the Verdures' and of staying at the Trocadéro, she had not succeeded in regaining my trust? All the more so because I could not say that her behaviour was not exemplary. If at Balbec, when anyone mentioned girls who behaved scandalously, she used often to copy their laughter, their wriggings, their general manner, which was a torture to me because of what I supposed it must mean to her girlfriends, now that she knew my opinion on the subject she ceased, as soon as anyone made an allusion to things of that sort, to take part in the conversation, not only orally but with her facial expression. Whether it was in order not to contribute her share to the slanders that were being uttered about some woman or other, or for a quite different reason, the only thing that was noticeable then, upon those so mobile features, was that as soon as the topic was broached they had made their inattention evident, while preserving exactly the same expression as they had worn a moment earlier. And this immobility of even a light expression was as heavy as a silence. It would have been impossible to say whether she blamed, whether she approved, whether she knew or did not know about these things. Her features no longer bore any relation to anything except one another. Her nose, her mouth, her eyes formed a perfect harmony, isolated from everything else; she looked like a pastel, and seemed to have no more heard what had just been said than if it had been uttered in front of a portrait by La Tour.

My servitude, which had again been brought home to me when, as I gave the driver Brichot's address, I had seen her lighted window, had ceased to weigh upon me shortly afterwards, when I saw that Albertine appeared so cruelly conscious of her own. And in order that it might seem to her less burdensome, that she might not decide to break her bonds of her own accord, I had felt that the most effective plan was to give her the impression that it would not be permanent and that I myself was looking forward to its termination. Seeing that my feint had proved successful, I might well have felt happy, in the first place because what I had so dreaded, Albertine's supposed wish to leave me, seemed to be ruled out, and secondly because, quite apart from the object that I had had in mind, the very success of my feint, by proving that I was something more to Albertine than a scorned lover, whose jealousy is flouted, all of his ruses detected in advance, restored to our love a sort of virginity, revived for it the days in which she could still, at Balbec, so readily believe that I was in love with another woman. Doubtless she would no longer have believed that, but she gave credence to my feigned determination to part from her now and for ever.

She appeared to suspect that the cause of it might lie at the Verdurins'. I told her that I had seen a dramatist (Bloch), who was a great friend of Lea's and to whom Lea had said some strange things (I hoped by telling her this to make her think that I knew a great deal more than I cared to say about Bloch's cousins). But feeling a need to calm the agitation induced in me by my pretence of a rupture, I said to her: "Albertine, can you swear that you have never lied to me?"

She gazed fixedly into space before replying: "Yes ... that's to say no. I was wrong to tell you that Andrée was greatly taken with Bloch. We never met him."

"Then why did you say so?"

"Because I was afraid that you believed other stories about her."

"That's all?"

She stared once again into space and then said: "I ought not to have kept from you a three weeks' trip I went on with Lea. But I knew you so slightly in those days!"

"It was before Balbec?"

"Before the second time, yes."

And that very morning, she had told me that she did not know Lea! I watched a tongue of flame seize and devour in an instant a novel which I had spent millions of minutes in writing. To what end? To what end? Of course I realised that Albertine had revealed these two facts to me because she thought that I had learned them indirectly from Lea; and that there was no reason why a hundred similar facts should not exist. I realised too that Albertine's words, when one interrogated her, never contained an atom of truth, that the truth was something she let slip only in spite of herself, as a result of a sudden mixing together in her mind of the facts which she had previously been determined to conceal with the belief that one had got wind of them.

"But two things are nothing," I said to Albertine, "let's have as many as four, so that you may leave me with some memories. What other revelations have you got for me?"

Once again she stared into space. To what belief in a future life was she adapting her falsehood, with what gods less accommodating than she had supposed was she seeking to make a deal? It cannot have been an easy matter, for her silence and the fixity of her gaze continued for some time.

"No, nothing else," she said at length. And, notwithstanding my persistence, she adhered, easily now, to "nothing else." And what a lie! For, from the moment she had acquired those tastes until the day when she had been shut up in my house, how many times, in how many places, on how many excursions must she have gratified them! The daughters of Gomorrah are at once rare enough and numerous enough for one not to pass unnoticed by another in any given crowd. Thenceforward, a rendezvous is an easy matter.

I remembered with horror an evening which at the time had struck me as merely absurd. One of my friends had invited me to dine at a restaurant with his mistress and another of his friends who had also brought his. The two women were not long in coming to an understanding, but were so impatient to enjoy one another that already at the soup stage their feet were searching for one another, often finding mine. Presently their legs were intertwined. My two friends noticed nothing; I was in agonies. One of the women, who could contain herself no longer, stooped under the table, saying that she had dropped something. Then one of them complained of a headache and asked to go upstairs to the lavatory. The other remembered that it was time for her to go and meet a woman friend at the theatre. Finally I was left alone with my two friends, who suspected nothing. The lady with the headache reappeared, but begged to be allowed to go home by herself to wait for her lover at his house, so that she might take a febrifuge. The two women became great friends and used to go about together, one of them, dressed as a man, picking up little girls and taking them home to the other to be initiated. This other had a little boy with whom she would pretend to be displeased and would hand him over for correction to her friend, who went to it with a will. One may say that there was no place, however public, in which they did not do what is most secret.



"But Lea behaved perfectly properly with me throughout the trip," Albertine told me. "In fact she was a great deal more reserved than plenty of society women."

"Are there any society women who have shown a lack of reserve with you, Albertine?"

"Never."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Oh, well, she was less free in her speech."

"For instance?"

"She would never, like many of the women you meet, have used the expression 'rotten,' or say: 'I don't care a damn for anybody.'"

It seemed to me that a part of the novel which the flames had so far spared had finally crumbled into ashes.

My discouragement might have persisted. Albertine's words, when I thought of them, made it give way to a furious rage. This subsided into a sort of tenderness. I too, since I had come home and declared that I wished to break with her, had been lying. And this desire to separate, which I simulated perseveringly, brought for me little by little something of the sadness I would have felt had I truly wanted to leave Albertine.

Besides, even when I thought in fits and starts, in twinges, as we say of other bodily pains, of that orgiastic life which Albertine had led before she met me, I wondered all the more at the docility of my captive and ceased to feel any resentment. Never, in the course of our life together, had I ceased to make it clear to Albertine that that life would in all probability be merely temporary, so that she might continue to find some charm in it. But tonight I had gone further, having feared that vague threats of separation were no longer sufficient, contradicted as they would doubtless be, in Albertine's mind, by her idea of a great and jealous love of her, which must have made me, she seemed to imply, go and investigate at the Verdurins'. That night I thought that, among the other reasons which might have made me suddenly decide to put on this comedy of rupture, without even realising what I was doing except as I went on, there was above all the fact that when, in one of those impulses to which my father was prone, I threatened another person's safety, since unlike him I did not have the courage to put a threat into practice, in order not to give the impression that it had been nothing but empty words, I would go to considerable lengths in pretending to carry out my threat and would recoil only when my adversary, genuinely convinced of my sincerity, had begun seriously to tremble.

Besides, we feel that in these lies there is indeed a grain of truth, that, if life does not bring about any changes in our loves, it is we ourselves who will seek to bring about or to feign them, so strongly do we feel that all love, and everything else in life, evolves rapidly towards a farewell. We want to shed the tears that it will bring long before it comes. No doubt there was, on this occasion, a practical reason for the scene that I had enacted. I had suddenly wanted to keep Albertine because I felt that she was scattered about among other people with whom I could not prevent her from mixing. But even if she had renounced them all for ever for my sake, I might perhaps have been still more firmly resolved never to leave her, for separation is made painful by jealousy but impossible by gratitude. I felt that in any case I was fighting the decisive battle in which I must conquer or succumb. I would have offered Albertine in an hour all that I possessed, because I said to myself: "Everything depends upon this battle." But such battles are less like those of old, which lasted for a few hours, than like those of today which do not end the next day, or the day after, or the following week. We give all our strength, because we steadfastly believe that we shall never need it again. And more than a year goes by without producing a "decision."

Perhaps an unconscious reminiscence of lying scenes enacted by M. de Charlus, in whose company I had been when the fear of Albertine's leaving me had seized hold of me, had contributed thereto. But later on I heard my mother tell a story, of which I then knew nothing, which leads me to believe that I had found all the elements of this scene in myself, in one of those obscure reserves of heredity which certain emotions, acting in this as drugs such as alcohol or coffee act upon the residue of our stored-up strength, place at our disposal. When my aunt Leonie learned from Eulalie that Françoise, convinced that her mistress would never again leave the house, had secretly planned an outing of which my aunt was to know nothing, she pretended, the day before, to have suddenly decided to go for a drive next day. The incredulous Françoise was ordered not only to prepare my aunt's clothes beforehand, and to air those that had been put away for too long, but even to order the carriage and arrange all the details of the excursion down to the last quarter of an hour. It was only when Françoise, convinced or at any rate shaken, had been forced to confess to my aunt the plan that she herself had made, that my aunt publicly abandoned her own, so as not, she said, to interfere with Françoise's arrangements. Similarly, in order that Albertine should not think that I was exaggerating and in order to make her proceed as far as possible in the idea that we were to part, myself drawing the obvious inferences from the proposal I had advanced, I had begun to anticipate the time which was to begin next day and was to last for ever, the time when we should be separated, addressing to Albertine the same requests as if we were not presently to be reconciled. Like a general who considers that if a feint is to succeed in deceiving the enemy it must be pushed to the limit, I had used up almost as much of my store of sensibility as if it had been genuine. This fictitious parting scene ended by causing me almost as much grief as if it had been real, possibly because one of the actors, Albertine, by believing it to be real, had heightened the illusion for the other. We lived a day-to-day life which, however tedious, was still endurable, held down to earth by the ballast of habit and by that certainty that the next day, even if it should prove painful, would contain the presence of the other. And here was I foolishly destroying all that heavy life. I was destroying it, it is true, only in a fictitious fashion, but this was enough to make me wretched; perhaps because the sad words which we utter, even mendaciously, carry in themselves their sorrow and inject it deeply into us; perhaps because we realise that, by feigning farewells, we anticipate an hour which must inevitably come sooner or later; then we cannot be certain that we have not triggered off the mechanism which will make it strike. In every bluff there is an element of uncertainty, however small, as to what the person whom we are deceiving is going to do. What if this make-believe parting should lead to a real parting! One cannot consider the possibility, however unlikely it may seem, without a pang of anguish. One is doubly anxious, because the parting would then occur at the moment when it would be most intolerable, when one has been made to suffer by the woman who would be leaving us before having healed, or at least soothed, one's pain. Finally, one no longer has the solid ground of habit upon which to rest, even in one's sorrow. One has deliberately deprived oneself of it, one has given the present day an exceptional importance, detached it from the days before and after it; it floats without roots like a day of departure; one's imagination, ceasing to be paralysed by habit, has awakened, one has suddenly added to one's everyday love sentimental dreams which enormously enhance it, making indispensable to one a presence upon which in fact one is no longer certain that one can rely. No doubt it is precisely in order to assure oneself of that presence for the future that one has indulged in the make-believe of being able to dispense with it. But one has oneself

been taken in by the game, one has begun to suffer anew because one has created something new and unfamiliar which thus resembles those cures that are destined in time to heal the malady from which one is suffering, but the first effects of which are to aggravate it.

I had tears in my eyes, like those people who, alone in their rooms, imagining, in the wayward course of their meditations, the death of someone they love, conjure up so precise a picture of the grief that they would feel that they end by feeling it. So, multiplying my injunctions as to how Albertine should behave towards me after we had parted, I seemed to feel almost as much distress as though we had not been on the verge of a reconciliation. Besides, was I so certain that I could bring about this reconciliation, bring Albertine back to the idea of a shared life, and, if I succeeded for the time being, that, in her, the state of mind which this scene had dispelled would not revive? I felt that I was in control of the future but I did not quite believe it because I realised that this feeling was due merely to the fact that the future did not yet exist, and that thus I was not crushed by its inevitability. And while I lied, I was perhaps putting into my words more truth than I supposed. I had just had an example of this, when I told Albertine that I would quickly forget her; this was what had indeed happened to me in the case of Gilberte, whom I now refrained from going to see in order to avoid, not suffering, but an irksome duty. And certainly I had suffered when I wrote to Gilberte to tell her that I would not see her any more. Yet I saw Gilberte only from time to time. Whereas the whole of Albertine's time belonged to me. And in love, it is easier to relinquish a feeling than to give up a habit. But all these painful words about our parting, if the strength to utter them had been given me because I knew them to be untrue, were on the other hand sincere on Albertine's lips when I heard her exclaim: "Ah! I promise I shall never see you again. Anything sooner than see you cry like that, my darling. I don't want to cause you pain. Since it must be, we'll never meet again." They were sincere, as they could not have been coming from me, because, since Albertine felt nothing stronger for me than friendship, on the one hand the renunciation that they promised cost her less, and on the other hand because my tears, which would have been so small a matter in a great love, seemed to her almost extraordinary and distressed her, transposed into the domain of that state of friendship in which she dwelt, a friendship greater than mine for her, to judge by what she had just said—what she had just said, because when two people part it is the one who is not in love who makes the tender speeches, since love does not express itself directly—what she had just said and what was perhaps not altogether untrue, for the countless kindnesses of love may end by arousing, in the person who inspires without feeling it, an affection and a gratitude less selfish than the sentiment that provoked them, which, perhaps, after years of separation, when nothing of that sentiment remains in the former lover, will still persist in the beloved.

There was only one moment when I felt a kind of hatred for her, which merely sharpened my need to hold on to her. Since, being exclusively jealous of Mlle Vinteuil that night, I thought of the Trocadéro with the greatest indifference (not only because I had sent her there to avoid the Verdurins, but even when I thought of Lea's presence there, on account of which I had brought her back so that she should not meet her), I mentioned Lea's name without thinking, and Albertine, at once on her guard, supposing that I had perhaps heard something more, took the initiative and exclaimed volubly, but without looking me straight in the face: "I know her very well. Some of my friends and I went to see her act last year, and after the performance we went behind to her dressing-room. She changed in front of us. It was most interesting." Then my mind was compelled to relinquish Mlle Vinteuil and, in a despairing effort, in that fruitless hunt through the abysses of possible reconstructions, attached itself to the actress, to that evening when Albertine had gone to see her in her dressing-room. On the one hand, after all the oaths she had sworn to me, and in so truthful a tone, after her complete sacrifice of her freedom, how could I possibly believe that there was anything wrong in it? And yet, on the other hand, were not my suspicions antennae pointing in the direction of the truth, since if she had given up the Verdurins for my sake in order to go to the Trocadéro, nevertheless at the Verdurins' Mlle Vinteuil had been expected, and at the Trocadéro, which she had moreover given up in order to go for a drive with me, there had been this Lea, who seemed to me to be disturbing me without cause and yet whom, in a remark which I had not extracted from her, she admitted having known on a larger scale than my fears had ever envisaged, in circumstances that were indeed dubious: for what could have induced her to go behind like that to her dressing-room? If I ceased to suffer on account of Mlle Vinteuil when I suffered because of Lea, those two tormentors of my day, it was either because of the inability of my mind to picture too many scenes at one time, or because of the intrusion of my nervous emotions of which my jealousy was but the echo. I could deduce from them only that she had no more belonged to Lea than to Mlle Vinteuil and that I believed in the Lea hypothesis only because she was now uppermost in my mind. But the fact that my jealousies subsided—to revive from time to time one after another—did not mean, either, that they did not correspond each to some truth of which I had had a foreboding, that of these various women I must not say to myself none, but all. I say a foreboding, for I could not project myself to all the points of time and space which I should have had to occupy; and besides, what instinct would have given me the sequence and the co-ordinates to enable me to surprise Albertine at such and such a time with Lea, or with the Balbec girls, or with that friend of Mme Bontemps whom she had brushed against, or with the girl on the tennis-court who had nudged her with her elbow, or with Mlle Vinteuil?

"My little Albertine," I replied, "it is very good of you to make me this promise. Anyhow, for the first few years at least, I shall avoid the places where I might meet you. You don't know whether you'll be going to Balbec this summer? Because in that case I should arrange not to go there myself." Now, if I went on in this way, anticipating the future in my lying inventions, it was less with the object of frightening Albertine than that of distressing myself. As a man who at first has had no serious reason for losing his temper becomes completely intoxicated by the sound of his own voice and lets himself be carried away by a fury engendered not by his grievance but by his anger itself as it steadily grows, so I was sliding faster and faster down the slope of my wretchedness, towards an ever more profound despair, with the inertia of a man who feels the cold grip him, makes no effort to struggle against it, and even finds a sort of pleasure in shivering. And if, presently, I had the strength at last to pull myself together, to react, to go into reverse, as I had every intention of doing, it was not so much for the pain that Albertine had caused me by greeting me with such hostility on my return, as for the pain I had felt in imagining, in order to pretend to be settling them, the formalities of an imaginary separation, in foreseeing its consequences, that Albertine's kiss, when the time came for her to bid me good-night, would have to console me now. In any case, it was important that this leave-taking should not come of its own accord from her, for that would have made more difficult the reversal whereby I would propose to her to abandon the idea of our parting. I therefore continued to remind her that the time to say good-night had long since come and gone, and this, by leaving the initiative to me, enabled me to put it off for a moment longer. And thus I interspersed the questions which I continued to put to Albertine with allusions to our exhaustion and the lateness of the hour.

"I don't know where I shall be going," she replied to the last of these questions with a preoccupied air. "Perhaps I shall go to Touraine, to my aunt's." And this first plan that she suggested froze me as though it were beginning actually to put our final separation into effect. She looked round the room, at the pianola, the blue satin armchairs. "I still can't get used to the idea that I shan't see all this again, tomorrow, or the next day, or ever. Poor little room. It seems to me quite impossible; I can't get it into my head."

"It had to be; you were unhappy here."

"No, I wasn't at all unhappy, it's now that I shall be unhappy."

"No, I assure you, it's better for you."

"For you, perhaps!"

I began to stare into space as though, tormented by a great uncertainty, I was struggling with an idea that had just occurred to me. Then, all of a sudden: "Listen, Albertine, you say that you're happier here, that you're now going to be unhappy."

"Why, of course."

"That appals me. Would you like us to try to carry on for a few weeks? Who knows, week by week, we may perhaps go on for a long time. You know that there are temporary arrangements which end by becoming permanent."

"Oh, it would be sweet of you!"

"Only in that case it's ridiculous of us to have made ourselves wretched like this over nothing for hours on end. It's like making all the preparations for a long journey and then staying at home. I'm absolutely dead beat."

I sat her on my knee, took Bergotte's manuscript which she so longed to have, and wrote on the cover: "To my little Albertine, in memory of a new lease of life."

"Now," I said to her, "go and sleep until tomorrow, my darling, for you must be worn out."

"Most of all I'm very happy."

"Do you love me a bit?"

"A hundred times more than ever."

I should have been wrong to be pleased with this little piece of play-acting. Even if it had stopped short of the sort of full-scale production I had given it, even if we had done no more than simply discuss a separation, it would have been serious enough. In conversations of this sort, we imagine that we are speaking not just insincerely, which is true, but freely. Whereas they are generally the first faint murmur of an unsuspected storm, whispered to us without our knowing it. In reality, what we express at such times is the opposite of our desire (which is to live for ever with the one we love), but also the impossibility of living together which is the cause of our daily suffering, a suffering preferred by us to that of a separation, which will, however, end by separating us in spite of ourselves. But not, as a rule, at once. More often than not it happens—this was not, as we shall see, my case with Albertine—that, some time after the words in which we did not believe, we put into action a vague attempt at a deliberate separation, not painful, temporary. We ask the woman, so that afterwards she may be happier in our company, so that we at the same time may momentarily escape from continual bouts of gloom and exhaustion, to go away without us, or to let us go away without her, for a few days—the first that we have spent away from her for a long time past, and something that we should have thought inconceivable. Very soon she returns to take her place by our fireside. Only this separation, short but effectuated, is not so arbitrarily decided upon, not so certainly the only one that we have in mind. The same bouts of gloom begin again, the same difficulty in living together makes itself felt, only a parting is no longer so difficult as before; we have begun by talking about it, and have then put it into practice amicably. But these are only premonitory symptoms which we have failed to recognise. Presently, the temporary and benign separation will be succeeded by the terrible and final separation for which, without knowing it, we have paved the way.

"Come to my room in five minutes and let me see something of you, my darling one. It would so nice if you would. But afterwards I shall fall asleep at once, for I'm almost dead."

It was indeed a dead woman that I saw when, presently, I entered her room. She had fallen asleep as soon as she lay down; her sheets, wrapped round her body like a shroud, had assumed, with their elegant folds, the rigidity of stone. It was as though, reminiscent of certain mediaeval Last Judgments, the head alone was emerging from the tomb, awaiting in its sleep the Archangel's trumpet. This head had been surprised by sleep almost upside down, the hair dishevelled. Seeing that expressionless body lying there, I asked myself what logarithmic table it constituted, that all the actions in which it might have been involved, from the nudge of an elbow to the brushing of a skirt, should be capable of causing me, stretched out to the infinity of all the points that it had occupied in space and time, and from time to time sharply reawakened in my memory, so intense an anguish, even though I knew that it was determined by impulses and desires of hers which in another person, in herself five years earlier or five years later, would have left me quite indifferent. It was all a lie, but a lie for which I had not the courage to seek any solution other than my own death. And so I remained, in the fur-lined coat which I had not taken off since my return from the Verdurins', beside that twisted body, that allegorical figure. Allegorising what? My death? My love? Soon I began to hear her regular breathing. I went and sat down on the edge of her bed to take that soothing cure of breeze and contemplation. Then I withdrew very quietly so as not to wake her.

It was so late that, in the morning, I warned Françoise to tread very softly when she had to pass by the door of Albertine's room. And so Françoise, convinced that we had spent the night in what she used to call orgies, sarcastically warned the other servants not to "wake the Princess." And this was one of the things that I dreaded, that Françoise might one day be unable to contain herself any longer, might treat Albertine with insolence, and that this might introduce complications into our life. Françoise was now no longer, as at the time when it distressed her to see Eulalie treated generously by my aunt, of an age to endure her jealousy with fortitude. It distorted, paralysed our old servant's face to such an extent that at times I wondered, after some outburst of rage, whether she had not had a slight stroke. Having thus asked that Albertine's sleep should be respected, I was unable to sleep myself. I tried to understand Albertine's true state of mind. Was it a real peril that I had averted by that wretched farce which I had played, and notwithstanding her assurance that she was so happy living with me, had she really felt at certain moments a longing for freedom, or on the contrary was I to believe what she said? Which of these two hypotheses was the truth? If it often happened to me, especially later on, to extend an incident in my past life to the dimensions of history when I wished to understand some political event, conversely, that morning, in trying to understand the significance of our overnight scene, I could not help identifying it, in spite of all the differences, with a diplomatic incident that had just occurred. I had perhaps the right to reason thus. For it was highly probable that the example of M. de Charlus had guided me unwittingly in the sort of lying

scene which I had so often seen him enact with such authority; and what else was this on his part than an unconscious importation into the domain of his private life of the innate tendency of his German blood, guilefully provocative and arrogantly bellicose at need?

Various persons, among them the Prince of Monaco, having suggested the idea to the French Government that, if it did not dispense with M. Delcassé, a menacing Germany would definitely declare war, the Minister for Foreign Affairs had been asked to resign. Thus the French Government had admitted the hypothesis of an intention to make war upon us if we did not yield. But others thought that it was all a mere "bluff" and that if France had stood firm Germany would not have drawn the sword. No doubt in this case the scenario was not merely different but almost the reverse, since the threat of a rupture had never been put forward by Albertine; but a series of impressions had led me to believe that she was thinking of it, as France had been led to believe it of Germany. On the other hand, if Germany desired peace, to have provoked in the French Government the idea that she was anxious for war was a questionable and dangerous trick. True, my conduct had been adroit enough, if it was the thought that I would never make up my mind to break with her that provoked in Albertine sudden longings for independence. And was it not difficult to believe that she did not have such longings, to shut one's eyes to a whole secret existence, directed towards the satisfaction of her vice, simply on the strength of the anger with which, on learning that I had gone to see the Verdurins, she had exclaimed: "I thought as much," and then gone on to reveal everything by saying: "Wasn't Mlle Vinteuil to be there?" All this was corroborated by Albertine's meeting with Mme Verdurin of which Andrée had informed me. And yet, perhaps, I told myself, when I tried to go against my own instinct, these sudden longings for independence were caused—supposing them to exist—or would eventually be caused by the opposite theory, to wit, that I had never had any intention of marrying her, that it was when I made, as though involuntarily, an allusion to our approaching separation that I was telling the truth, that I would leave her sooner or later whatever happened—belief which the scene I had fabricated that night could then only have reinforced and which might end by engendering in her the resolution: "If it's bound to happen sooner or later, we might as well get it over with at once." Preparations for war, which are recommended by the most misleading of adages as the best way of ensuring peace, on the contrary create first of all the belief in each of the adversaries that the other desires a rupture, a belief which brings the rupture about, and then, when it has occurred, the further belief in each of the two that it is the other that has sought it. Even if the threat was not sincere, its success encourages a repetition. But the exact point up to which a bluff may succeed is difficult to determine; if one party goes too far, the other, which has yielded hitherto, advances in its turn; the first party, no longer capable of changing its methods, accustomed to the idea that to seem not to fear a rupture is the best way of avoiding one (which is what I had done that night with Albertine), and moreover driven by pride to prefer death to surrender, perseveres in its threat until the moment when neither can draw back. The bluff may also be blended with sincerity, may alternate with it, and what was yesterday a game may become a reality tomorrow. Finally it may also happen that one of the adversaries is really determined upon war—that Albertine, for instance, had the intention of sooner or later not continuing this life any longer, or on the contrary that the idea had never even entered her head and that my imagination had invented the whole thing from start to finish.

Such were the different hypotheses which I considered while she lay asleep that morning. And yet as to the last I can say that never, in the period that followed, did I threaten to leave Albertine unless in response to a hankering for a baleful freedom on her part, a hankering which she did not express to me, but which seemed to me to be implied by certain mysterious dissatisfactions, certain words, certain gestures, for which it could be the only possible explanation and for which she refused to give me any other. Even then, quite often, I noted them without making any allusion to a possible separation, hoping that they were the result of a bad mood which would end that same day. But sometimes that mood would continue without remission for weeks on end, during which Albertine seemed anxious to provoke a conflict, as though she knew of pleasures which were available at that moment in some more or less remote place and which would continue to influence her until they came to an end, like those atmospheric changes which, right by our own fireside, affect our nerves even when they are occurring as far away as the Balearic islands.

That morning, while Albertine lay asleep and I was trying to guess what was concealed in her, I received a letter from my mother in which she expressed her anxiety at having heard nothing of what I had decided in these words from Mme de Sévigné: "As for me, I am convinced that he will not marry; but then, why trouble this girl whom he will never marry? Why risk making her refuse suitors whom she will henceforth regard only with scorn? Why disturb the mind of a person whom it would be so easy to avoid?" This letter from my mother brought me back to earth. "Why do I go on seeking after a mysterious soul, interpreting a face, and feeling myself surrounded by presentiments which I dare not explore?" I asked myself. "I've been dreaming, the matter is quite simple. I am an indecisive young man, and it is a case of one of those marriages as to which it takes time to find out whether they will happen or not. There is nothing in this peculiar to Albertine." This thought brought me immense but short-lived relief. Very soon I said to myself: "One can of course reduce everything, if one regards it in its social aspect, to the most commonplace item of newspaper gossip. From outside, it is perhaps thus that I myself would look at it. But I know very well that what is true, what at least is also true, is everything that I have thought, what I have read in Albertine's eyes, the fears that torment me, the problem that I continually put to myself with regard to Albertine. The story of the hesitant suitor and the broken engagement may correspond to this, as the report of a theatrical performance made by an intelligent reporter may give us the subject of one of Ibsen's plays. But there is something beyond those facts that are reported. It is true that this other thing exists perhaps, were we capable of seeing it, in all hesitant suitors and in all engagements that drag on, because there is perhaps an element of mystery in everyday life." It was possible for me to neglect it in the lives of other people, but Albertine's life and my own I was living from within.

Albertine did not say to me after this midnight scene, any more than she had said before it: "I know you don't trust me, and I'm going to try to dispel your suspicions." But this idea, which she never expressed in words, might have served as an explanation of even her most trivial actions. Not only did she take care never to be alone for a moment, so that I could not help but know what she had been doing if I did not believe her own statements, but even when she had to telephone to Andrée, or to the garage, or to the livery stable or elsewhere, she pretended that it was too boring to stand about by herself waiting to telephone, what with the time the girls took to give you your number, and was careful that I should be with her at such times, or, failing me, Françoise, as though she were afraid that I might imagine reprehensible telephone conversations in which she would make mysterious assignments.

Alas, all this did not set my mind at rest. Aimé had sent me back Esther's photograph, saying that she was not the person. So there were yet others? Who? I sent this photograph back to Bloch. The one I should have liked to see was the one Albertine had given to Esther. How was she dressed in it? Perhaps in a low-cut dress. Who knew whether they had

not been photographed together? But I dared not mention it to Albertine (for it would then have appeared that I had not seen the photograph), or to Bloch, since I did not wish him to think that I was interested in Albertine.

And this life, which anyone who knew of my suspicions and her bondage would have seen to be agonising both to myself and to Albertine, was regarded from without, by Françoise, as a life of unmerited pleasures of which full advantage was cunningly taken by that “wheedler” and (as Françoise said, using the feminine form far more often than the masculine, for she was more envious of women) “charlatante.” Indeed, as Françoise, by contact with myself, had enriched her vocabulary with new expressions, but adapted them to her own style, she said of Albertine that she had never known a person of such “perfidity,” who was so skilful at “drawing my money” by play-acting (which Françoise, who was as prone to mistake the particular for the general as the general for the particular and who had but a very vague idea of the various forms of dramatic art, called “acting a pantomime”). Perhaps I was myself to some extent responsible for this misconception as to the true nature of the life led by Albertine and myself, owing to the vague confirmations of it which, when I was talking to Françoise, I cunningly let fall, from a desire either to tease her or to appear, if not loved, at any rate happy. And yet it did not take her long to detect my jealousy and the watch I kept over Albertine (which I would have given anything for Françoise not to be aware of), guided, like a thought-reader who finds a hidden object while blindfolded, by that intuition which she possessed for anything that might be painful to me, which would not allow itself to be turned aside by any lies that I might tell in the hope of putting her off the scent, and also by that clairvoyant hatred which drove her—even more than it drove her to believe her enemies more prosperous, more cunning play-actresses than they really were—to uncover what might prove their undoing and precipitate their downfall. Françoise certainly never made any scenes with Albertine. But I knew her skill in the art of insinuation, the way she knew how to make the most of the implications of a particular situation, and I cannot believe that she resisted the temptation to let Albertine know, day after day, what a humiliating role she was playing in the household, to madden her by a slyly exaggerated portrayal of the confinement to which she was subjected. On one occasion I found Françoise, armed with a huge pair of spectacles, rummaging through my papers and replacing among them a sheet on which I had jotted down a story about Swann and his inability to do without Odette. Had she maliciously left it lying in Albertine’s room? Besides, above all Françoise’s innuendoes, which had merely been the muttering and perfidious accompaniment of it in the bass, it is probable that there must have risen, louder, clearer, more insistent, the accusing and calumnious voice of the Verdurins, irritated to see that Albertine was involuntarily keeping me and that I was voluntarily keeping her away from the little clan.

As for the money that I spent on Albertine, it was almost impossible for me to conceal it from Françoise, since I was unable to conceal any of my expenditure from her. Françoise had few faults, but those faults had created in her, for their own purposes, positive talents which she often lacked apart from the exercise of those faults. The principal one was her curiosity as to all money spent by us upon people other than herself. If I had a bill to pay or a tip to give, it was useless my going into a corner, she would find a plate to be put in the right place, a napkin to be picked up, which would give her an excuse for approaching. And however short a time I allowed her before dismissing her with fury, this woman who had almost lost her sight, who could scarcely count, guided by the same expert sense whereby a tailor, on catching sight of you, instinctively calculates the price of the stuff of which your coat is made, and indeed cannot resist fingering it, or a painter is immediately responsive to a colour effect, Françoise furtively glimpsed and instantaneously calculated the amount that I was giving. If, in order that she should not tell Albertine that I was corrupting her chauffeur, I tried to forestall her and, apologising for the tip, said: “I wanted to be generous to the chauffeur, so I gave him ten francs,” Françoise, for whom the merciless glance of an old and almost blind eagle had sufficed, would reply: “No no, Monsieur gave him a tip of 43 francs. He told Monsieur that the charge was 45 francs, Monsieur gave him 100 francs, and he handed back only 12 francs.” She had had time to see and to reckon the amount of the gratuity which I myself did not know.

I wondered whether Albertine, feeling herself watched, would not herself put into effect the separation with which I had threatened her, for life in its changing course makes realities of our fables. Whenever I heard a door open, I gave a start, as my grandmother used to start in her last moments whenever I rang the bell. I did not believe that she would have left the house without telling me, but my unconscious thought so, as my grandmother’s unconscious quivered at the sound of the bell when she was no longer conscious. One morning, indeed, I had a sudden anxious fear that she had not only left the house but gone for good: I had just heard the sound of a door which seemed to me to be that of her room. I tiptoed towards the room, opened the door, and stood on the threshold. In the dim light the bedclothes bulged in a semicircle. It had to be Albertine, lying in a curve, sleeping with her head and her feet nearest the wall. The hair on that head, abundant and dark, which alone showed above the bedclothes, made me realise that it was she, that she had not opened her door, had not stirred, and I sensed this motionless and living semicircle, in which a whole human life was contained and which was the only thing to which I attached any value; I sensed that it was there, in my despotic possession.

If Albertine’s object was to restore my peace of mind, she was partly successful; my reason moreover asked nothing better than to prove to me that I had been mistaken as to her evil plans, as I had perhaps been mistaken as to her vicious instincts. No doubt I took into account, in assessing the value of the arguments with which my reason furnished me, my desire to find them sound. But in order to be really impartial and to have a chance of perceiving the truth, short of acknowledging that it can never be known save by presentiment, by a telepathic emanation, ought I not to tell myself that if my reason, in seeking to bring about my cure, let itself be guided by my desire, on the other hand, as regards Mlle Vinteuil, Albertine’s vices, her intention to lead a different life, her plan of separation, which were the corollaries of her vices, my instinct, in trying to make me ill, might have allowed itself to be led astray by my jealousy? Besides, her seclusion, which Albertine herself contrived so ingeniously to render absolute, in eradicating my suffering gradually eradicated my suspicion and I could begin again, when evening revived my anxieties, to find in Albertine’s presence the consolation of earlier days. Seated beside my bed, she would talk to me about one of those dresses or one of those objects which I was constantly giving her in order to make her life more agreeable and her prison more beautiful.

If I had questioned M. de Charlus about old French silver, this was because, when we had been planning to have a yacht, we had asked Elstir’s advice on the off chance, even though Albertine did not believe that we would ever have one. Now, no less than in matters of women’s dress, the painter’s taste in the furnishing of yachts was refined and severe. He would allow only English furniture and old silver. This had led Albertine, who had at first thought only of clothes and furniture, to become interested in silver, and since our return from Balbec she had read books on the silversmith’s art and on the hallmarks of the old craftsmen. But old French silver—having been melted down twice, at the time of the Treaty of Utrecht when the King himself, setting the example to his great nobles, sacrificed his silver plate, and again in

1789—is now extremely rare. At the same time, although modern silversmiths have managed to copy all this old plate from the Pont-aux-Choux designs, Elstir considered this reproduction work unworthy to enter the dwelling of a woman of taste, even a floating one. I knew that Albertine had read the description of the marvels that Roettiers had made for Mme du Barry. If any of these pieces remained, she longed to see them, and I to give them to her. She had even begun to form a neat collection which she installed with charming taste in a glass case and which I could not contemplate without affectionate dismay, for the art with which she arranged them was that, born of patience, ingenuity, homesickness, the need to forget, which prisoners practise.

In the matter of dress, what appealed to her most at this time was everything made by Fortuny. These Fortuny gowns, one of which I had seen Mme de Guermantes wearing, were those of which Elstir, when he told us about the magnificent garments of the women of Carpaccio's and Titian's day, had prophesied the imminent return, rising from their ashes, as magnificent as of old, for everything must return in time, as it is written beneath the vaults of St Mark's, and proclaimed, as they drink from the urns of marble and jasper of the Byzantine capitals, by the birds which symbolise at once death and resurrection. As soon as women had begun to wear them, Albertine had remembered Elstir's prophecy, had coveted them, and we were shortly to go and choose one. Now even if these gowns were not those genuine antiques in which women today seem a little too got up in fancy dress and which it is preferable to keep as collector's items (I was looking for some of these also, as it happens, for Albertine), neither did they have the coldness of the artificial, the sham antique. Like the theatrical designs of Sert, Bakst and Benois, who at that moment were re-creating in the Russian ballet the most cherished periods of art with the aid of works of art impregnated with their spirit and yet original, these Fortuny gowns, faithfully antique but markedly original, brought before the eye like a stage decor, and with an even greater evocative power since the decor was left to the imagination, that Venice saturated with oriental splendour where they would have been worn and of which they constituted, even more than a relic in the shrine of St Mark, evocative as they were of the sunlight and the surrounding turbans, the fragmented, mysterious and complementary colour. Everything of those days had perished, but everything was being reborn, evoked and linked together by the splendour and the swarming life of the city, in the piecemeal reappearance of the still-surviving fabrics worn by the Doges' ladies. I had tried once or twice to obtain advice on this subject from Mme de Guermantes. But the Duchess did not care for clothes that gave the effect of fancy dress. She herself, though she possessed several, never looked so well as in black velvet with diamonds. And with regard to gowns like Fortuny's, she had little useful advice to give. Besides, I had scruples about asking her advice lest I might give the impression that I called on her only when I happened to need her help, whereas for a long time past I had been declining several invitations a week from her. It was not only from her, moreover, that I received them in such profusion. Certainly, she and many other women had always been extremely friendly to me. But my seclusion had undoubtedly multiplied their friendliness tenfold. It seems that in our social life, a minor echo of what occurs in love, the best way to get oneself sought after is to withhold oneself. A man may think up everything that he can possibly cite to his credit, in order to find favour with a woman; he may wear different clothes every day, look after his appearance; yet she will not offer him a single one of the attentions and favours which he receives from another woman to whom, by being unfaithful to her, and in spite of his appearing before her ill-dressed and without any artifice to attract, he has endeared himself for ever. Similarly, if a man were to regret that he was not sufficiently courted in society, I should not advise him to pay more calls, to keep an even finer carriage; I should tell him not to accept any invitation, to live shut up in his room, to admit nobody, and that then there would be a queue outside his door. Or rather I should not tell him so. For it is a sure way to become sought-after which succeeds only like the way to be loved, that is to say if you have not adopted it with that object in view, if, for instance, you confine yourself to your room because you are seriously ill, or think you are, or are keeping a mistress shut up with you whom you prefer to society (or for all these reasons at once), in the eyes of which, even if it is unaware of the woman's existence, and simply because you resist its overtures, it will simply be a reason to prefer you to all those who offer themselves, and to attach itself to you.

"We shall have to begin to think soon about your Fortuny dressing-gown," I said to Albertine one evening. Surely, for her, who had long desired them, who would choose them with me after long deliberation, who had a place reserved for them in advance, not only in her wardrobe but in her imagination, the possession of these gowns, every detail of which, before deciding among so many others, she would carefully examine, was something more than it would have been to a woman with too much money who has more dresses than she knows what to do with and never even looks at them. And yet, notwithstanding the smile with which Albertine thanked me, saying: "It's so sweet of you," I noticed how weary and even sad she was looking.

From time to time, while we were waiting for these gowns to be finished, I used to borrow others of the kind, sometimes merely the stuffs, and would dress Albertine in them, drape them over her; she walked about my room with the majesty of a Doge's wife and the grace of a mannequin. But my captivity in Paris was made more burdensome to me by the sight of these garments which reminded me of Venice. True, Albertine was far more of a prisoner than I. And it was curious to remark how fate, which transforms persons, had contrived to penetrate the walls of her prison, to change her in her very essence, and turn the girl I had known at Balbec into a dreary, docile captive. Yes, the walls of her prison had not prevented that influence from reaching her; perhaps indeed it was they that had produced it. It was no longer the same Albertine, because she was not, as at Balbec, incessantly in flight upon her bicycle, impossible to find owing to the number of little watering-places where she would go to spend the night with friends and where moreover her lies made it more difficult to lay hands on her; because, shut up in my house, docile and alone, she was no longer what at Balbec, even when I had succeeded in finding her, she used to be upon the beach, that fugitive, cautious, deceitful creature, whose presence was expanded by the thought of all those assignations which she was skilled in concealing, which made one love her because they made one suffer and because, beneath her coldness to other people and her casual answers, I could sense yesterday's assignation and tomorrow's, and for myself a sly, disdained thought; because the sea breeze no longer puffed out her skirts; because, above all, I had clipped her wings, and she had ceased to be a winged Victory and become a burdensome slave of whom I would have liked to rid myself.

Then, to change the course of my thoughts, rather than begin a game of cards or draughts with Albertine, I would ask her to give me a little music. I remained in bed, and she would go and sit down at the end of the room before the pianola, between the two bookcases. She chose pieces which were either quite new or which she had played to me only once or twice, for, beginning to know me better, she was aware that I liked to fix my thoughts only upon what was still obscure to me, and to be able, in the course of these successive renderings, thanks to the increasing but, alas, distorting and alien light of my intellect, to link to one another the fragmentary and interrupted lines of the structure which at first had been almost hidden in mist. She knew and, I think, understood the joy that my mind derived, at these first hearings,

from this task of modelling a still shapeless nebula. And as she played, of all Albertine's multiple tresses I could see but a single heart-shaped loop of black hair clinging to the side of her ear like the bow of a Velasquez Infanta. Just as the volume of that angel musician was constituted by the multiple journeys between the different points in the past which the memory of her occupied within me and the different signs, from the purely visual to the innermost sensations of my being, which helped me to descend into the intimacy of hers, so the music that she played had also a volume, produced by the unequal visibility of the different phrases, according as I had more or less succeeded in throwing light on them and joining up the lines of the seemingly nebulous structure. She guessed that at the third or fourth repetition my intellect, having grasped, having consequently placed at the same distance, all the parts, and no longer having to exert any effort on them, had conversely projected and immobilised them on a uniform plane. She did not, however, yet move on to another piece, for, without perhaps having any clear idea of the process that was going on inside me, she knew that at the moment when the exertions of my intelligence had succeeded in dispelling the mystery of a work, it was very rarely that, in compensation, it had not, in the course of its baleful task, picked up some profitable reflexion. And when in time Albertine said: "We might give this roll to Françoise and get her to change it for something else," often there was for me a piece of music the less in the world, perhaps, but a truth the more.

I was so convinced that it would be absurd to be jealous of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, inasmuch as Albertine gave not the least sign of wanting to see them again, and among all the plans for a holiday in the country which we had formed had herself rejected Combray, so near to Montjouvain, that often I would ask her to play to me some of Vinteuil's music, without its causing me pain. Once only this music had been an indirect cause of jealousy. This was when Albertine, who knew that I had heard it performed at Mme Verdurin's by Morel, spoke to me one evening about him, expressing a keen desire to go and hear him play and to make his acquaintance. This, as it happened, was shortly after I had learned of the letter, unintentionally intercepted by M. de Charlus, from Lea to Morel. I wondered whether Lea might not have mentioned him to Albertine. The words "you naughty girl," "you vicious thing," came back to my horrified mind. But precisely because Vinteuil's music was in this way painfully associated with Léa—and not with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend—when the anguish caused by Lea had subsided, I could listen to this music without pain; one malady had cured me of the possibility of the others. In the music I had heard at Mme Verdurin's, phrases I had not noticed, obscure larvae that were then indistinct, turned into dazzling architectural structures; and some of them became friends, that I had scarcely distinguished, that at best had appeared to me to be ugly, so that I could never have supposed that they were like those people, antipathetic at first sight, whom we discover to be what they really are only after we have come to know them well. Between the two states there was a real transmutation. At the same time, phrases which had been quite distinct the first time but which I had not then recognised, I identified now with phrases from other works, such as that phrase from the Sacred Variation for Organ which, at Mme Verdurin's, had passed unperceived by me in the septet, where nevertheless, like a saint that had stepped down from the sanctuary, it found itself consorting with the composer's familiar sprites. Moreover, the phrase evoking the joyful clanging of the bells at noon, which had seemed to me too unmelodious, too mechanical in its rhythm, had now become my favourite, either because I had grown accustomed to its ugliness or because I had discovered its beauty. This reaction from the disappointment which great works of art cause at first may in fact be attributed to a weakening of the initial impression or to the effort necessary to lay bare the truth—two hypotheses which recur in all important questions, questions about the truth of Art, of Reality, of the Immortality of the Soul; we must choose between them; and, in the case of Vinteuil's music, this choice was constantly presenting itself under a variety of forms. For instance, this music seemed to me something truer than all known books. At moments I thought that this was due to the fact that, what we feel about life not being felt in the form of ideas, its literary, that is to say intellectual expression describes it, explains it, analyses it, but does not recompose it as does music, in which the sounds seem to follow the very movement of our being, to reproduce that extreme inner point of our sensations which is the part that gives us that peculiar exhilaration which we experience from time to time and which, when we say "What a fine day! What glorious sunshine!" we do not in the least communicate to others, in whom the same sun and the same weather evoke quite different vibrations. In Vinteuil's music, there were thus some of those visions which it is impossible to express and almost forbidden to contemplate, since, when at the moment of falling asleep we receive the caress of their unreal enchantment, at that very moment in which reason has already deserted us, our eyes seal up and before we have had time to know not only the ineffable but the invisible, we are asleep. It seemed to me, when I abandoned myself to this hypothesis that art might be real, that it was something even more than the merely nerve-tingling joy of a fine day or an opiate night that music can give; a more real, more fruitful exhilaration, to judge at least by what I felt. It is inconceivable that a piece of sculpture or a piece of music which gives us an emotion that we feel to be more exalted, more pure, more true, does not correspond to some definite spiritual reality, or life would be meaningless. Thus nothing resembled more closely than some such phrase of Vinteuil the peculiar pleasure which I had felt at certain moments in my life, when gazing, for instance, at the steeples of Martinville, or at certain trees along a road near Balbec, or, more simply, at the beginning of this book, when I tasted a certain cup of tea. Like that cup of tea, all those sensations of light, the bright clamour, the boisterous colours that Vinteuil sent to us from the world in which he composed, paraded before my imagination, insistently but too rapidly for me to be able to apprehend it, something that I might compare to the perfumed silkiness of a geranium. But whereas in memory this vagueness may be, if not fathomed, at any rate identified, thanks to a pinpointing of circumstances which explain why a certain taste has been able to recall to us luminous sensations, the vague sensations given by Vinteuil coming not from a memory but from an impression (like that of the steeples of Martinville), one would have had to find, for the geranium scent of his music, not a material explanation, but the profound equivalent, the unknown, colourful festival (of which his works seemed to be the disconnected fragments, the scarlet-flashing splinters), the mode by which he "heard" the universe and projected it far beyond himself. Perhaps it was in this, I said to Albertine, this unknown quality of a unique world which no other composer had ever yet revealed, that the most authentic proof of genius lies, even more than in the content of the work itself. "Even in literature?" Albertine inquired. "Even in literature." And thinking again of the sameness of Vinteuil's works, I explained to Albertine that the great men of letters have never created more than a single work, or rather have never done more than refract through various media an identical beauty which they bring into the world. "If it were not so late, my sweet," I said to her, "I would show you this quality in all the writers whose works you read while I'm asleep, I would show you the same identity as in Vinteuil. These key-phrases, which you are beginning to recognise as I do, my little Albertine, the same in the sonata, in the septet, in the other works, would be, say for instance in Barbey d'Aureville, a hidden reality revealed by a physical sign, the physiological blush of the Bewitched, of Aimée de Spens, of old Clotte, the hand in the *Rideau cramois*, the old manners and customs, the old words, the ancient and peculiar trades behind which there is the Past, the oral

history made by the herdsmen with their mirror, the noble Norman cities redolent of England and charming as a Scottish village, the hurler of curses against which one can do nothing, la Vellini, the Shepherd, a similar sensation of anxiety in a passage, whether it be the wife seeking her husband in *Une vieille maîtresse*, or the husband in *L'Ensorcelée* scouring the plain and the Bewitched herself coming out from mass. Another example of Vinteuil's key-phrases is that stonemason's geometry in the novels of Thomas Hardy."

Vinteuil's phrases made me think of the "little phrase" and I told Albertine that it had been as it were the national anthem of the love of Swann and Odette, "the parents of Gilberte, whom I believe you know. You told me she was a bad girl. Didn't she try to have relations with you? She spoke to me about you."

"Yes, you see, her parents used to send a carriage to fetch her from school when the weather was bad, and I seem to remember she took me home once and kissed me," she said, after a momentary pause, laughing as though it were an amusing revelation. "She asked me all of a sudden whether I was fond of women." (But if she only "seemed to remember" that Gilberte had taken her home, how could she say with such precision that Gilberte had asked her this odd question?) "In fact, I don't know what weird idea came into my head to fool her, but I told her that I was." (It was as though Albertine was afraid that Gilberte had told me this and did not want me to see that she was lying to me.) "But we did nothing at all." (It was strange, if they had exchanged these confidences, that they should have done nothing, especially as, before this, they had kissed, according to Albertine.) "She took me home like that four or five times, perhaps more, and that's all."

It cost me a great effort not to ply her with questions, but, mastering myself so as to appear not to be attaching any importance to all this, I returned to Thomas Hardy. "Do you remember the stonemasons in *Jude the Obscure*, and in *The Well-Beloved* the blocks of stone which the father hews out of the island coming in boats to be piled up in the son's workshop where they are turned into statues; and in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the parallelism of the tombs, and also the parallel line of the boat and the nearby railway coaches containing the lovers and the dead woman; and the parallel between *The Well-Beloved*, where the man loves three women, and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where the woman loves three men, and in short all those novels which can be superimposed on one another like the houses piled up vertically on the rocky soil of the island. I can't sum up the greatest writers like this in a few moments, but you'll see in Stendhal a certain sense of altitude symbolising the life of the spirit: the lofty place in which Julien Sorel is imprisoned, the tower at the top of which Fabrice is incarcerated, the belfry in which the Abbé Blanès pores over his astrology and from which Fabrice has such a magnificent bird's-eye view. You told me you had seen some of Vermeer's pictures: you must have realised that they're fragments of an identical world, that it's always, however great the genius with which they have been re-created, the same table, the same carpet, the same woman, the same novel and unique beauty, an enigma at that period in which nothing resembles or explains it, if one doesn't try to relate it all through subject matter but to isolate the distinctive impression produced by the colour. Well, this novel beauty remains identical in all Dostoevsky's works. Isn't the Dostoevsky woman (as distinctive as a Rembrandt woman) with her mysterious face, whose engaging beauty changes abruptly, as though her apparent good nature was only play-acting, into terrible insolence (although at heart it seems that she is more good than bad), isn't she always the same, whether it's Nastasia Philipovna writing love letters to Aglaya and telling her that she hates her, or in a visit that's absolutely identical with this—as also the one where Nastasia Philipovna insults Gania's family—Grushenka, as charming in Katerina Ivanovna's house as the latter had supposed her to be terrible, then suddenly revealing her malevolence by insulting Katerina Ivanovna (although Grushenka is good at heart)? Grushenka, Nastasia—figures as original, as mysterious, not merely as Carpaccio's courtesans but as Rembrandt's Bathsheba. Mind you, he certainly didn't only know how to depict that striking dual face, with its sudden explosions of furious pride, which makes the woman seem other than she is ('You are not like that,' says Myshkin to Nastasia during the visit to Gania's family, and Alyosha might have said the same to Grushenka during the visit to Katerina Ivanovna). But on the other hand when he wants 'ideas for paintings' they're always stupid and would at best result in the pictures where Munkacsy wanted to see a condemned man represented at the moment when ... etc., or the Virgin Mary at the moment when ... etc. But to return to the new kind of beauty that Dostoevsky brought to the world, just as, in Vermeer, there's the creation of a certain soul, of a certain colour of fabrics and places, so in Dostoevsky there's the creation not only of people but of their homes, and the house of the Murder in *Crime and Punishment*, with its janitor, isn't it as marvellous as the masterpiece of the house of Murder in *The Idiot*, that sombre house of Rogozhin's, so long, and so high, and so vast, in which he kills Nastasia Philipovna. That new and terrible beauty of a house, that new and two-sided beauty of a woman's face, that is the unique thing that Dostoevsky has given to the world, and the comparisons that literary critics may make, between him and Gogol, or between him and Paul de Kock, are of no interest, being external to this secret beauty. Besides, if I've said to you that from one novel to another it's the same scene, it's in the compass of a single novel that the same scenes, the same characters reappear if the novel is at all long. I could illustrate this to you easily in *War and Peace*, and a certain scene in a carriage ..."

"I didn't want to interrupt you, but now that I see that you're leaving Dostoevsky, I'm afraid I might forget. My sweet, what was it you meant the other day when you said: 'It's like the Dostoevsky side of Mme de Sévigné.' I must confess that I didn't understand. It seems to me so different."

"Come, little girl, let me give you a kiss to thank you for remembering so well what I say. You shall go back to the pianola afterwards. And I must admit that what I said was rather stupid. But I said it for two reasons. The first is a special reason. What I meant was that Mme de Sévigné, like Elstir, like Dostoevsky, instead of presenting things in their logical sequence, that is to say beginning with the cause, shows us first of all the effect, the illusion that strikes us. That is how Dostoevsky presents his characters. Their actions seem to us as deceptive as those effects in Elstir's pictures where the sea appears to be in the sky. We're quite surprised to find later on that some sly-looking individual is really the best of men, or vice versa."

"Yes, but give me an example in Mme de Sévigné."

"I admit," I answered her with a laugh, "that it's very far-fetched, but still I could find examples. For instance ...,"<sup>23</sup>

"But did he ever murder anyone, Dostoevsky? The novels of his that I know might all be called *The Story of a Crime*. It's an obsession with him, it isn't natural that he should always be talking about it."

"I don't think so, dear Albertine. I know little about his life. It's certain that, like everyone else, he was acquainted with sin, in one form or another, and probably in a form which the laws condemn. In that sense he must have been a bit criminal, like his heroes—who in any case are not entirely criminal, who are found guilty with extenuating circumstances. And perhaps it wasn't necessary for him to be criminal himself. I'm not a novelist; it's possible that creative writers are tempted by certain forms of life of which they have no personal experience. If I come with you to Versailles as we



arranged, I shall show you the portrait of an ultra-respectable man, the best of husbands, Choderlos de Laclos, who wrote the most appallingly perverse book, and just opposite it the portrait of Mme de Genlis who wrote moral tales and, not content with betraying the Duchesse d'Orléans, tortured her by turning her children against her. I admit all the same that in Dostoevsky this preoccupation with murder is something extraordinary which makes him very alien to me. I'm amazed enough when I hear Baudelaire say:

If not yet poison, arson, rape, and stabbing ...  
It is because our soul, alas! lacks daring.

But I can at least assume that Baudelaire is not sincere. Whereas Dostoevsky ... All that sort of thing seems to me as remote from myself as possible, unless there are parts of myself of which I know nothing, for we realise our own nature only in the course of time. In Dostoevsky I find the deepest wells of insight but only into certain isolated regions of the human soul. But he is a great creator. For one thing, the world which he describes does really appear to have been created by him. All those buffoons who keep on reappearing, like Lebedev, Karamazov, Ivolgin, Segrev, that incredible procession, are human types even more fantastic than those that people Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. And yet perhaps they're fantastic only in the same way, by the effect of lighting and costume, and are quite normal really. In any case the whole thing is full of profound and unique truths, which belong only to Dostoevsky. They almost suggest, those buffoons, some trade or calling that no longer exists, like certain characters in the old drama, and yet how they reveal true aspects of the human soul! What I find so tedious is the solemn manner in which people talk and write about Dostoevsky. Have you ever noticed the part that self-esteem and pride play in his characters? It's as though, for him, love and the most passionate hatred, goodness and treachery, timidity and insolence, are merely two aspects of a single nature, their self-esteem, their pride preventing Aglaya, Nastasia, the Captain whose beard Mitya pulls, Krassotkin, Alyosha's enemy-friend, from showing themselves in their true colours. But there are many other great qualities as well. I know very few of his books. But what a simple, sculptural notion it is, worthy of the most classical art, a frieze interrupted and resumed in which the theme of vengeance and expiation is unfolded in the crime of old Karamazov getting the poor simpleton with child, the mysterious, animal, unexplained impulse whereby the mother, herself unconsciously the instrument of an avenging destiny, obeying also obscurely her maternal instinct, feeling perhaps a combination of resentment and physical gratitude towards her violator, comes to give birth to her child in old Karamazov's garden. This is the first episode, mysterious, grandiose, august, like the Creation of Woman in one of the sculptures at Orvieto. And as counterpart, the second episode more than twenty years later, the murder of old Karamazov, the infamy committed against the Karamazov family by the madwoman's son, Smerdiakov, followed shortly afterwards by another act as mysteriously sculptural and unexplained, of a beauty as obscure and natural as the childbirth in old Karamazov's garden, Smerdiakov hanging himself, his crime accomplished. Actually I wasn't straying as far from Dostoevsky as you thought when I mentioned Tolstoy, who imitated him a great deal. In Dostoevsky there's concentrated, still tense and peevish, a great deal of what was to blossom later on in Tolstoy. There's that proleptic gloom of the primitives which the disciples will brighten and dispel."

"What a bore it is that you're so lazy, my sweet. Just look at your view of literature, so much more interesting than the way we were made to study it; the essays that they used to make us write about *Esther*: 'Monsieur,'—you remember," she said with a laugh, less from a desire to make fun of her masters and herself than from the pleasure of finding in her memory, in our common memory, a recollection that was already quite venerable.

But while she was speaking, and I thought once more of Vinteuil, it was the other, the materialist hypothesis, that of there being nothing, that in turn presented itself to my mind. I began to doubt again; I told myself that after all it might be the case that, if Vinteuil's phrases seemed to be the expression of certain states of soul analogous to that which I had experienced when I tasted the madeleine soaked in tea, there was nothing to assure me that the vagueness of such states was a sign of their profundity rather than of our not having yet learned to analyse them, so that there might be nothing more real in them than in other states. And yet that happiness, that sense of certainty in happiness while I was drinking the cup of tea, or when I smelt in the Champs-Élysées a smell of mouldering wood, was not an illusion. In any case, whispered the spirit of doubt, even if these states are more profound than others that occur in life, and defy analysis for that very reason, because they bring into play too many forces of which we have hitherto been unaware, the charm of certain phrases of Vinteuil's music makes us think of them because it too defies analysis, but this does not prove that it has the same profundity; the beauty of a phrase of pure music can easily appear to be the image of or at least akin to an unintellectual impression which we have received, but simply because it is unintellectual. And why then do we suppose to be specially profound those mysterious phrases which haunt certain quartets and this septet by Vinteuil?

It was not, however, his music alone that Albertine played me; the pianola was to us at times like a scientific magic lantern (historical and geographical), and on the walls of this room in Paris, supplied with inventions more modern than my room at Combray, I would see extending before me, according to whether Albertine played me Rameau or Borodin, now an eighteenth-century tapestry sprinkled with cupids and roses, now the Eastern steppe in which sounds are muffled by the boundless distances and the soft carpet of snow. And these fleeting decorations were as it happened the only ones in my room, for although, at the time of inheriting my aunt Léonie's fortune, I had resolved to become a collector like Swann, to buy pictures and statues, all my money went on horses, a motor-car, dresses for Albertine. But did not my room contain a work of art more precious than all these—Albertine herself? I looked at her. It was strange to me to think that it was she, she whom I had for so long thought it impossible even to know, who now, a wild beast tamed, a rosebush to which I had acted as the prop, the framework, the trellis of its life, was seated thus, day by day, at home, by my side, before the pianola, with her back to my bookcase. Her shoulders, which I had seen drooping sullenly when she was carrying her golf-clubs, now leaned against my books. Her shapely legs, which on the first day I had with good reason imagined as having manipulated throughout her girlhood the pedals of a bicycle, now rose and fell alternately upon those of the pianola, upon which Albertine, who had acquired an elegance which made me feel her more my own, because it was from myself that it came, pressed her shoes of cloth of gold. Her fingers, at one time accustomed to handlebars, now rested upon the keys like those of a St Cecilia. Her throat, the curve of which, seen from my bed, was strong and full, at that distance and in the lamplight appeared pinker, less pink however than her face, bent forward in profile, which my gaze, issuing from the innermost depths of myself, charged with memories and burning with desire, invested with such a brilliancy, such an intensity of life that its relief seemed to stand out and turn with the same almost magic power as on the day, in the hotel at Balbec, when my vision was clouded by my overpowering desire to kiss her; and I prolonged each of its surfaces beyond what I was able to see and beneath what concealed it from me and made me feel all the more strongly—eyelids which half hid her eyes, hair that covered the upper part of her cheeks—the relief of those

superimposed planes; her eyes (like two facets that alone have yet been polished in the matrix in which an opal is still embedded), become more resistant than metal while remaining more brilliant than light, disclosed, in the midst of the blind matter overhanging them, as it were the mauve, silken wings of a butterfly placed under glass; and her dark, curling hair, presenting different conformations whenever she turned to ask me what she was to play next, now a splendid wing, sharp at the tip, broad at the base, black, feathered and triangular, now massing the contours of its curls in a powerful and varied chain, full of crests, of watersheds, of precipices, with its soft, creamy texture, so rich and so multiple, seeming to exceed the variety that nature habitually achieves and to correspond rather to the desire of a sculptor who accumulates difficulties in order to emphasise the suppleness, the vibrancy, the fullness, the vitality of his creation, brought out more strongly, but interrupting in order to cover it, the animated curve and, as it were, the rotation of the smooth, roseate face, with its glazed matt texture as of painted wood. And, by contrast with all this relief, by the harmony also which united them with her, who had adapted her attitude to their form and purpose, the pianola which half concealed her like an organ-case, the bookcase, the whole of that corner of the room, seemed to be reduced to the dimensions of a lighted sanctuary, the shrine of this angel musician, a work of art which, presently, by a charming magic, was to detach itself from its niche and offer to my kisses its precious, rose-pink substance. But no, Albertine was for me not at all a work of art. I knew what it meant to admire a woman in an artistic fashion, having known Swann. For my own part, however, no matter who the woman might be, I was incapable of doing so, having no sort of power of detached observation, never knowing what it was that I saw, and I had been amazed when Swann added retrospectively an artistic dignity—by comparing her to me, as he liked to do gallantly to her face, to some portrait by Luini, by recalling in her attire the gown or the jewels of a picture by Giorgione—to a woman who had seemed to me to be devoid of interest. Nothing of that sort with me. Indeed, to tell the truth, when I began to regard Albertine as an angel musician glazed with a marvellous patina whom I congratulated myself upon possessing, it was not long before I found her uninteresting; I soon became bored in her company; but these moments were of brief duration: one only loves that in which one pursues the inaccessible, one only loves what one does not possess, and very soon I began to realise once more that I did not possess Albertine. I saw flitting across her eyes, now the hope, now the memory, perhaps the regret, of joys which I could not guess at, which in that case she preferred to renounce rather than reveal to me, and which, glimpsing no more of them than that gleam in her pupils, I no more perceived than does the spectator who has been refused admission to the theatre, and who, his face glued to the glass panes of the door, can take in nothing of what is happening on the stage. (I do not know whether this was the case with her, but it is a strange thing—like evidence of a belief in good in the most incredulous—this perseverance in falsehood shown by all those who deceive us. It would be no good our telling them that their lies hurt us more than a confession, it would be no good their realising it for themselves, they would start lying again a moment later, to remain consistent with what they had always told us that they were, or with what they had told us that we were to them. Similarly, an atheist who values his life will let himself be burned alive rather than give the lie to the view that is generally held of his bravery.) During these hours, I used sometimes to see hover over her face, in her expression, in her pout, in her smile, the reflexion of those inner visions the contemplation of which made her on these evenings unlike her usual self, remote from me to whom they were denied. “What are you thinking about, my darling?” “Why, nothing.” Sometimes, in answer to the reproaches I made to her that she told me nothing, she would at one moment tell me things which she was not unaware that I knew as well as anyone (like those statesmen who will never give you the least bit of news, but speak to you instead of what you could have read for yourself in the papers the day before), at another would describe without any precise details, in the manner of false confidences, bicycle rides that she had had at Balbec, the year before our first meeting. And as though I had guessed aright long ago, when I inferred therefrom that she must be a girl who was allowed a great deal of freedom, who went on long jaunts, the mention of those rides insinuated between Albertine’s lips the same mysterious smile that had captivated me in those first days on the front at Balbec. She spoke to me also of the excursions she had made with some girlfriends through the Dutch countryside, of returning to Amsterdam in the evening, at a late hour, when a dense and happy crowd of people, almost all of whom she knew, thronged the streets and the towpaths of the canals, of which I felt that I could see reflected in Albertine’s brilliant eyes, as in the glancing windows of a fast-moving carriage, the innumerable, flickering lights. How much more deserving of the name indifference is so-called aesthetic curiosity compared with the painful, unwearying curiosity I felt as to the places in which Albertine had stayed, as to what she might have been doing on a particular evening, her smiles, the expressions in her eyes, the words that she had uttered, the kisses that she had received! No, never would the jealousy that I had felt one day of Saint-Loup, if it had persisted, have caused me this immense uneasiness. This love between women was something too unfamiliar; there was nothing to enable me to form a precise and accurate idea of its pleasures, its quality. How many people, how many places (even places which did not concern her directly, vague haunts of pleasure where she might have enjoyed some pleasure, places where there are a great many people, where people brush against one) had Albertine—like a person who, shepherding all her escort, a whole crowd, past the barrier in front of her, secures their admission to the theatre—from the threshold of my imagination or of my memory, where I paid no attention to them, introduced into my heart! Now, the knowledge that I had of them was internal, immediate, spasmodic, painful. Love is space and time made perceptible to the heart.

And yet perhaps, had I myself been entirely faithful, I might not have suffered because of infidelities which I would have been incapable of conceiving; whereas what it tortured me to imagine in Albertine was my own perpetual desire to find favour with new women, to start up new romances, was to suppose her guilty of the glance which I had been unable to resist casting, the other day, even while I was by her side, at the young bicyclists seated at tables in the Bois de Boulogne. As there is no knowledge, one might almost say that there is no jealousy, except of oneself. Observation counts for little. It is only from the pleasure that we ourselves have felt that we can derive knowledge and pain.

At moments, in Albertine’s eyes, in the sudden inflammation of her cheeks, I felt as it were a gust of warmth pass furtively through regions more inaccessible to me than the sky, in which Albertine’s memories, unknown to me, lived and moved. Then this beauty which, when I thought of the successive years in which I had known Albertine, whether on the beach at Balbec or in Paris, I found that I had but recently discovered in her, and which consisted in the fact that she existed on so many planes and embodied so many days that had passed, this beauty became almost heart-rending. Then beneath that rose-pink face I felt that there yawned like a gulf the inexhaustible expanse of the evenings when I had not known Albertine. I could, if I chose, take Albertine on my knee, hold her head in my hands, I could caress her, run my hands slowly over her, but, just as if I had been handling a stone which encloses the salt of immemorial oceans or the light of a star, I felt that I was touching no more than the sealed envelope of a person who inwardly reached to infinity. How I suffered from that position to which we are reduced by the obliviousness of nature which, when instituting the

division of bodies, never thought of making possible the interpenetration of souls! And I realised that Albertine was not even for me (for if her body was in the power of mine, her thoughts eluded the grasp of my thoughts) the marvellous captive with whom I had thought to enrich my home, while concealing her presence there as completely, even from the friends who came to see me and never suspected that she was at the end of the corridor, in the room next to my own, as did that person of whom nobody knew that he kept the Princess of China sealed in a bottle; urging me with cruel and fruitless insistence in quest of the past, she resembled, if anything, a mighty goddess of Time. And if I had to waste years of my life and much of my fortune for her sake—and provided that I can tell myself, which is by no means certain, alas, that she herself lost nothing—I have nothing to regret. No doubt solitude would have been better, more fruitful, less painful. But if I had led the collector's life which Swann counselled, and the joys of which M. de Charlus reproached me with not knowing, when, with a blend of wit, insolence and good taste, he complained to me how ugly my rooms were, what statues, what pictures long pursued, at length possessed, or even, to put it in the best light, contemplated with detachment, would—like the little wound which healed quickly enough, but which the unconscious tactlessness of Albertine, or of people generally, or of my own thoughts, was never long in reopening—have given me access to that way out of oneself, that connecting road which, though private, opens on to the highway along which passes what we learn to know only from the day when it has made us suffer: the life of other people?

Sometimes there was such a beautiful moonlight that, an hour after Albertine had gone to bed, I would go to her bedside to tell her to look out of the window. I am certain that it was for this reason that I went to her room, and not to assure myself that she was really there. What likelihood was there of her being able to escape, even if she had wished? It would have required an improbable collusion with Françoise. In the dim room, I could see nothing except, against the whiteness of the pillow, a slender diadem of dark hair. But I could hear Albertine's breathing. Her sleep was so deep that I hesitated at first to go as far as the bed. Then I sat down on the edge of it. Her sleep continued to flow with the same murmur. What I find it impossible to express is how gay her awakenings were. I would kiss her and shake her. At once she would cease to sleep, without even a moment's interval, would break out in a laugh, saying as she twined her arms round my neck: "I was just beginning to wonder whether you were coming," and then laugh even more blithely and tenderly. It was as though her charming head, when she slept, was filled with nothing but gaiety, affection and laughter. And in waking her I had merely, as when we cut open a fruit, released the gushing juice which quenches thirst.

Meanwhile winter was at an end; the fine weather returned, and often when Albertine had just bidden me good-night, my curtains and the wall above the curtains being still quite dark, in the nuns' garden next door I could hear, rich and mellow in the silence like a harmonium in church, the modulation of an unknown bird which, in the Lydian mode, was already chanting matins, and into the midst of my darkness flung the rich dazzling note of the sun that it could see. Soon the nights grew shorter still, and before what had been the hour of daybreak, I could see already stealing above my window-curtains the daily increasing whiteness of the dawn. If I resigned myself to allowing Albertine to continue to lead this life in which, notwithstanding her denials, I felt that she had the impression of being a prisoner, it was only because each day I was sure that on the morrow I should be able to set to work from time to time, to get up, to go out, to prepare our departure for some country place which we should buy and where Albertine would be able to lead, more freely and without anxiety on my account, the open-air life of the country or the seaside, of boating or hunting, which appealed to her.

Only, the next day, from that past which I loved and detested by turns in Albertine (since, when it is the present, everyone, from calculation, or politeness, or pity, sets to work to weave, between himself and us, a curtain of falsehood which we mistake for the truth) it would happen that, retrospectively, one of the hours which composed it, even of those which I thought I knew, presented to me all of a sudden an aspect which she no longer made any attempt to conceal from me and which was then quite different from the aspect in which it had previously appeared to me. Behind some look in her eyes, in place of the benign thought which I had formerly supposed that I could read in it, a hitherto unsuspected desire would reveal itself, alienating from me a fresh region of Albertine's heart which I had believed to be assimilated to my own. For instance, when Andrée had left Balbec in the month of July, Albertine had never told me that she was to see her again shortly, and I imagined that she had seen her even sooner than she expected since, because of the great unhappiness that I had suffered at Balbec, on that night of the fourteenth of September, she had made me the sacrifice of not remaining there and of returning at once to Paris. When she had arrived there on the fifteenth, I had asked her to go and see Andrée and had said to her: "Was she pleased to see you again?" Now one day Mme Bontemps called round to bring something for Albertine. I saw her for a moment and told her that Albertine had gone out with Andrée: "They've gone for a drive in the country."

"Yes," replied Mme Bontemps, "Albertine is always ready to go to the country. Three years ago, for instance, she simply had to go every day to the Buttes-Chaumont." At the name Buttes-Chaumont, a place where Albertine had told me that she had never been, my breath stopped for a moment. The truth is the most cunning of enemies. It delivers its attacks at the point in one's heart where one was least expecting them and where one has prepared no defence. Had Albertine been lying, to her aunt then, when she said that she went every day to the Buttes-Chaumont, or to myself since, when she told me that she did not know the place? "Fortunately," Mme Bontemps went on, "that poor Andrée will soon be leaving for a more bracing countryside, for the real countryside. She needs it badly, she's not looking at all well. It's true that she didn't get all the fresh air she needs last summer. You see, she left Balbec at the end of July, expecting to go back there in September, and then her brother put his knee out, and she was unable to go back."

So Albertine was expecting her at Balbec and had concealed this from me! It is true that it was all the more kind of her to have offered to return to Paris with me. Unless ...

"Yes, I remember Albertine's mentioning it to me" (this was untrue). "When did the accident occur, again? I'm a bit muddled about it all."

"Actually, in a way it happened just at the right moment, because a day later the lease of the villa would have begun, and Andrée's grandmother would have had to pay a month's rent for nothing. He damaged his leg on the fourteenth of September, and she had time to cable Albertine on the morning of the fifteenth that she wasn't coming and Albertine was in time to warn the agency. A day later, and the lease would have run on to the middle of October."

And so, no doubt, when Albertine, changing her mind, had said to me: "Let's go this evening," what she saw with her mind's eye was an apartment unknown to me, that of Andrée's grandmother, where, as soon as we returned, she would be able to see the friend whom, without my suspecting it, she had hoped to see again shortly at Balbec. The kind words with which she had expressed her willingness to return to Paris with me, in contrast to her stubborn refusal a little earlier, I had sought to attribute to a genuine change of heart. In fact they were simply the reflexion of one of those changes in a

situation of which we do not know, and which are the whole secret of the variations in the conduct of women who do not love us. They obstinately refuse to meet us the following evening, because they are tired, because their grandfather insists on their dining with him: "But come later," we insist. "He keeps me very late. He may want to see me home." The simple truth is that they have a rendezvous with some man whom they like. Suddenly he is no longer free. And they come to tell us how sorry they are to have hurt us, that the grandfather has been given the brush-off, and that there is nothing in the world that could keep them from remaining with us. I ought to have recognised these phrases in what Albertine had said to me on the day of my departure from Balbec. But to interpret her words I should have needed not only to recognise those phrases but to remember two traits peculiar to Albertine's character.

The two traits now recurred to my mind, one to console me, the other to make me wretched, for we find a little of everything in our memory; it is a sort of pharmacy, a sort of chemical laboratory, in which our groping hand may come to rest now on a sedative drug, now on a dangerous poison. The first trait, the consoling one, was that habit of making a single action serve the pleasure of several persons, that multiple utilisation of whatever she did, which was characteristic of Albertine. It was quite in keeping with her character that, returning to Paris (the fact that Andrée was not coming back might have made it inconvenient for her to remain at Balbec without this meaning that she could not do without Andrée), she should use that single journey as an opportunity for pleasing two people of whom she was genuinely fond: myself by making me believe that it was in order not to leave me on my own, in order that I should not be unhappy, out of devotion to me, and Andrée by persuading her that, since she was not coming to Balbec, she herself did not wish to remain there a moment longer, that she had prolonged her stay there only in the hope of seeing Andrée and was now hurrying back to join her. Now, Albertine's departure with me was such an immediate sequel, on the one hand to my access of grief and my desire to return to Paris, and on the other hand to Andrée's telegram, that it was quite natural that Andrée and I, respectively unaware, she of my grief, I of her telegram, should both have supposed that Albertine's departure from Balbec was the effect of the one cause that each of us knew, which indeed it followed at so short an interval and so unexpectedly. And in this case, it was still possible for me to believe that the thought of keeping me company had been Albertine's real object, though she had not wanted to neglect an opportunity of thereby establishing a claim to Andrée's gratitude.

But unfortunately I remembered almost at once another of Albertine's characteristics, which was the swiftness with which she was seized by the irresistible temptation of a pleasure. And I recalled how, when she had decided to leave, she had been so impatient to get to the train, how she had pushed past the hotel manager who in trying to detain us might have made us miss the omnibus, the shrug of complicity which she had given me and by which I had been so touched when, on the twister, M. de Cambremer had asked us whether we could not "postpone it by a sennight." Yes, what she saw in front of her eyes at that moment, what made her so feverishly anxious to leave, what she was so impatient to get to, was an uninhabited apartment I had once visited, belonging to Andrée's grandmother, a luxurious apartment looked after by an old manservant, facing south, but so empty, so silent, that the sun appeared to spread dust-sheets over the sofa and the armchairs of the room in which Albertine and Andrée would ask the respectful caretaker, perhaps unsuspecting, perhaps conniving, to allow them to rest for a while. I saw it constantly now, empty, with a bed or a sofa, and a maid who was either a dupe or an accomplice, that apartment to which, whenever Albertine seemed serious and in a hurry, she set off to meet her friend, who had doubtless arrived there before her since her time was more her own. Until then I had never given a thought to that apartment, which now possessed for me a horrible beauty. The unknown element in the lives of other people is like that of nature, which each fresh scientific discovery merely reduces but does not abolish. A jealous lover exasperates the woman he loves by depriving her of a thousand unimportant pleasures, but those pleasures which are the keystone of her life she conceals in a place where, even at moments when he thinks that he is showing the most intelligent perspicacity and third parties are keeping him most closely informed, he never dreams of looking. However, at least Andrée was going to leave Paris. But I did not want Albertine to be in a position to despise me as having been the dupe of herself and Andrée. One of these days I would tell her. And thus I would force her perhaps to speak to me more frankly, by showing her that I was after all informed of the things that she concealed from me. But I did not wish to mention it to her for the moment, first of all because, so soon after her aunt's visit, she would guess where my information came from, would block that source and would not be worried about other, unknown ones; and then because I did not want to run the risk, so long as I was not absolutely certain of keeping Albertine for as long as I chose, of provoking her irritation to the extent of making her decide to leave me. It is true that if I reasoned, sought the truth, prognosticated the future on the basis of her words, which always approved of all my plans, assuring me how much she loved this life, how little her seclusion deprived her of, I had no doubt that she would remain with me always. I was in fact dismayed by the thought; I felt that life and the world, whose fruits I had never really tasted, were passing me by, bartered for a woman in whom I could no longer find anything new. I could not even go to Venice, where, while I lay in bed, I should be too tormented by the fear of the advances that might be made to her by the gondolier, the people in the hotel, the Venetian women. But if on the contrary I reasoned on the basis of the other hypothesis, that which rested not upon Albertine's words but upon silences, looks, blushes, sulks, and even fits of anger, which I could quite easily have shown her to be unfounded and which I preferred to appear not to notice, then I told myself that she was finding this life unbearable, that she felt constantly deprived of what she loved, and that inevitably she would leave me one day. All that I wished, if she did so, was that I might choose the moment, a moment when it would not be too painful to me, and also at a time of the year when she could not go to any of the places in which I imagined her debaucheries, neither to Amsterdam, nor to Andrée's, nor to Mlle Vinteuil's, though she would see them again, it was true, a few months later. But in the meantime I should have become calmer and it would no longer matter to me. In any case, before even thinking of it I must wait until I was cured of the slight relapse that had been caused by my discovery of the reasons on account of which Albertine, at a few hours' interval, had been determined not to leave, and then to leave Balbec immediately; I must allow time for the symptoms to disappear, since they could only go on diminishing if I learned nothing new, but were still too acute not to render more painful, more difficult, a process of separation now recognised as inevitable, but in no sense urgent, and one that would be better performed in "cold blood." I could control the choice of moment, for if she decided to leave me before I had made up my mind, as soon as she informed me that she had had enough of this life, there would always be time enough for me to think up some way of countering her arguments, to offer her a larger freedom, to promise her some great pleasure in the near future which she herself would be anxious not to miss, and at worst, if I could find no other recourse but to appeal to her heart, to confess my anguish to her. My mind was therefore at rest from this point of view though I was not being very logical with myself. For, though the basis of this hypothesis

was that I precisely disregarded what she said or intimated, I was assuming that, when the question of her leaving arose, she would give me her reasons beforehand, would allow me to resist and overcome them.

I felt that my life with Albertine was on the one hand, when I was not jealous, nothing but boredom, and on the other hand, when I was jealous, nothing but pain. If there had been any happiness in it, it could not last. In the same spirit of wisdom which had inspired me at Balbec, on the evening when we had been happy together after Mme de Cambremer's visit, I wanted to leave her, because I knew that by carrying on I should gain nothing. Only, even now, I imagined that the memory that I retained of her would be like a sort of vibration, prolonged by a pedal, of the last moment of our parting. Hence I was anxious to choose a moment of sweetness, so that it might be it that continued to vibrate in me. I must not be too particular, and wait too long, I must be sensible. And yet, having waited so long, it would be madness not to wait a few days longer, until an acceptable moment should offer itself, rather than risk seeing her depart with that same sense of revolt which I had felt in the past when Mamma left my bedside without bidding me good-night, or when she said good-bye to me at the station. To be on the safe side, I heaped more and more presents on her. As regards the Fortuny gowns, we had at length decided upon one in blue and gold lined with pink which was just ready. And I had ordered all the same the other five which she had relinquished with regret in favour of this one.

Yet with the coming of spring, two months after her aunt's conversation with me, I lost my temper with her one evening. It was the very evening on which Albertine had put on for the first time the indoor gown in gold and blue by Fortuny which, by reminding me of Venice, made me feel all the more strongly what I was sacrificing for her, who showed no corresponding gratitude towards me. If I had never seen Venice, I had dreamed of it incessantly since those Easter holidays which, when still a boy, I had been going to spend there, and earlier still, since the Titian prints and Giotto photographs which Swann had given me long ago at Combray. The Fortuny gown which Albertine was wearing that evening seemed to me the tempting phantom of that invisible Venice. It was overrun by Arab ornamentation, like Venice, like the Venetian palaces hidden like sultan's wives behind a screen of perforated stone, like the bindings in the Ambrosian Library, like the columns from which the oriental birds that symbolised alternatively life and death were repeated in the shimmering fabric, of an intense blue which, as my eyes drew nearer, turned into a malleable gold by those same transmutations which, before an advancing gondola, change into gleaming metal the azure of the Grand Canal. And the sleeves were lined with a cherry pink which is so peculiarly Venetian that it is called Tiepolo pink.

In the course of the day, Françoise had let fall in my hearing that Albertine was satisfied with nothing, that when I sent word to her that I would be going out with her, or that I would not be going out, that the car would or would not come to fetch her, she almost shrugged her shoulders and would barely give a polite answer. That evening when I felt that she was in a bad mood, and when the first heat of summer had wrought upon my nerves, I could not restrain my anger and reproached her for her ingratitude. "Yes, you can ask anybody," I shouted at the top of my voice, quite beside myself, "you can ask Françoise, it's common knowledge." But immediately I remembered how Albertine had once told me how terrifying she found me when I was angry, and had applied to me the lines from *Esther*:

Judge how, incensed against me, that great forehead  
Must then have cast into my troubled soul such dread.  
Alas! where is the heart audacious that defies  
Unmoved those lightnings starting from your eyes?

I felt ashamed of my violence. And, to make amends for what I had done, without however acknowledging defeat, so that my peace might be an armed and formidable peace, while at the same time I thought it as well to show her once again that I was not afraid of a rupture so that she might not feel tempted to provoke it: "Forgive me, my little Albertine, I'm ashamed of my violence, I don't know how to apologise. If we can't get on together, if we're to be obliged to part, it mustn't be like this, it wouldn't be worthy of us. We will part, if part we must, but first of all I wish to beg your pardon most humbly and from the bottom of my heart." I decided that, to atone for my outburst and also to make certain of her intention to remain with me for some time to come, at any rate until Andrée should have left Paris, which would be in three weeks' time, it would be as well, next day, to think of some pleasure greater than any that she had yet had, but fairly far ahead; and since I was going to wipe out the offence that I had given her, perhaps it would be as well to take advantage of this moment to show her that I knew more about her life than she supposed. The resentment that she would feel would be removed next day by my generosity, but the warning would remain in her mind. "Yes, my little Albertine, forgive me if I was violent. But I'm not quite as much to blame as you think. There are wicked people in the world who are trying to make us quarrel; I've always refrained from mentioning it, as I didn't want to torment you. But sometimes I'm driven out of my mind by these accusations." And wishing to make the most of the fact that I was going to be able to show her that I was in the know as regards the departure from Balbec, I went on: "For instance, you knew that Mlle Vinteuil was expected at Mme Verdurin's that afternoon when you went to the Trocadéro."

She blushed: "Yes, I knew that."

"Can you swear to me that it was not in order to renew your relations with her that you wanted to go to the Verdurins'."

"Why, of course I can swear it. Why do you say *renew*, I never had any relations with her, I swear it."

I was deeply grieved to hear Albertine lie to me like this, deny the facts which her blush had made all too evident. Her mendacity appalled me. And yet, as it contained a protestation of innocence which, almost unconsciously, I was prepared to accept, it hurt me less than her sincerity when, after I had asked her: "Can you at least swear to me that the pleasure of seeing Mlle Vinteuil again had nothing to do with your anxiety to go to the Verdurins' that afternoon?" she replied: "No, that I cannot swear. It would have been a great pleasure to see Mlle Vinteuil again."

A moment earlier, I had been angry with her because she concealed her relations with Mlle Vinteuil, and now her admission of the pleasure she would have felt at seeing her again turned my bones to water. True, when Albertine had said to me, on my return from the Verdurins': "Wasn't Mlle Vinteuil to be there?" she had revived all my anguish by proving that she knew of her coming. But doubtless in the meantime I had reasoned thus: "She knew of her coming, which gave her no pleasure in the least, but since she must have realised, after the event, that it was the revelation that she knew someone with such a bad reputation as Mlle Vinteuil that had distressed me at Balbec to the point of thinking of suicide, she didn't want to mention it." And now here she was being obliged to admit that the prospect of seeing Mlle Vinteuil gave her pleasure. Besides, the mystery in which she had cloaked her intention of going to see the Verdurins ought to have been a sufficient proof. But I had not given the matter enough thought. And so, while saying to myself now: "Why does she only half confess? It's even more stupid than wicked and sad," I was so crushed that I did not have the heart to

pursue the question, as to which I was not in a strong position, having no damning evidence to produce, and to recover my ascendancy I hurriedly turned to the subject of Andrée which would enable me to put Albertine to rout by means of the overwhelming revelation of Andrée's telegram. "Anyhow," I said to her, "now I'm being tormented and persecuted again with reports of your relations, this time with Andrée."

"With Andrée?" she cried. Her face was ablaze with fury. And astonishment or the desire to appear astonished made her open her eyes wide. "How charming! And may one know who has been telling you these pretty tales? May I be allowed to speak to these persons, to learn from them what basis they have for their slanders?"

"My little Albertine, I don't know, the letters are anonymous, but from people whom you would perhaps have no difficulty in finding" (this to show her that I did not believe that she would try) "for they must know you quite well. The last one, I must admit (and I mention it because it deals with a trivial thing and there's nothing at all unpleasant in it), made me furious all the same. It informed me that if, on the day when we left Balbec, you first of all wished to remain there and then decided to go, that was because in the meantime you had received a letter from Andrée telling you that she wasn't coming."

"I know quite well that Andrée wrote to tell me that she wasn't coming, in fact she telegraphed; I can't show you the telegram because I didn't keep it, but it wasn't that day. Besides, even if it had been that day, what difference do you suppose it could make to me whether Andrée came or not?"

The words "what difference do you suppose it could make to me" were a proof of anger and that it did make some difference, but were not necessarily a proof that Albertine had returned to Paris solely from a desire to see Andrée. Whenever Albertine saw one of the real or alleged motives of one of her actions discovered by a person to whom she had pleaded a different motive, she became angry, even if the person was someone for whose sake she had really performed the action. That Albertine believed that this information about what she had been doing did not come to me from anonymous letters which I had received willy-nilly but was eagerly solicited by me could never have been deduced from the words which she next uttered, in which she appeared to accept my story of the anonymous letters, but rather from her look of fury with me, a fury which appeared to be merely the explosion of her previous ill-humour, just as the espionage in which, on this hypothesis, she must suppose that I had been indulging would have been only the culmination of a surveillance of all her actions which she had suspected for a long time past. Her anger extended even to Andrée herself, and deciding no doubt that from now on I should no longer be unworried even when she went out with Andrée, she went on: "Besides, Andrée exasperates me. She's a deadly bore. I never want to go anywhere with her again. You can tell that to the people who informed you that I came back to Paris for her sake. Suppose I were to tell you that after all the years I've known Andrée I couldn't even describe her face to you, so little have I ever looked at it!"

But at Balbec, that first year, she had said to me: "Andrée is lovely." It is true that this did not mean that she had had amorous relations with her, and indeed I had never heard her speak at that time except with indignation of any relations of that sort. But was it not possible that she had changed, even without being aware that she had changed, not thinking that her amusements with a girlfriend were the same thing as the immoral relations, not very clearly defined in her own mind, which she condemned in other women? Was this not possible, since this same change, and this same unawareness of change, had occurred in her relations with myself, whose kisses she had repulsed at Balbec with such indignation, kisses which afterwards she was to give me of her own accord every day, which, I hoped, she would give me for a long time to come, which she was going to give me in a moment?

"But, my darling, how do you expect me to tell them when I don't know who they are?"

This answer was so forceful that it ought to have dissolved the objections and doubts which I saw crystallised in Albertine's pupils. But it left them intact. I was now silent, and yet she continued to gaze at me with that persistent attention which we give to someone who has not finished speaking. I asked her forgiveness once more. She replied that she had nothing to forgive me. She had become very gentle again. But, beneath her sad and troubled features, it seemed to me that a secret plan had taken shape. I knew quite well that she could not leave me without warning me; in fact she could neither want to leave me (it was in a week's time that she was to try on the new Fortuny gowns), nor decently do so, as my mother was returning to Paris at the end of the week and her aunt also. Why, since it was impossible for her to leave, did I repeat to her several times that we should be going out together next day to look at some Venetian glass which I wished to give her, and why was I comforted when I heard her say that that was agreed? When it was time for her to say good-night and I kissed her, she did not behave as usual, but turned her face away—it was barely a minute or two since I had been thinking how pleasing it was that she now gave me every evening what she had refused me at Balbec—and did not return my kiss. It was as though, having quarrelled with me, she was not prepared to give me a token of affection which might later on have appeared to me an act of duplicity that belied the quarrel. It was as though she was attuning her actions to that quarrel, and yet with moderation, whether so as not to announce it, or because, while breaking off carnal relations with me, she wished nevertheless to remain my friend. I kissed her then a second time, pressing to my heart the shimmering golden azure of the Grand Canal and the mating birds, symbols of death and resurrection. But for the second time, instead of returning my kiss, she drew away with the sort of instinctive and baleful obstinacy of animals that feel the hand of death. This presentiment which she seemed to be expressing overcame me too, and filled me with such anxious dread that when she had reached the door I could not bear to let her go, and called her back.

"Albertine," I said to her, "I'm not at all sleepy. If you don't want to go to sleep yourself, you might stay here a little longer, if you like, but I don't really mind, and I don't on any account want to tire you." I felt that if I had been able to make her undress, and to have her there in her white nightdress, in which she seemed pinker and warmer, in which she excited my senses more keenly, the reconciliation would have been more complete. But I hesitated for an instant, for the sky-blue border of her dress added to her face a beauty, a luminosity, without which she would have seemed to me harder.

She came back slowly and said to me very sweetly, and still with the same downcast, sorrowful expression: "I can stay as long as you like, I'm not sleepy." Her reply calmed me, for, so long as she was in the room, I felt that I could prepare for the future, and it also reflected friendliness and obedience, but of a certain sort, which seemed to me to be limited by that secret which I sensed behind her sorrowful gaze, her altered manner, altered partly in spite of herself, partly no doubt to attune it in advance to something which I did not know. I felt that, all the same, I needed only to have her all in white, with her throat bare, in front of me, as I had seen her at Balbec in bed, to find the courage which would oblige her to yield.

"Since you're being kind enough to stay here a moment to console me, you ought to take off your gown, it's too hot, too stiff, I dare not approach you for fear of crumpling that fine stuff, and there are those fateful birds between us. Undress, my darling."

"No, I couldn't possibly take off this dress here. I shall undress in my own room presently."

"Then you won't even come and sit down on my bed?"

"Why, of course."

She remained, however, some way away from me, by my feet. We talked. Suddenly we heard the regular rhythm of a plaintive call. It was the pigeons beginning to coo. "That proves that day has come already," said Albertine; and, her brows almost knitted, as though she missed, by living with me, the joys of the fine weather, "Spring has begun, if the pigeons have returned." The resemblance between their cooing and the crow of the cock was as profound and as obscure as, in Vinteuil's septet, the resemblance between the theme of the adagio and that of the opening and closing passages, it being built on the same key-theme but so transformed by differences of tonality, tempo, etc. that the lay listener who opens a book on Vinteuil is astonished to find that they are all three based on the same four notes, four notes which for that matter he may pick out with one finger upon the piano without recognising any of the three passages. Likewise, this melancholy refrain performed by the pigeons was a sort of cockcrow in the minor key, which did not soar up into the sky, did not rise vertically, but, regular as the braying of a donkey, enveloped in sweetness, went from one pigeon to another along a single horizontal line, and never raised itself, never changed its lateral plaint into that joyous appeal which had been uttered so often in the allegro of the introduction and the finale. I know that I then uttered the word "death," as though Albertine were about to die. It seems that events are larger than the moment in which they occur and cannot be entirely contained in it. Certainly they overflow into the future through the memory that we retain of them, but they demand a place also in the time that precedes them. One may say that we do not then see them as they are to be, but in memory are they not modified too?

When I saw that she deliberately refrained from kissing me, realising that I was merely wasting my time, that it was only after a kiss that the really soothing moments would begin, I said to her: "Good-night, it's too late," because that would make her kiss me and we would go on kissing afterwards. But after saying to me, "Good-night, try and sleep well," she contented herself with letting me kiss her on the cheek, exactly as she had done twice before. This time I dared not call her back. But my heart beat so violently that I could not lie down again. Like a bird flying from one end of its cage to the other I alternated between anxiety lest Albertine should leave me and a state of comparative calm. This calm was produced by the argument which I kept repeating several times a minute: "She cannot go without warning me, and she never said anything about going," and I was more or less calmed. But at once I said to myself: "But what if tomorrow I find her gone! My very anxiety must be founded on something. Why didn't she kiss me?" At this my heart ached horribly. Then it was slightly soothed by the argument which I advanced once more, but I ended with a headache, so incessant and monotonous was this fluctuation of my thoughts. There are thus certain mental states, and especially anxiety, which, offering us only two alternatives, are somehow as atrociously circumscribed as a simple physical pain. I perpetually repeated both the argument which justified my anxiety and the one which proved it false and reassured me, within as narrow a space as the sick man who explores without ceasing, on an internal impulse, the organ that is causing his suffering and withdraws for an instant from the painful spot only to return to it a moment later. Suddenly, in the silence of the night, I was startled by a noise which, though apparently insignificant, filled me with terror, the noise of Albertine's window being violently opened. When I heard nothing more, I wondered why this noise had caused me such alarm. In itself there was nothing so extraordinary about it, but I probably gave it two interpretations which alarmed me equally. In the first place it was one of the conventions of our life together that, since I was afraid of draughts, nobody must ever open a window at night. This had been explained to Albertine when she came to stay in the house, and although she was convinced that this was a fad on my part and thoroughly unhealthy, she had promised me that she would never infringe the rule. And she was so timorous about everything that she knew to be my wish, even if she disapproved of it, that she would have gone to sleep amid the fumes of a smouldering fire rather than open her window, just as, however important the circumstances, she would not have had me woken up in the morning. It was only one of the minor conventions of our life, but if she was prepared to violate this one without consulting me, might it not mean that she no longer needed to behave with circumspection, that she would violate them all just as easily? Besides, the noise had been violent, almost rude, as though she had flung the window open, crimson with rage, saying to herself: "This life is stifling me. I don't care, I must have air!" I did not exactly say all this to myself, but I continued to think, as of an omen more mysterious and more funereal than the hoot of an owl, of that sound of the window which Albertine had opened. Filled with an agitation such as I had not perhaps felt since the evening at Combray when Swann had been dining downstairs, I paced the corridor all night long, hoping, by the noise that I made, to attract Albertine's attention, hoping that she would take pity on me and would call me to her, but I heard no sound from her room. At Combray, I had asked my mother to come. But with my mother I feared only her anger; I knew that I would not diminish her affection by displaying mine. This made me hesitate to call out to Albertine. Gradually I began to feel that it was too late. She must long have been asleep. I went back to bed. In the morning, as soon as I awoke, since no one ever came to my room, whatever happened, without a summons, I rang for Françoise. And at the same time I thought: "I must speak to Albertine about a yacht which I mean to have built for her." As I took my letters I said to Françoise without looking at her: "I shall have something to say to Mlle Albertine presently. Is she up yet?" "Yes, she got up early." I felt untold anxieties which I could scarcely contain rise up in me as in a gust of wind. The tumult in my chest was so great that I was quite out of breath, as though buffeted by a storm. "Ah! but where is she just now?" "I expect she's in her room." "Ah! good! Well, I shall see her presently." I breathed again; my agitation subsided; Albertine was here; it was almost a matter of indifference to me whether she was or not. Besides, had it not been absurd of me to suppose that she could possibly not be there? I fell asleep, but, in spite of my certainty that she would not leave me, it was a light sleep and its lightness related to her alone. For the sounds that were obviously connected with work in the courtyard, while I heard them vaguely in my sleep, left me untroubled, whereas the slightest rustle that came from her room, when she left it, or noiselessly returned, pressing the bell so gently, made me start, ran through my whole body, left me with a palpitating heart, although I had heard it in a deep drowse, just as my grandmother in the last days before her death, when she was plunged in a motionless torpor which nothing could disturb and which the doctors called coma, would begin, I was told, to tremble for a moment like a leaf when she heard the three rings with which I was in the habit of summoning Françoise, and which, even when I made them softer, during that week, so as not to disturb the silence of the death-chamber, nobody, Françoise assured me, could mistake for anyone else's ring because of a way that I had, and was quite

unconscious of having, of pressing the bell. Had I then myself entered into my last agony? Was this the approach of death?

That day and the next we went out together, since Albertine refused to go out again with Andrée. I did not even mention the yacht to her. These outings had completely restored my peace of mind. But in the evening she had continued to embrace me in the same new way, which left me furious. I could interpret it now in no other way than as a means of showing me that she was sulking, which seemed to me perfectly absurd after the kindnesses I continued to heap upon her. And so, no longer receiving from her even those carnal satisfactions on which I depended, finding her ugly in her ill humour, I felt all the more keenly my deprivation of all the women and of the travels for which these first warm days reawakened my desire. Thanks no doubt to scattered memories of forgotten assignations that I had had, while still a schoolboy, with women, beneath trees already in full leaf, this springtime region in which the journey of our dwelling-place through the seasons had halted three days since beneath a clement sky, and in which all the roads sped away towards picnics in the country, boating parties, pleasure trips, seemed to me to be the land of women just as much as it was the land of trees, and the land in which the pleasure that was everywhere on offer became permissible to my convalescent strength. Resigning myself to idleness, resigning myself to chastity, to tasting pleasure only with a woman whom I did not love, resigning myself to remaining shut up in my room, to not travelling, all this was possible in the old world where we had been only yesterday, the empty world of winter, but not any longer in this new leafy world, in which I had awoken like a young Adam faced for the first time with the problem of existence, of happiness, and not bowed down beneath the accumulation of previous negative solutions. Albertine's presence weighed upon me. I looked at her, grim-faced and sullen, and felt it was a pity we had not broken with each other. I wanted to go to Venice, I wanted in the meantime to go to the Louvre to look at Venetian pictures and to the Luxembourg to see the two Elstirs which, as I had just heard, the Princesse de Guermantes had recently sold to that gallery, those that I had so greatly admired at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, the *Pleasures of the Dance* and the *Portrait of the X Family*. But I was afraid that, in the former, certain lascivious poses might give Albertine a desire, a nostalgic longing for popular rejoicings, might make her think that perhaps a certain life which she had never led, a life of fireworks and suburban pleasure-grounds, had something to recommend it. Already, in anticipation, I was afraid lest, on the Fourteenth of July, she would ask me to take her to a popular ball and I longed for some impossible event which would do away with the national holiday. And besides, there were also in those Elstirs nude female figures in verdant southern landscapes which might make Albertine think of certain pleasures, albeit Elstir himself (but would she not degrade his work?) had seen in them no more than sculptural beauty, or rather the beauty of white monuments, which women's bodies seated amidst verdure assume.

And so I resigned myself to abandoning that pleasure and decided instead to go to Versailles. Not wanting to go out with Andrée, Albertine had remained in her room, reading, in her Fortuny dressing-gown. I asked her if she would like to go with me to Versailles. She had the charming quality of being always ready for anything, perhaps because she had been accustomed in the past to spend half her time as the guest of other people, and, just as she had made up her mind to come to Paris in two minutes, she said to me: "I can come as I am if we don't get out of the car." She hesitated for a moment between two Fortuny coats beneath which to conceal her dressing-gown—as she might have hesitated between two friends in choosing an escort—chose a beautiful dark-blue one, and stuck a pin into a hat. In a minute, she was ready, before I had put on my overcoat, and we went to Versailles. This very promptitude, this absolute docility left me more reassured, as though, without having any precise reason for anxiety, I had indeed been in need of reassurance. "After all I have nothing to fear. She does everything that I ask, in spite of the noise of her window the other night. The moment I spoke of going out, she flung that blue coat over her gown and out she came. That's not what a rebel would have done, a person who was no longer on friendly terms with me," I said to myself as we went to Versailles. We stayed there a long time. The sky consisted entirely of that radiant and slightly pale blue which the wayfarer lying in a field sees at times above his head, but so uniform and so deep that one feels that the pigment of which it is composed has been applied without the least alloy and with such an inexhaustible richness that one might delve more and more deeply into its substance without encountering an atom of anything but the same blue. I thought of my grandmother who—in human art as in nature—loved grandeur, and who used to enjoy gazing at the steeple of Saint-Hilaire soaring into that same blue. Suddenly I felt once again a longing for my lost freedom on hearing a noise which I did not at first recognise and which my grandmother would also have loved. It was like the buzz of a wasp. "Look," said Albertine, "there's an aeroplane, high up there, very very high." I looked all over the sky but could see only, unmarred by any black spot, the unbroken pallor of the unalloyed blue. I continued nevertheless to hear the humming of the wings, which suddenly entered my field of vision. Up there, a pair of tiny wings, dark and flashing, punctured the continuous blue of the unalterable sky. I had at last been able to attach the buzzing to its cause, to that little insect throbbing up there in the sky, probably six thousand feet above me; I could see it hum. Perhaps at a time when distances by land had not yet been habitually shortened by speed as they are today, the whistle of a passing train two thousand yards away was endowed with that beauty which now and for some time to come will stir our emotions in the drone of an aeroplane six thousand feet up, at the thought that the distances traversed in this vertical journey are the same as those on the ground, and that in this other direction, where measurements appear different to us because the reach seemed impossible, an aeroplane at six thousand feet is no further away than a train at two thousand yards, is nearer even, the identical trajectory occurring in a purer medium, with no obstacle between the traveller and his starting point, just as on the sea or across the plains, in calm weather, the wake of a ship that is already far away or the breath of a single zephyr will furrow the ocean of water or of corn.

I wanted something to eat. We stopped at a big pastry-cook's, situated almost outside the town, which at the time enjoyed a certain vogue. A lady was leaving the place, and asked the proprietress for her things. And after the lady had gone, Albertine cast repeated glances at the proprietress as though she wished to attract her attention while she was putting away cups, plates, cakes, for it was already late. She approached us only if I asked for something. And it happened then that, as the woman, who incidentally was extremely tall, was standing up while she waited on us and Albertine was seated beside me, Albertine, each time, in an attempt to attract her attention, raised vertically towards her a sunny gaze which compelled her to elevate her pupils to an inordinate height since, the woman being close up against us, Albertine had no possibility of tempering the angle with a sidelong glance. She was obliged, without raising her head unduly, to make her eyes ascend to that disproportionate height at which the woman's eyes were situated. Out of consideration for me, Albertine would quickly lower her eyes and then, the woman having paid no attention to her, would begin again. This led to a series of vain imploring elevations before an inaccessible deity. Then the proprietress moved away to clear a large table next to ours. Now Albertine could look sideways. But never once did the woman's eyes come to rest upon my mistress. This did not surprise me, for I knew that this woman, with whom I was slightly acquainted, had lovers, although



she was married, but managed skilfully to conceal her intrigues, which astonished me vastly in view of her prodigious stupidity. I studied the woman while we finished our meal. Engrossed in her task, she carried her disregard for Albertine's glances (which incidentally were in no way improper) almost to the point of rudeness. She went on clearing away and arranging things without letting anything distract her. The putting away of the coffee-spoons, the fruit-knives, might have been entrusted not to this large and handsome woman, but, by a labour-saving device, to a mere machine, and you would not have seen so complete an isolation from Albertine's attention; and yet she did not lower her eyes, did not appear self-absorbed, allowed her eyes, her charms to shine in an undivided attention to her work. It is true that if this woman had not been a particularly stupid person (not only was this her reputation, but I knew it from experience), this detachment might have been a supreme proof of guile. And I know very well that the stupidest person, if his desire or his pocket is involved, can, in that sole instance, emerging from the nullity of his stupid life, adapt himself immediately to the workings of the most complicated machinery; all the same, this would have been too subtle a supposition in the case of a woman as brainless as this. Her stupidity even took her to improbable lengths of impoliteness. Not once did she look at Albertine whom, after all, she could not help seeing. It was not very flattering for my mistress, but, when all was said, I was delighted that Albertine should receive this little lesson and should see that frequently women paid no attention to her. We left the pastry-cook's, got into our carriage and were already on our way home when I was seized by a sudden regret that I had not taken the proprietress aside and begged her on no account to tell the lady who had come out of the shop as we were going in my name and address, which she must know perfectly well because of the orders I had constantly left with her. It was undesirable that the lady should be enabled thus to learn, indirectly, Albertine's address. But I felt that it was not worth while turning back for so small a matter, and that I should appear to be attaching too great an importance to it in the eyes of the idiotic and deceitful proprietress. I decided, however, that I should have to return there, in a week's time, to make this request, and that it is a great bore, since one always forgets half the things one has to say, to have to do even the simplest things in instalments.

We returned home very late, in a half-light through which here and there, by the roadside, a pair of red breeches pressed against a skirt revealed an amorous couple. Our carriage passed in through the Porte Maillot. For the monuments of Paris had been substituted, pure, linear, two-dimensional, a drawing of the monuments of Paris, as though in an attempt to recapture the appearance of a city that had been destroyed. But, at the edges of this picture, there rose so delicately the pale-blue mounting in which it was framed that one's thirsty eyes sought everywhere for a little more of that delicious hue which was too sparingly meted out to them: the moon was shining. Albertine admired the moonlight. I dared not tell her that I would have admired it more if I had been alone, or in quest of an unknown woman. I recited to her some lines of verse or passages of prose about moonlight, pointing out to her how from "silvery" which it had been at one time, it had turned "blue" in Chateaubriand, and in the Victor Hugo of *Eviradnus* and *La Fete chez Thérèse*, to become in turn yellow and metallic in Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle. Then, reminding her of the image that is used for the crescent moon at the end of *Booz endormi*, I talked to her about the whole poem.

Looking back, I find it difficult to describe how densely her life was covered in a network of alternating, fugitive, often contradictory desires. No doubt falsehood complicated this still further, for, as she retained no accurate memory of our conversations, if, for example, she had said to me: "Ah! that was a pretty girl, if you like, and a good golfer," and, when I had asked the girl's name, had answered with that detached, universal, superior air of which no doubt there is always enough and to spare, for all liars of this category borrow it for a moment when they do not wish to answer a question, and it never fails them: "Ah, I'm afraid I don't know" (with regret at her inability to enlighten me), "I never knew her name, I used to see her on the golf course, but I didn't know what she was called"—if, a month later, I said to her: "Albertine, you remember that pretty girl you mentioned to me, who used to play golf so well," "Ah, yes," she would answer without thinking, "Emilie Daltier, I don't know what's become of her." And the lie, like a line of earthworks, was carried back from the defence of the name, now captured, to the possibilities of meeting her again. "Oh, I couldn't say, I never knew her address. I can't think of anyone who could give it to you. Oh, no! Andrée never knew her. She wasn't one of our little band, now so scattered."

At other times the lie took the form of a base admission: "Ah! if I had three hundred thousand francs a year ..." She bit her lip. "Well? what would you do then?" "I should ask your permission," she said, kissing me, "to stay with you always. Where else could I be so happy?"

But, even allowing for her lies, it was incredible how spasmodic her life was, how fugitive her strongest desires. She would be mad about a person whom, three days later, she would refuse to see. She could not wait for an hour while I sent out for canvas and colours, for she wished to start painting again. For two whole days she would be impatient, almost shed the tears, quickly dried, of an infant that has just been weaned from its nurse. And this instability of her feelings with regard to people, things, occupations, arts, places, was in fact so universal that, if she did love money, which I do not believe, she cannot have loved it for longer than anything else. When she said: "Ah! if I had three hundred thousand francs a year!" or even if she expressed a nefarious but short-lived thought, she could not have held on to it any longer than to the idea of going to Les Rochers, of which she had seen an engraving in my grandmother's edition of Mme de Sévigné, of meeting an old friend from the golf course, of going up in an aeroplane, of going to spend Christmas with her aunt, or of taking up painting again.

"By the way, since neither of us is really hungry, we might look in at the Verdurins'," Albertine said to me. "This is their day and their hour."

"But I thought you were cross with them?"

"Oh! there are all sorts of stories about them, but really they're not so bad as all that. Madame Verdurin has always been very nice to me. Besides, one can't keep on quarrelling all the time with everybody. They have their faults, but who hasn't?"

"You're not properly dressed, you would have to go home and dress, and that would make us very late."

"Yes, you're right, let's just go home," replied Albertine with that marvellous docility which never ceased to amaze me.

The fine weather, that night, made a leap forward as the mercury in a thermometer darts upwards in the heat. On those early-risen spring mornings I could hear from my bed the tramcars rumbling through a cloud of perfumes, in an atmosphere which became more and more saturated by the warmth until it reached the solidification and density of noon. In my bedroom, where on the contrary it was cooler, when the unctuous air had succeeded in glazing and isolating the smell of the wash-stand, the smell of the wardrobe, the smell of the sofa, simply by the sharpness with which they stood out, vertical and erect, in adjacent but distinct slices, in a pearly chiaroscuro which added a softer glaze to the

shimmer of the curtains and the blue satin armchairs, I saw myself, not by a mere caprice of my imagination but because it was physically possible, following, in some new suburban quarter like that in which Bloch's house at Balbec was situated, the streets blinded by the sun, and finding in them not the dull butchers' shops and the white freestone facings, but the country dining-room which I could reach in no time, and the smells that I would find there on my arrival, the smell of the bowl of cherries and apricots, the smell of cider, the smell of gruyère cheese, held in suspense in the luminous coagulation of shadow which they delicately vein like the heart of an agate, while the knife-rests of prismatic glass scatter rainbows athwart the room or paint the oilcloth here and there with peacock-eyes.

Like a wind that swells in a steady roar, I heard with joy a car beneath the window. I sniffed its smell of petrol. The latter may seem regrettable to the oversensitive (who are always materialists and for whom it spoils the country), and to certain thinkers (materialists after their own fashion also) who, believing in the importance of facts, imagine that man would be happier, capable of higher flights of poetry, if his eyes were able to perceive more colours and his nostrils to distinguish more scents, a philosophical misrepresentation of the naive idea of those who believe that life was finer when men wore sumptuous costumes instead of black coats. But to me (just as an aroma, unpleasing perhaps in itself, of naphthalene and vetiver would have thrilled me by bringing back to me the blue purity of the sea on the day of my arrival at Balbec), this smell of petrol which, together with the smoke from the exhaust of the car, had so often melted into the pale azure on those scorching days when I used to drive from Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise to Gourville, since it had accompanied me on my excursions during those summer afternoons when I left Albertine painting, called into blossom now on either side of me, for all that I was lying in my darkened bedroom, corn-flowers, poppies and red clover, intoxicated me like a country scent, not circumscribed and fixed like that of the hawthorns which, held in by its dense, oleaginous elements, hangs with a certain stability about the hedge, but like a scent before which the roads sped away, the landscape changed, stately houses came hurrying to meet me, the sky turned pale, forces were increased tenfold, a scent which was like a symbol of elastic motion and power and which revived the desire that I had felt at Balbec to climb into the cage of steel and crystal, but this time no longer to pay visits to familiar houses with a woman I knew too well, but to make love in new places with a woman unknown. A scent that was accompanied incessantly by the horns of passing motors, which I set to words like a military summons: "Parisian, get up, get up, come out and picnic in the country, and take a boat on the river, under the trees, with a pretty girl; get up, get up!" And all these day-dreams were so agreeable that I congratulated myself upon the "stern decree" which prescribed that until I had rung my bell no "timid mortal," whether Françoise or Albertine, should dare come in and disturb me "within this palace" where a majesty so terrible

Means that to my subjects I remain invisible.<sup>24</sup>

But all of a sudden the scene changed; it was the memory, no longer of old impressions but of an old desire, only recently reawakened by the Fortuny gown in blue and gold, that spread before me another spring, a spring not leafy at all but on the contrary suddenly stripped of its trees and flowers by the name that I had just murmured to myself: "Venice;" a decanted springtime, which is reduced to its own essence and expresses the lengthening, the warming, the gradual unfolding of its days in the progressive fermentation, no longer, now, of an impure soil, but of a blue and virginal water, springlike without bud or blossom, which could answer the call of May only by gleaming facets fashioned and polished by May, harmonising exactly with it in the radiant, unalterable nakedness of its dusky sapphire. Likewise, too, no more than the seasons to its flowerless creeks, do modern times bring any change to the Gothic city; I knew it, even if I could not imagine it, or rather, imagining it, this was what I longed for with the same desire which long ago, when I was a boy, in the very ardour of departure, had broken and robbed me of the strength to make the journey: to find myself face to face with my Venetian imaginings, to observe how that divided sea enclosed in its meanderings, like the sinuosities of the ocean stream, an urbane and refined civilisation, but one that, isolated by their azure girdle, had evolved independently, had had its own schools of painting and architecture, to admire that fabulous garden of fruits and birds in coloured stone, flowering in the midst of the sea which kept it refreshed, lapped the base of the columns with its tide, and, like a sombre azure gaze watching in the shadows, kept patches of light perpetually flickering on the bold relief of the capitals.

Yes, I must go, the time had come. Now that Albertine no longer appeared to be angry with me, the possession of her no longer seemed to me a treasure in exchange for which one is prepared to sacrifice every other. For perhaps one would have done so only to rid oneself of a grief, an anxiety, which are now appeased. One has succeeded in jumping through the calico hoop through which one thought for a moment that one would never be able to pass. One has dispersed the storm, returned to a smiling serenity. The agonising mystery of a hatred with no known cause, and perhaps no end, is dispelled. Henceforward one finds oneself once more face to face with the problem, momentarily thrust aside, of a happiness which one knows to be impossible.

It might well occur to us, were we better able to analyse our loves, to see that women often attract us only because of the counterpoise of all the men with whom we have to compete for them, although we suffer agonies from having thus to compete; this counterpoise removed, the charm of the woman declines. We have a painful and cautionary example of this in the predilection men have for women who have strayed before they came to know them, for those women whom they feel to be sinking in perilous quicksands and whom they must spend the whole period of their love in rescuing; a posthumous example, on the other hand, and one that is not in the least tragic, in the man who, conscious of a decline in his affection for the woman he loves, spontaneously applies the rules that he has deduced, and, to make sure that he does not cease to love the woman, places her in a dangerous environment where he is obliged to protect her daily. (The opposite of the men who insist on a woman's retiring from the stage even though it was because she was on the stage that they fell in love with her.)

Now that life with Albertine had become possible once again, I felt that I could derive nothing from it but misery, since she did not love me; better to part from her in the gentle solace of her acquiescence, which I would prolong in memory. Yes, this was the moment; I must make quite certain of the date on which Andrée was leaving Paris, use all my influence with Mme Bontemps to make sure that at that moment Albertine should not be able to go either to Holland or to Montjouvain; and when in this way there were no immediate drawbacks to Albertine's departure, choose a fine day like this—and there would be plenty of them before long—when she had ceased to matter to me, when I was tempted by countless desires. I should have to let her leave the house without my seeing her, then, getting up and preparing myself in haste, leave a note for her, taking advantage of the fact that as she could not for the time being go anywhere that would

upset me, I might be spared, during my travels, from imagining the wicked things which she might do—and which in any case for the moment seemed quite unimportant—and, without seeing her again, set off for Venice.

I rang for Françoise to ask her to buy me a guidebook and a timetable, as I had done as a boy when already I wanted to prepare in advance a journey to Venice, the fulfilment of a desire as violent as that which I felt at this moment. I forgot that, in the meantime, there was a desire which I had attained without any satisfaction—the desire for Balbec—and that Venice, being also a visible phenomenon, was probably no more able than Balbec to fulfil an ineffable dream, that of the Gothic age made actual by a springtime sea, that now teased my mind from moment to moment with an enchanted, caressing, elusive, mysterious, confused image. Françoise, having heard my ring, came into the room, rather uneasy as to how I would take what she had to say and what she had done. “I was very worried,” she said to me, “that Monsieur should be so late in ringing this morning. I didn’t know what I ought to do. This morning at eight o’clock Mademoiselle Albertine asked me for her boxes. I dared not refuse her, and I was afraid that Monsieur might scold me if I came and waked him. It was no use lecturing her, telling her to wait an hour because I expected all the time that Monsieur would ring; she wouldn’t have it, she left this letter with me for Monsieur, and at nine o’clock off she went.” Then—so ignorant can we be of what is inside us, since I was convinced of my indifference to Albertine—my breath was cut short, I gripped my heart in my hands, which were suddenly moistened by a perspiration I had not experienced since the revelation she had made to me on the little train with regard to Mlle Vinteuil’s friend, and I was incapable of saying anything else but: “Ah! very good, Françoise, you were of course quite right not to wake me. Leave me now for a moment, I shall ring for you presently.”

BOOK VI  
THE FUGITIVE  
*Chapter Sixteen*

GRIEVING AND FORGETTING

**M**ademoiselle Albertine has gone!" How much further does anguish penetrate in psychology than psychology itself! A moment before, in the process of analysing myself, I had believed that this separation without having seen each other again was precisely what I wished, and, comparing the mediocrity of the pleasures that Albertine afforded me with the richness of the desires which she prevented me from realising, I had felt that I was being subtle, had concluded that I no longer wished to see her, that I no longer loved her. But now these words: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone," had produced in my heart an anguish such that I felt I could not endure it much longer. So what I had believed to be nothing to me was simply my entire life. How ignorant one is of oneself. My anguish must be made to end at once; tender towards myself as my mother had been towards my dying grandmother, I said to myself with that genuine wish that one has to relieve the suffering of a person one loves: "Be patient for a moment, we shall find something to take the pain away, don't fret, we're not going to allow you to suffer like this." It was in this category of ideas that my instinct of self-preservation sought for the first balms to lay upon my open wound: "None of this is of the slightest importance, because I'm going to bring her back at once. I shall have to think how, but in any case she will be here this evening. Therefore it's useless to torment myself." "None of this is of the slightest importance"—I had not been content merely with giving myself this assurance, but had tried to convey the same impression to Françoise by not allowing her to see my suffering, because, even at the moment when I was feeling it so acutely, my love did not forget how important it was that it should appear a happy love, a mutual love, especially in the eyes of Françoise, who disliked Albertine and had always doubted her sincerity.

Yes, a moment ago, before Françoise came into the room, I had believed that I no longer loved Albertine, I had believed that I was leaving nothing out of account, like a rigorous analyst; I had believed that I knew the state of my own heart. But our intelligence, however lucid, cannot perceive the elements that compose it and remain unsuspected so long as, from the volatile state in which they generally exist, a phenomenon capable of isolating them has not subjected them to the first stages of solidification. I had been mistaken in thinking that I could see clearly into my own heart. But this knowledge, which the shrewdest perceptions of the mind would not have given me, had now been brought to me, hard, glittering, strange, like a crystallised salt, by the abrupt reaction of pain. I was so much in the habit of having Albertine with me, and now I suddenly saw a new aspect of Habit. Hitherto I had regarded it chiefly as an annihilating force which suppresses the originality and even the awareness of one's perceptions; now I saw it as a dread deity, so riveted to one's being, its insignificant face so incrustated in one's heart, that if it detaches itself, if it turns away from one, this deity that one had barely distinguished inflicts on one sufferings more terrible than any other and is then as cruel as death itself.

The first thing to be done was to read Albertine's letter, since I was anxious to think of some way of bringing her back. I felt that this lay in my power, because, as the future is what exists as yet only in the mind, it seems to us to be still alterable by the intervention, at the eleventh hour, of the will. But at the same time, I remembered that I had seen forces other than my own act upon it, forces against which, even if I had had more time, I could never have prevailed. Of what use is it that the hour has not yet struck if we can do nothing to influence what will happen when it does? When Albertine was living in the house I had been quite determined to retain the initiative in our parting. And then she had gone. I opened her letter. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

Forgive me for not having dared to say to you in person what I am now writing, but I am such a coward, and have always been so afraid in your presence, that however much I tried to force myself I could not find the courage to do so. This is what I should have said to you: Our life together has become impossible; indeed you must have realised, from your outburst the other evening, that there had been a change in our relations. What we were able to patch up that night would become irreparable in a few days' time. It is better for us, therefore, since we have had the good fortune to be reconciled, to part as friends. That is why, my darling, I am sending you this line, and I beg you to be kind enough to forgive me if I am causing you a little grief when you think of the immensity of mine. Dearest one, I do not want to become your enemy; it will be bad enough to become by degrees, and all too soon, a stranger to you; and so, as I have absolutely made up my mind, before sending you this letter by Françoise I shall have asked her to let me have my boxes. Good-bye: I leave you the best of myself.

ALBERTINE"

"All this means nothing," I told myself, "it's even better than I thought, for as she doesn't mean a word of what she says, she obviously wrote it only in order to give me a shock, to frighten me, to stop me behaving unbearably towards her. I must think of something to do as soon as possible, so that Albertine will be back here this evening. It's sad to think that the Bontemps are unscrupulous people who make use of their niece to extort money from me. But what does that matter? Even if, to have Albertine here this evening, I must give half my fortune to Mme Bontemps, we shall still have enough left, Albertine and I, to live in comfort." And at the same time I calculated whether I had time to go out that morning and order the yacht and the Rolls-Royce

which she coveted, quite forgetting, all my doubts having vanished, that I had decided that it would be unwise to give them to her. "Even if Mme Bontemps's agreement isn't enough, if Albertine refuses to obey her aunt and makes it a condition of her return that she shall enjoy complete independence, well, however much it may distress me, I shall let her have it; she shall go out by herself, as and when she likes. One must be prepared to make sacrifices, however painful they may be, for the thing to which one attaches most importance, which is, in spite of everything I decided this morning on the strength of my precise and absurd arguments, that Albertine shall continue to live here." Can I say moreover that to grant her that freedom would have been altogether painful to me? I should be lying if I did. Already I had often felt that the anguish of leaving her free to misbehave far away from me was perhaps less acute even than the sort of misery which I used to feel when I sensed that she was bored in my company, under my roof. No doubt at the actual moment of her asking me to let her go somewhere, allowing her to do so, with my mind obsessed by the idea of organised orgies, would have been agonising for me. But to say to her: "Take our yacht, or the train, and go away for a month, to some place which I have never seen, where I shall know nothing of what you're doing"—this had often appealed to me, because of the thought that, by force of contrast, when she was far away from me, she would hanker after my society, and would be happy when she returned. "Besides, it's certainly what she herself wants; she doesn't in the least demand that freedom on which moreover, by offering her every day some new pleasure, I could easily succeed in imposing day by day some further restriction. No, what Albertine wanted was for me not to go on behaving insufferably to her, and above all—like Odette with Swann—for me to make up my mind to marry her. Once she is married, her independence will cease to matter to her; we shall stay here together, in perfect happiness." No doubt this meant giving up any thought of Venice. But the cities for which we have most longed (and *a fortiori* the most agreeable hostesses, the most pleasurable diversions—even more than Venice, the Duchesse de Guermantes or the theatre), how pale, insignificant, dead they become when we are tied to another's heart by a bond so painful that it prevents us from tearing ourselves away! "Besides, Albertine is perfectly right about our marriage. Mamma herself was saying that all this procrastination was ridiculous. Marry her, that's what I ought to have done long ago, that's what I must do now, that's what made her write her letter without meaning a word of it; it's only to bring about our marriage that she has postponed for a few hours what she must desire as keenly as I do: her return to this house. Yes, that's what she wanted, that was the purpose of her action," my compassionate reason assured me; but I felt that, in doing so, my reason was still basing itself on the same hypothesis which it had adopted from the start. Whereas I was well aware that it was the other hypothesis which had invariably proved correct. No doubt this second hypothesis would never have been so bold as to formulate in so many words the notion that Albertine could have been on intimate terms with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend. And yet, when I had been overwhelmed by the impact of that terrible revelation, as the train slowed down before stopping at Incarville station, it was the second hypothesis that had been confirmed. This hypothesis had subsequently never conceived the idea that Albertine might leave me of her own accord, in this fashion, without warning me and giving me time to prevent her departure. But all the same, if, after the immense new leap which life had just caused me to make, the reality that confronted me was as novel as that which is presented to us by the discovery of a scientist, by the inquiries of an examining magistrate or the researches of a historian into the hidden aspects of a crime or a revolution, this reality, while exceeding the puny predictions of my second hypothesis, nevertheless fulfilled them. This second hypothesis was not an intellectual one, and the panic fear that had gripped me on the evening when Albertine had refused to kiss me, or the night when I had heard the sound of her window being opened, was not based upon reason. But—and what follows will show it even more clearly, as many episodes must have indicated it already—the fact that our intelligence is not the subtlest, most powerful, most appropriate instrument for grasping the truth is only one reason the more for beginning with the intelligence, and not with an unconscious intuition, a ready-made faith in presentiments. It is life that, little by little, case by case, enables us to observe that what is most important to our hearts or to our minds is taught us not by reasoning but by other powers. And then it is the intelligence itself which, acknowledging their superiority, abdicates to them through reasoning and consents to become their collaborator and their servant. Experimental faith. It seemed to me that the unforeseen calamity with which I found myself grappling was also something that I had already known (as I had known of Albertine's friendship with a pair of lesbians), from having read it in so many signs in which (notwithstanding the contrary affirmations of my reason, based upon Albertine's own statements) I had discerned the weariness, the loathing that she felt at having to live in that state of slavery, signs that had so often seemed to me to be written as though in invisible ink behind her sad, submissive eyes, upon her cheeks suddenly inflamed with an unaccountable blush, in the sound of the window that had suddenly been flung open. Doubtless I had not dared to explore them fully or to form explicitly the idea of her sudden departure. I had thought, with a mind kept in equilibrium by Albertine's presence, only of a departure arranged by myself at an undetermined date, that is to say a date situated in a non-existent time; consequently I had had merely the illusion of thinking of a departure, just as people imagine that they are not afraid of death when they think of it while they are in good health and are actually doing no more than introduce a purely negative idea into a healthy state which the approach of death would of course precisely alter. Besides, the idea of Albertine's departure on her own initiative might have occurred to my mind a thousand times over, in the clearest, the most sharply defined form, without my suspecting any the more what, in relation to myself, that is to say in reality, that departure would be, what an unprecedented, appalling, unknown thing, how entirely novel a calamity. I might have gone on thinking of that departure (had I foreseen it) unceasingly for years on end, without all those thoughts, placed end to end, having the faintest connexion, not merely in intensity but in kind, with the unimaginable hell the curtain of which Françoise had raised for

me when she said: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone." In order to picture to itself an unknown situation the imagination borrows elements that are already familiar and, for that reason, cannot picture it. But the sensibility, even in its most physical form, receives, like the wake of a thunderbolt, the original and for long indelible imprint of the novel event. And I hardly dared say to myself that, if I had foreseen this departure, I would perhaps have been incapable of picturing it to myself in all its horror, or indeed, with Albertine informing me of it, and myself threatening, imploring her, of preventing it. How far removed from me now was the desire to go to Venice! Just as, long ago at Combray, had been the desire to know Mme de Guermantes when the moment came at which I longed for one thing only, to have Mamma in my room. And it was indeed all the anxieties I had felt ever since my childhood which, at the bidding of this new anguish, had come hastening to reinforce it, to amalgamate themselves with it in a homogeneous mass that suffocated me.

To be sure, the physical blow which such a parting administers to the heart, and which, because of that terrible capacity for registering things with which the body is endowed, makes the pain somehow contemporaneous with all the epochs in our life in which we have suffered—to be sure, this blow to the heart which—so little compunction do we feel for the sufferings of others—she who wishes to give the maximum intensity to the regret she causes, whether because, her departure being only a sham, she merely wants to demand better terms, or because, leaving us for ever—for ever!—she desires to wound us, or in order to avenge herself, or to continue to be loved, or (with an eye to the quality of the memory that she will leave behind her) to destroy the web of lassitude and indifference which she has felt being woven about her—to be sure, this blow to the heart is something we had vowed that we would avoid, assuring ourselves that we would part on good terms. But it is seldom indeed that one does part on good terms, because if one were on good terms one would not part. And then the woman to whom we show the utmost indifference nevertheless obscurely feels that in growing tired of her, by virtue of an identical force of habit, we have grown more and more attached to her, and she reflects that one of the essential elements in parting on good terms is to warn the other person before one goes. But she is afraid, by warning, of preventing. Every woman feels that the greater her power over a man, the more impossible it is to leave him except by sudden flight: a fugitive precisely because a queen. True, there is an extraordinary discrepancy between the boredom which she inspired a moment ago and, because she has gone, this furious desire to have her back again. But for this—over and above those which have been given in the course of this work and others which will be given later on—there are reasons. For one thing, her departure occurs as often as not at the moment when her companion's indifference—real or imagined—is greatest, at the extreme point of the swing of the pendulum. The woman says to herself: "No, this can't go on any longer," precisely because the man speaks of nothing but leaving her, or thinks of nothing else; and it is she who leaves him. Then, the pendulum swinging back to the other extreme, the distance is all the greater. In an instant it returns to this point; once more, apart from all the reasons that have been given, it is so natural! The heart still beats; and besides, the woman who has gone is no longer the same as the woman who was with us. Her life under our roof, all too well known, is suddenly enlarged by the addition of the lives with which she is inevitably to be associated, and it is perhaps to associate herself with them that she has left us. So that this new richness of the life of the woman who has gone retroacts upon the woman who was with us and was perhaps premeditating her departure. To the sequence of psychological facts which we are able to deduce and which form part of her life with us, our too evident boredom in her company, our jealousy too (and the effect of which is that men who have been left by a number of women have been left almost always in the same way because of their character and of certain always identical reactions which can be calculated: everyone has his own way of being betrayed, as he has his own way of catching cold), to this sequence that is not too mysterious for us there doubtless corresponded a sequence of facts of which we were unaware. She must for some time past have been keeping up relations, written, or verbal, or through messengers, with some man, or some woman, have been awaiting some signal which we may perhaps have given her unwittingly ourselves when we said: "X called yesterday to see me," if she had arranged with X that on the eve of the day when she was to join him he was to call on me. How many possible hypotheses! Possible only. I constructed the truth so well, but in the realm of possibility only, that, having one day opened by mistake a letter addressed to one of my mistresses, a letter written in a prearranged code which said: "Still awaiting signal to go to the Marquis de Saint-Loup's; please inform tomorrow by telephone," I reconstructed a sort of projected flight; the name of the Marquis de Saint-Loup was there only as a substitute for some other name, for my mistress did not know Saint-Loup, but had heard me speak of him, and moreover the signature was some sort of nickname, without any intelligible form. As it happened, the letter was addressed not to my mistress but to another person in the building who bore a different name which had been misread. The letter was written not in a code but in bad French because it was from an American woman, who was indeed a friend of Saint-Loup, as he himself told me. And the odd way in which this American woman formed certain letters had given the appearance of a nickname to a name which was quite genuine, only foreign. And so I had on that occasion been utterly mistaken in my suspicions. But the intellectual structure which had linked these facts, all of them false, together in my mind was itself so strict and accurate a model of the truth that when, three months later, my mistress (who had at that time been meaning to spend the rest of her life with me) left me, it was in a fashion absolutely identical with that which I had imagined on the former occasion. A letter arrived, containing the same peculiarities which I had wrongly attributed to the former letter, but this time it was indeed meant as a signal.

The present calamity was the worst that I had experienced in my life. And yet the suffering that it caused me was perhaps even exceeded by my curiosity to learn the causes of this calamity: who Albertine had desired and gone to join. But the sources of great events are like those of rivers; in vain do we explore the earth's

surface, we can never find them. Had Albertine been planning her flight for a long time past? I have not mentioned the fact (because at the time it had seemed to me simply affectation and ill-humour, what in the case of Françoise we called "a fit of the sulks") that, from the day when she had ceased to kiss me, she had gone about as though tormented by a devil, stiffly erect, unbending, saying the simplest things in a mournful voice, slow in her movements, never smiling. I cannot say that there was any concrete proof of conspiracy with the outer world. True, Françoise told me later that, having gone into Albertine's room two days before her departure, she had found it empty, with the curtains drawn, but had sensed from the atmosphere of the room and from the noise that the window was open. And indeed she had found Albertine on the balcony. But it is difficult to see with whom she could have been communicating from there, and moreover the drawn curtains screening the open window could doubtless be explained by the fact that she knew I was afraid of draughts, and that even if the curtains afforded me little protection they would prevent Françoise from seeing from the passage that the shutters had been opened so early. No, I can see nothing apart from one trifling fact which proves merely that on the day before her departure she knew that she was going. For during that day she took from my room without my noticing it a large quantity of wrapping paper and packing cloth which was kept there, and in which she spent the whole night packing her innumerable negligees and dressing-gowns so that she might leave the house in the morning. This is the only fact; that was all. I cannot attach any importance to her having repaid that evening, practically by force, a thousand francs which she owed me; there is nothing extraordinary in that, for she was extremely scrupulous about money.

Yes, she took the wrapping paper the night before, but it was not only then that she knew that she was going to leave me! For it was not resentment that made her leave but the decision, already taken, to leave me, to abandon the life of which she had dreamed, that gave her that air of resentment. A resentful air, almost solemnly cold towards myself, except on the last evening when, after staying in my room longer than she had intended, she said—a remark which surprised me, coming from her who had always sought to postpone the moment of parting—she said to me from the door: "Good-bye, little one, good-bye." But I did not take any notice of this at the time. Françoise told me that next morning when Albertine informed her that she was going (but this may be explained also by exhaustion, for she had not undressed and had spent the whole night packing everything except the things she had to ask Françoise for, as they were not in her bedroom or her dressing-room), she was still so sad, so much more erect, so much stiffer than during the previous days that Françoise thought, when Albertine said to her: "Good-bye, Françoise," that she was about to fall. When one is told a thing like that one realises that the woman who appealed to us so much less than any of the women whom one meets so easily in the course of the briefest outing, the woman who makes us resent having to sacrifice them to her, is on the contrary the one we would a thousand times prefer. For the choice lies no longer between a certain pleasure—which has become by force of habit, and perhaps by the mediocrity of its object, almost null and void—and other pleasures which tempt and thrill us, but between these latter pleasures and something that is far stronger than they, compassion for suffering.

When I vowed to myself that Albertine would be back in the house before night, I had proceeded as quickly as possible to cover with a fresh belief the open wound from which I had torn the belief I had lived with until then. But swiftly though my instinct of self-preservation had acted, I had, when Françoise spoke to me, been left helpless for an instant, and for all that I now knew that Albertine would be back that same evening, the pain I had felt during the instant in which I had not yet assured myself of her return (the instant that had followed the words: "Mademoiselle Albertine has asked for her boxes; Mademoiselle Albertine has gone"), this pain reawoke in me of its own accord, as sharp as it had been before, that is to say as if I had still been unaware of Albertine's imminent return. However, it was essential that she should return, but of her own accord. On any assumption, to appear to be taking the first step, to be begging her to return, would be to defeat my own object. True, I lacked the strength to give her up as I had given up Gilberte. Even more than to see Albertine again, what I wanted was to put an end to the physical anguish which my heart, less robust than of old, could endure no longer. Then, by dint of accustoming myself not to use my will-power, whether it was a question of work or of anything else, I had become more cowardly. But above all, this anguish was incomparably more intense for a number of reasons of which the most important was perhaps not that I had never tasted any sensual pleasure with Mme de Guermantes or with Gilberte, but that, not seeing them every day, and at every hour of the day, having no opportunity and consequently no need to see them, there had been lacking, in my love for them, the immense force of Habit. Perhaps, now that my heart, incapable of willing and of voluntarily enduring suffering, could think of only one possible solution, that Albertine should return at all costs, perhaps the opposite solution (a deliberate renunciation, a gradual resignation) would have seemed to me a novelist's solution, improbable in real life, had I not myself opted for it in the case of Gilberte. I knew therefore that this other solution might be accepted also, and by one and the same man, for I had remained more or less the same. But time had played its part, time which had aged me, time which moreover had kept Albertine perpetually in my company while we were living together. But at least, without giving her up, what survived in me of all that I had felt for Gilberte was the pride which made me refuse to be to Albertine a despicable plaything by begging her to return; I wanted her to come back without my appearing to care whether she did or not. I got up, in order to lose no more time, but my anguish made me pause; this was the first time that I had got out of bed since Albertine had left me. Yet I must dress at once in order to go and make inquiries of Albertine's concierge.

Suffering, the prolongation of a spiritual shock that has come from without, keeps aspiring to change its form; one hopes to be able to dispel it by making plans, by seeking information; one wants it to pass through its countless metamorphoses, for this requires less courage than keeping our suffering intact; the bed on

which we lie down with our grief appears so narrow, hard and cold. I therefore put my feet to the ground, and I stepped across the room with infinite care, placing myself in such a way as not to see Albertine's chair, the pianola on the pedals of which she used to press her golden slippers, or a single one of the things which she had used and all of which, in the secret language that my memories had taught them, seemed to be seeking to give me a translation, a different version, for a second time to tell me, of her departure. But even without looking at them I could see them: my strength left me; I sank down on one of those blue satin armchairs, the glossy surface of which an hour earlier, in the dimness of my bedroom anaesthetised by a ray of morning light, had made me dream dreams which then I had passionately caressed but which were infinitely remote from me now. Alas, I had never sat in one of them until this minute except when Albertine was still with me. And so I could not remain sitting there, and stood up again; and thus, at every moment, there was one more of those innumerable and humble "selves" that compose our personality which was still unaware of Albertine's departure and must be informed of it; I was obliged—and this was more cruel than if they had been strangers and did not share my susceptibility to suffering—to announce to all these beings, to all these "selves" who did not yet know of it, the calamity that had just occurred; each of them in turn must hear for the first time the words: "Albertine has asked for her boxes"—those coffin-shaped boxes which I had seen loaded on to the train at Balbec with my mother's—"Albertine has gone." Each of them had to be told of my grief, the grief which is in no way a pessimistic conclusion freely drawn from an accumulation of baneful circumstances, but is the intermittent and involuntary reviviscence of a specific impression that has come to us from without and was not chosen by us. There were some of these "selves" which I had not encountered for a long time past. For instance (I had not remembered that it was the day on which the barber called) the "self" that I was when I was having my hair cut. I had forgotten this "self," and his arrival made me burst into tears, as, at a funeral, does the appearance of an old retired servant who has not forgotten the deceased. Then all of a sudden I remembered that, during the past week, I had from time to time been seized by panic fears which I had not confessed to myself. At those moments, however, I had debated the question, saying to myself: "No need, of course, to consider the hypothesis of her suddenly leaving me. It's absurd. If I were to confide it to a sensible, intelligent man" (and I would have done so to set my mind at rest, had not jealousy prevented me from confiding in anyone) "he would be sure to say to me: 'Why, you're mad. It's impossible.' (And, as a matter of fact, during these last days we had not quarrelled once.) People leave you for a reason. They tell you the reason. They give you a chance to reply. They don't run away like that. No, it's perfectly childish. It's the only really absurd hypothesis." And yet, every day, on finding her still there in the morning when I rang my bell, I had heaved an immense sigh of relief. And when Françoise handed me Albertine's letter, I had at once been certain that it referred to the one thing that could not happen, to this departure which I had somehow perceived several days in advance, in spite of the logical reasons for feeling reassured. I had told myself this, almost with self-satisfaction at my perspicacity in my despair, like a murderer who knows that he cannot be found out but is nevertheless afraid and all of a sudden sees his victim's name written at the top of a document on the table of the examining magistrate who has sent for him.

My only hope was that Albertine had gone to Touraine, to her aunt's house, where after all she would be under some sort of surveillance and could not do anything very serious before I brought her back. My worst fear was that she might have stayed in Paris, or have gone to Amsterdam or to Montjouvain, in other words that she had escaped in order to pursue some intrigue the preliminaries of which I had failed to observe. But in reality, when I said to myself Paris, Amsterdam, Montjouvain, that is to say several places, I was thinking of places that were merely potential. And so, when Albertine's concierge informed me that she had gone to Touraine, that place of residence which I had thought desirable seemed to me the most dreadful of all, because it was real, and because for the first time, tortured by the certainty of the present and the uncertainty of the future, I pictured Albertine starting on a life which she had deliberately chosen to lead apart from me, perhaps for a long time, perhaps for ever, a life in which she would realise that unknown element which in the past had so often troubled me, even though I enjoyed the good fortune of possessing, of caressing what was its outer shell, that charming face, impenetrable and captive. It was this unknown element that formed the core of my love. As for Albertine herself, she scarcely existed in me save under the form of her name, which, but for certain rare moments of respite when I awoke, came and engraved itself upon my brain and continued incessantly to do so. If I had thought aloud, I should have kept on repeating it, and my speech would have been as monotonous, as limited, as if I had been transformed into a bird, a bird like the one in the fable whose song repeated incessantly the name of her whom it had loved when a man. One says the name to oneself, and since one remains silent it is as though one were inscribing it inside oneself, as though it were leaving its trace on one's brain, which must end up, like a wall on which somebody has amused himself scribbling, by being entirely covered with the name, written a thousand times over, of the woman one loves. One rewrites it all the time in one's mind when one is happy, and even more when one is unhappy. And one feels a constantly recurring need to repeat this name which brings one nothing more than what one already knows, until, in course of time, it wearies us. I did not even give a thought to carnal pleasure at this moment; I did not even see in my mind's eye the image of that Albertine who had been the cause of such an upheaval of my being, I did not perceive her body, and if I had tried to isolate the idea—for there is always one—that was bound up with my suffering, it would have been, alternately, on the one hand my doubt as to the intention with which she had left me, with or without any thought of returning, and on the other hand the means of bringing her back. Perhaps there is something symbolical and true in the infinitesimal place occupied in our anxiety by the one who is its cause. The fact is that her person itself counts for little or nothing; what is almost everything is the series of emotions and anxieties which chance occurrences have made us feel in the



past in connexion with her and which habit has associated with her. What proves this clearly is (even more than the boredom which we feel in moments of happiness) the extent to which seeing or not seeing the person in question, being or not being admired by her, having or not having her at our disposal, will seem to us utterly irrelevant when we no longer have to pose ourselves the problem (so otiose that we shall no longer take the trouble to consider it) save in relation to the person herself—the series of emotions and anxieties being forgotten, at least so far as she is concerned, for it may have developed anew, but transferred to another. Before this, when it was still attached to her, we supposed that our happiness was dependent upon her person; it depended merely upon the cessation of our anxiety. Our unconscious was therefore more clairvoyant than ourselves at that moment, when it made the figure of the beloved so minute, a figure which we had even perhaps forgotten, which we might have been comparatively unfamiliar with and thought mediocre, in the terrible drama in which seeing her again in order to cease waiting for her could be a matter of life and death for us. Minuscule proportions of the woman's form; logical and necessary effect of the manner in which love develops; clear allegory of the subjective nature of that love.

Outside the door of Albertine's house I found a little poor girl who gazed at me with huge eyes and who looked so sweet-natured that I asked her whether she would care to come home with me, as I might have taken home a dog with faithful eyes. She seemed pleased at the suggestion. When I got home, I held her for some time on my knee, but very soon her presence, by making me feel too keenly Albertine's absence, became intolerable. And I asked her to go away, after giving her a five-hundred franc note. And yet, soon afterwards, the thought of having some other little girl in the house with me, of never being alone without the comfort of an innocent presence, was the only thing that enabled me to endure the idea that Albertine might perhaps remain away for some time. The spirit in which Albertine had left me was similar no doubt to that of nations who pave the way by a demonstration of their armed force for the exercise of their diplomacy. She must have left me only in order to obtain from me better terms, greater freedom, more luxury. In that case, of the two of us, the one who prevailed would have been myself, had I had the strength to await the moment when, seeing that she could gain nothing, she would return of her own accord. But if at cards, or in war, where victory alone matters, we can hold out against bluff, the conditions are not the same as those created by love and jealousy, not to mention suffering. If, in order to wait, to "hold out," I allowed Albertine to remain away from me for several days, for several weeks perhaps, I was ruining what had been my sole purpose for more than a year: never to leave her by herself for a single hour. All my precautions would be rendered fruitless if I allowed her the time and the opportunity to be unfaithful to me to her heart's content; and if in the end she capitulated, I should never be able to forget the time when she had been alone, and even though victorious in the end, nevertheless in the past, that is to say irreparably, I should be the vanquished one.

As for the means of bringing Albertine back, they had all the more chance of success the more plausible the hypothesis appeared that she had left me only in the hope of being summoned back on more favourable terms. And of course to the people who did not believe in Albertine's sincerity, certainly to Françoise for instance, it was indeed plausible. But my reason, to which, before I knew anything, the only explanation of certain bouts of ill-humour, of certain attitudes, had appeared to be that she had planned to leave for good, found it difficult to believe that, now that her departure had occurred, it was a mere feint. I say my reason, not myself. The hypothesis of a feint became all the more necessary to me the more improbable it was, and gained in strength what it lost in probability. When we find ourselves on the verge of despair and it seems as though God has forsaken us, we no longer hesitate to expect a miracle of him.

I realise that in all this I was the most apathetic, albeit the most anxious of detectives. But Albertine's flight had not restored to me the faculties of which the habit of having her watched by other people had deprived me. I could think of one thing only: employing another person to search for her. This other person was Saint-Loup, who agreed. The transference of the anxiety of so many days to another person filled me with joy and I jiggled about, certain of success, my hands becoming suddenly dry again as in the past, and no longer moist with the sweat in which Françoise had soaked me when she said: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone."

It will be remembered that when I decided to live with Albertine, and even to marry her, it was in order to guard her, to know what she was doing, to prevent her from returning to her old habits with Mlle Vinteuil. It had been in the appalling anguish caused by her revelation at Balbec, when she had told me, as a thing which was quite natural, and which I succeeded, although it was the greatest sorrow I had ever experienced in my life, in appearing to find quite natural, the thing which in my worst suppositions I should never have been bold enough to imagine. (It is astonishing what a want of imagination jealousy, which spends its time making petty suppositions that are false, shows when it comes to discovering what is true.) Now this love, born first and foremost of a need to prevent Albertine from doing wrong, this love had thereafter preserved the traces of its origin. Being with her mattered little to me so long as I could prevent the fugitive creature from going to this place or to that. In order to prevent her, I had had recourse to the vigilance, to the company, of the people who escorted her, and they had only to give me at the end of the day a report that was fairly reassuring for my anxieties to dissolve into good humour.

Having given myself the assurance that, whatever steps I might have to take, Albertine would be back in the house that same evening, I had granted a respite to the pain which Françoise had caused me when she told me that Albertine had gone (because at that moment my mind, caught unawares, had believed for an instant that her departure was final). But after an interruption, when under the momentum of its own independent life the initial pain revived spontaneously in me, it was just as agonising as before, because it pre-existed the consoling promise that I had given myself to bring Albertine back that evening. My suffering was oblivious of this promise which would have calmed it. To set in motion the means of bringing about her return, once again

I was condemned—not that such an attitude had ever proved very successful, but because I had always adopted it since I had been in love with Albertine—to behave as though I did not love her, as though I was not hurt by her departure; I was condemned to continue to lie to her. I could be all the more energetic in my efforts to bring her back in that personally I should appear to have given her up for good. I proposed to write Albertine a farewell letter in which I would regard her departure as final, while at the same time I would send Saint-Loup down, as though without my knowledge, to put the most brutal pressure on Mme Bontemps to make Albertine return as soon as possible. No doubt I had had experience with Gilberte of the danger of letters expressing an indifference which, feigned at first, ends by becoming genuine. And this experience ought to have restrained me from writing to Albertine letters of the same sort as those I had written to Gilberte. But what we call experience is merely the revelation to our own eyes of a trait in our character which naturally reappears, and reappears all the more markedly because we have already once brought it to light, so that the spontaneous impulse which guided us on the first occasion finds itself reinforced by all the suggestions of memory. The human plagiarism which is most difficult to avoid, for individuals (and even for nations which persevere in their faults and indeed intensify them), is self-plagiarism.

Knowing that Saint-Loup was in Paris, I summoned him there and then; he hastened round at once, swift and efficient as he had been long ago at Doncières, and agreed to set off at once for Touraine. I suggested to him the following arrangement. He was to take the train to Châtellerault, find out where Mme Bontemps lived, and wait until Albertine had left the house, since there was a risk of her recognising him. “But does the girl in question know me, then?” he asked. I told him that I did not think so. This plan of action filled me with indescribable joy. It was nevertheless diametrically opposed to my original intention: to arrange things so that I should not appear to be seeking Albertine’s return; whereas by so acting I must inevitably appear to be seeking it. But this plan had the inestimable advantage over “the proper thing to do” that it enabled me to say to myself that someone sent by me was going to see Albertine, and would doubtless bring her back with him. And if I had been able to see clearly into my own heart at the outset, I might have foreseen that it was this solution, which was hidden in the shadows and which I thought deplorable, that would ultimately prevail over the alternative course of patience which I had decided to adopt, from lack of will-power. As Saint-Loup already appeared slightly surprised to learn that a girl had been living with me through the whole winter without my having said a word to him about her, as moreover he had often spoken to me of the girl he had seen at Balbec and I had never said in reply: “But she’s living here,” he might have been offended by my lack of trust. It was true that Mme Bontemps might talk to him about Balbec. But I was too impatient for his departure, and for his arrival at the other end, to be willing or able to think of the possible consequences of his journey. As for the risk of his recognising Albertine (whom in any case he had resolutely refrained from looking at when he had met her at Doncières), she had, everyone said, so changed and put on weight that it was hardly likely. He asked me whether I had a picture of Albertine. I replied at first that I had not, so that he might not have a chance of recognising Albertine from her photograph, taken at about the time of our stay at Balbec, though he had had no more than a glimpse of her in the railway carriage. But then I realised that in the photograph she would be already as different from the Albertine of Balbec as the living Albertine now was, and that he would recognise her no better from her photograph than in the flesh. While I was looking for it, he laid his hand gently on my forehead, by way of consoling me. I was touched by the distress which the grief that he guessed me to be feeling was causing him. In the first place, however final his breach with Rachel, what he had felt at that time was not yet so remote for him not to have a special sympathy, a special pity for sufferings of that kind, as one feels closer to a person who is afflicted with the same illness as oneself. Besides, he had so strong an affection for me that the thought of my suffering was intolerable to him. Hence he conceived a mixture of rancour and admiration for the girl who was the cause of it. He regarded me as so superior a being that he felt that for me to be in thrall to another creature she must be quite out of the ordinary. I quite expected that he would think Albertine pretty in her photograph, but since at the same time I did not imagine that it would produce upon him the impression that Helen made upon the Trojan elders, as I continued to look for it I said modestly: “Oh, you know, you mustn’t get ideas into your head. For one thing it’s a bad photograph, and besides there’s nothing startling about her, she’s not a beauty, she’s merely very nice.”

“Oh, but she must be wonderful,” he said with a naive, sincere enthusiasm as he sought to form a mental picture of the person who was capable of plunging me into such despair and agitation. “I’m angry with her for hurting you, but at the same time one can’t help seeing that someone who’s an artist to his fingertips as you are, someone who loves beauty in all its forms and with so passionate a love, that you were predestined to suffer more than an ordinary person when you found it in a woman.”

At last I had found the photograph. “She’s bound to be wonderful,” Robert was still saying, not yet having seen that I was holding out the photograph to him. All at once he caught sight of it, and held it for a moment between his hands. His face expressed a stupefaction which amounted to stupidity. “Is this the girl you love?” he said at length in a tone in which astonishment was curbed by his fear of offending me. He made no comment, but he had assumed the reasonable, prudent, unavoidably somewhat disdainful air which one assumes in front of a sick person—even if he is a man of outstanding gifts, and your friend—who is now nothing of the sort, for, raving mad, he speaks to you of a celestial being who has appeared to him, and continues to behold this being where you, being sane, can see nothing but a quilt on the bed. I at once understood Robert’s astonishment, realising that it was the same as that which the sight of his mistress had provoked in me, the only difference being that I had recognised in her a woman whom I already knew, where he imagined that he had never seen Albertine. But no doubt the difference between our respective impressions

of the same person was equally great. The time was long past when I had all too tentatively begun at Balbec by adding to my visual sensations when I gazed at Albertine sensations of taste, of smell, of touch. Since then, other more profound, more tender, more indefinable sensations had been added to them, and afterwards painful sensations. In short, Albertine was merely, like a stone round which snow has gathered, the generating centre of an immense structure which rose above the plane of my heart. Robert, to whom all this stratification of sensations was invisible, grasped only a residue which it prevented me, on the contrary, from perceiving. What had struck Robert when his eyes fell upon Albertine's photograph was not the thrill of wonderment that overcame the Trojan elders seeing Helen go by and saying:

One single glance from her eclipses all our ills<sup>25</sup>

but precisely the opposite impression which may be expressed by: "What, it's for this that he has worked himself into such a state, has grieved himself so, has done so many idiotic things!" It must indeed be admitted that this sort of reaction at the sight of the person who has caused the suffering, upset the life, sometimes brought about the death of someone we love, is infinitely more frequent than that of the Trojan elders, indeed to all intents and purposes the habitual one. This is not merely because love is individual, nor because, when we ourselves do not feel it, finding it avoidable and philosophising about the folly of others comes naturally to us. No, it is because, when it has reached the stage at which it causes such misery, the edifice of the sensations interposed between the face of the woman and the eyes of her lover—the huge egg of pain which encases it and conceals it as a mantle of snow conceals a fountain—is already raised so high that the point at which the lover's gaze comes to rest, the point at which he finds his pleasure and his sufferings, is as far from the point which other people see as is the real sun from the place in which its refracted light enables us to see it in the sky. And what is more, during this time, beneath the chrysalis of grief and tenderness which renders the worst metamorphoses of the beloved object invisible to the lover, her face has had time to grow old and to change. With the result that, if the face which the lover saw for the first time is very far removed from that which he has seen since he has loved and suffered, it is, in the opposite sense, equally far from the face which may now be seen by the indifferent onlooker. (What would have happened if, instead of the photograph of one who was still a girl, Robert had seen the photograph of an elderly mistress?) And indeed, in order to feel this astonishment, we have no need to see for the first time the woman who has caused such ravages. Often we know her already, as my great-uncle knew Odette. So the difference in optics extends not only to people's physical appearance but to their character, and to their individual importance. It is more likely than not that the woman who is causing the man who loves her to suffer has always behaved good-naturedly towards someone who was indifferent to her, as Odette, who was so cruel to Swann, had been the kind, attentive "lady in pink" to my great-uncle, or indeed that the person whose every decision is computed in advance by the man who loves her, with as much dread as that of a deity, appears as a person of no consequence, only too glad to do anything he asks, in the eyes of the man who does not love her, as Saint-Loup's mistress had appeared to me who saw in her merely that "Rachel when from the Lord" who had so repeatedly been offered to me. I recalled my own amazement, the first time I met her with Saint-Loup, at the thought that anybody could be tormented by not knowing what such a woman had been doing one evening, what she might have whispered to someone, why she had desired a rupture. And I felt that all this past existence—but, in this case, Albertine's—towards which every fibre of my heart, of my life, was directed with a throbbing and importunate pain, must appear just as insignificant to Saint-Loup, and would one day, perhaps, appear so to me; I felt that I might gradually pass, so far as the insignificance or gravity of Albertine's past was concerned, from the state of mind in which I was at the moment to that of Saint-Loup, for I was under no illusion as to what Saint-Loup might be thinking, as to what anyone else than the lover himself may think. And I was not unduly distressed. Let us leave pretty women to men with no imagination. I recalled that tragic explanation of so many lives which is furnished by an inspired but not lifelike portrait such as Elstir's portrait of Odette, which is a portrait not so much of a mistress as of the distortions of love. All that it lacked was—what so many portraits have—the fact of coming at once from a great painter and from a lover (and even then it was said that Elstir had been Odette's). The whole life of a lover, of a lover whose folly nobody understands—the whole life of a Swann—goes to prove this disparity. But let the lover be embodied in a painter like Elstir and then we have the clue to the enigma, we have at last before our eyes those lips which the common herd have never perceived, that nose which nobody has ever seen, that unsuspected carriage. The portrait says: "What I have loved, what has made me suffer, what I have never ceased to behold, is this." By an inverse gymnastic, I who had made a mental effort to add to Rachel all that Saint-Loup had added to her of himself, I now attempted to subtract the contribution of my heart and mind from the composition of Albertine and to picture her to myself as she must appear to Saint-Loup, as Rachel had appeared to me. But how much importance does all this have? Would we give credence to these differences, even if we could see them ourselves? When, in the summer at Balbec, Albertine used to wait for me beneath the arcades of Incarville and jump into my carriage, not only had she not yet "thickened," but, as a result of too much exercise, she had lost weight; thin, made plainer by an ugly hat which left visible only the tip of an ugly nose and, at a side-view, pale cheeks like white slugs, there was very little of her that I recognised, enough, however, to know, when she sprang into the carriage, that it was she, that she had been punctual in keeping our appointment and had not gone somewhere else; and this was enough; what we love is too much in the past, consists too much in the time that we have wasted together for us to require the whole woman; we wish only to be sure that it is she, not to be mistaken as to her identity, a thing far more important than beauty to those who love; her cheeks may grow hollow, her body thin, even to those who were originally proudest, in the eyes of the world, of their

domination over a beauty, and yet that little tip of nose, that sign which epitomises the permanent personality of a woman, that algebraical formula, that constant factor, is sufficient to prevent a man who is courted in the highest society, and was once fond of it, from having a single evening free because he spends his time combing and uncombing, until it is time to go to sleep, the hair of the woman he loves, or simply sitting by her side, in order to be with her, or in order that she may be with him, or merely in order that she may not be with other men.

"Are you sure," Robert asked me, "that I can offer this woman thirty thousand francs just like that for her husband's election committee? She's as dishonest as all that? If you're right, three thousand francs would be enough."

"No, I beg of you, don't be cheeseparing about a thing that matters so much to me. This is what you're to say to her (and it's to some extent true): 'My friend had borrowed these thirty thousand francs from a relative for the election expenses of the uncle of the girl he was engaged to marry. It was because of this engagement that the money was given him. And he had asked me to bring it to you so that Albertine should know nothing about it. And now Albertine has left him. He doesn't know what to do. He's obliged to pay back the thirty thousand francs if he doesn't marry Albertine. And if he is going to marry her, then if only to keep up appearances she ought to return immediately, because it will make a very bad impression if she stays away for long.' You think I've deliberately made all this up?"

"Not at all," Saint-Loup assured me out of kindness, out of tact, and also because he knew that circumstances are often stranger than one supposes.

After all, it was by no means impossible that in this tale of the thirty thousand francs there might be, as I assured him, a large element of truth. It was possible, but it was not true, and this element of truth was in fact a lie. But we lied to each other, Robert and I, as in every conversation when one friend is genuinely anxious to help another who is unhappy in love. The friend who is being counsellor, prop, comforter, may pity the other's distress but cannot share it, and the kinder he is to him the more he lies. And the other confesses to him as much as is necessary in order to secure his help, but, precisely in order to secure that help, perhaps, conceals many things from him. And the happy one of the two is, when all is said, he who takes trouble, goes on a journey, carries out a mission, but has no inner anguish. I was at this moment the person Robert had been at Doncières when he thought that Rachel had left him.

"Very well, just as you like; if I get a snub, I accept it in advance for your sake. And even if it does seem a bit queer to make such an undisguised bargain, I know that in our world there are plenty of duchesses, even the stuffiest of them, who if you offered them thirty thousand francs would do things far more difficult than telling their nieces not to stay in Touraine. Anyhow, I'm doubly glad to be doing you a service, since it's the only thing that will make you agree to see me. If I marry," he went on, "don't you think we might see more of one another, won't you regard my house as your own? ..."

He suddenly stopped short, the thought having occurred to him (as I supposed at the time) that, if I too were to marry, Albertine might not be a suitable friend for his wife. And I remembered what the Cambremers had said to me about the probability of his marrying a niece of the Prince de Guermantes.

He consulted the timetable, and found that he could not leave Paris until the evening. Françoise inquired: "Am I to take Mlle Albertine's bed out of the study?" "On the contrary," I said, "you must make it for her." I hoped that she would return any day and did not wish Françoise to suppose that there could be any doubt of this. Albertine's departure must appear to have been agreed between ourselves, and not in any way to imply that she loved me less than before. But Françoise looked at me with an air, if not of incredulity, at any rate of doubt. She too had her alternative hypotheses. Her nostrils flared, she scented a quarrel, she must have felt it in the air for a long time past. And if she was not absolutely sure of it, this was perhaps only because, like myself, she hesitated to believe unconditionally what would have given her too much pleasure. Now the weight of the affair no longer rested on my overtaxed mind but on Saint-Loup. I was buoyed up with gladness because I had made a decision, because I told myself: "I have answered quick as a flash."

Saint-Loup could scarcely have been in the train when I ran into Bloch in my hall. I had not heard his ring, and was obliged to let him stay with me for a while. He had met me recently with Albertine (whom he had known at Balbec) on a day when she was in a bad mood. "I met M. Bontemps at dinner," he told me, "and as I have a certain influence over him, I told him that I was grieved that his niece was not nicer to you, and that he ought to have a word with her about it." I choked with rage; these remonstrations and complaints would destroy the whole effect of Saint-Loup's intervention and involve me directly in the eyes of Albertine, whom I now seemed to be imploring to return. To make matters worse, Françoise, who was lingering in the hall, could hear every word. I heaped every imaginable reproach upon Bloch, telling him that I had never authorised him to do anything of the sort and that, besides, the whole thing was nonsense. From then on, Bloch never left off smiling, less, I think, from joy than from embarrassment at having annoyed me. He laughingly expressed his surprise at having provoked such anger. Perhaps he said this in the hope of minimising in my eyes the importance of his indiscreet intervention, perhaps because he was of a cowardly nature and lived gaily and idly in an atmosphere of falsehood, as jellyfish float upon the surface of the sea, perhaps because, even if he had been a man of a different kind, other people can never see things from our point of view and therefore do not realise the magnitude of the injury that words uttered at random can do us. I had barely shown him out, unable to think of any remedy for the mischief he had done, when the bell rang again and Françoise brought me a summons from the head of the Sûreté. The parents of the little girl whom I had brought into the house for an hour had decided to bring a charge against me for abduction of a minor. There are moments in life when a sort of beauty is born of the multiplicity of the troubles that assail us, intertwined like Wagnerian

leitmotifs, and also from the notion, which then emerges, that events are not situated in the sum of the reflexions portrayed in the wretched little mirror which the mind holds in front of it and which it calls the future, that they are somewhere outside and spring up as suddenly as a person who comes to catch us in the act. Even when left to itself, an event becomes modified, whether frustration amplifies it for us or satisfaction reduces it. But it is rarely unaccompanied. The feelings aroused by each one of them contradict one another, and fear, to a certain extent, as I felt on my way to see the head of the Sûreté, is at least temporary and fairly efficacious counter-irritant for sentimental miseries.

At the Sûreté, I found the girl's parents, who insulted me and with the words "We'd rather starve" handed me back the five hundred francs which I did not want to take, and the head of the Sûreté who, setting himself the inimitable example of the judicial facility in repartee, seized upon a word in each sentence that I uttered for the purpose of concocting a witty and crushing retort. My innocence of the alleged crime was never taken into consideration, for that was the sole hypothesis which nobody was willing to accept for an instant. Nevertheless the difficulty of proving the charge enabled me to escape with this castigation, which was extremely violent for as long as the parents were in the room. But as soon as they had gone, the head of the Sûreté, who had a weakness for little girls, changed his tone and admonished me as man to man: "Next time, you must be more careful. Good God, you can't pick them up as easily as that, or you'll get into trouble. Anyhow, you'll find dozens of little girls who are better-looking than that one, and far cheaper. It was a perfectly ridiculous amount to pay." I was so certain that he would fail to understand me if I attempted to tell him the truth that without saying a word I took advantage of his permission to withdraw. Every passer-by, until I was safely at home, seemed to me an inspector appointed to spy on my every movement. But this leitmotif, like that of my anger with Bloch, died away, leaving the field clear for that of Albertine's departure.

The latter resumed on an almost joyous note now that Saint-Loup had set out. Since he had undertaken to go and see Mme Bontemps, my sufferings had been dispelled. I believed that this was because I had acted, and I believed it sincerely, for we never know what is concealed in our hearts of hearts. But what really made me happy was not, as I supposed, that I had unburdened my indecisions on to Saint-Loup. I was not in fact entirely mistaken; the specific for curing an unfortunate event (and three events out of four are unfortunate) is a decision; for it has the effect, by a sudden reversal of our thoughts, of interrupting the flow of those that come from the past event and prolong its vibration, and breaking it with a counter-flow of thoughts from the outside, from the future. But these new thoughts are most of all beneficial to us (and this was the case with the thoughts that assailed me at this moment) when from the depths of that future it is a hope that they bring us. What really made me so happy was the secret certainty that Saint-Loup's mission could not fail and that Albertine was bound to return. I realised this; for not having received any word from Saint-Loup on the following day, I began to suffer anew. My decision, my transference to him of plenipotentiary powers, was not, therefore, the cause of my joy, which in that case would have persisted; its cause was rather the "Success is certain" which had been in my mind when I said "Come what may." And the thought, aroused by his delay, that after all his mission might not prove successful, was so hateful to me that all my gaiety evaporated. It is in reality our anticipation, our hope of happy events that fills us with a joy which we ascribe to other causes and which ceases, plunging us once more into misery, if we are no longer so certain that what we desire will come to pass. It is always an invisible belief that sustains the edifice of our sensory world and deprived of which it totters. We have seen that it created for us the merit or the nullity of other people, our excitement or boredom at seeing them. It similarly creates the possibility of enduring a grief which seems to us trivial simply because we are convinced that it will presently be brought to an end, or its sudden intensification to the point where a person's presence matters to us as much as, sometimes even more than, life itself.

One thing finally succeeded in making my heartache as acute as it had been in the first instant and (I am bound to admit) no longer was. This was when I re-read a sentence in Albertine's letter. However much we love people, the pain of losing them—when in our isolation we are confronted with it alone, to which our mind to a certain extent gives whatever form it chooses—is endurable and different from that other pain, less human, less our own—as unforeseen and unusual as an accident in the moral world and in the region of the heart—which is caused not so much by the people themselves as by the manner in which we have learned that we will never see them again. I could think of Albertine while weeping gently and accepting the fact that I should not be seeing her tonight any more than I had yesterday; but to re-read "my decision is irrevocable" was another matter; it was like taking a dangerous drug which had given me a heart attack from which I might never recover. There is in inanimate objects, in events, in farewell letters, a special danger which amplifies and alters the very nature of the grief that people are capable of causing us. But this pain did not last long. I was, when all was said, so sure of Saint-Loup's skill, of his eventual success, Albertine's return seemed to me so certain, that I wondered whether I had been right to wish for it. Nevertheless, I rejoiced at the thought. Unfortunately, although I had assumed that the business with the Sûreté was over and done with, Françoise came in to tell me that an inspector had called to inquire whether I was in the habit of having girls in the house, that the concierge, supposing him to be referring to Albertine, had replied in the affirmative, and that since then it seemed as though the house was being watched. Henceforth it would be impossible for me ever to bring a little girl into the house to console me in my grief, without risking the shame of an inspector suddenly appearing and of her taking me for a criminal. And in the same instant I realised how much more important certain longings are to us than we suppose, for this impossibility of my ever taking a little girl on my knee again seemed to me to strip life of all its value but what was more, I realised how understandable it is that people will readily refuse wealth and risk death, whereas we imagine that pecuniary interest and the fear of dying rule the world. For, rather than think that even an unknown little girl might be given a bad

impression of me by the arrival of a policeman, I should have preferred to kill myself! Indeed there was no possible comparison between the two degrees of suffering. Yet in everyday life people never bear in mind that those to whom they offer money, or whom they threaten to kill, may have mistresses, or merely friends, whose respect they value even if they do not value their own. But all of a sudden, by a confusion of which I was not aware (for it did not occur to me that Albertine, being of age, was free to live under my roof and even to be my mistress), it seemed to me that the charge of corrupting minors might apply to Albertine also. Thereupon my life appeared to me to be hedged in on every side. And reflecting that I had not lived chastely with her, I saw, in the punishment that had been inflicted upon me for having dandled an unknown little girl on my knee, that relation which almost always exists in human sanctions, whereby there is hardly ever either a just sentence or a judicial error, but a sort of compromise between the false idea that the judge forms of an innocent act and the culpable deeds of which he is unaware. But then when I thought that Albertine's return might involve me in an ignominious charge which would degrade me in her eyes and might perhaps even do her some damage for which she would not forgive me, I ceased to look forward to her return, it terrified me. I wanted to cable her to tell her not to come back. And immediately, a passionate desire for her return overwhelmed me, drowning everything else. The fact was that, having envisaged for a moment the possibility of telling her not to return and of living without her, all of a sudden I felt on the contrary ready to abandon all travel, all pleasure, all work, if only Albertine would return!

Ah, how my love for Albertine, the course of which I had imagined that I could foretell on the basis of my love for Gilberte, had developed differently from the latter, indeed in perfect contrast with it! How impossible it was for me to live without seeing her! And with each of my actions, even the most trivial, since they had all been steeped beforehand in the blissful atmosphere which was Albertine's presence, I was obliged time after time, at renewed cost, with the same pain, to relive the first experience of separation. Then the competition of other forms of life thrust this new pain into the background, and during those days which were the first days of spring, as I waited until Saint-Loup had managed to see Mme Bontemps, I even enjoyed a few moments of agreeable calm in imagining Venice and beautiful, unknown women. As soon as I was conscious of this, I felt within me a panic terror. This calm which I had just enjoyed was the first apparition of that great intermittent force which was to wage war in me against grief, against love, and would ultimately get the better of them. This state of which I had just had a foretaste and had received the warning was for a moment only what would in time to come be my permanent state, a life in which I should no longer be able to suffer on account of Albertine, in which I should no longer love her. And my love, which had just seen and recognised the one enemy by whom it could be conquered, forgetfulness, began to tremble, like a lion which in the cage in which it has been confined has suddenly caught sight of the python that will devour it.

I thought of Albertine all the time, and Françoise, when she came into my room, never said to me "There are no letters" quickly enough to curtail my anguish. From time to time I succeeded, by letting some current or other of ideas flow through my grief, in freshening, in airing to some slight extent the vitiated atmosphere of my heart; but at night, if I succeeded in going to sleep, then it was as though the memory of Albertine had been the drug that had procured my sleep and the cessation of whose influence would awaken me. I thought all the time of Albertine while I was asleep. It was a special sleep of her own that she gave me, and one in which, moreover, I was no longer at liberty, as when awake, to think of other things. Sleep and the memory of her were like two substances which one must mix together and take at one draught in order to sleep. When I was awake, meanwhile, my suffering went on increasing day by day instead of diminishing. Not that oblivion was not performing its task, but by that very fact it encouraged the idealisation of the lamented image and thereby the assimilation of my initial suffering to other analogous sufferings which intensified it. At least that image was endurable. But if all of a sudden I thought of her room, of her room in which the bed stood empty, of her piano, of her motor-car, all my strength left me, I shut my eyes and let my head droop on my shoulder like someone who is about to faint. The sound of doors being opened hurt me almost as much because it was not she that was opening them. When it was possible that a telegram might have come from Saint-Loup, I dared not ask: "Is there a telegram?" At length one did come, but brought with it only a postponement, with the message: "The ladies have gone away for three days."

No doubt, if I had endured the four days that had already elapsed since her departure, it was because I said to myself: "It's only a matter of time. By the end of the week she will be here." But this consideration did not alter the fact that for my heart, for my body, the action to be performed was the same: living without her, returning home and not finding her in the house, passing the door of her room (as for opening it, I did not yet have the courage to do that) knowing that she was not inside, going to bed without having said good-night to her—such were the tasks that my heart had been obliged to perform in their terrible entirety, and for all the world as though I was not going to see Albertine again. But the fact that my heart had already performed this daily task four times proved that it was now capable of continuing to perform it. And soon, perhaps, the consideration that was helping me thus to go on living—the prospect of Albertine's return—would cease to be necessary to me; I should be able to say to myself: "She will never come back," and go on living all the same as I had already done for the last four days, like a cripple who has recovered the use of his legs and can dispense with his crutches. No doubt when I came home at night I still found, taking my breath away, suffocating me in the vacuum of solitude, the memories, placed end to end in an interminable series, of all the evenings on which Albertine had been waiting for me; but already I also found the memory of last night, of the night before and of the two previous nights, that is to say the memory of the four nights that had passed since Albertine's departure, during which I had remained without her, alone, through which none the less I

had lived, four nights already forming a strip of memories which was very slender compared with the other, but which would be filled out, perhaps, by every day that went by.

I shall say nothing of the letter conveying a declaration of affection which I received at this time from a niece of Mme de Guermantes who was considered to be the prettiest girl in Paris, or of the overtures made to me by the Duc de Guermantes on behalf of her parents, resigned, in their anxiety to secure their daughter's happiness, to the inequality of the match, to an apparent misalliance. Such incidents which might prove gratifying to one's self-esteem are too painful when one is in love. One might have the desire but not the indelicacy to communicate them to her who has a less flattering opinion of one, an opinion which moreover would not be modified by the knowledge that one is capable of inspiring a quite different one. What the Duke's niece wrote to me could only have irritated Albertine.

From the moment of waking, when I picked up my grief again at the point where I had left it before going to sleep, like a book which had been shut for a while but which I would keep before my eyes until night, it was invariably to some thought concerning Albertine that I related every sensation, whether it came to me from without or from within. The bell would ring: it must be a letter from her, or she herself perhaps! If I felt well and not too miserable, I was no longer jealous, I no longer had any grievance against her, I wanted to see her at once, to kiss her, to live happily with her ever after. The act of telegraphing to her "Come at once" seemed to me to have become a perfectly simple thing, as though my new mood had changed not merely my attitude, but things external to myself, had made them easier. If I was in a sombre mood, all my anger with her revived, I no longer felt any desire to kiss her, I felt how impossible it was that she could ever make me happy, I sought only to harm her and to prevent her from belonging to other people. But the outcome of these two opposite moods was identical: it was essential that she should return as soon as possible. And yet, whatever joy I might feel at the moment of her return, I sensed that very soon the same difficulties would recur and that to seek happiness in the satisfaction of a desire of the mind was as naive as to attempt to reach the horizon by walking straight ahead. The further the desire advances, the further does real possession recede. So that if happiness, or at least the absence of suffering, can be found, it is not the satisfaction, but the gradual reduction and the eventual extinction of desire that one should seek. One seeks to see the beloved object, but one ought to seek not to: forgetfulness alone brings about the ultimate extinction of desire. And I imagine that if an author were to publish truths of this sort he would dedicate the book that contained them to a woman with whom he would thus take pleasure in striking up a relationship, saying to her: "This book is yours." And thus, while telling the truth in his book, he would be lying in his dedication, for he will attach to the book's being hers only the importance that he attaches to the stone which came to him from her and which will remain precious to him only so long as he is in love with her. The bonds between ourselves and another person exist only in our minds. Memory as it grows fainter loosens them, and notwithstanding the illusion by which we want to be duped and with which, out of love, friendship, politeness, deference, duty, we dupe other people, we exist alone. Man is the creature who cannot escape from himself, who knows other people only in himself, and when he asserts the contrary, he is lying. And I should have been so afraid of being robbed (had anyone been capable of so robbing me) of this need of her, this love for her, that I convinced myself that it was a precious necessity in my life. To be able to hear, without being charmed and pained by them, the names of the stations through which the train passed on its way to Touraine would have seemed to me a diminution of myself (for no other reason really than that it would have proved that I was becoming indifferent to Albertine). It was right, I told myself, that by incessantly asking myself what she could be doing, thinking, wishing, at every moment, whether she intended, whether she was going to return, I should keep open that communicating door which love had opened up in me, and feel another person's life flooding through open sluices to fill the reservoir which must not again become stagnant.

Presently, as Saint-Loup's silence persisted, a subordinate anxiety—my expectation of a further telegram or a telephone call from him—masked the first, my uncertainty as to the result, whether Albertine was going to return. Listening for every sound in expectation of the telegram became so intolerable that I felt that, whatever its contents might be, the arrival of the telegram, which was the only thing I could think of at the moment, would put an end to my sufferings. But when at last I received a telegram from Robert in which he informed me that he had seen Mme Bontemps but that in spite of all his precautions Albertine had seen him, and that this had upset everything, I burst out in a torrent of fury and despair, for this was what I had wanted at all costs to avoid. Once it came to Albertine's knowledge, Saint-Loup's mission gave me an appearance of needing her which could only dissuade her from returning and my horror of which was moreover all that I had retained of the pride that my love had boasted in Gilberte's day and had since lost. I cursed Robert, then told myself that, if this scheme had failed, I would try another. Since man is capable of influencing the external world, how could I fail, by bringing into play cunning, intelligence, money, affection, to abolish this terrible fact: Albertine's absence? We believe that we can change the things around us in accordance with our desires—we believe it because otherwise we can see no favourable outcome. We do not think of the outcome which generally comes to pass and is also favourable: we do not succeed in changing things in accordance with our desires, but gradually our desires change. The situation that we hoped to change because it was intolerable becomes unimportant to us. We have failed to surmount the obstacle, as we were absolutely determined to do, but life has taken us round it, led us beyond it, and then if we turn round to gaze into the distance of the past, we can barely see it, so imperceptible has it become.

From the floor above I could hear one of the neighbours playing some tunes from *Manon*. I applied their words, which I knew, to Albertine and myself, and was stirred so deeply that I began to cry. The words were:

The bird that flees from what it felt was bondage  
Returns to beat at the glass in desperate flight,

and the death of Manon:

Then, Manon, answer me!—The one love of my soul,  
Never till now did I know the goodness of your heart.

Since Manon returned to Des Grieux, it seemed to me that I was to Albertine the one and only love of her life. Alas, it is probable that, if she had been listening at that moment to the same tune, it would not have been me that she cherished under the name of Des Grieux, and, even if the idea had occurred to her at all, the memory of me would have prevented her from being moved by this music which, though subtler and better-written, was very much of the kind that she admired. As for me, I had not the heart to abandon myself to the comforting thought of Albertine calling me her “soul’s one love” and realising that she had been mistaken over what she had “felt was bondage.” I knew that one can never read a novel without giving its heroine the form and features of the woman one loves. But however happy the book’s ending may be, our love has not advanced an inch and, when we have shut it, she whom we love and who has come to us at last in its pages, loves us no better in real life.

In a fit of fury, I telegraphed to Saint-Loup to return as quickly as possible to Paris, in order to avoid at least the appearance of an aggravating persistence in a mission which I had been so anxious to keep secret. But even before he had returned in obedience to my instructions, it was from Albertine herself that I received the following message:

“My dear, you have sent your friend Saint-Loup to my aunt, which was foolish. My dearest, if you needed me, why did you not write to me direct? I should have been only too delighted to come back. Do not let us have any more of these absurd approaches.”

“I should have been only too delighted to come back”! If she said this, it must mean that she regretted her departure, and was only waiting for an excuse to return. I had only to do what she said, to write to her that I needed her, and she would return. So I was going to see her again, her, the Albertine of Balbec (for since her departure this was what she had once more become for me; like a sea-shell to which one ceases to pay any attention when it is always there on one’s chest of drawers, and once one has parted with it, either by giving it away or by losing it, one begins to think about again, she recalled to me all the joyous beauty of the blue mountains of the sea). And it was not only she that had become a creature of the imagination, that is to say desirable, but life with her had become an imaginary life, that is to say a life freed from all difficulties, so that I said to myself: “How happy we are going to be!” But, now that I was assured of her return, I must not appear to be seeking to hasten it, but must on the contrary efface the bad impression left by Saint-Loup’s intervention, which I could always disavow later on by saying that he had acted on his own initiative, because he had always been in favour of our marriage.

Meanwhile, I read her letter again, and was after all disappointed to be reminded of how little there is of a person in a letter. Doubtless the characters traced on the paper express our thoughts, as do also our features; it is still a thought of some kind that we are confronted with. But even so, in the person, the thought is not apparent to us until it has been diffused through the corolla of the face opened up like a water lily. This modifies it considerably, after all. And it is perhaps one of the causes of our perpetual disappointments in love, this perpetual displacement whereby, in response to our expectation of the ideal person whom we love, each meeting provides us with a person in flesh and blood who yet contains so little trace of our dream. And then, when we demand something of this person, we receive from her a letter in which even of the person very little remains, as in the letters of an algebraical formula there no longer remains the precise value of the arithmetical figures, which themselves do not contain the qualities of the fruit or flowers that they enumerate. And yet “love,” the “beloved,” her letters, are perhaps nevertheless translations (unsatisfying though it may be to pass from one to the other) of the same reality, since the letter seems to us inadequate only while we are reading it, but we sweat blood until its arrival, and it is sufficient to calm our anguish, if not to appease, with its tiny black symbols, our desire which knows that it contains after all only the equivalent of a word, a smile, a kiss, not those things themselves.

I wrote to Albertine:

“Dear friend, I was just about to write to you. Thank you for saying that if I had been in need of you you would have come at once; it is good of you to have so exalted a sense of loyalty to an old friend, and my regard for you can only be increased thereby. But no, I did not ask and I shall not ask you to return; our seeing each other again—for a long time to come—might not perhaps be painful to you, a heartless girl. To me, whom at times you have thought so cold, it would be most painful. Life has driven us apart. You have made a decision which I consider very wise, and which you made at the right moment, with wonderful prescience, for you left me on the day when I had just received my mother’s consent to my asking for your hand. I would have told you this when I awoke, when I received her letter (at the same time as yours). Perhaps you would have been afraid of hurting me by leaving there and then. And we might perhaps have linked our lives together in what (who knows?) could have been unhappiness. If that was what was in store for us, then I bless you for your wisdom. We should lose all the fruit of it were we to meet again. This is not to say that I should not find it a temptation. But I claim no great credit for resisting it. You know what an inconstant person I am and how quickly I forget. Therefore I am not greatly to be pitied. As you have told me often, I am first and foremost a man of habit. The habits which I am beginning to form in your absence are not as yet very strong. Naturally, for the moment, the habits which I shared with you and which your departure has disturbed are still the stronger. They will not remain so for very long. For that reason, indeed, I had thought of taking advantage of these last few days in which our meeting would not yet be for me what it will be in a fortnight’s time, perhaps even sooner, a ... (forgive my frankness) an inconvenience—I had thought of taking advantage of them, before oblivion finally comes, in order to settle certain little material questions with you, in which you might, as a kind and charming friend, have rendered a service to him who for five minutes imagined himself your future husband. Since I never doubted my mother’s approval, and since moreover I desired that we should each of us enjoy all that liberty of which you had too generously and abundantly made a sacrifice which was



acceptable for a few weeks' living together but would have become as hateful to you as to myself now that we were to spend the rest of our lives together (it almost pains me as I write to you to think that this nearly happened, that we came within a few seconds of it), I had thought of organising our existence in the most independent manner possible, and to begin with I wished you to have that yacht in which you could go cruising while I, not being well enough to accompany you, would wait for you in port (I had written to Elstir to ask for his advice, since you admire his taste); and on land I wished you to have a motor-car to yourself, for your very own, in which you could go out, could travel wherever you chose. The yacht was almost ready, it is named, after a wish that you expressed at Balbec, the *Swan*. And remembering that you preferred Rolls-Royces to any other cars, I had ordered one. But now that we are never to meet again, as I have no hope of persuading you to accept either the boat or the car (to me they would be quite useless), I had thought—as I had ordered them through a middleman, in your name—that you might perhaps by countermanding them yourself save me the expense of the yacht and the car which are no longer required. But this, and many other matters, would have needed to be discussed. And I find that so long as I am capable of falling in love with you again, which will not be for long, it would be madness, for the sake of a sailing boat and a Rolls-Royce, to meet again and to jeopardise your life's happiness since you have decided that it lies in your living apart from me. No, I prefer to keep the Rolls and even the yacht. And as I shall make no use of them and they are likely to remain for ever, one in its dock, dismantled, the other in its garage, I shall have engraved on the ... of the yacht (Heavens, I'm afraid of calling it the wrong thing and committing a heresy which would shock you) those lines of Mallarmé which you used to like:

A swan of olden times recalls that he,  
Splendid yet void of hope to free himself,  
Had left unsung the realm of life itself  
When sterile winter glittered with ennui.

You remember—it's the poem that begins: "he lively, lovely, virginal today." Alas, today is no longer either virginal or lovely. But those who, like me, know that they will very soon make of it an endurable "tomorrow" are seldom *endurable* themselves. As for the Rolls, it would deserve rather those other lines of the same poet which you said you could not understand:

Say then if I am not joyful  
Thunder and rubies at the axle  
To see in the air pierced by this fire  
With every scattered palatine  
Dying as though in purple of Tyre  
The wheel of my chariot vespertine.

Farewell for ever, my little Albertine, and thank you once again for the enjoyable drive which we went for together on the eve of our separation. I retain a very pleasant memory of it.

PS. I make no reference to what you tell me of the alleged suggestions which Saint-Loup (whom I do not for a moment believe to be in Touraine) may have made to your aunt. It's pure Sherlock Holmes. What do you take me for?"

No doubt, just as I had said in the past to Albertine: "I don't love you," in order that she should love me, "I forget people when I don't see them," in order that she might see me often, "I have decided to leave you," in order to forestall any idea of separation, now it was because I was absolutely determined that she must return within a week that I said to her: "Farewell for ever;" it was because I wished to see her again that I said to her: "I think it would be dangerous to see you;" it was because living apart from her seemed to me worse than death that I wrote to her: "You were right, we would be unhappy together." Alas, in writing this sham letter in order to appear not to need her (the only vestige of pride that survived from my former love for Gilberte in my love for Albertine), and also to enjoy the pleasure of saying certain things which were only capable of moving me and not her, I ought to have foreseen from the start that it was possible that it would invite a negative response, that is to say, one which substantiated what I had said; that this was indeed probable, for even had Albertine been less intelligent than she was, she would never have doubted for an instant that what I said to her was untrue. Indeed, without pausing to consider the intentions that I expressed in this letter, the mere fact of my writing it, even if it had not been preceded by Saint-Loup's intervention, was enough to prove to her that I desired her return and to prompt her to let me become more and more inextricably ensnared. Then, having foreseen the possibility of a negative reply, I ought also to have foreseen that this reply would at once revive in its fullest intensity my love for Albertine. And I ought, still before posting my letter, to have asked myself whether, in the event of Albertine's replying in the same tone and refusing to return, I should have sufficient control over my grief to force myself to remain silent, not to telegraph to her "Come back," not to send her some other emissary—all of which, after I had written to her to say that we would never meet again, would make it perfectly obvious that I could not do without her, and would lead to her refusing more emphatically than ever, whereupon, unable to endure my anguish for another moment, I would go down to her myself and might, for all I knew, be refused admission. And doubtless this would have been, after three enormous blunders, the worst of all, after which there would be nothing left but to kill myself in front of her house. But the disastrous way in which the psychopathological universe is constructed has decreed that the clumsy act, the act which we ought most sedulously to avoid, is precisely the act that will calm us, the act that, opening before us, until we discover its outcome, fresh avenues of hope, momentarily relieves us of the intolerable pain which a refusal has aroused in us. So that, when the pain is too acute, we dash headlong into the blunder that consists in writing to, in sending somebody to intercede with, in going in person to see, in proving that we cannot do without, the woman we love.

But I foresaw none of all this. The probable outcome of my letter seemed to me on the contrary to be to make Albertine return to me at once. And so, with this outcome in mind, I had felt a sweet pleasure in writing the letter. But at the same time I had not ceased to shed tears while writing it; partly, first of all, in the same way as on the day when I had acted a pretence of separation, because, as the words represented for me the idea which they expressed to me although they were addressed to a different end (uttered mendaciously

because my pride forbade me to admit that I loved), they carried their own load of sorrow, but also because I felt that the idea contained a grain of truth.

As this letter seemed to me to be certain of its effect, I began to regret that I had sent it. For when I pictured to myself Albertine's return and what an easy matter it was after all, suddenly all the reasons which made our marriage a thing disastrous to myself returned in their fullest force. I hoped that she would refuse to come back. I was in the process of calculating that my liberty, my whole future depended upon her refusal, that I had been mad to write to her, that I ought to have retrieved my letter which, alas, had gone, when Françoise brought it back to me (at the same time handing me the newspaper which she had just brought upstairs). She was not certain how many stamps it required. But immediately I changed my mind; I hoped that Albertine would not return, but I wanted the decision to come from her, so as to put an end to my anxiety, and I handed the letter back to Françoise. I opened the newspaper. It announced a performance by Berma. Then I remembered the two different ways in which I had listened to *Phèdre*, and it was now in a third way that I thought of the declaration scene. It seemed to me that what I had so often recited to myself, and had seen and heard in the theatre, was the statement of the laws which I was to experience in my life. There are things in our hearts to which we do not realise how strongly we are attached. Or else, if we live without them, it is because day after day, from fear of failure, or of being made to suffer, we put off entering into possession of them. This was what had happened to me in the case of Gilberte, when I thought that I was giving her up. If before the time comes when we are entirely detached from these things—a time long subsequent to that in which we believe ourselves to be detached from them—the girl we love becomes, for instance, engaged to someone else, we are driven mad, we can no longer endure the life which appeared to us to be so mournfully calm. Or else, if the thing is already in our possession, we feel that it is a burden, that we should be only too glad to be rid of it; and this was what had happened to me in the case of Albertine. But let a sudden departure remove the unwanted person from us, and we can no longer bear to live. Now, did not the "argument" of *Phèdre* combine these two cases? Hippolyte is about to leave. *Phèdre*, who until then has gone out of her way to court his enmity, from qualms of conscience, she says (or rather the poet makes her say), but really because she does not see that it can lead anywhere and feels that she is not loved, *Phèdre* can endure the situation no longer. She comes to him to confess her love, and this was the scene which I had so often recited to myself:

They say a prompt departure takes you from us.

Doubtless Hippolyte's departure is a secondary reason, one may feel, compared to the death of Thésée. And similarly when, a few lines further on, *Phèdre* pretends for a moment that she has been misunderstood:

Would I have cast off all care for my honour?

we may suppose that it is because Hippolyte has repulsed her declaration:

Do you not remember,  
Lady, Theseus is your husband, and my father?

But if he had evinced no indignation, *Phèdre*, her happiness achieved, might have had the same feeling that it did not amount to much. Whereas, as soon as she sees that it still eludes her grasp, that Hippolyte thinks he has misunderstood her and makes apologies, then, like myself when I decided to give my letter back to Françoise, she decides that the refusal must come from him, decides to stake everything on one last throw of the dice:

Ah, cruel! You have understood me all too well.

And even the very harshness with which, I had been told, Swann had treated Odette, or with which I myself had treated Albertine, a harshness which substituted for the original love a new love composed of pity, tenderness, the need for an outpouring of emotion which was merely a variant of the first, is to be found also in this scene:

You hated me the more, I did not love you less.  
Your misfortunes lent you further and fresh charms.

What proves that it is not to the "care for her honour" that *Phèdre* attaches most importance is that she would have forgiven Hippolyte and turned a deaf ear to Oenone's advice had she not learned that Hippolyte was in love with Aricie. For jealousy, which in love is equivalent to the loss of all happiness, outweighs mere loss of reputation. It is then that she allows Oenone (who is merely a name for the baser side of herself) to slander Hippolyte without taking upon herself the "burden of his defence" and thus sends the man who will have none of her to a fate the calamities of which are moreover no consolation to herself, since her own suicide follows immediately upon the death of Hippolyte. Thus at least it was that, reducing the part played by all the "Jansenist" scruples, as Bergotte would have put it, which Racine ascribed to *Phèdre* to make her appear less guilty, I saw this scene, as a sort of prophecy of the amorous episodes in my own life. These reflexions had, however, in no way altered my resolve, and I handed my letter to Françoise so that she might post it after all, in order to carry into effect that approach to Albertine which seemed to me to be essential now that I had learned that my former attempt had failed. And no doubt we are wrong when we suppose that the fulfilment of our desire is a small matter, since as soon as we believe that it cannot be realised we become intent upon it once again, and decide that it was not worth our while to pursue it only when we are quite certain that our attempt will not fail. And yet we are right also. For if that fulfilment, if the achievement of happiness, appears

of small account only in the light of certainty, nevertheless it is an unstable element from which only sorrows can arise. And those sorrows will be all the greater the more completely our desire will have been fulfilled, all the more impossible to endure when our happiness has been, in defiance of the law of nature, prolonged for a certain time, when it has received the consecration of habit. In another sense, too, these two tendencies, in this particular case that which made me anxious that my letter should be posted, and, when I thought that it had gone, that which made me regret the fact, have each of them a certain element of truth. As regards the first tendency, it is only too understandable that we should go in pursuit of our happiness—or misery—and that at the same time we should hope to keep before us, by this latest action which is about to involve us in its consequences, a state of expectancy which does not leave us in absolute despair, in a word that we should seek to convert into other forms which, we imagine, must be less painful to us, the malady from which we are suffering. But the other tendency is no less important, for, born of our belief in the success of our enterprise, it is simply an anticipation of the disillusionment which we should very soon feel in the presence of a satisfied desire, our regret at having fixed for ourselves, at the expense of others which are necessarily excluded, this particular form of happiness.

I gave the letter back to Françoise and asked her to go out at once and post it. As soon as it had gone, I began once more to think of Albertine's return as imminent. The thought did not fail to introduce into my mind certain pleasing images which neutralised to some extent the dangers I foresaw in her return. The pleasure, so long lost, of having her with me was intoxicating.

Time passes, and little by little everything that we have spoken in falsehood becomes true; I had learned this only too well with Gilberte; the indifference I had feigned while never ceasing to weep had eventually become a fact; gradually life, as I told Gilberte in a lying formula which retrospectively had come true, life had driven us apart. I remembered this, saying to myself: "If Albertine allows a few months to go by, my lies will become the truth. And now that the worst moments are over, isn't it to be wished that she will allow this month to elapse? If she returns, I shall have to renounce the true life which certainly I am not in a fit state to enjoy as yet, but which as time goes on may begin to offer me attractions while my memory of Albertine grows fainter."

I do not say that the process of forgetting was not beginning to operate. But one of the effects of forgetting was precisely—since it meant that many of Albertine's less pleasing aspects, of the boring hours that I had spent with her, no longer figured in my memory, ceased therefore to be reasons for my wanting her not to be there as I used to when she was—that it gave me a more concise impression of her enhanced by all the love that I had ever felt for other women. In this particular form, forgetfulness, although it was working towards inuring me to separation from her, nevertheless, by showing me a sweeter and more beautiful Albertine, made me long all the more for her return.

Often, since her departure, when I was confident that I showed no trace of tears, I had rung for Françoise and said to her: "We must make sure that Mademoiselle Albertine hasn't forgotten anything. See that you do her room so that it's nice and tidy for her when she comes." Or simply: "Only the other day Mademoiselle Albertine was saying to me, let me think now, it was the day before she left ..." I wanted to diminish Françoise's detestable pleasure at Albertine's departure by giving her the impression that it was not to be prolonged. I wanted, too, to show Françoise that I was not afraid to speak of this departure, to proclaim it—like certain generals who describe a forced retreat as a strategic withdrawal in conformity with a prearranged plan—as deliberate, as constituting an episode the true meaning of which I was concealing for the moment, but in no way implying the end of my friendship with Albertine. I wanted, finally, by repeating her name incessantly, to introduce, like a breath of air, something of her into that room in which her departure had left a vacuum, in which I could no longer breathe. Besides, one seeks to reduce the dimensions of one's grief by fitting it into one's everyday talk between ordering a suit of clothes and ordering dinner.

While she was doing Albertine's room, Françoise, out of curiosity, opened the drawer of a little rosewood table in which my mistress used to put away the ornaments which she discarded when she went to bed. "Oh! Monsieur, Mademoiselle Albertine has forgotten to take her rings, they're still in the drawer."

My first impulse was to say: "We must send them after her." But this would make me appear uncertain of her return. "Oh well," I replied after a moment's silence, "it's hardly worth while sending them to her as she's coming back so soon. Give them to me, I shall see about them."

Françoise handed me the rings with some misgiving. She loathed Albertine, but, judging me by her own standards, she reckoned that one could not give me a letter in my mistress's handwriting without the risk of my opening it. I took the rings.

"Monsieur must take care not to lose them," said Françoise. "They're real beauties, they are! I don't know who gave them to her, whether it was Monsieur or someone else, but I can tell it was someone rich, who had good taste!"

"It wasn't me," I assured her, "and besides, they don't both come from the same person. One was given her by her aunt and the other she bought for herself."

"Not from the same person!" Françoise exclaimed. "Monsieur must be joking, they're exactly the same, except for the ruby that's been added to one of them, there's the same eagle on both, the same initials inside ..."

I do not know whether Françoise was conscious of the pain she was causing me, but a smile began to flicker across her lips and thereafter never left them.

"What do you mean, the same eagle? You're talking nonsense. It's true that the one without the ruby has an eagle on it, but the other has a sort of man's head carved on it."

"A man's head? Where did Monsieur see that? I had only to put on my specs to see at once that it was one of the eagle's wings. If Monsieur takes his magnifying glass, he'll see the other wing on the other side, and the head and the beak in the middle. You can count every feather. Oh, it's a fine piece of work."

My intense anxiety to know whether Albertine had lied to me made me forget that I ought to maintain a certain dignity in Françoise's presence and deny her the wicked pleasure that she felt, if not in torturing me, at least in harming Albertine. I almost gasped for breath as Françoise went to fetch my magnifying glass. I took it from her, and asked her to show me the eagle on the ring with the ruby. She had no difficulty in making me pick out the wings, stylised in the same way as on the other ring, the relief of the feathers, the head. She also pointed out to me the similar inscriptions, to which, it is true, others were added on the ring with the ruby. And on the inside of both was Albertine's monogram.

"But I'm surprised that it should need all this to make Monsieur see that the rings are the same," said Françoise. "Even without examining them, you can see that it's the same style, the same way of turning the gold, the same shape. As soon as I looked at them I could have sworn they came from the same place. You can tell straight away, just as you can tell the dishes of a good cook."

And indeed, to the curiosity of a servant fanned by hatred and trained to observe details with terrifying precision, there had been added, to assist her in this expert criticism, her natural taste, that same taste, in fact, which she showed in her cookery and which was sharpened perhaps, as I had noticed on the way to Balbec in the way she dressed, by the coquetry of a woman who has once been pretty and has studied the jewellery and dresses of other women. I might have picked up the wrong bottle of pills and, instead of swallowing a few veronal tablets on a day when I felt that I had drunk too many cups of tea, might have swallowed as many caffeine tablets, and my heart would not have pounded more violently. I asked Françoise to leave the room. I would have liked to see Albertine immediately. My horror at her lie, my jealousy of the unknown donor, was combined with pain at the thought that she should have allowed herself to accept presents. I gave her even more, it is true, but a woman whom we are keeping does not seem to us to be a kept woman as long as we are unaware that she is being kept by other men. And yet, since I had never ceased to spend a great deal of money on her, I had taken her in spite of this moral baseness; I had encouraged this baseness of hers, I had perhaps increased, perhaps even created it. Then, just as we have the faculty of making up stories to soothe our anguish, just as we manage, when we are dying of hunger, to persuade ourselves that a stranger is going to leave us a fortune of a hundred million, I imagined Albertine in my arms, explaining to me without the slightest hesitation that it was because of the similarity of its workmanship that she had bought the second ring, that it was she who had had her initials engraved on it. But this explanation was still fragile, it had not yet had time to thrust into my mind its beneficent roots, and my pain could not be so quickly assuaged. And I reflected that many men who tell their friends that their mistress is very sweet to them must suffer similar torments. Thus it is that they lie to others and to themselves. They do not altogether lie; they do spend in her company hours that are genuinely delightful; but the sweetness which she shows her lover in front of his friends and which enables him to preen himself, and the sweetness which she shows him when they are alone together and which enables him to bless her, conceal all too many unrecorded hours in which the lover has suffered, doubted, sought everywhere in vain to discover the truth! Such sufferings are inseparable from the pleasure of loving, of delighting in a woman's most trivial remarks, remarks which we know to be trivial but which we perfume with her fragrance. At that moment, I was no longer capable of delighting, through memory, in the fragrance of Albertine. Shattered, holding the two rings in my hand, I stared at that pitiless eagle whose beak was rending my heart, whose wings, chiselled in high relief, had borne away the trust that I still retained in my mistress, in whose claws my tortured mind was unable to escape for an instant from the incessantly recurring questions concerning the stranger whose name the eagle doubtless symbolised though without allowing me to decipher it, whom she had doubtless loved in the past, and whom she had doubtless seen again not so long ago, since it was on the day, so peaceful, so loving and so intimate, of our drive together through the Bois that I had seen, for the first time, the second ring, the one in which the eagle appeared to be dipping its beak in the bright blood of the ruby.

If, however, from morning till night, I never ceased to grieve over Albertine's departure, this did not mean that I thought only of her. For one thing, her charm having for a long time past spread gradually over things which had since become quite remote from her, but were none the less electrified by the same emotion as she gave me, if something made me think of Incarville, or of the Verdurins, or of some new part that Lea was playing, a sudden flux of pain would overwhelm me. For another thing, what I myself called thinking of Albertine meant thinking of how I might get her back, how I might join her, how I might discover what she was doing. With the result that if, during those hours of incessant torment, a pictogram could have represented the images that accompanied my sufferings, it would have shown pictures of the Gare d'Orsay, of the banknotes offered to Mme Bontemps, of Saint-Loup stooping over the sloping desk of a telegraph office filling in a telegram form to me, never the picture of Albertine. Just as, throughout the whole course of one's life, one's egoism sees before it all the time the objects that are of concern to the self, but never takes in that "I" itself which is perpetually observing them, so the desire which directs our actions descends towards them, but does not reach back to itself, whether because, being unduly utilitarian, it plunges into the action and disdains all knowledge of it, or because it looks to the future to compensate for the disappointments of the present, or because the inertia of the mind urges it to slide down the easy slope of imagination, rather than to climb the steep slope of introspection. In reality, during those hours of crisis in which we would stake our whole life, in proportion as the woman upon whom it depends reveals more and more clearly the immensity of the place that she occupies for us, leaving nothing in the world that is not disrupted by her, so the image of

that woman diminishes until it is no longer perceptible. We find in everything the effect of her presence in the emotion that we feel; herself, the cause, we find nowhere. I was so incapable during those days of forming any picture of Albertine that I could almost have believed that I did not love her, just as my mother, in the moments of despair when she was incapable of ever picturing my grandmother (except once in the chance encounter of a dream, the importance of which she felt so strongly, although asleep, that she strove with all the strength that remained to her in her sleep to make it last), might have accused and did in fact accuse herself of not missing her mother, whose death had been a mortal blow to her but whose features eluded her memory.\*

Why should I have supposed that Albertine did not care for women? Because she had said, especially of late, that she did not care for them: but did not our life rest upon a perpetual lie? Never once had she said to me: "Why can't I go out as and when I choose? Why do you always ask other people what I have been doing?" And yet, after all, the conditions of her life were so unusual that she must have asked me this had she not herself guessed the reason. And was it not understandable that my silence as to the causes of her confinement should be matched by a similar and constant silence on her part as to her perpetual desires, her innumerable memories, her countless hopes and longings? Françoise looked as though she knew that I was lying when I alluded to the imminence of Albertine's return. And her belief seemed to be founded upon something more than that truth which generally guided our old housekeeper, to the effect that masters do not like to be humiliated in front of their servants, and allow them to know only so much of the truth as does not depart too far from a flattering fiction calculated to maintain respect for themselves. This time, Françoise's belief seemed to be founded upon something else, as though she had herself aroused and fostered distrust in Albertine's mind, stimulated her anger, driven her, in short, to the point at which she could predict her departure as inevitable. If this was true, my version of a temporary absence, of which I had known and approved, could be received with nothing but incredulity by Françoise. But the idea that she had formed of Albertine's venal nature, the exasperation with which, in her hatred, she magnified the "profit" that Albertine was supposed to be making out of me, might to some extent belie that certainty. And so when in her hearing I made an allusion, as if to something perfectly natural, to Albertine's imminent return, Françoise would look at my face to see whether I was making it up, in the same way as, when the butler teased her by pretending to read out some political news which she hesitated to believe, as for instance the closing of churches and the expulsion of the clergy, even from the other end of the kitchen, and without being able to read it, she would stare instinctively and greedily at the paper, as though she were capable of seeing whether the report was really written there.

But when Françoise saw that after writing a long letter I added the exact address of Mme Bontemps, her alarm that Albertine might return, hitherto quite vague, began to increase. It grew to the point of consternation when one morning she had to bring me with the rest of my mail a letter on the envelope of which she had recognised Albertine's handwriting. She wondered whether Albertine's departure had not been a mere sham, a supposition which distressed her twice over as finally ensuring Albertine's future presence in the house, and as constituting for me, and thereby, as I was her employer, for herself, the humiliation of having been tricked by Albertine. Impatient though I was to read the letter, I could not refrain from studying for a moment Françoise's eyes from which all hope had fled, inferring from this omen the imminence of Albertine's return, as a lover of winter sports concludes with joy that the cold weather is at hand when he sees the swallows fly south. At length Françoise left me, and when I had made sure that she had shut the door behind her, I opened, noiselessly so as not to appear anxious, the letter which ran as follows:

"Dear friend, thank you for all the nice things you wrote to me. I am at your disposal for the countermanding of the Rolls, if you think that I can help in any way, as I am sure I can. You have only to let me know the name of the agents. You would let yourself be taken for a ride by these people who are only interested in selling, and what would you do with a motor-car, you who never stir out of the house? I am deeply touched that you have kept a happy memory of our last outing. You may be sure that for my part I shall never forget that drive in a double twilight (since night was falling and we were about to part) and that it will be effaced from my thoughts only when the darkness is complete."

I felt that this last sentence was merely phrase-making and that Albertine could not possibly retain until death any such sweet memory of this drive from which she had certainly derived no pleasure since she had been impatient to leave me. But I was impressed also, when I thought of the cyclist, the golfer of Balbec, who had read nothing but *Esther* before she came to know me, to see how gifted she was and how right I had been in thinking that she had enriched herself in my house with new qualities which made her different and more complete. And thus, the words that I had said to her at Balbec: "I feel that my friendship would be of value to you, that I am just the person who could give you what you lack" (I had written by way of dedication on a photograph I gave her: "with the certainty of being providential"), words which I uttered without believing them and simply that she might derive some benefit from my society which would outweigh any possible boredom, these words turned out to have been true as well; as, for that matter, had been my remark to her that I did not wish to see her for fear of falling in love with her. I had said this because on the contrary I knew that in constant proximity my love became deadened and that separation kindled it, but in reality constant proximity had given rise to a need of her that was infinitely stronger than my love in the first weeks at Balbec, so that that remark too had proved true.

But Albertine's letter in no way advanced matters. She spoke to me only of writing to the agents. It was essential to break out of this situation, to hasten things on, and I had the following idea. I sent a letter at once to Andrée in which I told her that Albertine was at her aunt's, that I felt very lonely, that she would give me

immense pleasure if she came and stayed with me for a few days and that, as I did not wish to make any mystery of it, I begged her to inform Albertine. And at the same time I wrote to Albertine as though I had not yet received her letter:

"Dear friend, forgive me for what I am sure you will understand. I have such a hatred of secrecy that I wanted you to be informed both by her and by myself. I have acquired, from having you staying so charmingly in the house with me, the bad habit of not being able to be alone. Since we have decided that you will not come back, it occurred to me that the person who would best fill your place, because she would make least change in my life, would remind me most of you, is Andrée, and I have asked her to come. So that all this should not appear too sudden, I have spoken to her only of a short visit, but between ourselves I am pretty certain that this time it will be a permanent thing. Don't you agree that I'm right? You know that your little group of girls at Balbec has always been the social unit that exerted the greatest influence upon me, in which I was most happy to be eventually included. No doubt this influence is still making itself felt. Since the fatal incompatibility of our characters and the mischances of life have decreed that my little Albertine can never be my wife, I believe that I shall nevertheless find a wife—less charming than herself but one whom greater natural affinities will enable perhaps to be happier with me—in Andrée."

But after I had sent off this letter, the suspicion occurred to me suddenly that, when Albertine had written to me to say: "I should have been only too glad to come back if you had written to me direct," she had said this only because I had not written to her, and that had I done so she would still not have come back, that she would be happy to know that Andrée was with me, and was to be my wife, provided that she herself remained free, because she could now, as already for a week past, stultifying the hourly precautions which I had taken during more than six months in Paris, abandon herself to her vices and do what, minute by minute, I had prevented her from doing. I told myself that she was probably making an improper use of her freedom down there, and no doubt this idea which I formed seemed to me sad but remained general, showing me no specific details, and, by the indefinite number of possible mistresses which it allowed me to imagine, prevented me from stopping to consider any one of them, drew my mind on in a sort of perpetual motion not untinged with pain, but with a pain which the absence of any concrete image rendered endurable. It ceased, however, to be endurable and became atrocious when Saint-Loup arrived.

Before I explain why the information that he gave me made me so unhappy, I must relate an incident which occurred immediately before his visit and the memory of which so disturbed me afterwards that it weakened, if not the painful impression made on me by my conversation with Saint-Loup, at any rate the practical effect of that conversation. This incident was as follows. Burning with impatience to see Saint-Loup, I was waiting for him on the staircase (a thing which I could not have done had my mother been at home, for it was what she most abominated, next to "talking out of the window") when I heard the following words: "What! you mean to say you don't know how to get a fellow you don't like sacked? It's not difficult. For instance, you need only hide the things he has to take in. Then, when they're in a hurry and ring for him, he can't find anything, he loses his head. My aunt will be furious with him, and will say to you: 'But what's the man doing?' When he does show his face, everybody will be raging, and he won't have what's wanted. After this has happened four or five times you may be sure that he'll be sacked, especially if you take care to dirty the things that he's supposed to bring in clean, and a dozen other tricks of that kind."

I remained speechless with astonishment, for these cruel, Machiavellian words were uttered by the voice of Saint-Loup. Now I had always regarded him as so kind, so tender-hearted a person that these words had the same effect on me as if he had been rehearsing the role of Satan for a play: it could not be in his own name that he was speaking.

"But, after all, a man has to earn his living," said the other person, of whom I then caught sight and who was one of the Duchesse de Guermantes's footmen.

"What the hell does that matter to you so long as you're all right?" Saint-Loup replied callously. "It will be all the more fun for you, having a whipping-boy. You can easily spill ink over his livery just when he has to go and wait at a big dinner-party, and never leave him in peace for a moment until he's only too glad to give notice. Anyhow, I can put a spoke in his wheel. I shall tell my aunt that I admire your patience in working with a great lout like that, and so dirty too."

I showed myself, and Saint-Loup came to greet me, but my confidence in him was shaken since I had heard him speak in a manner so different from anything that I knew. And I wondered whether a person who was capable of acting so cruelly towards some poor wretch might not have played the part of a traitor towards me on his mission to Mme Bontemps. This reflexion served mainly, after he had left, to help me not to regard his failure as a proof that I myself might not succeed. But while he was with me, it was still of the Saint-Loup of old, and especially of the friend who had just come from Mme Bontemps, that I thought. He began by saying: "You feel that I ought to have telephoned to you more often, but I was always told that you were engaged." But the point at which my pain became unendurable was when he said: "To begin where my last telegram left you, after going through a sort of shed, I went into the house and at the end of a long passage was shown into a drawing-room."

At these words, shed, passage, drawing-room, and before he had even finished uttering them, my heart was convulsed more instantaneously than by an electric current, for the force that circles the earth most times in a second is not electricity but pain. How I repeated to myself these words, shed, passage, drawing-room, renewing the shock at will, after Saint-Loup had left me! In a shed one girl can hide with another. And in that drawing-room, who knew what Albertine did when her aunt was not there? Had I then imagined the house in which she was living as incapable of possessing either a shed or a drawing-room? No, I had not imagined it at all, except as a vague dwelling. I had suffered first of all when the place where Albertine was had acquired a geographical identity, when I had learned that, instead of being in two or three possible places, she was in Touraine; those words uttered by her concierge had marked in my heart as upon a map the place where I must suffer. But once I had grown accustomed to the idea that she was in a house in Touraine, I had still not seen the house; never had there occurred to my imagination this appalling idea of a drawing-room, a shed, a passage, which struck me now, facing me in the retina of Saint-Loup's eyes which had seen them, as the rooms in which Albertine came and went, lived her life, as those rooms in particular and not an infinity of possible rooms which had cancelled one another out. With the words shed, passage, drawing-room, I became aware of my folly in having left Albertine for a week in that accursed place whose *existence* (instead of its mere possibility) had just been revealed to me. Alas! when Saint-Loup told me also that in this drawing-room he had heard someone singing at the top of her voice in an adjoining room and that it was Albertine who was singing, I realised with despair that, rid of me at last, she was happy! She had regained her freedom. And I had been thinking that she would come to take the place of Andrée! My grief turned to anger with Saint-Loup.

"That's the one thing in the world I asked you to avoid, that she should know of your coming."

"Do you think it was easy! They assured me that she wasn't in the house. Oh, I know very well that you're not pleased with me, I could tell that from your telegrams. But you're not being fair; I did what I could."

Set free once more, released from the cage in which, here at home, I used to leave her for days on end without letting her come to my room, Albertine had regained all her attraction in my eyes; she had become once more the girl whom everyone pursued, the marvellous bird of the earliest days.

"Anyhow, to sum up—as regards the money, I don't know what to say to you. I found myself addressing a woman who seemed to me to be so scrupulous that I was afraid of offending her. However, she didn't say a word when I mentioned the money. In fact, a little later she told me that she was touched to find that we understood one another so well. And yet everything that she said afterwards was so delicate, so refined, that it seemed to me impossible that she could have been referring to my offer of money when she said: 'We understand one another so well,' for after all I was behaving like a cad."

"But perhaps she didn't understand what you meant, perhaps she didn't hear. You ought to have repeated the offer, because then it would certainly have worked."

"But how could she possibly not have heard? I spoke to her as I'm speaking to you, and she's neither deaf nor mad."

"And she made no comment?"

"None."

"You ought to have repeated the offer."

"How do you mean, repeat it? As soon as we met I saw what sort of person she was. I said to myself that you'd been mistaken, that you were making me commit the most awful gaffe, and that it would be terribly difficult to offer her the money like that. I did it, however, to oblige you, convinced that she'd turn me out of the house."

"But she didn't. Therefore, either she hadn't heard you and you should have started afresh, or you could have pursued the subject."

"You say: 'She hadn't heard,' because you were here in Paris, but, I repeat, if you'd been present at our conversation, there wasn't a sound to interrupt us, I said it quite plainly, it's not possible that she failed to understand."

"But anyhow she's quite convinced that I've always wished to marry her niece?"

"No, as to that, if you want my opinion, she didn't believe that you had any intention of marrying the girl. She told me that you yourself had informed her niece that you wished to leave her. I'm not really sure that she's convinced even now that you want to marry."

This reassured me slightly by showing me that I was in a less humiliating position, and therefore more capable of being still loved, more free to take some decisive action. Nevertheless I was tormented.

"I'm sorry, because I can see you're not pleased," Saint-Loup went on.

"Well, I'm touched by your kindness, and I'm grateful to you, but it seems to me that you might have ..."

"I did my best. No one else could have done more or even as much. Try sending someone else."

"No, no, as a matter of fact, if I had known I wouldn't have sent you, but the failure of your attempt prevents me from making another."

I heaped reproaches on him: he had tried to do me a service and had not succeeded.

On leaving the Bontemps' house he had met some girls arriving. I had already conjectured often enough that Albertine knew other girls in the neighbourhood; but this was the first time that I felt the pain of that conjecture. It would seem that nature has endowed the mind with the means of secreting a natural antidote which destroys the suppositions that we form unremittingly but without danger to ourselves; but nothing could immunise me against these girls whom Saint-Loup had met. But were not all these details precisely what I had sought to learn from everyone with regard to Albertine? Was it not I who, in order to learn them more fully, had begged Saint-Loup, summoned back to Paris by his colonel, to come and see me at all costs? Was it not I, therefore, who had desired them, or rather my famished grief, longing to feed and to wax fat upon them? Finally Saint-Loup told me that he had had the pleasant surprise of meeting down there—the only familiar face that had reminded him of the past—a former friend of Rachel, a pretty actress who was taking a holiday in the neighbourhood. And the name of this actress was enough to make me say to myself: "Perhaps it's with her;" was enough to make me see, in the very arms of a woman whom I did not know, Albertine smiling and flushed with pleasure. And, after all, why should this not have been so? Had I myself refrained from thinking of other women since I had known Albertine? On the evening of my first visit to the Princesse de Guermantes, when I returned home, had I not been thinking far less of her than of the girl of whom Saint-Loup had told me, who frequented houses of assignation, and of Mme Putbus's maid? Was it not for the latter that I had returned to Balbec? More recently, had I not longed to go to Venice? Why then might Albertine not have longed to go to Touraine? Only, when it came to the point, as I now realised, I would not have left her, I would not have gone to Venice. Indeed, in my heart of hearts, when I said to myself: "I shall leave her soon," I knew that I would never leave her, just as I knew that I would never settle down to work, or live a healthy life, or do any of the things which, day after day, I vowed to do on the morrow. Only, whatever I might feel in my heart, I had thought it more adroit to let her live under the perpetual threat of a separation. And no doubt, thanks to my detestable adroitness, I had convinced her only too well. In any case, things could not now go on like this; I could not leave her in Touraine with those girls, with that actress; I could not endure the thought of that life which eluded me. I would await her reply to my letter: if she was doing wrong, alas! a day more or less made no difference (and perhaps I said this to myself because, being no longer in the habit of taking note of every minute of her life, a single one of which wherein she was unobserved would formerly have thrown me into a panic, my jealousy no longer observed the same time-scale). But as soon as I received her answer, if she was not coming back I would go and fetch her; willy-nilly, I would tear her away from her women friends. Besides, was it not better for me to go down in person, now that I had discovered Saint-Loup's hitherto unsuspected duplicity? Might he not, for all I knew, have organised a plot to separate me from Albertine? Was it because I had changed, or because I had been incapable of imagining then that natural causes would bring me one day to this unprecedented pass? At all events, how I should have lied now had I written to her, as I had said to her in Paris, that I hoped that no accident might befall her! Ah! if some accident had happened to her, my life, instead of being poisoned for ever by this incessant jealousy, would at once regain, if not happiness, at least a state of calm through the suppression of suffering.

The suppression of suffering? Can I really have believed it, have believed that death merely strikes out what exists, and leaves everything else in its place, that it removes the pain from the heart of him for whom the other's existence has ceased to be anything but a source of pain, that it removes the pain and puts nothing in its place? The suppression of pain! As I glanced at the news items in the papers, I regretted that I had not had the courage to form the same wish as Swann. If Albertine could have been the victim of an accident, were she alive I should have had a pretext for hastening to her bedside, were she dead I should have recovered, as Swann said, my freedom to live. Did I believe this? He had believed it, that subtlest of men who thought that he knew himself well. How little do we know of what we have in our hearts! How clearly, a little later, had he been still alive, I could have proved to him that his wish was not only criminal but absurd, that the death of the woman he loved would have delivered him from nothing!

I forsook all pride with regard to Albertine, and sent her a despairing telegram begging her to return on any terms, telling her that she could do whatever she liked, that I asked only to be allowed to take her in my arms for a minute three times a week, before she went to bed. And if she had said once a week only, I would have accepted the restriction.

She never came back. My telegram had just gone off to her when I myself received one. It was from Mme Bontemps. The world is not created once and for all for each of us individually. There are added to it in the course of our lives things of which we have never had any suspicion. Alas! it was not a suppression of suffering that the first two lines of the telegram produced in me: "My poor friend, our little Albertine is no more. Forgive me for breaking this terrible news to you who were so fond of her. She was thrown by her horse against a tree while she was out riding. All our efforts to restore her to life were unavailing. If only I had died in her stead!" No, not the suppression of suffering, but a suffering until then unimagined, that of realising that she would not come back. But had I not told myself many times that she might not come back? I had indeed done so, but now I saw that I had never believed it for a moment. As I needed her presence, her kisses, to enable me to endure the pain that my suspicions caused me, I had formed, since Balbec, the habit of being always with her. Even when she had gone out, when I was alone, I was kissing her still. I had continued to do so since her departure for Touraine. I had less need of her fidelity than of her return. And if my reason might with impunity cast doubt upon it now and again, my imagination never ceased for an instant to picture



it for me. Instinctively I drew my hand over my throat, over my lips, which felt themselves kissed by her lips still after she had gone away, and would never be kissed by them again; I drew my hand over them, as Mamma had caressed me at the time of my grandmother's death, saying to me: "My poor boy, your grandmother who was so fond of you will never kiss you again." All my life to come seemed to have been wrenched from my heart. My life to come? Had I not, then, thought at times of living it without Albertine? Of course not! Had I then for a long time past pledged her every minute of my life until my death? I had indeed! This future indissolubly blended with hers was something I had never had the vision to perceive, but now that it had just been demolished, I could feel the place that it occupied in my gaping heart. Françoise, who still knew nothing, came into my room. In a sudden fury I shouted at her: "What do you want?" Then (sometimes there are words that set a different reality in the same place as that which confronts us; they bewilder us in the same way as a fit of dizziness) she said to me: "Monsieur has no need to look cross. On the contrary he's going to be pleased. Here are two letters from Mademoiselle Albertine."

I felt, afterwards, that I must have stared at her with the eyes of a man whose mind has become unhinged. I was not even glad, nor was I incredulous. I was like a person who sees the same place in his room occupied by a sofa and by a grotto: nothing seeming real to him any more, he collapses on the floor. Albertine's two letters must have been written shortly before the fatal ride. The first said:

"My dear, I must thank you for the proof of your confidence which you give me when you tell me of your intention to bring Andrée to live with you. I am sure that she will be delighted to accept, and I think that it will be a very good thing for her. Gifted as she is, she will know how to make the most of the companionship of a man like yourself, and of the admirable influence which you manage to exert over other people. I feel that you have had an idea from which as much good may spring for her as for yourself. And so, if she should make the slightest difficulty (which I do not believe she will), telegraph to me and I will undertake to bring pressure to bear upon her."

The second was dated the following day. (In fact she must have written them both within a few minutes of one another, perhaps at the same time, and must have predated the first. For, all the time, I had been forming absurd ideas of her intentions, which had simply been to return to me, and which anyone not directly interested in the matter, a man without imagination, the negotiator of a peace treaty, the merchant who has to examine a transaction, would have judged more accurately than myself.) It contained only these words:

"Is it too late for me to return to you? If you have not yet written to Andrée, would you be prepared to take me back? I shall abide by your decision, but I beg you not to be long in making it known to me; you can imagine how impatiently I shall be waiting. If it is to tell me to return, I shall take the train at once. Yours with all my heart, Albertine."

For the death of Albertine to have been able to eliminate my suffering, the shock of the fall would have had to kill her not only in Touraine but in myself. There, she had never been more alive. In order to enter into us, another person must first have assumed the form, have adapted himself to the framework of time; appearing to us only in a succession of momentary flashes, he has never been able to reveal to us more than one aspect of himself at a time, to present us with more than a single photograph of himself. A great weakness no doubt for a person, to consist merely of a collection of moments; a great strength also: he is a product of memory, and our memory of a moment is not informed of everything that has happened since; this moment which it has recorded endures still, lives still, and with it the person whose form is outlined in it. And moreover, this disintegration does not only make the dead one live, it multiplies him or her. In order to be consoled I would have to forget, not one, but innumerable Albertines. When I had succeeded in bearing the grief of losing this Albertine, I must begin again with another, with a hundred others.

So then my life was entirely altered. What had constituted its sweetness—not because of Albertine, but concurrently with her, when I was alone—was precisely the perpetual resurgence, at the bidding of identical moments, of moments from the past. From the sound of pattering raindrops I recaptured the scent of the lilacs at Combray; from the shifting of the sun's rays on the balcony the pigeons in the Champs-Élysées; from the muffling of sounds in the heat of the morning hours, the cool taste of cherries; the longing for Brittany or Venice from the noise of the wind and the return of Easter. Summer was at hand, the days were long, the weather was warm. It was the season when, early in the morning, pupils and teachers repair to the public gardens to prepare for the final examinations under the trees, seeking to extract the sole drop of coolness vouchsafed by a sky less ardent than in the midday heat but already as sterilely pure. From my darkened room, with a power of evocation equal to that of former days but capable now of evoking only pain, I felt that outside, in the heaviness of the atmosphere, the setting sun was plastering the vertical fronts of houses and churches with a tawny distemper. And if Françoise, when she came in, accidentally disturbed the folds of the big curtains, I stifled a cry of pain at the rent that had just been made in my heart by that ray of long-ago sunlight which had made beautiful in my eyes the modern façade of Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse when Albertine had said to me: "It's restored." Not knowing how to account to Françoise for my groan, I said to her: "Oh, I'm so thirsty." She left the room, then returned, but I turned sharply away under the impact of the painful discharge of one of the thousand invisible memories which incessantly exploded around me in the darkness: I had noticed that she had brought me cider and cherries, things which a farm-lad had brought out to us in the carriage, at Balbec, "kinds" in which I should have made the most perfect communion, in those days, with the prismatic gleam in shuttered dining-rooms on days of scorching heat. Then I thought for the first time of the farm called Les Ecorres, and said to myself that on certain days when Albertine had told me, at Balbec, that she would not be free, that she was obliged to go somewhere with her aunt, she had perhaps

been with one or another of her girlfriends at some farm to which she knew that I was not in the habit of going, and, while I waited desperately for her at Marie-Antoinette where they told me: "No, we haven't seen her today," had been saying to her friend the same words as she used to say to me when we went out together: "He'll never think of looking for us here, so there's no fear of our being disturbed." I told Françoise to draw the curtains together, so that I would no longer see that ray of sunlight. But it continued to filter through, just as corrosively, into my memory. "It doesn't appeal to me, it's been restored, but tomorrow we'll go to Saint-Mars-le-Vetu, and the day after to ..." Tomorrow, the day after, it was a prospect of life together, perhaps for ever, that was opening up; my heart leapt towards it, but it was no longer there, Albertine was dead.

I asked Françoise the time. Six o'clock. At last, thank God, that oppressive heat, of which in the past I used to complain to Albertine and which we so enjoyed, was about to die down. The day was drawing to its close. But what did that profit me? The cool evening air was rising; it was sunset; in my memory, at the end of a road which we had taken, she and I, on our way home, I saw it now, beyond the furthest village, like some distant place, inaccessible that evening, which we would spend at Balbec, still together. Together then; now I must stop short on the brink of that same abyss; she was dead. It was not enough now to draw the curtains; I tried to stop the eyes and ears of my memory in order not to see that band of orange in the western sky, in order not to hear those invisible birds responding from one tree to the next on either side of me who was then so tenderly embraced by her who was now dead. I tried to avoid those sensations that are produced by the dampness of leaves in the evening air, the rise and fall of humpback roads. But already those sensations had gripped me once more, carrying me far enough back from the present moment to give the necessary recoil, the necessary momentum to strike me anew, to the idea that Albertine was dead. Ah! never again would I enter a forest, never again would I stroll beneath the trees. But would the broad plains be less painful to me? How often had I crossed, on the way to fetch Albertine, how often had I retrodden, on the way back with her, the great plain of Cricqueville, sometimes in foggy weather when the swirling mists gave us the illusion of being surrounded by a vast lake, sometimes on limpid evenings when the moonlight, dematerialising the earth, making it appear from a few feet away as celestial as it is, in the daytime, in the distance only, enclosed the fields and the woods with the firmament to which it had assimilated them in the moss-agate of a universal blue!

Françoise must have been pleased by Albertine's death, and in fairness to her it should be said that by a sort of tact and decorum she made no pretence of sorrow. But the unwritten laws of her immemorial code and the tradition of the mediaeval peasant woman who weeps as in the romances of chivalry were older than her hatred of Albertine and even of Eulalie. Thus, on one of these late afternoons, as I was not quick enough in concealing my distress, she caught sight of my tears, prompted by her instinct as a former peasant girl which at one time had led her to catch and maltreat animals, to feel nothing but merriment in wringing the necks of chickens and in boiling lobsters alive, and, when I was ill, in observing, as it might be the wounds that she had inflicted on an owl, my suffering expression which she afterwards proclaimed in a sepulchral tone as a presage of coming disaster. But her Combray "unwritten law" did not permit her to treat tears and sorrow lightly—things which in her judgment were as fatal as shedding one's flannel vest or toying with one's food. "Oh, no, Monsieur, it doesn't do to cry like that, it isn't good for you." And in trying to stem my tears she looked as anxious as if they had been torrents of blood. Unfortunately I adopted a chilly air that cut short the effusions in which she was hoping to indulge and which might well have been sincere. Her attitude towards Albertine was perhaps akin to her attitude towards Eulalie, and, now that my mistress could no longer derive any profit from me, Françoise had ceased to hate her. She felt bound, however, to let me see that she was perfectly well aware that I was crying, and that, following the deplorable example set by my family, I did not wish to "show it." "You mustn't cry, Monsieur," she adjured me, in a calmer tone this time, and with the intention of proving her perspicacity rather than displaying her pity. And she added: "It was bound to happen; she was too happy, poor creature, she never knew how happy she was."

How slow the day is in dying on these interminable summer evenings! A pale ghost of the house opposite continued indefinitely to tinge the sky with its persistent whiteness. At last it was dark in the apartment; I stumbled against the furniture in the hall, but in the door that opened on to the staircase, in the midst of the darkness I had thought to be complete, the glazed panel was translucent and blue, with the blueness of a flower, the blueness of an insect's wing, a blueness that would have seemed to me beautiful had I not felt it to be a last glint, sharp as a steel blade, a final blow that was being dealt me, in its indefatigable cruelty, by the day. Finally, however, complete darkness came, but then a glimpse of a star behind the tree in the courtyard was enough to remind me of the times when we used to set out in a carriage, after dinner, for the woods of Chantepie, carpeted with moonlight. And even in the streets I might chance to isolate upon the back of a bench, to glean the natural purity of a moonbeam in the midst of the artificial lights of Paris—of Paris over which, by restoring the city for a moment, in my imagination, to a state of nature, with the infinite silence of the fields thus evoked, it enthroned the heartrending memory of the walks that I had taken there with Albertine. Ah! when would the night end? But at the first coolness of dawn I shivered, for it had brought back to me the sweetness of that summer when, from Balbec to Incarville, from Incarville to Balbec, we had so many times escorted each other home until daybreak. I had now only one hope left for the future—a hope far more poignant than any fear—and that was that I might forget Albertine. I knew that I should forget her one day; I had forgotten Gilberte and Mme de Guermantes; I had forgotten my grandmother. And it is our most just and cruel punishment for that forgetfulness, as total and as tranquil as the oblivion of the graveyard, through which we have detached ourselves from those we no longer love, that we should recognise it to be inevitable in the case of those we love still. In reality, we know that it is not a painful state but a state of indifference.

But not being able to think at one and the same time of what I was and of what I would be, I thought with despair of all that integument of caresses, of kisses, of friendly slumber, of which I must presently let myself be stripped for ever. The influx of these tender memories, breaking against the idea that Albertine was dead, oppressed me with such a clash of warring currents that I could not remain still; I rose, but all of a sudden I stopped, overwhelmed; the same faint daybreak that I used to see when I had just left Albertine, still radiant and warm from her kisses, had just drawn above the curtains its now sinister blade whose whiteness, cold, implacable and compact, glinted like a dagger thrust into my heart.

Presently the sounds from the street would begin, enabling me to tell from the qualitative scale of their sonorities the degree of the steadily increasing heat in which they resounded. But in this heat which a few hours later would become saturated with the fragrance of cherries, what I found (as in a medicine which the substitution of one ingredient for another is sufficient to transform from the stimulant and tonic that it was into a depressant) was no longer the desire for women but the anguish of Albertine's departure. Besides, the memory of all my desires was as much impregnated with her, and with suffering, as the memory of my pleasures. Venice, where I had thought that her company would be irksome (doubtless because I had felt in a confused way that it would be necessary to me), no longer attracted me now that Albertine was no more. Albertine had seemed to me to be an obstacle interposed between me and all other things, because she was for me their container, and it was from her alone, as from a vase, that I could receive them. Now that this vase was shattered, I no longer felt that I had the courage to grasp things, and there was not one of them from which I did not now turn away, despondent, preferring not to taste it. So that my separation from her did not in the least throw open to me the field of possible pleasures which I had imagined to be closed to me by her presence. Besides, the obstacle which her presence had perhaps indeed been in the way of my travelling and enjoying life had merely (as always happens) concealed from me other obstacles which reappeared intact now that this one had been removed. Likewise, in the past, when some friendly call had prevented me from working, if on the following day I was left undisturbed I did not work any better. Let an illness, a duel, a runaway horse make us see death face to face, and how richly we should have enjoyed the life of pleasure, the travels in unknown lands, which are about to be snatched from us! And no sooner is the danger past than we resume once more the same dull life in which none of those delights existed for us.

No doubt these short summer nights last only for a brief season. Winter would at length return, when I should no longer have to dread the memory of drives with her until the too early dawn. But would not the first frosts bring back to me, preserved in their ice, the germ of my first desires, when at midnight I used to send for her, when the time seemed so long until I heard her ring at the door, a sound for which I might now wait everlastingly in vain? Would they not bring back to me the germ of my first anxieties, when twice I thought she would not come? At that time I saw her only rarely, but even those intervals between her visits which made her suddenly appear, after many weeks, from the heart of an unknown life which I made no attempt to possess, ensured my peace of mind by preventing the first inklings, constantly interrupted, of my jealousy from coagulating, from forming a solid mass in my heart. Soothing though they may have been at the time, in retrospect those intervals were stamped with pain since the unknown things she might have done in the course of them had ceased to be a matter of indifference to me, and especially now that no visit from her would ever occur again; so that those January evenings on which she used to come, and which for that reason had been so dear to me, would inject into me now with their biting winds an anxiety which was unknown to me then, and would bring back to me (but now grown pernicious) the first germ of my love. And when I thought how I would see the return of that cold season which, since the time of Gilberte and our games in the Champs-Élysées, had always seemed to me so melancholy, when I thought how evenings would come back like that snowy evening when I had waited in vain for Albertine far into the night, then, like an invalid—in his case physically, fearing for his chest, in my case mentally—what at such moments I still dreaded most, for my grief, for my heart, was the return of the intense cold, and I said to myself that what it would be hardest to live through was perhaps the winter.

Linked as it was to each of the seasons, in order for me to discard the memory of Albertine I should have had to forget them all, even if it meant having to get to know them all over again, like an old man learning to read again after a stroke; I should have had to renounce the entire universe. Nothing, I told myself, but a veritable extinction of myself would be capable (but that is impossible) of consoling me for hers. It did not occur to me that the death of oneself is neither impossible nor extraordinary; it is effected without our knowledge, even against our will, every day of our lives. And I should have to suffer from the recurrence of all sorts of days which not only nature, but adventitious circumstances, a purely conventional order, introduce into a season. Soon the date would return on which I had gone to Balbec, that last summer, and when my love, which was not yet inseparable from jealousy and did not concern itself with what Albertine was doing all day, was to undergo so many evolutions, before becoming that very different love of recent months, that this final year, in which Albertine's destiny had begun to change and had come to an end, appeared to me as full, as diverse and as vast as a whole century. Then it would be the memory of days more dilatory but dating from still earlier years, the rainy Sundays on which nevertheless everyone else had gone out, in the emptiness of the afternoon, when the sound of wind and rain would in the past have bidden me stay at home, to "philosophise in my garret;" with what anxiety would I see the hour approach at which Albertine, so little expected, had come to visit me, had caressed me for the first time, breaking off when Françoise had brought in the lamp, in that time now doubly dead when it had been Albertine who was curious about me, when my tenderness for her could legitimately cherish so many hopes! And even, later in the season, those glorious evenings when offices and girls' schools, half open like chapels, bathed in a golden dust, enable the street to crown itself with

those demigoddesses who, conversing not far from us with others of their kind, fill us with a feverish longing to penetrate into their mythological existence, now reminded me only of the tenderness of Albertine, whose presence by my side had been an obstacle to my approaching them.

Moreover, to the memory even of hours that were purely natural would inevitably be added the psychological background that makes each of them a thing apart. When, later on, I should hear the goatherd's horn, on a first fine almost Italian morning, that same day would blend alternately with its sunshine the anxiety of knowing that Albertine was at the Trocadéro, possibly with Lea and the two girls, then the homely, familial sweetness, almost that of a wife who seemed to me then an embarrassment and whom Françoise was bringing home to me. That telephone message from Françoise which had conveyed to me the dutiful homage of an Albertine returning with her had seemed to me then to be a matter for pride. I was mistaken. If it had exhilarated me, it was because it had made me feel that she whom I loved was really mine, lived only for me, and even at a distance, without my needing to occupy my mind with her, regarded me as her lord and master, returning home at a sign from me. And thus that telephone message had been a fragment of sweetness, coming to me from afar, sent out from that Trocadéro district where there happened to be, for me, sources of happiness directing towards me molecules of comfort, healing balms, restoring to me at length so precious an equanimity of mind that I need do no more—surrendering myself without the slightest qualm or reservation to Wagner's music—than await the certain arrival of Albertine, without anxiety, with an entire absence of impatience in which I had not had the perspicacity to recognise happiness. And the cause of this happiness at the knowledge of her returning home, of her obeying me and belonging to me, lay in love and not in pride. It would have been quite immaterial to me now to have at my behest fifty women returning, at a sign from me, not from the Trocadéro but from the Indies. But that day, thinking of Albertine coming dutifully home to me as I sat alone in my room making music, I had breathed in one of those substances, scattered like motes in a sunbeam, which, just as others are salutary to the body, do good to the soul. Then there had been, half an hour later, the arrival of Albertine, then the drive with Albertine, both of which had seemed to me boring because they were accompanied for me by certainty, but which, because of that very certainty, had, from the moment of Françoise's telephoning to me that she was bringing Albertine home, poured a golden calm over the hours that followed, had made of them as it were a second day, wholly unlike the first, because it had a very different emotional basis, an emotional basis which made it a uniquely original day, one to be added to the variety of the days that I had previously known, a day which I should never have been able to imagine—any more than we could imagine the delicious idleness of a summer day if such days did not exist in the calendar of those through which we have lived—a day of which I could not say absolutely that I recalled it, for to this calm I added now an anguish which I had not felt at the time. But much later, when I went back gradually, in reverse order, over the times through which I had passed before I had come to love Albertine so much, when my healed heart could detach itself without suffering from Albertine dead, then I was able to recall at length without suffering that day on which Albertine had gone shopping with Françoise instead of remaining at the Trocadéro; I recalled it with pleasure as belonging to an emotional season which I had not known until then; I recalled it at last exactly, no longer injecting it with suffering, but rather, on the contrary, as we recall certain days in summer which we found too hot while they lasted, and from which only after they have passed do we extract their unalloyed essence of pure gold and indestructible azure.

So that these few years imposed upon my memory of Albertine, which made them so painful, successive colourings, the different modulations, the embers, not only of their seasons or of their hours, from late afternoons in June to winter evenings, from moonlight on the sea to daybreak on the way home, from snow in Paris to fallen leaves at Saint-Cloud, but also of each of the particular ideas of Albertine that I successively formed, of the physical aspect in which I pictured her at each of those moments, the degree of frequency with which I had seen her during that season, which itself appeared consequently more or less dispersed or compact, the anxieties which she might have caused me by keeping me waiting, the desire which I had for her at such and such a moment, the hopes formed and then shattered—all this modified the character of my retrospective sadness fully as much as the impressions of light or of perfume which were associated with it, and complemented each of the solar years through which I had lived and which, simply with their springs, their autumns, their winters, were already so sad because of the inseparable memory of her, endowed it with a sort of sentimental counterpart in which the hours were defined not by the sun's position, but by the time spent waiting for a rendezvous, in which the length of the days or the changes in the temperature were measured by the soaring of my hopes, the progress of our intimacy, the gradual transformation of her face, the journeys she had made, the frequency and style of the letters she had written me during her absence, her eagerness, greater or lesser, to see me on her return. And lastly, if these changes of weather, these variegated days, each brought me back a different Albertine, it was not only through the evocation of similar moments. It will be remembered that always, even before I began to love, each season had made me a different person, having other desires because he had other perceptions, a person who, having dreamed only of cliffs and storms overnight, if the indiscreet spring daybreak had insinuated a scent of roses through the gaps in the ill-fitting enclosure of his sleep, would wake up on the way to Italy. Even in the course of my love, had not the volatile state of my emotional climate, the varying pressure of my beliefs, had they not one day reduced the visibility of the love that I was feeling, and the next day indefinitely extended it, one day embellished it to a smile, another day condensed it to a storm? We exist only by virtue of what we possess, we possess only what is really present to us, and many of our memories, our moods, our ideas sail away on a voyage of their own until they are lost to sight! Then we can no longer take them into account in the total which is our personality. But they know of secret paths by which to return to us. And on certain nights, having gone to

sleep almost without missing Albertine any more—we can only miss what we remember—on awakening I found a whole fleet of memories which had come to cruise upon the surface of my clearest consciousness and which I could distinguish perfectly. Then I wept over what I could see so plainly, though the night before it had been non-existent to me. In an instant, Albertine's name, her death, had changed their meaning; her betrayals had suddenly resumed their old importance.

How could she have seemed dead to me when now, in order to think of her, I had at my disposal only those same images one or other of which I used to recall when she was alive? Either swift-moving and bent over the mythological wheel of her bicycle, strapped on rainy days inside the warrior tunic of her waterproof which moulded her breasts, her head turbaned and dressed with snakes, when she spread terror through the streets of Balbec; or else on the evenings when we had taken champagne into the woods of Chantepie, her voice provocative and altered, her face suffused with warm pallor, reddened only on the cheekbones, and when, unable to make it out in the darkness of the carriage, I drew her into the moonlight in order to see it more clearly, the face I was now trying in vain to recapture, to see again in a darkness that would never end. A little statuette on the drive to the island in the Bois, a still and plump face with coarse-grained skin at the pianola, she was thus by turns rain-soaked and swift, provoking and diaphanous, motionless and smiling, an angel of music. In this way each one was attached to a moment, to the date of which I found myself carried back when I saw again that particular Albertine. And these moments of the past do not remain still; they retain in our memory the motion which drew them towards the future—towards a future which has itself become the past—drawing us along in their train. Never had I caressed the waterproofed Albertine of the rainy days; I wanted to ask her to take off that armour, in order to experience with her the love of the tented field, the fraternity of travel. But this was no longer possible, for she was dead. Neither, for fear of corrupting her, had I ever shown any sign of comprehension on the evenings when she seemed to be offering me pleasures which, but for my self-restraint, she might not perhaps have sought from others, and which aroused in me now a frantic desire. I should not have found them the same in any other woman, but I might scour the whole world now without encountering the woman who was prepared to give them to me, for Albertine was dead. It seemed that I had to choose between two facts, to decide which of them was true, to such an extent was the fact of Albertine's death—arising for me from a reality which I had not known, her life in Touraine—in contradiction with all my thoughts of her, my desires, my regrets, my tenderness, my rage, my jealousy. So great a wealth of memories borrowed from the treasury of her life, such a profusion of feelings evoking, implicating her life, seemed to make it incredible that Albertine should be dead. Such a profusion of feelings, for my memory, in preserving my affection, left it all its variety. It was not Albertine alone who was a succession of moments, it was also myself. My love for her was not simple: to a curiosity about the unknown had been added a sensual desire, and to a feeling of almost conjugal sweetness, at one moment indifference, at another a furious jealousy. I was not one man only, but as it were the march-past of a composite army in which there were passionate men, indifferent men, jealous men—jealous men not one of whom was jealous of the same woman. And no doubt it would be from this that one day would come the cure for which I had no wish. In a composite mass, the elements may one by one, without our noticing it, be replaced by others, which others again eliminate, until in the end a change has been brought about which it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person. The complexity of my love, of my person, multiplied and diversified my sufferings. And yet they could still be ranged in the two categories whose alternation had made up the whole life of my love for Albertine, swayed alternately by trust and by jealous suspicion.

If I found it difficult to imagine that Albertine, so alive in me (wearing as I did the double harness of the present and the past), was dead, perhaps it was equally paradoxical in me that this suspicion of the misdeeds which Albertine, stripped now of the flesh that had enjoyed them, of the mind that had conceived the desire for them, was no longer either capable of or responsible for, should excite in me such suffering, which I should only have blessed could I have seen it as the token of the spiritual reality of a person materially non-existent, instead of the reflexion, destined itself to fade, of impressions that she had made on me in the past. A woman who could no longer experience pleasures with others ought no longer to have excited my jealousy, if only my tenderness had been able to come to the surface. But it was precisely this that was impossible, since it could not find its object, Albertine, except among memories in which she was still alive. Since, merely by thinking of her, I brought her back to life, her infidelities could never be those of a dead woman, the moment at which she had committed them becoming the present moment, not only for Albertine, but for that one of my various selves thus suddenly evoked who happened to be thinking of her. So that no anachronism could ever separate the indissoluble couple, in which each new culprit was immediately mated with a jealous lover, pitiable and always contemporaneous. I had, during the last months, kept her shut up in my own house. But in my imagination now, Albertine was free; she was abusing her freedom, was prostituting herself to this person or that. Formerly, I used constantly to think of the uncertainty of the future that stretched before us, and endeavour to read its message. And now, what lay ahead of me, like a counterpart of the future—as worrying as the future because it was equally uncertain, equally difficult to decipher, equally mysterious, and crueller still because I did not have, as with the future, the possibility, or the illusion, of influencing it, and also because it would go on unfolding throughout the whole length of my life without my companion's being present to soothe the anguish that it caused me—was no longer Albertine's future, it was her past. Her past? That is the wrong word, since for jealousy there can be neither past nor future, and what it imagines is invariably the present.

Atmospheric changes, provoking other changes in the inner man, awaken forgotten selves, counteract the torpor of habit, restore their old force to certain memories, to certain sufferings. How much more so with me

if this change of weather recalled to me the weather in which Albertine, at Balbec, in the lashing rain, had set out, heaven knows why, on long rides, in the clinging tunic of her waterproof! If she had lived, no doubt today, in this so similar weather, she would be setting out on a comparable expedition in Touraine. Since she could do so no longer, I ought not to have suffered from the thought; but, as with people who have lost a limb, the slightest change in the weather revived the pain I felt in the limb that no longer existed.

Then a recollection that had not come back to me for a long time—for it had remained dissolved in the fluid and invisible expanse of my memory—suddenly crystallised. Many years ago, when somebody mentioned her bath-wrap, Albertine had blushed. At that time I was not jealous of her. But since then I had intended to ask her if she could remember that conversation, and why she had blushed. It had preoccupied me all the more because I had been told that the two girls who were friends of Lea's frequented the bathing establishment of the hotel, and, it was said, not merely for the purpose of taking showers. But, for fear of annoying Albertine, or else pending some more opportune moment, I had always put off mentioning it to her and in time had ceased to think about it. And all of a sudden, some time after Albertine's death, I recalled this memory, stamped with the character, at once tormenting and solemn, of puzzles left for ever insoluble by the death of the one person who could have explained them. Might I not at least try to find out whether Albertine had ever done anything wrong or even behaved suspiciously in that bathing establishment? By sending someone to Balbec, I might perhaps succeed in doing so. Had she been alive, I should doubtless have been unable to learn anything. But tongues become strangely loosened and will readily talk about a misdeed when the culprit's resentment need no longer be feared. As the constitution of our imagination, which has remained rudimentary and over-simplified (not having undergone the countless transformations which improve upon the primitive models of human inventions, whether it be the barometer, the balloon, the telephone, or anything else, which become barely recognisable in their ultimate perfection), allows us to see only a very few things at one time, the memory of the bathing establishment occupied the whole field of my inner vision. It was as though nothing else had ever happened in the whole of Albertine's life.

Sometimes I came into collision in the dark lanes of sleep with one of those bad dreams which are not very serious because for one thing the sadness they engender lasts for barely an hour after we awake, like the faintness caused by an artificial soporific, and for another we encounter them only very rarely, no more than once in two or three years. And, moreover, it remains uncertain whether we have encountered them before, whether they have not rather that aspect of not being seen for the first time which is projected on to them by an illusion, a subdivision (for duplication would not be a strong enough term). Of course, since I entertained doubts as to the life and the death of Albertine, I ought long since to have begun to make inquiries, but the same lassitude, the same cowardice which had made me give way to Albertine when she was with me prevented me from undertaking anything since I had ceased to see her. And yet, from a weakness that has dragged on for years, a flash of energy sometimes emerges. I decided to make this investigation at least, partial though it was.

I wondered who I could best send down to make inquiries on the spot, at Balbec. Aimé seemed to me to be a suitable person. Apart from his thorough knowledge of the place, he belonged to that category of working-class people who have a keen eye to their own advantage, are loyal to those they serve and indifferent to any form of morality, and of whom—because, if we pay them well, they prove themselves, in their obedience to our will, as incapable of indiscretion, lethargy or dishonesty as they are devoid of scruples—we say: "They are excellent people." In such we can have absolute confidence. When Aimé had gone, I thought how much more to the point it would have been if I could now interrogate Albertine herself about what he was going to try to find out down there. And at once the thought of this question which I would have liked to put, which it seemed to me that I was about to put to her, having brought Albertine to my side, not by dint of a conscious effort of resuscitation but as though by one of those chance encounters which, as is the case with photographs that are not posed, with snapshots, always make the person appear more alive, at the same time as I imagined our conversation I became aware of its impossibility; I had just approached from a new angle the idea that Albertine was dead, Albertine who inspired in me that tenderness we feel for absent ones the sight of whom does not come to correct the embellished image, inspiring also sorrow at the thought that this absence was eternal and that the poor child had been deprived for ever of the joys of life. And immediately, by an abrupt transposition, from the torments of jealousy I passed to the despair of separation.

What filled my heart now, instead of odious suspicions, was the affectionate memory of hours of confiding tenderness spent with the sister that her death had really deprived me of, since my grief was related not to what Albertine had been to me, but to what my heart, anxious to participate in the most general emotions of love, had gradually persuaded me that she was; then I became aware that the life that had bored me so (or so I thought) had been on the contrary delightful; the briefest moments spent in talking to her about even the most trivial things were now augmented, blended with a pleasure which at the time—it is true—had not been perceived by me, but which was already the cause of my having sought those moments so persistently to the exclusion of any others; the most trivial incidents which I recalled, a movement she had made in the carriage by my side, or when sitting down to dinner facing me in her room, sent through my heart a surge of sweet sadness which gradually overwhelmed it altogether.

That room in which we used to dine had never seemed to me attractive; I had told Albertine that it was, merely in order that she should be content to live in it. Now, the curtains, the chairs, the books, had ceased to be a matter of indifference to me. Art is not alone in imparting charm and mystery to the most insignificant things; pain is endowed with the same power to bring them into intimate relation with ourselves. At the time I had paid no attention to the dinner which we had eaten together after our return from the Bois, before I went

to the Verdurins', and towards the beauty, the solemn sweetness of which I now turned with my eyes full of tears. An impression of love is out of proportion to the other impressions of life, but when it is lost in their midst we are incapable of appreciating it. It is not from immediately below, in the tumult of the street and amid the thronging houses nearby, but when we have moved away, that, from the slope of a neighbouring hill, at a distance from which the whole town seems to have vanished or forms only a confused heap at ground level, we can appreciate, in the calm detachment of solitude and dusk, the towering splendour of a cathedral, unique, enduring and pure. I tried to embrace the image of Albertine through my tears as I thought of all the serious and sensible things that she had said that evening.

One morning, I thought I saw the oblong shape of a hill swathed in mist, and sniffed the warm odour of a cup of chocolate, while my heart was horribly wrung by the memory of the afternoon on which Albertine had come to see me and I had kissed her for the first time: the fact was that I had heard the hiccuping of the hot-water system which had just been turned on. And I flung angrily away an invitation which Françoise brought me from Mme Verdurin. How much more forcibly the impression I had felt when I went to dine for the first time at La Raspelière, that death does not strike us all at the same age, overcame me now that Albertine had died so young, while Brichot continued to dine with Mme Verdurin who was still entertaining and would perhaps continue to entertain for many years to come! At once the name of Brichot recalled to me the close of that same evening when he had accompanied me home, when I had seen from the street below the light of Albertine's lamp. I had already thought of it many times, but I had not approached this memory from the same angle. For, if our memories do indeed belong to us, they do so after the fashion of those country properties which have little hidden gates of which we ourselves are often unaware, and which someone in the neighbourhood opens for us, so that from one direction at least which is new to us, we find ourselves back in our own house. Then, when I thought of the void which I should now find on returning home, when I realised that never again would I see Albertine's window from below, that its light was extinguished for ever, I remembered how that evening, on leaving Brichot, I had felt irritated and regretful at my inability to roam the streets and make love elsewhere, and I saw how greatly I had been mistaken, that it was only because the treasure whose reflexions came down to me from above had seemed to be entirely in my possession that I had failed to appreciate its value, so that it appeared necessarily inferior to pleasures, however slight, whose value I estimated in seeking to imagine them. I understood how much this light, which seemed to me to issue from a prison, contained for me a plenitude of life and sweetness, this light which had intoxicated me for a moment, and then on the evening when Albertine had slept under the same roof as me, at Balbec, had appeared for ever impossible. I was perceiving that this life I had led in Paris, in a home of mine which was also a home of hers, was precisely the realisation of that profound peace I had dreamt of.

Remembering the conversation I had had with Albertine after our return from the Bois before that last party at the Verdurins', I would have been inconsolable had I felt that it had never occurred, that conversation which had to some extent involved Albertine in my intellectual life and in certain respects had made us one. For no doubt, if I returned with tender emotion to her intelligence and her sweetness to me, it was not because they had been any greater than those of other persons whom I had known; had not Mme de Cambremer said to me at Balbec: "What! you could be spending your days with Elstir, who is a genius, and you spend them with your cousin!" Albertine's intelligence pleased me because, by association, it reminded me of what I called her sweetness, as we call the sweetness of a fruit a certain sensation which exists only in our palate. And in fact, when I thought of Albertine's intelligence, my lips instinctively protruded and savoured a memory of which I preferred that the reality should remain external to me and should consist in the objective superiority of a person. There could be no denying that I had known people whose intelligence was greater. But the infinitude of love, or its egoism, brings it about that the people whom we love are those whose intellectual and moral physiognomy is least objectively defined in our eyes; we alter them incessantly to suit our desires and fears, we do not separate them from ourselves, they are simply a vast, vague arena in which to exteriorise our emotions. We do not have as clear an outline of our own body, into which so many sensations of pain and pleasure perpetually flow, as we have of a tree or a house or a passer-by. And where I had been wrong was perhaps in not making a greater effort to know Albertine in herself. Just as, from the point of view of her charm, I had long considered only the different positions that she occupied in my memory on the plane of the years, and had been surprised to see that she had become spontaneously enriched with modifications which were not due merely to the difference of perspective, so I ought to have sought to understand her character as that of an ordinary person, and thus perhaps, grasping the reason for her persistence in keeping her secret from me, might have avoided prolonging between us, through that strange tenacity, the conflict which had led to her death. And I then felt, together with an intense pity for her, a shame at having survived her. It seemed to me indeed, in the hours when I suffered least, that I had somehow benefited from her death, for a woman is of greater utility to our life if, instead of being an element of happiness in it, she is an instrument of suffering, and there is not a woman in the world the possession of whom is as precious as that of the truths which she reveals to us by causing us to suffer. In these moments, juxtaposing the deaths of my grandmother and of Albertine, I felt that my life was defiled by a double murder from which only the cowardice of the world could absolve me. I had dreamed of being understood by Albertine, of not being misjudged by her, thinking that it was for the great happiness of being understood, of not being misjudged, when so many other people could have done it better. One wants to be understood because one wants to be loved, and one wants to be loved because one loves. The understanding of others is a matter of indifference to us and their love importunate. My joy at having possessed a little of Albertine's intelligence and of her heart arose not from their intrinsic worth, but from the fact that this possession was a

stage further towards the complete possession of Albertine, a possession which had been my goal and my chimera ever since the day when I had first set eyes on her. When we speak of the "niceness" of a woman, we are doing no more perhaps than project outside ourselves the pleasure that we feel in seeing her, like children when they say: "My dear little bed, my dear little pillow, my dear little hawthorns." Which explains, incidentally, why men never say of a woman who is not unfaithful to them: "She is so nice," and say it so often of a woman by whom they are betrayed.

Mme de Cambremer was right in thinking that Elstir's intellectual charm was greater. But one cannot judge in the same way the charm of a person who is external to oneself like every other person, painted upon the horizon of one's mind, and that of a person who, as a result of an error in localisation consequent upon certain accidents but nevertheless tenacious, has lodged herself in one's own body to the point where wondering retrospectively whether or not she looked at a woman on a particular day in the corridor of a little seaside railway-train causes one the same pain as would a surgeon probing for a bullet in one's heart. A simple slice of bread, but one that we eat, gives us more pleasure than all the ortolans, leverets and rock-partridges that were set before Louis XV, and the blade of grass quivering a few inches in front of our eyes as we lie on the hillside may conceal from us the vertiginous summit of a mountain if the latter is several miles away.

Moreover, our error does not lie in prizing the intelligence and amiability of a woman whom we love, however slight they may be. Our error is to remain indifferent to the amiability and intelligence of others. Falsehood begins to cause us the indignation, and kindness the gratitude, which they ought always to arouse in us, only if they come from a woman whom we love, and physical desire has the marvellous faculty of giving intelligence its true value and providing solid foundations for the moral life. Never should I find again that divine thing, a person with whom I could talk freely of everything, in whom I could confide. Confide? But did not others offer me greater confidence than Albertine? With others, did I not have more extensive conversations? The fact is that confidence and conversation are ordinary things in themselves, and what does it matter if they are less than perfect if only there enters into them love, which alone is divine. I could see Albertine now, seated at her pianola, pink-faced beneath her dark hair; I could feel against my lips, which she would try to part, her tongue, her maternal, incommensurable, nutritious, hallowed tongue, whose secret dewy flame, even when she merely ran it over the surface of my neck or my stomach, gave to those caresses of hers, superficial but somehow imparted by the inside of her flesh, externalised like a piece of material reversed to show its lining, as it were the mysterious sweetness of a penetration.

I cannot even say that what I felt at the loss of all those moments of sweetness which nothing could ever restore to me was despair. To feel despair, we must still be attached to that life which can no longer be anything but unhappy. I had been in despair at Balbec when I saw the day break and realised that none of the days to come could ever be a happy one for me. I had remained just as selfish since then, but the self to which I was now attached, the self which constituted those vital reserves that bring the instinct of self-preservation into play, this self was no longer alive; when I thought of my inner strength, of my vital force, of what was best in me, I thought of a certain treasure which I had possessed (which I had been alone in possessing since others could not know exactly the feeling, hidden within myself, that it had inspired in me) and which no one could ever again take from me since I possessed it no longer. And in fact I had only ever possessed it because I had wanted to imagine myself as possessing it. I had not merely committed the imprudence, in looking at Albertine with my lips and lodging the treasure in my heart, of making it live within me, and that other imprudence of combining a domestic love with the pleasure of the senses. I had sought also to persuade myself that our relations were love, that we were mutually practising the relations that are called love, because she obediently returned the kisses that I gave her. And through having acquired the habit of believing this, I had lost not merely a woman whom I loved but a woman who loved me, my sister, my child, my tender mistress. And on the whole I had had a happiness and a misfortune which Swann had not experienced, for, after all, during the whole of the time in which he had loved Odette and had been so jealous of her, he had barely seen her, having found it so difficult, on certain days when she put him off at the last moment, to gain admission to her. But afterwards he had had her to himself, as his wife, and until the day of his death. I, on the contrary, while I was so jealous of Albertine, more fortunate than Swann, had had her with me in my own house. I had experienced in actuality what Swann had so often dreamed of and had experienced only when he had become indifferent to it. But, after all, I had not managed to keep Albertine as he had kept Odette. She had gone, she was dead. For nothing ever repeats itself exactly, and the most analogous lives which, thanks to kinship of character and similarity of circumstances, we may select in order to represent them as symmetrical, remain in many respects opposed. By losing my life I should not have lost very much; I should have lost only an empty form, the empty frame of a work of art. Indifferent as to what I might henceforth put into it, but happy and proud to think of what it had contained, I dwelt upon the memory of those hours of sweetness, and this moral support gave me a feeling of well-being which the approach of death itself would not have disturbed.

How she used to hasten to see me at Balbec when I sent for her, lingering only to sprinkle scent on her hair to please me! These images of Balbec and Paris which I loved thus to see again were the pages, still so recent, and so quickly turned, of her short life. All this, which for me was only memory, had been for her action, action speeding headlong, as in a tragedy, towards a swift death. For people develop in one way inside us, but in another way outside us (I had felt this strongly on those evenings when I remarked in Albertine an enrichment of qualities which was due not only to my memory), and these two ways inevitably react upon each other. Although, in seeking to know Albertine, then to possess her entirely, I had merely obeyed the need



to reduce by experiment to elements meanly akin to those of our own ego the mystery of every being, I had been unable to do so without in my turn influencing Albertine's life. Perhaps my wealth, the prospect of a brilliant marriage, had attracted her; my jealousy had kept her; her kindness, or her intelligence, or her sense of guilt, or her shrewd cunning, had made her accept, and had led me on to make harsher and harsher, a captivity in chains forged simply by the internal development of my mental toil, but which had none the less had repercussions on Albertine's life, themselves destined, by a natural backlash, to pose new and ever more painful problems to my psychology, since from my prison she had escaped to go and kill herself on a horse which but for me she would not have owned, leaving me, even after she was dead, with suspicions the verification of which, if it was to come, would perhaps be more painful to me than the discovery at Balbec that Albertine had known Mlle Vinteuil, since Albertine would no longer be there to soothe me. So that the long plaint of the soul which thinks that it is living shut up within itself is a monologue in appearance only, since the echoes of reality alter its course, and a given life is like an essay in subjective psychology spontaneously pursued, but providing from a distance the "plot" for the purely realistic novel of another reality, another existence, the vicissitudes of which come in their turn to inflect the curve and change the direction of the psychological essay. How highly geared had been the mechanism, how rapid had been the evolution of our love, and, notwithstanding a few delays, interruptions and hesitations at the start, as in certain of Balzac's tales or Schumann's ballads, how sudden the denouement! It was in the course of this last year, as long as a century to me—so often had Albertine changed position in relation to my thoughts between Balbec and her departure from Paris, and also, independently of me and often without my knowing it, changed in herself—that I must place the whole of that happy life of tenderness which had lasted so short a while and which yet appeared to me with an amplitude, almost an immensity, which now was for ever impossible and yet was indispensable to me. Indispensable without perhaps having been in itself and at the outset something necessary, since I should not have known Albertine had I not read in an archaeological treatise a description of the church at Balbec, had not Swann, by telling me that this church was almost Persian, directed my taste to the Byzantine Norman, had not a financial syndicate, by erecting at Balbec a hygienic and comfortable hotel, made my parents decide to grant my wish and send me to Balbec. To be sure, in that Balbec so long desired, I had not found the Persian church of my dreams, nor the eternal mists. Even the famous 1.22 train had not corresponded to my mental picture of it. But in exchange for what our imagination leads us to expect and we give ourselves so much futile trouble trying to find, life gives us something which we were very far from imagining. Who would have told me at Combray, when I lay waiting for my mother's good-night with so heavy a heart, that those anxieties would be healed, and would then break out again one day, not for my mother, but for a girl who would at first be no more, against the horizon of the sea, than a flower upon which my eyes would daily be invited to gaze, but a thinking flower in whose mind I was so childishly anxious to occupy a prominent place that I was distressed by her not being aware that I knew Mme de Villeparisis? Yes, it was for the good-night kiss of such an unknown girl that, in years to come, I was to suffer as intensely as I had suffered as a child when my mother did not come up to my room. And yet if Swann had not spoken to me of Balbec, I should never have known this Albertine who had become so necessary, of love for whom my soul was now almost exclusively composed. Her life would perhaps have been longer, mine would have been devoid of what was now making it a martyrdom. And thus it seemed to me that, by my entirely selfish love, I had allowed Albertine to die just as I had murdered my grandmother. Even later, even after I had already got to know her at Balbec, it is possible that I might not have loved her as I eventually did. For, when I gave up Gilberte and knew that I might love another woman some day, I hardly dared entertain a doubt as to whether, at any rate as regards the past, I could have loved anyone else but Gilberte. Whereas in the case of Albertine I no longer even had any doubt, I was sure that it might well not have been her that I loved, that it might have been someone else. It would have been enough that Mlle de Stermaria, on the evening when I was to dine with her on the island in the Bois, should not have cancelled the appointment. There was still time then, and it would have been upon Mlle de Stermaria that I would have directed that activity of the imagination which makes us extract from a woman so special a notion of individuality that she appears to us unique in herself and predestined and necessary for us. At the most, adopting an almost physiological point of view, I could say that I might have been able to feel that same exclusive love for another woman but not for *any* other woman. For Albertine, plump and dark, did not resemble Gilberte, slim and fair, and yet they were fashioned of the same healthy stuff, and above the same sensual cheeks there was a look in the eyes of both whose meaning was difficult to grasp. They were women of a sort that would not attract the attention of men who for their part would go mad about other women who "meant nothing" to me. A man has almost always the same way of catching cold, of falling ill; that is to say, he requires for it to happen a particular combination of circumstances; it is natural that when he falls in love he should love a certain type of woman, a type which for that matter is very widespread. The first glances from Albertine which had set me dreaming were not absolutely different from Gilberte's first glances. I could almost believe that the obscure personality, the sensuality, the wilful, cunning nature of Gilberte had returned to tempt me, incarnate this time in Albertine's body, a body quite different and yet not without analogies. In Albertine's case, thanks to a wholly different life shared with me where no fissure of distraction or obliviousness had been able to penetrate a block of thoughts in which a painful preoccupation maintained a permanent cohesion, her living body had not, like Gilberte's, ceased one day to be that in which I found what I subsequently recognised as being to me (what they would not have been to other men) the attributes of feminine charm. But she was dead. I would forget her. Who could say whether the same qualities of rich blood, of uneasy brooding would then return one day to create turmoil in me? But in what feminine form they would be embodied I could not foretell. The example

of Gilberte would as little have enabled me to form an idea of Albertine and guess that I should fall in love with her, as the memory of Vinteuil's sonata would have enabled me to imagine his septet. Indeed, what was more, the first few times I had seen Albertine, I had even managed to believe that it was others I would love. Moreover, she might even have appeared to me, had I met her a year earlier, as dull as a grey sky in which dawn has not yet broken. If I had changed in relation to her, she herself had changed too, and the girl who had come and sat on my bed on the day of my letter to Mlle de Stermaria was no longer the same girl I had known at Balbec, whether by virtue of the explosion of womanhood which occurs at the age of puberty, or as a result of circumstances which I was never able to discover. In any case, even if the woman I was one day to love must to a certain extent resemble her, that is to say if my choice of a woman was not entirely free, this nevertheless meant that, directed in a manner that was perhaps predetermined, it was directed towards something more considerable than an individual, towards a type of woman, and this removed all necessity from my love for Albertine.

We are well aware that the woman whose face we have before our eyes more constantly than light itself, since even with our eyes shut we never cease for an instant to adore her beautiful eyes, her beautiful nose, to arrange opportunities of seeing them again—that this woman who to us is unique might well have been another if we had been in a different town from the one in which we met her, if we had explored other quarters of the town, if we had frequented a different salon. Unique, we suppose? She is legion. And yet she is compact and indestructible in our loving eyes, irreplaceable for a long time to come by any other. The truth is that this woman has only raised to life by a sort of magic countless elements of tenderness existing in us already in a fragmentary state, which she has assembled, joined together, effacing every gap between them, and it is we ourselves who by giving her her features have supplied all the solid matter of the beloved object. Whence it arises that even if we are only one among a thousand to her and perhaps the last of them all, to us she is the only one, the one towards whom our whole life gravitates. It was, indeed, true that I had been quite well aware that this love was not inevitable, not only because it might have crystallised round Mlle de Stermaria, but even apart from that, through knowing the feeling itself, finding it to be only too like what it had been for others, and also sensing it to be vaster than Albertine, enveloping her, unconscious of her, like a tide swirling round a tiny rock. But gradually, by dint of living with Albertine, I was no longer able to fling off the chains which I myself had forged; the habit of associating Albertine's person with the sentiment which she had not inspired made me none the less believe that it was peculiar to her, as habit gives to the mere association of ideas between two phenomena, according to a certain school of philosophy, the illusory force and necessity of a law of causation. I had thought that my connexions, my wealth, would dispense me from suffering, and only too effectively perhaps, since it seemed to dispense me from feeling, loving, imagining; I envied a poor country girl whom the absence of connexions, even by telegraph, allows to day-dream for months on end about a sorrow which she cannot artificially put to sleep. And now I began to realise that if, in the case of Mme de Guermantes, endowed with everything that must make the gulf between her and myself infinite, I had seen that gulf suddenly bridged by abstract opinion, for which social advantages are no more than inert and transmutable matter, so, in a similar albeit converse fashion, my social relations, my wealth, all the material means by which not only my own position but the civilisation of my age enabled me to profit, had done no more than postpone the day of reckoning in my hand-to-hand struggle against the contrary, inflexible will of Albertine, upon which no pressure had had any effect. True, I had been able to exchange telegrams and telephone messages with Saint-Loup, to remain in constant communication with the post office at Tours, but had not the delay in waiting for them proved useless, the result nil? And country girls without social advantages or connexions, or human beings in general before these improvements of civilisation—do they not suffer less, because one desires less, because one regrets less what one has always known to be inaccessible, what for that reason has continued to seem unreal? One desires more the woman who has yet to give herself to us; hope anticipates possession; regret is an amplifier of desire. Mlle de Stermaria's refusal to come and dine with me on the island in the Bois was what had prevented her from becoming the object of my love. It might also have sufficed to make me love her if afterwards I had seen her again in time. As soon as I knew that she would not come, entertaining the improbable hypothesis—which had been proved correct—that perhaps she had a jealous lover who kept her away from other men and that therefore I should never see her again, I had suffered so intensely that I would have given anything in the world to see her, and it was one of the most desolating agonies that I had ever felt that Saint-Loup's arrival had assuaged. But after we have reached a certain age our loves, our mistresses, are begotten of our anguish; our past, and the physical lesions in which it is recorded, determine our future. In the case of Albertine in particular, the fact that it was not necessarily she that I was predestined to love was inscribed, even without those circumambient loves, in the history of my love for her, that is to say for herself and her friends. For it was not even a love like my love for Gilberte, but was created by division among a number of girls. Conceivably it was because of her and because they appeared to me more or less similar to her that I had been attracted to her friends. The fact remains that for a long time it was possible for me to waver between them all, for my choice to stray from one to another, and when I thought that I preferred one, it was enough that another should keep me waiting, should refuse to see me, to make me feel the first premonitions of love for her. Often it might have happened that when Andrée was coming to see me at Balbec, a little before her visit, if Albertine had let me down, my heart would beat without ceasing, I felt that I would never see her again and that it was she whom I loved. And when Andrée came it was quite truthfully that I said to her (as I said to her in Paris after I had learned that Albertine had known Mlle Vinteuil) what she might suppose me to be saying with an ulterior motive, insincerely, what I would indeed have said and in the same words had I been happy with Albertine the day before: "Alas! if you

had only come sooner, now I love someone else." Even then, in this case of Andrée being replaced by Albertine after I learned that the latter had known Mlle Vinteuil, my love had alternated between them, so that after all there had been only one love at a time. But there had been previous cases where I had fallen out with two of the girls. The one who took the first step towards a reconciliation would restore my peace of mind, but it was the other that I would love if she remained hostile, which does not mean that it was not with the former that I would form a definitive tie, for she would console me—however ineffectually—for the harshness of the other, whom I would end by forgetting if she did not return to me. Now, it sometimes happened that, convinced though I was that one or the other at least would come back to me, for some time neither of them did so. My anguish was therefore twofold, and twofold my love; pending the likelihood of my ceasing to love the one who came back, in the meantime I continued to suffer on account of them both. It is our fate at a certain stage in life, which may come to us quite early, to be made less enamoured by a person than by a desertion, in which event we end by knowing one thing and one thing only about the person, her face being dim, her soul non-existent, our preference quite recent and unexplained: namely that what we need to make our suffering cease is a message from her: "May I come and see you?" My separation from Albertine on the day when Françoise had said to me: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone" was like an allegory of countless other separations. For very often, in order that we may discover that we are in love, perhaps indeed in order that we may fall in love, the day of separation must first have come.

In these cases, when it is an unkept appointment, a letter of refusal, that dictates one's choice, one's imagination, goaded by suffering, sets about its work so swiftly, fashions with so frenzied a rapidity a love that had scarcely begun and remained inchoate, destined, for months past, to remain a rough sketch, that there are times when one's intelligence, which has been unable to keep pace with one's heart, cries out in astonishment: "But you must be mad. What are these strange thoughts that are making you so miserable? None of this is real life." And indeed at that moment, had one not been roused to action by the unfaithful one, a few healthy distractions that would calm one's heart physically would be sufficient to nip one's infatuation in the bud. In any case, if this life with Albertine was not in its essence necessary, it had become indispensable to me. I had trembled when I was in love with Mme de Guermantes because I said to myself that, with her too abundant means of seduction, not only beauty but position and wealth, she would be too much at liberty to belong to too many people, that I should have too little hold over her. Albertine, being penniless and obscure, must have been anxious to marry me. And yet I had not been able to possess her exclusively. Whatever our social position, however wise our precautions, when the truth is confessed we have no hold over the life of another person. Why had she not said to me: "I have those tastes"? I would have yielded, would have allowed her to gratify them. In a novel I had read there was a woman whom no objurgation from the man who was in love with her could induce to speak. When I read the book, I had thought this situation absurd; had I been the hero, I assured myself, I would first of all have forced the woman to speak, then we could have come to an understanding. What was the good of all those futile miseries? But I saw now that we are not free to refrain from forging the chains of our own misery, and that however well we may know our own will, other people do not obey it.

And yet how often we had expressed them, those painful, those ineluctable truths which dominated us and to which we were blind, the truth of our feelings, the truth of our destiny, how often we had expressed them without knowing it, without meaning it, in words which doubtless we ourselves thought mendacious but the prophetic force of which had been established by subsequent events. I remembered many words that each of us had uttered without knowing at the time the truth that they contained, which indeed we had said thinking that we were play-acting and yet the falseness of which was very slight, very uninteresting, wholly confined within our pitiable insincerity, compared with what they contained unbeknown to us—lies and errors falling short of the profound reality which neither of us perceived, truth extending beyond it, the truth of our natures, the essential laws of which escape us and require Time before they reveal themselves, the truth of our destinies also. I had believed myself to be lying when I said to her at Balbec: "The more I see you, the more I shall love you" (and yet it was that constant intimacy which, through the medium of jealousy, had attached me so strongly to her), "I feel that I could be of use to you intellectually;" and in Paris: "Do be careful. Remember that if you met with an accident, it would break my heart" (and she: "But I may meet with an accident"); in Paris too, on the evening when I had pretended that I wished to leave her: "Let me look at you once again since presently I shall not be seeing you again, and it will be for ever!" and she, when that same evening she had looked round the room: "To think that I shall never see this room again, those books, that pianola, the whole house, I cannot believe it and yet it's true." In her last letters again, when she had written (probably saying to herself that it was eyewash): "I leave you the best of myself" (and was it not now indeed to the fidelity, to the strength—also too frail, alas—of my memory that her intelligence, her kindness, her beauty were entrusted?) and: "That moment of double twilight, since night was falling and we were about to part, will be effaced from my thoughts only when the darkness is complete" (that sentence written on the eve of the day when her mind had indeed been plunged into complete darkness, and when, in those last brief glimmers which the anguish of the moment subdivides ad infinitum, she had indeed perhaps recalled our last drive together and in that instant when everything forsakes us and we create a faith for ourselves, as atheists turn Christian on the battlefield, she had perhaps summoned to her aid the friend whom she had so often cursed but had so deeply respected, who himself—for all religions are alike—was cruel enough to hope that she had also had time to see herself as she was, to give her last thought to him, to confess her sins at length to him, to die in him).

But to what purpose, since even if, at that moment, she had had time to see herself as she was, we had both of us understood where our happiness lay, what we ought to do, only when, only because, that happiness was no longer possible, when and because we could no longer do it—whether it is that, so long as things are possible, we postpone them, or that they cannot assume that force of attraction, that apparent ease of realisation except when, projected on to the ideal void of the imagination, they are removed from their deadening and degrading submersion in physical being. The idea that one will die is more painful than dying, but less painful than the idea that another person is dead, that, becoming once more a still, plane surface after having engulfed a person, a reality extends, without even a ripple at the point of disappearance, from which that person is excluded, in which there no longer exists any will, any knowledge, and from which it is as difficult to reascend to the idea that that person has lived as, from the still recent memory of his life, it is to think that he is comparable with the insubstantial images, the memories, left us by the characters in a novel we have been reading.

At any rate I was glad that before she died she had written me that letter, and above all had sent me that final message which proved to me that she would have returned had she lived. It seemed to me that it was not merely more soothing, but more beautiful also, that the event would have been incomplete without that message, would not have had so markedly the form of art and destiny. In reality it would have been just as markedly so had it been different; for every event is like a mould of a particular shape, and, whatever it may be, it imposes, upon the series of incidents which it has interrupted and seems to conclude, a pattern which we believe to be the only possible one, because we do not know the other which might have been substituted for it.

Why, I repeated to myself, had she not said to me: “I have those tastes”? I would have yielded, would have allowed her to gratify them; at this moment I would be kissing her still. How sad it was to have to remind myself that she had lied to me thus when she swore to me, three days before she left me, that she had never had with Mlle Vinteuil’s friend those relations which at the moment when she swore it her blush had confessed! Poor child, she had at least had the honesty to be reluctant to swear that the pleasure of seeing Mlle Vinteuil again had no part in her desire to go that day to the Verdurins’. Why had she not made her admission complete? Perhaps, however, it was partly my fault that she had never, despite all my entreaties which were powerless against her denial, been willing to say to me: “I have those tastes.” It was perhaps partly my fault because at Balbec, on the day when, after Mme de Cambremer’s visit, I had had things out with Albertine for the first time, and when I was so far from imagining that she could possibly have had anything more than a rather too passionate friendship with Andrée, I had expressed with undue violence my disgust at those proclivities, had condemned them too categorically. I could not recall whether Albertine had blushed when I had naively expressed my horror of that sort of thing, for it is often only long afterwards that we long to know what attitude a person adopted at a moment when we were paying no attention to it, an attitude which, later on, when we think again of our conversation, would elucidate an agonising problem. But in our memory there is a blank, there is no trace of it. And very often we have not paid sufficient attention, at the actual moment, to the things which might even then have seemed to us important, we have not properly heard a sentence, have not noticed a gesture, or else we have forgotten them. And when later on, eager to discover a truth, we work back from deduction to deduction, leafing through our memory like a sheaf of written evidence, when we arrive at that sentence, at that gesture, we find it impossible to remember, and we repeat the process a score of times, in vain: the road goes no further. Had she blushed? I do not know whether she had blushed, but she could not have failed to hear, and the memory of my words had pulled her up later on when perhaps she had been on the point of confessing to me. And now she no longer existed anywhere; I could have scoured the earth from pole to pole without finding Albertine; the reality which had closed over her was once more unbroken, had obliterated every trace of the being who had sunk without trace. She was now no more than a name, like that Mme de Charlus of whom people who had known her said with indifference: “She was charming.” But I could not conceive for more than an instant the existence of this reality of which Albertine had no knowledge, for in me she existed only too vividly, in me whose every feeling, every thought, related to her life. Perhaps, if she had known, she would have been touched to see that her lover had not forgotten her, now that her own life was finished, and would have been sensitive to things which in the past had left her indifferent. But as we would choose to abstain from infidelities, however secret, so fearful are we that she whom we love is not abstaining from them, I was terrified by the thought that if the dead do exist somewhere, my grandmother was as well aware of my forgetfulness as Albertine of my remembrance. And when all is said, even in the case of a single dead person, can we be sure that the joy we should feel in learning that she knows certain things would compensate for our alarm at the thought that she knows them *all*; and, however agonising the sacrifice, would we not sometimes forbear to keep those we have loved as friends after their death, for fear of having them also as judges?

My jealous curiosity as to what Albertine might have done was unbounded. I suborned any number of women from whom I learned nothing. If this curiosity was so tenacious, it was because people do not die for us immediately, but remain bathed in a sort of aura of life which bears no relation to true immortality but through which they continue to occupy our thoughts in the same way as when they were alive. It is as though they were travelling abroad. This is a thoroughly pagan survival. Conversely, when we have ceased to love, the curiosity which people arouse dies before they themselves are dead. Thus I would no longer have taken a single step to find out with whom Gilberte had been strolling on a certain evening in the Champs-Élysées. Now, I was well aware that these two forms of curiosity were absolutely identical, had no value in themselves, were incapable of lasting. But I continued to sacrifice everything to the cruel satisfaction of this transient

curiosity, although I knew in advance that my enforced separation from Albertine, by the fact of her death, would lead me to the same indifference as had resulted from my voluntary separation from Gilberte.

If she could have known what was going to happen, she would have stayed with me. But this simply amounted to saying that, once she saw herself dead, she would have preferred to remain alive with me. Because of the very contradiction that it implied, such a supposition was absurd. But it was not innocuous, for in imagining how glad Albertine would be, if she could know, if she could retrospectively understand, to come back to me, I saw her before me, I wanted to kiss her, and alas, it was impossible, she would never come back, she was dead.

My imagination sought for her in the sky, at nightfall when, still together, we had gazed at it; beyond that moonlight which she loved, I tried to raise up to her my tenderness so that it might be a consolation to her for being no longer alive, and this love for a being who was now so remote was like a religion; my thoughts rose towards her like prayers. Desire is powerful indeed: it engenders belief; I had believed that Albertine would not leave me because I desired that she should not do so. Because I desired it, I began to believe that she was not dead; I took to reading books about table-turning; I began to believe in the possibility of the immortality of the soul. But that did not suffice me. I required that, after my own death, I should find her again in her body, as though eternity were like life. Life, did I say? I say? I was more exacting still. I should have liked not to be for ever deprived by death of the pleasures of which in any case it is not alone in robbing us. For without it they would eventually have lost their edge; indeed they had already begun to do so through the effect of long-established habit, of fresh curiosities. Besides, had she been alive, Albertine, even physically, would gradually have changed; day by day I would have adapted myself to that change. But my memory, calling up only detached moments of her life, demanded to see her again as she would already have ceased to be had she lived; what it wanted was a miracle that would satisfy the natural and arbitrary limitations of memory, which cannot escape from the past. And yet, with the naivety of the old theologians, I imagined this living creature vouchsafing me not simply the explanations which she might possibly have given me but, by a final contradiction, those that she had always refused me during her life. And thus, her death being a sort of dream, my love would seem to her an unlooked-for happiness; all I retained of death was the comfort and the optimism of a denouement which simplifies, which settles everything.

Sometimes it was not so far off, it was not in another world, that I imagined our reunion. Just as, in the past, when I knew Gilberte only from playing with her in the Champs-Élysées, at home in the evening I used to imagine that I was about to receive a letter from her in which she would confess her love for me, that she was about to come into the room, so a similar force of desire, no more troubled by the laws of nature which inhibited it than on the former occasion, in the case of Gilberte (when after all it had not been mistaken since it had had the last word), made me think now that I was about to receive a message from Albertine, informing me that she had indeed had a riding accident but that for romantic reasons (and as, after all, has sometimes happened with people whom we have long believed to be dead) she had not wished me to hear of her recovery and now, repentant, asked to be allowed to come and live with me for ever. And—giving me an insight into the nature of certain mild lunacies in people who otherwise appear sane—I felt co-existing in me the certainty that she was dead and the constant hope that I might see her come into the room.

I had not yet received news from Aimé, although he must by now have reached Balbec. No doubt my inquiry turned upon a secondary point, and one quite arbitrarily chosen. If Albertine's life had been really culpable, it must have contained many other things of far greater importance, which chance had not allowed me to consider as it had in the case of the conversation about the bathing-wrap and Albertine's blushes. But those things precisely did not exist for me since I had not seen them. But it was quite arbitrarily that I had hit upon that particular day and, several years later, was trying to reconstruct it. If Albertine had been a lover of women, there were thousands of other days in her life which I did not know how she had spent and about which it might be just as interesting for me to learn; I might have sent Aimé to many other places in Balbec, to many other towns besides Balbec. But these other days, precisely because I did not know how she had spent them, did not present themselves to my imagination, had no existence for it. Things and people did not begin to exist for me until they assumed in my imagination an individual existence. If there were thousands of others like them, they became for me representative of all the rest. If I had long felt a desire to know, in the matter of my suspicions with regard to Albertine, what exactly had happened in the baths, it was in the same manner in which, in the matter of my desires for women, and although I knew that there were any number of young girls and lady's-maids who could satisfy them and whom chance might just as easily have brought to my notice, I wished to know—since it was they whom Saint-Loup had mentioned to me, they who existed individually for me—the girl who frequented houses of ill fame and Mme Putbus's maid. The difficulties which my health, my indecision, my "procrastination," as M. de Charlus called it, placed in the way of my carrying anything through, had made me put off from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, the elucidation of certain suspicions as well as the accomplishment of certain desires. But I retained them in my memory, promising myself that I would not forget to learn the truth of them, because they alone obsessed me (since the others had no form in my eyes, did not exist), and also because the very accident that had chosen them out of the surrounding reality gave me a guarantee that it was indeed in them that I should come in contact with a trace of the reality, of the true and coveted life. Besides, is not a single small fact, if it is well chosen, sufficient to enable the experimenter to deduce a general law which will reveal the truth about thousands of analogous facts? Although Albertine might exist in my memory only as she had successively appeared to me in the course of her life, that is, subdivided in accordance with a series of fractions of time, my mind, reestablishing unity in her, made her a single person, and it was on this person that I wished to

arrive at a general judgment, to know whether she had lied to me, whether she loved women, whether it was in order to associate with them freely that she had left me. What the woman in the baths would have to say might perhaps put an end for ever to my doubts as to Albertine's proclivities.

My doubts! Alas, I had supposed that it would be immaterial to me, even agreeable, not to see Albertine again, until her departure had revealed to me my error. Similarly her death had shown me how greatly I had been mistaken in believing that I sometimes wished for her death and supposed that it would be my deliverance. So it was that, when I received Aimé's letter, I realised that if I had not until then suffered too painfully from my doubts as to Albertine's virtue it was because in reality they were not doubts at all. My happiness, my life required that Albertine should be virtuous; they had laid it down once and for all that she was. Armed with this self-protective belief, I could with impunity allow my mind to play sadly with suppositions to which it gave a form but lent no credence. I said to myself, "She is perhaps a woman-lover," as we say "I may die tonight;" we say it, but we do not believe it, we make plans for the following day. This explains why, believing mistakenly that I was uncertain whether Albertine did or did not love women, and believing in consequence that a proof of Albertine's guilt would not tell me anything that I had not often envisaged, I experienced, in the face of the images, insignificant to anyone else, which Aimé's letter evoked for me, an unexpected anguish, the most painful that I had ever yet felt, and one that formed with those images, with the image, alas! of Albertine herself, a sort of precipitate, as they say in chemistry, in which everything was indivisible and of which the text of Aimé's letter, which I isolate in a purely conventional fashion, can give no idea whatsoever, since each of the words that compose it was immediately transformed, coloured for ever by the suffering it had just aroused.

"MONSIEUR,

Monsieur will kindly forgive me for not having written sooner to Monsieur. The person whom Monsieur instructed me to see had gone away for a few days, and, anxious to justify the confidence which Monsieur had placed in me, I did not wish to return empty-handed. I have just spoken at last to this person who remembers (Mlle A.) very well." (Aimé, who possessed certain rudiments of culture, meant to put "Mlle A." in italics or between inverted commas. But when he meant to put inverted commas he put brackets, and when he meant to put something in brackets he put it between inverted commas. In the same way Françoise would say that someone *stayed* in my street meaning that he *dwelt* there, and that one could *dwell* for a few minutes, meaning *stay*, the mistakes of popular speech consisting merely, as often as not, in interchanging—as for that matter the French language has done—terms which in the course of centuries have replaced one another.) "According to her the thing that Monsieur supposed is absolutely certain. For one thing, it was she who looked after (Mlle A.) whenever she came to the baths. (Mlle A.) came very often to take her shower with a tall woman older than herself, always dressed in grey, whom the shower-attendant without knowing her name recognised from having often seen her going after girls. But she took no notice of any of them after she met (Mlle A.). She and (Mlle A.) always shut themselves up in the cabin, remained there a very long time, and the lady in grey used to give at least 10 francs as a tip to the person I spoke to. As this person said to me, you can imagine that if they were just stringing beads they wouldn't have given a ten-franc tip. (Mlle A.) also used to come sometimes with a woman with a very dark skin and a lorgnette. But (Mlle A.) came most often with girls younger than herself, especially one with very red hair. Apart from the lady in grey, the people (Mlle A.) was in the habit of bringing were not from Balbec and must even quite often have come from quite a distance. They never went in together, but (Mlle A.) would come in, and ask for the door of her cabin to be left unlocked—as she was expecting a friend, and the person I spoke to knew what that meant. This person could not give me any other details as she did not remember very well, which is easy to understand after such a long time.' Besides, this person did not try to find out, because she is very discreet and it was to her advantage because (Mlle A.) brought her in a lot of money. She was quite sincerely touched to hear that she was dead. It is true that so young it is a great calamity for her and for her family. I await Monsieur's orders to know whether I may leave Balbec where I do not think that I can learn anything more. I thank Monsieur again for the little holiday that he has procured me, and which has been very pleasant especially as the weather is as fine as could be. The season promises well for this year. Everyone hopes that Monsieur will come and put in a little apparition.

"I can think of nothing else to say that will interest Monsieur," etc.

To understand how deeply these words penetrated my being, it must be remembered that the questions which I had been asking myself with regard to Albertine were not secondary, insignificant questions, questions of detail, the only questions in fact that one asks about anyone who is not oneself, whereby one is enabled to carry on, wrapped in the imperviousness of one's thoughts, through the midst of suffering, falsehood, vice and death. No, in Albertine's case they were essential questions: In her heart of hearts what was she? What were her thoughts? What were her loves? Did she lie to me? Had my life with her been as lamentable as Swann's life with Odette? Hence Aimé's reply, although it was not a general but a particular reply—indeed precisely because of that—struck home, in Albertine and in myself, to the very depths.

At last I saw before my eyes, in that arrival of Albertine at the baths along the narrow lane with the lady in grey, a fragment of that past which seemed to me no less mysterious, no less horrifying than I had feared when I imagined it enclosed in the memory, in the look in the eyes of Albertine. No doubt anyone but myself might have dismissed as insignificant these details on which, now that Albertine was dead, my inability to secure a denial of them from her conferred the equivalent of a sort of probability. It is indeed probable that for Albertine, even if they had been true, even if she had admitted them, her own misdeeds (whether her conscience had thought them innocent or reprehensible, whether her sensuality had found them exquisite or somewhat insipid) would not have been accompanied by that inexpressible sense of horror from which I was unable to detach them. I myself, with the help of my own love of women, and although they could not have meant the same thing to Albertine, could imagine a little of what she felt. And indeed there was already an initial pain in my picturing her to myself desiring as I had so often desired, lying to me as I had so often lied to her, preoccupied with this or that girl, putting herself out for her, as I had done for Mlle de Stermaria and so many others, for the peasant girls I met on country roads. Yes, all my own desires helped me to a certain extent to understand hers; it was by this time an immense anguish in which all desires were transformed into torments that were all the more cruel the more intense they had been; as though in this algebra of sensibility they reappeared with the same coefficient but with a minus instead of a plus sign. To Albertine, so far as I was

capable of judging her by my own standard, her misdeeds—however anxious she might have been to conceal them from me (which made me suppose that she considered herself guilty or was afraid of hurting me)—because she had planned them to suit her own taste in the clear light of the imagination in which desire operates, must after all have appeared as things of the same kind as the rest of life, pleasures for herself which she had not had the strength to deny herself, griefs for me which she had sought to avoid causing me by concealing them from me, but pleasures and griefs which might be numbered among the other pleasures and griefs of life. But for me, it was from the outside, without my having been forewarned, without my having been able myself to elaborate them, it was from Aimé's letter that there had come to me the visions of Albertine arriving at the baths and preparing her tip.

No doubt it was because in that silent and deliberate arrival of Albertine with the woman in grey I read the assignation they had made, that convention of going to make love in a shower-cabin, which implied an experience of corruption, the well-concealed organisation of a double life, it was because these images brought me the terrible tidings of Albertine's guilt, that they had immediately caused me a physical grief from which they would never be detached. But at once my grief had reacted upon them: an objective fact, an image, differs according to the internal state in which we approach it. And grief is as powerful a modifier of reality as intoxication. Combined with these images, my suffering had at once made of them something absolutely different from what might be for anyone else a lady in grey, a tip, a shower, the street where the purposeful arrival of Albertine with the lady in grey had taken place. All those images—a vista of a life of lies and iniquities such as I had never conceived—my suffering had immediately altered them in their very essence; I did not see them in the light that illuminates earthly spectacles, they were a fragment of another world, of an unknown and accursed planet, a glimpse of Hell. My Hell was the whole region of Balbec, all those neighbouring villages from which, according to Aimé's letter, she frequently collected girls younger than herself whom she took to the baths. That mystery which I had long ago imagined in the country around Balbec and which had been dispelled after I had lived there, which I had then hoped to grasp again when I knew Albertine because, when I saw her pass by on the beach, when I was mad enough to hope that she was not virtuous, I thought that she must be its incarnation—how fearfully now everything that related to Balbec was impregnated with it! The names of those watering-places, Toutainville, Epreville, Incarville, that had become so familiar, so soothing, when I heard them shouted at night as I returned from the Verdurins', now that I thought how Albertine had been staying at one, had gone from there to another, must often have ridden on her bicycle to a third, aroused in me an anxiety more cruel than on the first occasion, when I had observed them with such misgivings from the little local train with my grandmother before arriving at a Balbec which I did not yet know.

It is one of the faculties of jealousy to reveal to us the extent to which the reality of external facts and the sentiments of the heart are an unknown element which lends itself to endless suppositions. We imagine that we know exactly what things are and what people think, for the simple reason that we do not care about them. But as soon as we have a desire to know, as the jealous man has, then it becomes a dizzy kaleidoscope in which we can no longer distinguish anything. Had Albertine been unfaithful to me? With whom? In what house? On what day? On the day when she had said this or that to me, when I remembered that I had in the course of it said this or that? I could not tell. Nor did I know what her feelings were for me, whether they were inspired by self-interest or by affection. And all of a sudden I remembered some trivial incident, for instance that Albertine had wished to go to Saint-Mars-le-Vetu, saying that the name interested her, and perhaps simply because she had made the acquaintance of some peasant girl who lived there. But it was useless that Aimé should have informed me of what he had learned from the woman at the baths, since Albertine must remain eternally unaware that he had informed me, the need to know having always been exceeded, in my love for Albertine, by the need to show her that I knew; for this broke down the partition of different illusions that stood between us, without having ever had the result of making her love me more, far from it. And now, since she was dead, the second of these needs had been amalgamated with the effect of the first: the need to picture to myself the conversation in which I would have informed her of what I had learned, as vividly as the conversation in which I would have asked her to tell me what I did not know; that is to say, to see her by my side, to hear her answering me kindly, to see her cheeks become plump again, her eyes shed their malice and assume an air of melancholy; that is to say, to love her still and to forget the fury of my jealousy in the despair of my loneliness. The painful mystery of this impossibility of ever making known to her what I had learned and of establishing our relations upon the truth of what I had only just discovered (and would not have been able, perhaps, to discover but for her death) substituted its sadness for the more painful mystery of her conduct. What? To have so desperately desired that Albertine—who no longer existed—should know that I had heard the story of the baths! This again was one of the consequences of our inability, when we have to consider the fact of death, to picture to ourselves anything but life. Albertine no longer existed; but to me she was the person who had concealed from me that she had assignations with women at Balbec, who imagined that she had succeeded in keeping me in ignorance of them. When we try to consider what will happen to us after our own death, is it not still our living self which we mistakenly project at that moment? And is it much more absurd, when all is said, to regret that a woman who no longer exists is unaware that we have learned what she was doing six years ago than to desire that of ourselves, who will be dead, the public shall still speak with approval a century hence? If there is more real foundation in the latter than in the former case, the regrets of my retrospective jealousy proceeded none the less from the same optical error as in other men the desire for posthumous fame. And yet, if this impression of the solemn finality of my separation from Albertine had momentarily supplanted my idea of her misdeeds, it only

succeeded in aggravating them by bestowing upon them an irremediable character. I saw myself astray in life as on an endless beach where I was alone and where, in whatever direction I might turn, I would never meet her.

Fortunately, I found most opportunely in my memory—as there are always all sorts of things, some noxious, others salutary, in that jumble from which recollections come to light only one by one—I discovered, as a craftsman discovers the object that will serve for what he wishes to make, a remark of my grandmother's. She had said to me, with reference to an improbable story which the bath-attendant had told Mme de Villeparisis: "She is a woman who must suffer from a disease of mendacity." This memory was a great comfort to me. What significance could there be in the story she had told Aimé? Especially as, after all, she had seen nothing. A girl can come and take a shower with her friends without necessarily meaning any harm. Perhaps the woman had exaggerated the size of the tip in order to boast. I had indeed heard Françoise maintain once that my aunt Leonie had said in her hearing that she had "a million a month to spend," which was utter nonsense; another time that she had seen my aunt Leonie give Eulalie four thousand-franc notes, whereas a fifty-franc note folded in four seemed to me scarcely probable. And thus I sought to rid myself—and gradually succeeded in ridding myself—of the painful certainty which I had taken such trouble to acquire, tossed to and fro as I still was between the desire to know and the fear of suffering. Then my tenderness could revive anew, but, simultaneously with it, a sorrow at being parted from Albertine which made me perhaps even more wretched than I had been during the recent hours when it had been jealousy that tormented me. But the latter suddenly revived at the thought of Balbec, because of the vision which all at once reappeared (and which until then had never made me suffer and indeed appeared one of the most innocuous in my memory) of the dining-room at Balbec in the evening, with all that populace crowded together in the dark on the other side of the window, as in front of the luminous wall of an aquarium, watching the strange creatures moving around in the light but (and this I had never thought of) in its conglomeration causing the fisher-girls and other daughters of the people to brush against girls of the bourgeoisie envious of that luxury, new to Balbec, from which, if not their means, at any rate parsimony and tradition excluded their parents, girls among whom there had certainly been almost every evening Albertine whom I did not know and who doubtless used to pick up some little girl whom she would meet a few minutes later in the dark, upon the sands, or else in a deserted bathing hut at the foot of the cliff. Then my sadness would return as I heard like a sentence of banishment the sound of the lift, which instead of stopping at my floor went on higher. And yet the only person from whom I could have hoped for a visit would never come again, for she was dead. And in spite of this, when the lift did stop at my floor, my heart leapt, and for an instant I said to myself: "What if it was only a dream after all! Perhaps it's her—she's going to ring the bell, she has come back, Françoise will come in and say with more alarm than anger—for she's even more superstitious than vindictive, and would be less afraid of the living girl than of what she will perhaps take for a ghost—'Monsieur will never guess who's here.' " I tried not to think of anything, to take up a newspaper. But I found it impossible to read all those articles written by men who felt no real grief. Of a trivial song, one of them said: "It moves one to *tears*" whereas I myself would have listened to it with joy had Albertine been alive. Another, albeit a great writer, having been greeted with applause when he alighted from a train, said that he had received "an *unforgettable* welcome," whereas I, if it had been I who received that welcome, would not have given it even a moment's thought. And a third assured his readers that but for tiresome politics life in Paris would be "altogether delightful," whereas I knew well that even without politics that life could not but be odious to me, and would have seemed to me delightful, even with politics, if I had found Albertine again. The field sports correspondent said (we were in the month of May): "This season of the year is truly distressing, nay, catastrophic, to the true sportsman, for there is nothing, absolutely nothing in the way of game," and the art critic said of the Salon: "Faced with this method of arranging an exhibition one is overcome by an immense discouragement, by an infinite gloom ..." If the strength of my feelings made me regard as untruthful and colourless the expressions of men who had no true happiness or sorrow in their lives, on the other hand the most insignificant lines which could, however remotely, be related either to Normandy, or to Touraine, or to hydrotherapeutic establishments, or to Lea, or to the Princesse de Guermantes, or to love, or to absence, or to infidelity, at once brought back before my eyes the image of Albertine, without my having the time to turn away from it, and my tears started afresh. In any case, usually I could not even read these newspapers, for the mere act of opening one of them reminded me at once that I used to open them when Albertine was alive, and that she was alive no longer; and I let it drop without having the strength to unfold its pages. Each impression called up an impression that was identical but marred, because Albertine's existence had been excised from it, so that I never had the heart to live these mutilated minutes to the end. Even when she gradually ceased to be present in my thoughts and all-powerful over my heart, I felt a sudden pang if I had occasion, as in the time when she was there, to go into her room, to grope for the light, to sit down by the pianola. Divided into a number of little household gods, she dwelt for a long time in the flame of the candle, the doorknob, the back of a chair, and other domains more immaterial such as a night of insomnia or the emotion that was caused me by the first visit of a woman who had attracted me. In spite of this the few sentences which I read in the course of a day, or which my mind recalled that I had read, often aroused in me a cruel jealousy. To do this, they required not so much to supply me with a valid proof of the immorality of women as to revive an old impression connected with the life of Albertine. Transported then to a forgotten moment the force of which had not been blunted by the habit of thinking of it, and in which Albertine still lived, her misdeeds became more immediate, more painful, more agonising. Then I asked myself whether I could be certain that the bath-attendant's revelations were false. A good way of finding out the truth would be to send Aimé to Touraine, to spend a few days in the neighbourhood of Mme Bontemps's



villa. If Albertine enjoyed the pleasures which one woman takes with others, if it was in order not to be deprived of them any longer that she had left me, she must, as soon as she was free, have sought to indulge in them and have succeeded, in a neighbourhood which she knew and to which she would not have chosen to withdraw had she not expected to find greater facilities there than with me. No doubt there was nothing extraordinary in the fact that Albertine's death had so little altered my preoccupations. When one's mistress is alive, a large proportion of the thoughts which form what one calls one's love comes to one during the hours when she is not by one's side. Thus one acquires the habit of having as the object of one's musings an absent person, and one who, even if she remains absent for a few hours only, during those hours is no more than a memory. Hence death does not make any great difference. When Aimé returned, I asked him to go down to Châtellerault, and thus by virtue not only of my thoughts, my sorrows, the emotion caused me by a name connected, however remotely, with a certain person, but also of all my actions, the inquiries that I undertook, the use that I made of my money, all of which was devoted to the discovery of Albertine's actions, I may say that throughout the whole of that year my life remained fully occupied with a love affair, a veritable liaison. And she who was its object was dead. It is often said that something may survive of a person after his death, if that person was an artist and put a little of himself into his work. It is perhaps in the same way that a sort of cutting taken from one person and grafted on to the heart of another continues to carry on its existence even when the person from whom it had been detached has perished.

Aimé took lodgings close to Mme Bontemps's villa; he made the acquaintance of a maidservant, and of a livery-stable keeper from whom Albertine had often hired a carriage by the day. These people had noticed nothing. In a second letter, Aimé informed me that he had learned from a young laundry-girl in the town that Albertine had a peculiar way of gripping her arm when she brought back the washing. "But," she said, "the young lady never did anything more." I sent Aimé the money to pay for his journey, to pay for the pain he had caused me by his letter, and meanwhile I was doing my best to heal it by telling myself that what he had described was a familiarity which gave no proof of any vicious desire, when I received a telegram from him: "Have learned most interesting things. Have heaps of news for Monsieur. Letter follows." On the following day came a letter the envelope of which was enough to make me tremble; I had recognised that it was from Aimé, for every person, even the humblest, has under his control those little familiar creatures, at once alive and reclining in a sort of torpor upon the paper: the characters of his handwriting which he alone possesses.

"At first the young laundry-girl refused to tell me anything, she assured me that Mlle Albertine had never done anything more than pinch her arm. But to get her to talk, I took her out to dinner and gave her plenty to drink. Then she told me that Mlle Albertine often used to meet her on the bank of the Loire, when she went to bathe, that Mlle Albertine, who was in the habit of getting up very early to go and bathe, was in the habit of meeting her by the water's edge, at a spot where the trees are so thick that nobody can see you, and besides there is nobody who can see you at that hour in the morning. Then the laundry-girl brought her girlfriends and they bathed and afterwards, as it is already very hot down there and the sun beats down on you even through the trees, they used to lie about on the grass drying themselves and playing and stroking and tickling one another. The young laundry-girl confessed to me that she enjoyed playing around with her girlfriends and that seeing that Mlle Albertine was always rubbing up against her in her bathing-wrap she made her take it off and used to caress her with her tongue along the throat and arms, even on the soles of her feet which Mlle Albertine held out to her. The laundry-girl undressed too, and they played at pushing each other into the water. After that she told me nothing more, but being always at your service and ready to do anything to oblige you, I took the young laundry-girl to bed with me. She asked me if I would like her to do to me what she used to do to Mlle Albertine when she took off her bathing-dress. And she said to me: (If you could have seen how she used to wriggle, that young lady, she said to me (oh, it's too heavenly) and she got so excited that she could not keep from biting me.) I could still see the marks on the laundry-girl's arms. And I can understand Mlle Albertine's pleasure, for that young wench is really a very good performer."

I had suffered indeed at Balbec when Albertine told me of her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil. But Albertine was there to console me. Then, when by my excessive curiosity as to her actions I had succeeded in making Albertine leave me, when Françoise informed me that she was no longer in the house and I found myself alone, I had suffered even more. But at least the Albertine whom I had loved remained in my heart. Now, in her place—to punish me for having pushed even further a curiosity to which, contrary to what I had supposed, death had not put an end—what I found was a different girl, heaping up lies and deceit there where the other had so sweetly reassured me by swearing that she had never tasted those pleasures, which in the intoxication of her recaptured liberty she had set out to enjoy to the point of fainting, to the point of biting that young laundress whom she used to meet at sunrise, on the bank of the Loire, and to whom she used to say "Oh, it's too heavenly." A different Albertine, not only in the sense in which we understand the word different when we apply it to other people. If people are different from what we have supposed, as this difference does not affect us deeply, and the pendulum of intuition cannot swing outward with a greater oscillation than that of its inward swing, it is only in superficial areas of their being that we situate these differences. Formerly, when I learned that a woman loved other women, she did not seem to me on that account to be a quintessentially different woman. But in the case of a woman one loves, in order to rid oneself of the pain one feels at the thought that such a thing is possible, one wants to know not only what she has done, but what she felt while she was doing it, what she thought of what she was doing; then, probing ever more deeply, through the intensity of one's pain one arrives at the mystery, the quintessence. I suffered to the very depths of my being, in my body and in my heart, far more than the pain of losing my life would have made me suffer, from this curiosity to which all the force of my intelligence and my unconscious contributed; and thus it was into the core of Albertine's own being that I now projected everything that I learned about her. And the pain that the revelation of her vice had thus driven into me to such a depth was to render me, much later, a final service. Like the harm that I had done my grandmother, the harm that Albertine had done me was a last bond between her and myself which outlived memory even, for with the conservation of energy which belongs to

everything that is physical, suffering has no need of the lessons of memory. Thus a man who has forgotten the glorious nights spent by moonlight in the woods, suffers still from the rheumatism which he then contracted.

Those tastes which she had denied but which were hers, those tastes the discovery of which had come to me not by a cold process of reasoning but in the burning anguish I had felt on reading the words "Oh, it's too heavenly," an anguish that gave them a qualitative distinction, those tastes were not merely added to the image of Albertine as the new shell which it drags after it is affixed to the hermit crab, but rather as a salt which, coming in contact with another salt, alters not only its colour but its nature. When the laundry-girl must have said to her friends, "Just fancy, I'd never have believed it, but the young lady is one too," to me it was not merely a vice hitherto unsuspected by them that they added to Albertine's person, but the discovery that she was another person, a person like themselves, speaking the same language, and this, by making her the compatriot of others, made her even more alien to myself, proved that what I had possessed of her, what I carried in my heart, was only quite a small part of her, and that the rest, which was made so extensive by not being merely that thing which is already mysteriously important enough, an individual desire, but being shared with others, she had always concealed from me, had kept me away from, as a woman might conceal from me that she was a native of an enemy country and a spy, and far more treacherously even than a spy, for the latter deceives us only as to her nationality, whereas Albertine had deceived me as to her profoundest humanity, the fact that she did not belong to ordinary humankind, but to an alien race which moves among it, hides itself among it and never merges with it. I had as it happened seen two paintings by Elstir showing naked women in a thickly wooded landscape. In one of them, a girl is raising her foot as Albertine must have raised hers when she offered it to the laundress. With her other foot she is pushing into the water another girl who gaily resists, her thigh raised, her foot barely dipping into the blue water. I remembered now that the raised thigh made the same swan's-neck curve with the angle of the knee as was made by the line of Albertine's thigh when she was lying by my side on the bed, and I had often meant to tell her that she reminded me of those paintings. But I had refrained from doing so, for fear of awakening in her mind the image of naked female bodies. Now I saw her, side by side with the laundry-girl and her friends, recomposing the group which I had so loved when I was sitting among Albertine's friends at Balbec. And if I had been an art-lover responsive to beauty alone, I should have recognised that Albertine recomposed it a thousand times more ravishingly, now that its elements were the nude statues of goddesses like those which the great sculptors scattered among the groves of Versailles or arrayed round the fountains to be washed and polished by the caresses of their waters. Now, beside the laundry-girl, I saw her, a girl at the water's edge, in their twofold nudity of marble statues in the midst of a grove of vegetation and dipping into the water like aquatic bas-reliefs. Remembering Albertine as she lay on my bed, I seemed to see the curve of her thigh, I saw it as a swan's neck, seeking the other girl's mouth. Then I no longer even saw a thigh, but simply the bold neck of a swan, like the one in a stirring sketch seeking the mouth of a Leda who is seen in all the specific palpitation of feminine pleasure, because there is no one else with her but a swan, and she seems more alone, just as one discovers on the telephone the inflexions of a voice which one fails to perceive so long as it is not dissociated from a face in which one objectivises its expression. In this sketch, the pleasure, instead of reaching out to the woman who inspires it and who is absent, replaced by an inert swan, is concentrated in her who feels it. At moments the contact between my heart and my memory was interrupted. What Albertine had done with the laundry-girl was indicated to me now only by quasi-algebraic abbreviations which no longer meant anything to me; but a hundred times an hour the interrupted current was restored, and my heart was pitilessly scorched by a fire from hell, while I saw Albertine, resurrected by my jealousy, really alive, stiffen beneath the caresses of the young laundry-girl to whom she was saying: "Oh, it's too heavenly."

As she was alive at the moment when she committed her misdeed, that is to say at the moment at which I myself found myself placed, it was not enough for me to know of the misdeed, I wanted her to know that I knew. Hence, if at those moments I thought with regret that I should never see her again, this regret bore the stamp of my jealousy, and, very different from the lacerating regret of the moments when I loved her, was only regret at not being able to say to her: "You thought I'd never know what you did after you left me. Well, I know everything—the laundry-girl on the bank of the Loire, and your saying to her 'Oh, it's too heavenly,' and I've seen the bite." Of course I said to myself: "Why torment yourself? She who took her pleasure with the laundry-girl no longer exists, and consequently was not a person whose actions retain any importance. She isn't telling herself that you know. But neither is she telling herself that you don't know, since she isn't telling herself anything." But this line of reasoning convinced me less than the visual image of her pleasure which brought me back to the moment in which she had experienced it. What we feel is the only thing that exists for us, and we project it into the past, or into the future, without letting ourselves be stopped by the fictitious barriers of death. If my regret that she was dead was subjected at such moments to the influence of my jealousy and assumed such a peculiar form, that influence naturally extended to my thoughts about occultism and immortality, which were no more than an effort to realise what I desired. Hence, at those moments, if I could have succeeded in evoking her by table-turning as Bergotte had at one time thought possible, or in meeting her in the other life as the abbé X thought, I would have wished to do so only in order to say to her: "I know about the laundry-girl. You said to her: 'Oh, it's too heavenly,' and I've seen the bite."

What came to my rescue against this image of the laundry-girl—certainly when it had lasted for some time—was that image itself, because we only truly know what is new, what suddenly introduces into our sensibility a change of tone which strikes us, what habit has not yet replaced with its colourless facsimiles. But it was above all that fragmentation of Albertine into many parts, into many Albertines, that was her sole mode of existence in me. Moments recurred in which she had simply been kind, or intelligent, or serious, or even

loving sport above all else. And was it not right, after all, that this fragmentation should soothe me? For if it was not in itself something real, if it arose from the continuously changing shape of the hours in which she had appeared to me, a shape which remained that of my memory as the curve of the projections of my magic lantern depended on the curve of the coloured slides, did it not in its own way represent a truly objective truth, this one, namely that none of us is single, that each of us contains many persons who do not all have the same moral value, and that if a vicious Albertine had existed, it did not mean that there had not been others, the Albertine who enjoyed talking to me about Saint-Simon in her room, the Albertine who on the night when I had told her that we must part had said so sadly: "This pianola, this room, to think that I shall never see any of these things again" and, when she saw the distress which I had finally communicated to myself by my lie, had exclaimed with sincere pity: "Oh, no, anything rather than make you unhappy, I promise that I shall never try to see you again." Then I was no longer alone; I felt the barrier that separated us vanish. As soon as this good Albertine had returned, I had found once more the only person who could provide me with the antidote to the sufferings which Albertine was causing me. True, I still wanted to speak to her about the story of the laundry-girl, but no longer in order to score a cruel triumph and to show her maliciously how much I knew. I asked her tenderly, as I should have asked her had she been alive, whether the story about the laundry-girl was true. She swore to me that it was not, that Aimé was not very truthful and that, wishing to appear to have earned the money I had given him, he had not liked to return empty-handed, and had made the girl tell him what he wished to hear. No doubt Albertine had never ceased to lie to me. And yet, in the ebb and flow of her contradictions, I felt that there had been a certain progression due to myself. That she had not, indeed, confided some of her secrets to me at the beginning (perhaps, it is true, involuntarily, in a remark that escaped her lips) I would not have sworn. I no longer remembered. And besides, she had such odd ways of naming certain things that they could be interpreted one way or the other. But the impression she had received of my jealousy had led her afterwards to retract with horror what at first she had complacently admitted. In any case, Albertine had no need to tell me this. To be convinced of her innocence it was enough for me to embrace her, and I could do so now that the barrier that separated us was down, that impalpable but hermetic barrier which rises between two lovers after a quarrel and against which kisses would be shattered. No, she had no need to tell me anything. Whatever she might have done, whatever she might have wished to do, the poor child, there were sentiments in which, over the barrier that divided us, we could be united. If the story was true, and if Albertine had concealed her tastes from me, it was in order not to make me unhappy. I had the comfort of hearing this Albertine say so. Besides, had I ever known any other? The two chief causes of error in one's relations with another person are, having oneself a kind heart, or else being in love with that other person. We fall in love for a smile, a look, a shoulder. That is enough; then, in the long hours of hope or sorrow, we fabricate a person, we compose a character. And when later on we see much of the beloved being, we can no more, whatever the cruel reality that confronts us, divest the woman with that look, that shoulder, of the sweet nature and loving character with which we have endowed her than we can, when she has grown old, eliminate her youthful face from a person whom we have known since her girlhood. I recalled the kind and compassionate look in the eyes of that Albertine, her plump cheeks, the grainy texture of her neck. It was the image of a dead woman, but, as this dead woman was alive, it was easy for me to do immediately what I should inevitably have done if she had been by my side in her living body (what I should do were I ever to meet her again in another life), I forgave her.

The moments which I had lived through with this Albertine were so precious to me that I did not want to let any of them escape me. And occasionally, as one recovers the remnants of a squandered fortune, I recaptured some of them which I had thought to be lost: for instance, tying a scarf behind my neck instead of in front, I remembered a drive which I had never thought of since, during which, in order that the cold air might not reach my throat, Albertine had arranged my scarf for me in this way after first kissing me. That simple drive, restored to my memory by so humble a gesture, gave me the same pleasure as the intimate objects belonging to a dead woman who was dear to us which are brought to us by her old servant and which we find so precious; my grief was enriched by it, all the more so as I had never given another thought to the scarf in question. As with the future, it is not all at once but grain by grain that one savours the past.

Moreover my grief assumed so many forms that at times I no longer recognised it; I wanted to experience a great love; I wanted to find a woman who would live with me; this seemed to me to be the sign that I no longer loved Albertine, whereas it meant that I loved her still. Now, freed, she had taken flight again; men, women followed her. But she lived in me. I realised that this need to experience a great love was, quite as much as the desire to kiss Albertine's plump cheeks, merely a part of my regret. And at heart I was happy not to fall in love with another woman; I realised that this continuing love for Albertine was like the ghost of the feeling I had had for her, reproducing its various stages and obeying the same laws as the sentimental reality which it reflected on the further side of death. For I was well aware that if I could extend the intervals between my thoughts of Albertine, I should have ceased to love her if the gap had been too wide; I should have become indifferent to her as I was now indifferent to my grandmother. Too much time spent without thinking of her would have broken, in my memory, the continuity which is the very principle of life, though it may recover and resume after a certain lapse of time. Had not this been the case with my love for Albertine when she was alive, a love which had been able to revive after a quite long interval during which I had not given her a thought? My memory must have been obedient to the same laws, must have been unable to endure longer intervals, for it simply went on reflecting, like an aurora borealis, after Albertine's death the feeling I had had for her; it was like the phantom of my love. It was when I had forgotten her that I might think it wiser and happier to live without love. Thus my regret for Albertine, because it was it that aroused in me the need

of a sister, made that need unassuageable. And as my regret for Albertine grew fainter, the need of a sister, which was only an unconscious form of that regret, would become less imperious. And yet these two residues of my love did not follow the same rate of progress in their gradual decline. There were hours when I was determined to marry, so completely had the former been eclipsed, while the latter on the contrary remained very strong. And on the other hand, later on, my jealous memories having died away, suddenly at times a feeling of tenderness for Albertine would well up in my heart, and then, thinking of my own love affairs with other women, I told myself that she would have understood, would have shared them—and her vice became almost a reason for loving her. At times my jealousy revived in moments when I no longer remembered Albertine, although it was of her that I was jealous. I thought that I was jealous of Andrée, apropos of whom I heard at that time of an amorous adventure she was having. But Andrée was to me merely a substitute, a by-road, a connecting link which brought me indirectly to Albertine. So it is that in dreams we give a different face, a different name to a person as to whose underlying identity we are not mistaken. When all was said, notwithstanding the continuing ebb and flow which upset in these particular instances the general law, the sentiments that Albertine had bequeathed to me were more difficult to extinguish than the memory of their original cause. Not only the sentiments, but the sensations. Different in this respect from Swann who, when he had begun to cease to love Odette, had not even been able to re-create in himself the sensation of his love, I felt myself still reliving a past which was now no more than the story of another person; my personality was now somehow split in two, and while the upper part was already hard and chilled, it still burned at its base whenever a spark made the old current pass through it, even after my mind had long ceased to conceive of Albertine. And as no image of her accompanied the painful palpitations that were substituted for it, and the tears that were brought to my eyes by a cold breeze blowing as at Balbec through apple-trees already pink with blossom, I came to wonder whether the renewal of my grief was not due to entirely pathological causes and whether what I took to be the revival of a memory and the final period of a lingering love was not rather the first stage of heart-disease.

There are in certain affections secondary symptoms which the sufferer is too apt to confuse with the malady itself. When they cease, he is surprised to find himself nearer to recovery than he had supposed. Of this sort had been the suffering caused me—the “complication” brought about—by Aimé’s letters with regard to the bathing establishment and the laundry-girls. But a spiritual healer, had such a person visited me, would have found that, in other respects, my grief itself was on the way to recovery. Doubtless, since I was a man, one of those amphibious creatures who are plunged simultaneously in the past and in the reality of the present, there still existed in me a contradiction between the living memory of Albertine and my consciousness of her death. But this contradiction was in a sense the converse of what it had been before. The idea that Albertine was dead, which at first used to contest so furiously with the idea that she was alive that I was obliged to run away from it as children run away from an oncoming wave, by the very force of its incessant onslaughts had ended by capturing the place in my mind that a short while before was still occupied by the idea of her life. Without my being precisely aware of it, it was now this idea of Albertine’s death—no longer the present memory of her life—that for the most part formed the basis of my unconscious musings, with the result that if I interrupted them suddenly to reflect upon myself, what surprised me was not, as during the first days, that Albertine, so alive in me, could be no longer existent upon the earth, could be dead, but that Albertine, who no longer existed upon the earth, who was dead, should have remained so alive in me. Built up and held together by the contiguity of the memories that followed one another, the black tunnel in which my thoughts had lain dreaming so long that they had even ceased to be aware of it was suddenly broken by an interval of sunlight, bathing in the distance a blue and smiling universe where Albertine was no more than a memory, insignificant and full of charm. Was it she, I wondered, who was the true Albertine, or was it the person who, in the darkness through which I had so long been travelling, seemed to me the sole reality? The person I had been so short a time ago, who lived only in the perpetual expectation of the moment when Albertine would come in to say good-night and kiss him, was now made to appear to me, by a sort of multiplication of myself, as no more than a faint fragment of me, already half stripped away, and, like a flower unfolding its petals, I felt the rejuvenating refreshment of an exfoliation. However, these brief illuminations succeeded perhaps only in making me more conscious of my love for Albertine, as happens with every idea that is too constant, needing opposition to make it affirm itself. People who were alive during the war of 1870, for instance, say that the idea of war ended by seeming to them natural, not because they did not think enough about the war, but because they thought of it all the time. And in order to understand how strange and momentous a fact war is, it was necessary that, something else wrenching them out of their permanent obsession, they should forget for a moment that a state of war prevailed and should find themselves once again as they had been in peacetime, until all of a sudden, against that momentary blank, there stood out clearly at last the monstrous reality which they had long ceased to see, since there had been nothing else visible.

If only this withdrawal of my different impressions of Albertine had at least been carried out not in echelon but simultaneously, evenly, frontally, along the whole line of my memory, the recollections of her infidelities receding at the same time as those of her sweetness, forgetting would have brought me solace. It was not so. As upon a beach where the tide recedes unevenly, I would be assailed by the onrush of one of my suspicions when the image of her tender presence had already withdrawn too far from me to be able to bring me its remedial balm.

The betrayals had made me suffer because, however remote the year in which they had occurred, to me they were not remote; but I suffered from them less when they became remote, that is to say when I pictured them to myself less vividly, for the remoteness of a thing is in proportion rather to the visual power of the memory

that is looking at it than to the real duration of the intervening days, as the memory of last night's dream may seem to us more distant in its imprecision and dimness than an event which is many years old. But, although the idea of Albertine's death made some headway in me, the reflux of the sensation that she was alive, if it did not arrest that progress, obstructed it nevertheless and prevented its being regular. And I realise now that during this period (doubtless because of my having forgotten the hours in which she had been cloistered in my house, hours which, by dispelling my anguish at misdeeds which seemed to me almost unimportant because I knew that she was not committing them, had become tantamount to so many proofs of her innocence), I underwent the martyrdom of living in the constant company of an idea quite as novel as the idea that Albertine was dead (until then I had always started from the idea that she was alive), with an idea which I should have supposed it to be equally impossible to endure and which, without my noticing it, was gradually forming the basis of my consciousness, substituting itself for the idea that Albertine was innocent: the idea that she was guilty. When I thought I was doubting her, I was on the contrary believing in her; similarly I took as the starting point of my other ideas the certainty—often proved false as the contrary idea had been—of her guilt, while continuing to imagine that I still felt doubts. I must have suffered a great deal during this period, but I realise that it had to be so. One is cured of suffering only by experiencing it to the full. By protecting Albertine from any contact with the outside world, by creating for myself the illusion that she was innocent, and also, later on, by adopting as the basis of my reasoning the thought that she was alive, I was merely postponing the hour of recovery, because I was postponing the long hours of necessary suffering that must precede it. Now with regard to these ideas of Albertine's guilt, habit, were it to come into play, would do so in accordance with the same laws as I had already experienced in the course of my life. Just as the name Guermantes had lost the significance and the charm of a road bordered with red and purple flowers and of the window of Gilbert the Bad, Albertine's presence that of the blue undulations of the sea, the names of Swann, of the lift-boy, of the Princesse de Guermantes and so many others, all that they had meant to me—that charm and that significance leaving me with a mere word which they considered big enough to stand on its own feet, as a man who comes to set a subordinate to work gives him his instructions and after a few weeks withdraws—similarly the painful knowledge of Albertine's guilt would be expelled from me by habit. Moreover between now and then, like an attack launched from both flanks at once, in this action undertaken by habit two allies would mutually lend a hand. It was because this idea of Albertine's guilt would become for me more probable, more habitual, that it would become less painful. But at the same time, because it would be less painful, the objections against my certainty of her guilt, which were inspired in my mind only by my desire not to suffer too acutely, would collapse one by one; and, one action precipitating another, I should pass quickly enough from the certainty of Albertine's innocence to the certainty of her guilt. I had to live with the idea of Albertine's death, with the idea of her misdeeds, in order for these ideas to become habitual, that is to say in order to be able to forget these ideas and in the end forget Albertine herself.

I had not yet reached this stage. At one time it was my memory, made clearer by some intellectual excitement—such as reading a book—which revived my grief; at other times it was on the contrary my grief—when it was aroused, for instance, by the anguish of a spell of stormy weather—which raised higher, brought nearer to the light, some memory of our love. Moreover these revivals of my love for Albertine might occur after an interval of indifference interspersed with other curiosities, as, after the long interval which had begun with her refusal to let me kiss her at Balbec and during which I had thought far more about Mme de Guermantes, about Andrée, about Mlle de Stermaria, it had revived when I had started seeing her regularly again. But even now various preoccupations could bring about a separation—from a dead woman, this time—in which she left me more indifferent. All this for the same reason, that she was a living person for me. And even later on, when I loved her less, it remained nevertheless for me one of those desires of which we quickly tire, but which revive when we have allowed them to lie dormant for a while. I pursued one living woman, then another, then I returned to my dead one. Often it was in the most obscure recesses of myself, when I could no longer form any clear idea of Albertine, that a name would come by chance to stimulate painful reactions which I supposed to be no longer possible, like those dying people whose brain is no longer capable of thought and who are made to contract their muscles by the prick of a needle. And, during long periods, these stimulations occurred to me so rarely that I was driven to seek for myself occasions for grief, for a pang of jealousy, in an attempt to re-establish contact with the past, to remember her better. For, since regret for a woman is only a recrudescence of love and remains subject to the same laws, the keenness of my regret was intensified by the same causes which in Albertine's lifetime had increased my love for her and in the front rank of which had always appeared jealousy and grief. But as a rule these occasions—for an illness or a war can always last far longer than the most prophetic wisdom has calculated—took me unawares and caused me such violent shocks that I thought far more of protecting myself against suffering than of appealing to them for a memory.

Moreover a word did not even need to be connected, like "Chaumont," with some suspicion (even a syllable common to two different names was sufficient for my memory—as for an electrician who is happy with any substance that is a good conductor—to restore the contact between Albertine and my heart) in order to reawaken that suspicion, to be the password, the "Open sesame" unlocking the door of a past which one had ceased to take into account because, having seen more than enough of it, literally one no longer possessed it; one had been shorn of it, had supposed that by this subtraction one's own personality had changed its form, like a geometrical figure which by the removal of an angle would lose one of its sides; certain phrases, for instance, in which there occurred the name of a street or a road where Albertine might have been, were

sufficient to incarnate a potential, non-existent jealousy, in quest of a body, a dwelling, some physical location, some particular realisation.

Often it was simply during my sleep that these "reprises," these "da capos" of one's dreams, which turn back several pages of one's memory, several leaves of the calendar at once, brought me back, made me regress to a painful but remote impression which had long since given place to others but which now became present once more. As a rule, it was accompanied by a whole stage-setting, clumsy but striking, which, giving me the illusion of reality, brought before my eyes, voiced in my ears, what thenceforward dated from that night. Besides, in the history of a love-affair and of its struggles against forgetfulness, do not our dreams occupy an even larger place than our waking state, since they take no account of the infinitesimal divisions of time, suppress transitions, oppose sharp contrasts, undo in an instant the web of consolation so slowly woven during the day, and contrive for us, by night, a meeting with her whom we would eventually have forgotten, provided always that we did not see her again? For whatever people may say, we can perfectly well have in a dream the impression that what is happening in it is real. It would be impossible only for reasons drawn from our waking experience, an experience which at that moment is hidden from us. With the result that this supposititious life seems to us real. Sometimes, by a defect in the internal lighting which spoiled the success of the play, my well-staged memories giving me the illusion of life, I really believed that I had arranged to meet Albertine, that I was seeing her again, but then I found myself incapable of advancing to meet her, of uttering the words which I meant to say to her, of relighting in order to see her the torch that had gone out—impossibilities which were simply in my dream the immobility, the dumbness, the blindness of the sleeper—as suddenly one sees a huge shadow which ought not to be visible obliterate the figures on the screen of a magic lantern, a shadow which is that of the lantern itself, or that of the operator. At other times Albertine was present in my dream, and proposed to leave me once again, without my being moved by her resolve. This was because a warning ray of light had managed to filter into the darkness of my sleep, and what deprived Albertine's future actions, her threatened departure, of any importance for me was the knowledge that she was dead. But often, even more clearly, this memory that Albertine was dead was combined, without destroying it, with the sensation that she was alive. I chatted to her, and while I was speaking my grandmother moved to and fro at the back of the room. Part of her chin had crumbled away like a corroded statue, but I found nothing unusual in that. I told Albertine that I had various questions to ask her with regard to the bathing establishment at Balbec, and to a certain laundress in Touraine, but I would put them off till later since we had plenty of time and there was no longer any urgency. She assured me that she was not doing anything wrong and that she had merely, the day before, kissed Mlle Vinteuil on the lips. "What? Is she here?" "Yes, in fact it's time for me to leave you, as I have to go and see her presently." And since, now that Albertine was dead, I no longer kept her a prisoner in my house as in the last months of her life, her visit to Mlle Vinteuil perturbed me. I did not want to show it; Albertine told me that she had done no more than kiss her, but she was evidently beginning to lie again as in the days when she used to deny everything. Presently, no doubt, she would not be content merely with kissing Mlle Vinteuil. Doubtless from a certain point of view I was wrong to let myself be disturbed like this, since, according to what we are told, the dead can feel nothing, can do nothing. People say so, but this did not alter the fact that my grandmother, who was dead, had continued nevertheless to live for many years, and at that moment was walking to and fro in my room. And no doubt, once I was awake, this idea of a dead woman who continued to live ought to have become as impossible for me to understand as it is to explain. But I had already formed it so many times in the course of those transient periods of madness which are our dreams, that I had become in time familiar with it; our memory of dreams may become lasting, if they repeat themselves often enough. And long after my dream had ended, I remained tormented by that kiss which Albertine had told me she had given in words which I thought I could still hear. And indeed they must have passed very close to my ear since it was I myself who had uttered them. All day long, I continued to talk to Albertine; I questioned her, I forgave her, I made up for my forgetfulness of the things which I had always meant to say to her during her life. And all of a sudden I was startled by the thought that the creature invoked by memory to whom all these remarks were addressed no longer bore any relation to reality, that death had destroyed the various parts of the face to which the continual thrust of the will to live, now abolished, had alone given the unity of a person.

At other times, without my having dreamed, as soon as I awoke I felt that the wind had changed in me; it was blowing coldly and steadily from another direction, issuing from the remotest past, bringing back to me the sound of a clock striking far-off hours, of the whistle of departing trains which I did not ordinarily hear. One day I tried to interest myself in a book. I reopened a novel by Bergotte of which I had been especially fond. Its congenial characters appealed to me greatly, and very soon, reconquered by the charm of the book, I began to hope, as for a personal pleasure, that the wicked woman might be punished, while my eyes grew moist when the happiness of the young lovers was assured. "But then," I exclaimed in despair, "I cannot conclude, from the fact that I attach so much importance to what Albertine may have done, that her personality is something real which cannot be destroyed, that I shall find her one day in her own likeness in heaven, if I invoke with so many entreaties, await with such impatience, welcome with tears the success of a person who has never existed except in Bergotte's imagination, whom I have never seen, whose appearance I am at liberty to imagine as I please!" Besides, in this novel, there were seductive girls, amorous correspondences, deserted paths in which lovers meet, and all this, reminding me that one may love clandestinely, revived my jealousy, as though Albertine had still been able to stroll along deserted paths. And the novel also pictured a man who after fifty years meets a woman whom he loved in her youth, fails to recognise her, is bored in her company. And this reminded me that love does not last for ever and distressed

me as though I were destined to be parted from Albertine and to meet her again with indifference in my old age. If I caught sight of a map of France, my fearful eyes took care not to fall upon Touraine so that I might not be jealous, nor, so that I might not be miserable, upon Normandy, where would certainly be indicated at least Balbec and Doncières, between which I could situate all those places we had traversed so many times together. In the midst of other names of towns or villages of France, names which were merely visible or audible, the name of Tours, for instance, seemed to be differently composed, to be made up, not of intangible images, but of venomous substances which acted instantaneously on my heart, making it beat faster and more painfully. And if this force extended to certain names, making them so different from the rest, how, when I stayed closer to myself, when I confined myself to Albertine herself, could I be astonished that this force which I found irresistible, and to produce which any other woman might have served, had been the result of an entanglement, of a bringing into contact of dreams, desires, habits, affections, with the requisite conjunction of alternating pains and pleasures? And this continued her life in death, memory being sufficient to sustain the reality of life, which is mental. I recalled Albertine alighting from a railway carriage and telling me that she wanted to go to Saint-Mars-le-Vetu, and I saw her again before that, with her "polo" pulled down over her cheeks; I thought of new possibilities of happiness, towards which I sprang, saying to myself: "We might have gone on together to Infreville, to Doncières." There was no watering-place in the neighbourhood of Balbec in which I did not see her, with the result that that country, like a mythological land which had been preserved, restored to me, living and cruel, the most ancient, the most charming legends, those that had been most obliterated by the sequel of my love. Ah, what anguish were I ever to have to sleep again in that bed at Balbec around whose brass frame, as around an immovable pivot, a fixed bar, my life had moved and evolved, bringing successively into its compass gay conversations with my grandmother, the nightmare of her death, Albertine's soothing caresses, the discovery of her vice, and now a new life into which, looking at the glazed bookcases in which the sea was reflected, I knew that Albertine would never come again! Was it not, that Balbec hotel, like the single set of a provincial theatre, in which for years past the most diverse plays have been performed, which has served for a comedy, for first one tragedy, then another, for a purely poetical drama, that hotel which already stretched quite far back into my past? The fact that this part alone, with its walls, its bookcases, its mirror, remained invariably the same throughout new epochs of my life, made me better aware that all in all it was the rest, it was myself, that had changed, and thus gave me that impression that the mysteries of life, of love, of death—which in their optimism children believe they have no share in—are not set apart, but one perceives with sorrowful pride that they have formed an integral part of one's own life through the course of the years.

I tried at times to take an interest in the newspapers. But I found the act of reading them repellent, and moreover by no means innocuous. The fact is that from each of our ideas, as from a crossroads in a forest, so many paths branch off in different directions that at the moment when I least expected it I found myself faced by a fresh memory. The title of Fauré's melody *Le Secret* had led me to the Duc de Broglie's *Secret du Roi*, the name Broglie to that of Chaumont,<sup>26</sup> or else the words "Good Friday" had made me think of Golgotha, Golgotha of the etymology of the word which is, it seems, the equivalent of *Calvus Mons*, Chaumont. But, whatever the path by which I had arrived at Chaumont, at that moment I received so violent a shock that I was far more concerned to ward off pain than to probe for memories. Some moments after the shock, my intelligence, which like the sound of thunder travels less rapidly, produced the reason for it. Chaumont had made me think of the Buttes-Chaumont, where Mme Bontemps had told me that Andrée used often to go with Albertine, whereas Albertine had told me that she had never seen the Buttes-Chaumont. After a certain age our memories are so intertwined with one another that what we are thinking of, the book we are reading, scarcely matters any more. We have put something of ourselves everywhere, everything is fertile, everything is dangerous, and we can make discoveries no less precious than in Pascal's *Pensées* in an advertisement for soap.

No doubt a fact such as the one about the Buttes-Chaumont, which at the time had appeared to me trifling, was in itself far less serious, far less decisive evidence against Albertine than the story of the bath-attendant or the laundry-girl. But in the first place, a memory which comes to us fortuitously finds in us an intact capacity for imagining, that is to say in this case for suffering, which we would have partly used up had it been, on the contrary, we who had deliberately applied our mind to recreating a memory. And then to these latter memories (those that concerned the bath-attendant and the laundry-girl), ever present albeit obscured in my consciousness, like the furniture placed in the semi-darkness of a gallery which, without being able to see, one avoids knocking into, I had grown accustomed. Whereas it was a long time since I had given a thought to the Buttes-Chaumont, or, to take another instance, to Albertine's scrutiny of the mirror in the casino at Balbec, or to her unexplained delay on the evening when I had waited so long for her after the Guermentes party, or any of those parts of her life which remained outside my heart and which I would have liked to know in order that they might become assimilated, annexed to it, merged with the sweeter memories formed therein by an interior Albertine, an Albertine genuinely possessed. Lifting a corner of the heavy curtain of habit (stupefying habit, which during the whole course of our life conceals from us almost the whole universe, and in the dead of night, without changing the label, substitutes for the most dangerous or intoxicating poisons of life something anodyne that procures no delights), such memories would come back to me as at the time itself with that fresh and piercing novelty of a recurring season, of a change in the routine of our hours, which, in the realm of pleasures also, if we get into a carriage on the first fine day in spring, or leave the house at sunrise, makes us observe our own most trivial actions with a lucid exaltation which makes that intense minute worth more than the sum-total of the preceding days. Days in the past cover up little by little those that preceded them and are themselves buried beneath those that follow them. But each past day has remained

deposited in us, as in a vast library where, even of the oldest books, there is a copy which doubtless nobody will ever ask to see. And yet should this day from the past, traversing the translucency of the intervening epochs, rise to the surface and spread itself inside us until it covers us entirely, then for a moment names resume their former meaning, people their former aspect, we ourselves our state of mind at the time, and we feel, with a vague suffering which however is endurable and will not last for long, the problems which have long ago become insoluble and which caused us such anguish at the time. Our ego is composed of the superimposition of our successive states. But this superimposition is not unalterable like the stratification of a mountain. Incessant upheavals raise to the surface ancient deposits. I found myself once more after the party at the Princesse de Guermantes's, awaiting Albertine's arrival. What had she been doing that evening? Had she been unfaithful to me? With whom? Aimé's revelations, even if I accepted them, in no way diminished for me the anxious, despairing interest of this unexpected question, as though each different Albertine, each new memory, set a special problem of jealousy, to which the solutions of the other problems could not apply.

But I would have liked to know not only with what woman she had spent that evening, but what special pleasure it represented to her, what was happening inside her at that moment. Sometimes, at Balbec, Françoise had gone to fetch her, and had told me that she had found her leaning out of her window with an anxious, questing air, as though she were expecting somebody. Supposing I learned that the girl she was awaiting was Andrée—what was the state of mind in which Albertine awaited her, that state of mind concealed behind the anxious, questing gaze? How important were those tastes to Albertine? How large a place did they occupy in her thoughts? Alas, remembering my own agitation whenever I had caught sight of a girl who attracted me, sometimes when I had merely heard her spoken of without having seen her, my anxiety to look my best, to show myself to advantage, my cold sweats, I had only, in order to torture myself, to imagine the same voluptuous excitement in Albertine, as though by means of the apparatus which, after the visit of a certain practitioner who had shown some scepticism about her malady, my aunt Leonie had wished to see invented, and which would enable the doctor to undergo all the sufferings of his patient in order to understand better. And already it was enough to torture me, to tell me that, compared with this other thing, serious conversations with me about Stendhal and Victor Hugo must have counted for very little with her, to feel her heart being drawn towards other people, detaching itself from mine, implanting itself elsewhere. But even the importance which this desire must have for her and the reserve with which she surrounded it could not reveal to me what it was qualitatively, still less how she referred to it when she spoke of it to herself. In physical suffering, at least we do not have to choose our pain ourselves. The malady determines it and imposes it on us. But in jealousy we have, so to speak, to try out sufferings of every shape and size, before we arrive at the one which seems to fit. And how much more difficult this is in the case of a suffering such as that of feeling that she whom we loved is finding pleasure with beings who are different from us, who give her sensations which we are not capable of giving her, or who at least by their configuration, their aspect, their ways, represent to her something quite different from us! Ah, if only Albertine had fallen in love with Saint-Loup, how much less, it seemed to me, I should have suffered!

It is true that we are unaware of the particular sensibility of each of our fellow-creatures, but as a rule we do not even know that we are unaware of it, for this sensibility of other people is a matter of indifference to us. So far as Albertine was concerned, my misery or happiness would have depended upon the nature of this sensibility; I was well aware that it was unknown to me, and the fact that it was unknown to me was painful in itself. Once, I had the illusion of seeing these unknown desires and pleasures of Albertine's, another time, of hearing them. Of seeing them when, some time after her death, Andrée came to see me.

For the first time she seemed to me beautiful. I said to myself that her almost frizzy hair, her dark, shadowed eyes, were doubtless what Albertine had loved so much, the materialisation before my eyes of what she pictured in her amorous day-dreams, what she saw with the expectant eyes of desire on the day when she had so suddenly decided to leave Balbec. Like a strange, dark flower brought back to me from beyond the grave, from the innermost being of a person in whom I had been unable to discover it, I seemed to see before me, the unlooked-for exhumation of a priceless relic, the incarnate desire of Albertine which Andrée was to me, as Venus was the desire of Jove. Andrée regretted Albertine's death, but I sensed at once that she did not miss her. Forcibly removed from her friend by death, she seemed to have easily reconciled herself to a final separation which I would not have dared to ask of her while Albertine was alive, so afraid would I have been of failing to obtain her consent. She seemed on the contrary to accept this renunciation without difficulty, but precisely at the moment when it could no longer be of any advantage to me. Andrée abandoned Albertine to me, but dead, and having lost for me not only her life but retrospectively a little of her reality, now that I saw that she was not indispensable and unique to Andrée who had been able to replace her with others.

While Albertine was alive, I would not have dared to ask Andrée to confide in me about the nature of their friendship both mutually and with Mlle Vinteuil's friend, being uncertain, towards the end, whether Andrée did not repeat to Albertine everything I said to her. But now such an inquiry, even if it were to prove fruitless, would at least be unattended by danger. I spoke to Andrée, not in a questioning tone but as though I had known all the time, perhaps from Albertine, of the fondness that she herself, Andrée, had for women and of her own relations with Mlle Vinteuil. She admitted it all without the slightest reluctance, smiling as she spoke. I could not help drawing the most painful conclusions from this avowal; first of all because Andrée, so affectionate and coquettish with many of the young men at Balbec, would never have been suspected by anyone of practices which she made no attempt to deny, so that by analogy, when I discovered this new Andrée, I felt that Albertine would have confessed them with the same ease to anyone other than myself, whom she felt to be jealous. But at the same time, Andrée having been Albertine's best friend, and the friend



for whose sake she had probably returned in haste from Balbec, and Andrée having admitted to these tastes, the conclusion that was forced upon my mind was that Albertine and Andrée had always indulged them together. Of course, just as, in the presence of a stranger, we do not always dare to examine the gift he has brought us, the wrapper of which we shall not unfasten until the donor has gone, so long as Andrée was with me I did not retire into myself to examine the pain she had brought me. Although I could feel that it was already causing my bodily servants, my nerves, my heart, the greatest turmoil, out of good manners I pretended not to notice, chatting away on the contrary with the utmost affability to the girl who was my guest without diverting my gaze to these internal incidents. It was especially painful to me to hear Andrée say of Albertine: "Oh, yes, she always loved going to the Chevreuse valley." To the vague and non-existent universe in which Albertine's excursions with Andrée occurred, it seemed to me that the latter, by a subsequent and diabolical act of creation, had just added to God's work an accursed valley. I felt that Andrée was going to tell me everything that she had been in the habit of doing with Albertine, and, as I went on trying, from politeness, from canniness, from pride, perhaps from gratitude, to appear more and more affectionate, while the space that I had still been able to concede to Albertine's innocence became smaller and smaller, it seemed to me that, despite my efforts, I presented the paralysed aspect of an animal round which a bird of prey is wheeling in steadily narrowing circles, unhurriedly because it is confident of being able to swoop on its helpless victim whenever it chooses. I gazed at her nevertheless, and, with such liveliness, naturalness and assurance as a person can muster who is trying to make it appear that he is not afraid of being hypnotised by someone's stare, I said casually to Andrée: "I've never mentioned the subject to you for fear of offending you, but now that we both find pleasure in talking about her, I may as well tell you that I found out long ago all about the things of that sort that you used to do with Albertine. And I can tell you something that you will be glad to hear although you know it already: Albertine adored you."

I told Andrée that it would be of great interest to me if she would allow me to see her (even if she simply confined herself to caresses which would not embarrass her unduly in my presence) performing such actions with those of Albertine's friends who shared her tastes, and I mentioned Rosemonde, Berthe, each of Albertine's friends, in the hope of finding out something.

"Apart from the fact that not for anything in the world would I do the things you mention in your presence," Andrée replied, "I don't believe that any of the girls whom you've named have those tastes."

Drawing closer in spite of myself to the monster that was mesmerising me, I answered: "What! You don't expect me to believe that of all your group Albertine was the only one with whom you did that sort of thing!"

"But I never did anything of the sort with Albertine."

"Come now, my dear Andrée, why deny things which I've known for at least three years? I see nothing wrong in them, far from it. For instance, that evening when she was so anxious to go with you the next day to Mme Verdurin's, you may remember perhaps ..."

Before I had completed my sentence, I saw in Andrée's eyes, which it sharpened to a pinpoint like those stones which for that reason jewellers find it difficult to use, a fleeting, worried look, like the look on the face of a person privileged to go behind the scenes who draws back the edge of the curtain before the play has begun and at once withdraws in order not to be seen. This anxious look vanished and everything was back in place, but I sensed that whatever I saw from now on would have been artificially arranged for my benefit. At that moment I caught sight of myself in the mirror, and was struck by a certain resemblance between myself and Andrée. If I had not long since ceased to shave my upper lip and had had only a faint shadow of a moustache, this resemblance would have been almost complete. It was perhaps on seeing my moustache at Balbec when it had scarcely begun to grow again that Albertine had suddenly felt that impatient, furious desire to return to Paris.

"But I still can't say things that aren't true simply because you see no harm in them. I swear to you that I never did anything with Albertine, and I'm convinced that she detested that sort of thing. The people who told you that were lying to you, probably with some ulterior motive," she said with a questioning, defiant air.

"Oh, very well then, since you won't tell me," I replied, pretending to appear to be unwilling to furnish a proof which in fact I did not possess. However, I mentioned vaguely and at random the Buttes-Chaumont.

"I may have gone to the Buttes-Chaumont with Albertine, but is it a place that has a particularly evil reputation?"

I asked her whether she could not raise the subject with Gisele who had at one time been on intimate terms with Albertine. But Andrée told me that because of a vile thing that Gisele had done to her recently, asking a favour of her was the one thing that she must absolutely decline to do for me. "If you see her," she went on, "don't tell her what I've said to you about her; there's no point in making an enemy of her. She knows what I think of her, but I've always preferred to avoid having violent quarrels with her which only have to be patched up afterwards. And besides, she's dangerous. But you must understand that when one has read the letter which I had in my hands a week ago, and in which she lied with such absolute treachery, nothing, not even the noblest actions in the world, can wipe out the memory of such a thing."

On the whole I felt that if, in spite of the fact that Andrée had those tastes to the extent of making no pretence of concealing them, and the fact that Albertine had felt for her the great affection which she undoubtedly had felt, Andrée had none the less never had any carnal relations with Albertine and had never been aware that Albertine had those tastes, this meant that Albertine did not have them, and had never enjoyed with anyone those relations which, rather than with anyone else, she would have enjoyed with Andrée. And so when Andrée had left me, I realised that her categorical assertion had brought me some peace of mind. But perhaps it had been dictated by a sense of the obligation, which Andrée felt that she owed to the

dead girl whose memory still survived in her, not to let me believe what Albertine, while she was alive, had doubtless begged her to deny.

Having thought for a moment, contemplating Andrée, that I could actually see these pleasures of Albertine's which I had so often tried to imagine, on another occasion I received an intimation of them otherwise than through the eyes: I thought I heard them. I had had two young laundry-girls, from a district where Albertine had often gone, brought to a house of assignation. One of them, beneath the caresses of the other, suddenly began to utter sounds which at first I found difficult to identify; for one never understands precisely the meaning of an original sound expressive of a sensation which one does not experience oneself. Hearing it from a neighbouring room without being able to see, one may mistake for uncontrollable laughter the noise which is forced by pain from a patient being operated on without an anaesthetic; and as for the noise emitted by a mother who has just been told that her child has died, it can seem to us, if we are unaware of its origin, as difficult to translate into human terms as the noise emitted by an animal or by a harp. It takes us a little time to realise that those two noises express what, by analogy with the (very different) sensations we ourselves may have felt, we call pain; and it took me some time, too, to understand that *this* noise expressed what, by analogy with the (very different) sensations I myself had felt, I called pleasure; and the pleasure must have been very great to overwhelm to this extent the person who was expressing it and to extract from her this strange utterance which seemed to describe and comment on all the phases of the exquisite drama which the young woman was living through and which was concealed from my eyes by the curtain that is for ever lowered for other people over what happens in the mysterious intimacy of every human creature. In any case these two girls could tell me nothing, as they had no idea who Albertine was.

Novelists sometimes pretend in an introduction that while travelling in a foreign country they have met somebody who has told them the story of another person's life. They then withdraw in favour of this chance acquaintance, and the story that he tells them is nothing more or less than their novel. Thus the life of Fabrice del Dongo was related to Stendhal by a canon of Padua. How gladly would we, when we are in love, that is to say when another person's existence seems to us mysterious, find some such well-informed narrator! And undoubtedly he exists. Do we not ourselves frequently relate the story of some woman or other quite dispassionately to one of our friends, or to a stranger, who has known nothing of her love-affairs and listens to us with keen interest? Such a person as I was when I spoke to Bloch about the Princesse de Guermantes or Mme Swann, such a person existed, who could have spoken to me of Albertine, such a person exists always ... but we never come across him. It seemed to me that if I had been able to find women who had known her I should have learned everything I did not yet know. And yet to strangers it must have seemed that nobody could have known as much about her life as I did. Indeed, did I not know her dearest friend, Andrée? Thus one imagines that the friend of a minister must know the truth about some political affair or cannot be implicated in a scandal. From his own experience the friend has found that whenever he discussed politics with the minister the latter confined himself to generalisations and told him nothing more than what had already appeared in the newspapers, or that if he was in any trouble, his repeated attempts to secure the minister's help have invariably been met with an "It's not in my power" against which the friend is himself powerless. I said to myself: "If I could have known such and such witnesses!"—from whom, if I had known them, I should probably have been unable to extract anything more than from Andrée, herself the custodian of a secret which she refused to surrender. Differing in this respect also from Swann who, when he was no longer jealous, ceased to feel any curiosity as to what Odette might have done with Forcheville, I found that, even after my jealousy had subsided, the thought of making the acquaintance of Albertine's laundry-girl, of people in her neighbourhood, of reconstructing her life in it, her intrigues, alone had any charm for me. And as desire always springs from an initial glamour, as had happened to me in the past with Gilberte and with the Duchesse de Guermantes, it was the women of Albertine's background, in the districts in which she had formerly lived, that I sought to know, and whose presence alone I could have desired. Whether or not I could learn anything from them, the only women towards whom I felt attracted were those whom Albertine had known or whom she might have known, women of her own background or of the sort with whom she liked to associate, in a word those women who had in my eyes the distinction of resembling her or of being of the type that might have appealed to her. Recalling thus either Albertine herself or the type for which she doubtless had a predilection, these women aroused in me a painful feeling of jealousy or regret, which later, when my grief subsided, changed into a curiosity that was not devoid of charm. And among these last, especially girls of the working class, because of that life, so different from the life that I knew, which is theirs. No doubt it is only in one's mind that one possesses things, and one does not possess a picture because it hangs in one's dining-room if one is incapable of understanding it, or a landscape because one lives in it without even looking at it. But still, I had had in the past the illusion of recapturing Balbec, when in Paris Albertine came to see me and I held her in my arms, and similarly I established some contact, restricted and furtive though it might be, with Albertine's life, the atmosphere of workrooms, a conversation across a counter, the spirit of the slums, when I embraced a seamstress. Andrée, and these other women, all of them in relation to Albertine—like Albertine herself in relation to Balbec—were to be numbered among those substitute pleasures, replacing one another in a gradual declension, which enable us to dispense with the pleasure to which we can no longer attain, a trip to Balbec or the love of Albertine, pleasures which (just as going to the Louvre to look at a Titian consoles us for not being able to go to Venice where it originally was), separated one from another by indistinguishable gradations, convert one's life into a series of concentric, contiguous, harmonic and graduated zones, encircling an initial desire which has set the tone, eliminated everything that does not combine with it, applied the dominant colour (as had, for instance, occurred to me

also in the cases of the Duchesse de Guermantes and of Gilberte). Andrée and these women were to the desire, which I knew I could no longer gratify, to have Albertine by my side, what had been, one evening, before I knew Albertine except by sight and felt that she could never be mine, the writhing, sun-drenched freshness of a cluster of grapes.

Associated now with the memory of my love, Albertine's physical and social attributes, in spite of which I had loved her, oriented my desire on the contrary towards what at one time it would least readily have chosen: dark-haired girls of the lower middle class. Indeed what was beginning partially to revive in me was that immense desire which my love for Albertine had been unable to assuage, that immense desire to know life which I used to feel on the roads round Balbec, in the streets of Paris, that desire which had caused me so much suffering when, supposing it to exist in Albertine's heart also, I had sought to deprive her of the means of satisfying it with anyone but myself. Now that I was able to endure the idea of her desire, since that idea was at once aroused by my own desire, these two immense appetites coincided; I would have liked us to be able to indulge them together, saying to myself: "That girl would have appealed to her," and led by this sudden detour to think of her and of her death, I felt too unhappy to be able to pursue my own desire any further. As, long ago, the Méséglise and Guermantes ways had laid the foundations of my taste for the countryside and prevented me thereafter from finding any real charm in a place where there was no old church, where there were no cornflowers or buttercups, so it was by linking them in my mind to a past full of charm that my love for Albertine made me seek out exclusively a certain type of woman; I was beginning once more, as before I loved her, to feel the need for overtones from her which would be interchangeable with a memory that had become gradually less exclusive. I could not have found pleasure now in the company of a golden-haired and haughty duchess, because she would not have aroused in me any of the emotions that sprang from Albertine, from my desire for her, from my jealousy of her love-affairs, from my grief at her death. For our sensations, in order to be strong, need to release inside us something different from themselves, a sentiment which cannot find its satisfaction in pleasure, but which adds itself to desire, swells it, makes it cling desperately to pleasure. Gradually, as the love that Albertine may have felt for certain women ceased to cause me pain, it attached those women to my past, made them somehow more real, as the memory of Combray gave to buttercups and hawthorn blossom a greater reality than to unfamiliar flowers. Even of Andrée, I no longer said to myself with rage in my heart: "Albertine loved her," but on the contrary, in order to explain my desire to myself, in an affectionate tone: "Albertine was fond of her." I could now understand the widowers whom we suppose to have found consolation and who prove on the contrary that they are inconsolable because they marry their deceased wife's sister.

Thus my waning love seemed to make new loves possible for me, and Albertine, like those women long loved for themselves who later, feeling their lover's desire fade, preserve their power by contenting themselves with the role of procuresses, provided me, as the Pompadour provided Louis XV, with fresh damsels. In the past, my time had been divided into periods in which I desired this woman or that. When the violent pleasures afforded by one had subsided, I longed for the other who would give me an almost pure affection until the need of more sophisticated caresses brought back my desire for the first. Now these alternations had come to an end, or at least one of the periods was being indefinitely prolonged. What I would have liked was that the newcomer should take up her abode in my house, and should give me at night, before leaving me, a familial, sisterly kiss. So that I might have been able to believe—had I not had experience of the intolerable presence of another person—that I regretted a kiss more than a certain pair of lips, a pleasure more than a love, a habit more than a person. I would have liked also that the newcomer should be able to play Vinteuil's music to me like Albertine, to talk to me as she had talked about Elstir. All this was impossible. Her love would not match up to Albertine's, I thought; either because a love which embraced all those episodes, visits to picture galleries, evenings at concerts, a whole complicated existence which allows correspondence, conversations, a flirtation preliminary to the more intimate relations, a serious friendship afterwards, possesses more resources than love for a woman who can only offer herself, as an orchestra possesses more resources than a piano; or because, more profoundly, my need of the same sort of tenderness as Albertine used to give me, the tenderness of a girl of a certain culture who would at the same time be a sister to me, was—like my need for women of the same background as Albertine—merely a recrudescence of my memory of Albertine, of my memory of my love for her. And once again I discovered, first of all that memory has no power of invention, that it is powerless to desire anything else, let alone anything better, than what we have already possessed; secondly that it is spiritual, in the sense that reality cannot provide it with the state which it seeks; and lastly that, stemming from a dead person, the resurrection that it incarnates is not so much that of the need to love, in which it makes us believe, as that of the need for the absent person. So that even the resemblance to Albertine of the woman I had chosen, the resemblance of her tenderness, if I succeeded in winning it, to Albertine's, only made me the more conscious of the absence of what I had been unconsciously seeking, of what was indispensable to the revival of my happiness, that is to say, Albertine herself, the time we had lived together, the past in the search for which I was unwittingly engaged.

Certainly, on fine days, Paris seemed to me innumerable aflower with all the girls, not whom I desired, but who thrust down their roots into the obscurity of the desire and the unknown nocturnal life of Albertine. It was of one such that she had said to me at the outset, when she had not yet begun to be wary of me: "She's ravishing, that girl. What pretty hair she has!" All that I had wanted to know about her life in the past when I knew her only by sight, and at the same time all my desires in life, merged into this one sole curiosity, to know in what manner Albertine experienced pleasure, to see her with other women, perhaps because thus, when they had left her, I should have remained alone with her, the last and the master. And seeing her

hesitations as to whether it would be worth her while to spend the evening with this or that girl, her satiety when the other had gone, perhaps her disappointment, I should have elucidated, I should have restored to its true proportions, the jealousy that Albertine inspired in me, because seeing her thus experience them I should have taken the measure and discovered the limit of her pleasures. Of how many pleasures, of what an agreeable life she deprived us, I said to myself, by that stubborn obstinacy in denying her tastes! And as once again I sought to discover what could have been the reason for that obstinacy, all of a sudden the memory came back to me of a remark that I had made to her at Balbec on the day when she gave me a pencil. As I reproached her for not having allowed me to kiss her, I had told her that I thought a kiss just as natural as I thought it revolting that a woman should have relations with another woman. Alas, perhaps Albertine had remembered it.

I took home with me the girls who would have appealed to me least, I stroked sleek virginal tresses, I admired a small and well-shaped nose or a Spanish pallor. True, in the past, even with a woman I had merely glimpsed on a road near Balbec or in a street in Paris, I had felt the individuality of my desire and that it would be adulterating it to seek to assuage it with another person. But life, by disclosing to me little by little the permanence of our needs, had taught me that failing one person we must content ourselves with another, and I felt that what I had demanded of Albertine could have been given to me by another, by Mlle de Stermaria. But it had been Albertine; and between the satisfaction of my need for tenderness and the distinctive characteristics of her body, such an inextricable network of memories had been woven that I could no longer detach all that embroidery from any new physical desire. She alone could give me that happiness. The idea of her uniqueness was no longer a metaphysical *a priori* based upon what was individual in Albertine, as in the case of the women I passed in the street long ago, but an *a posteriori* created by the contingent and indissoluble overlapping of my memories. I could no longer desire physically without feeling a need for her, without suffering from her absence. Hence the mere resemblance of the woman chosen, the caresses sought, to the happiness I had known only made me the more conscious of all that they lacked wherewith to revive it. The same vacuum that I had found in my room since Albertine had left, and had supposed that I could fill by taking women in my arms, I regained in them. They had never spoken to me, these women, of Vinteuil's music, of Saint-Simon's memoirs, they had not sprayed themselves with an overpowering scent before coming to see me, they had not played at intertwining their eyelashes with mine, all of which things are important because they seem to enable one to weave dreams round the sexual act itself and to give oneself the illusion of love, but in reality because they formed part of my memory of Albertine and it was she whom I wanted there. What these women had in common with Albertine made me feel all the more strongly what was lacking of her in them, which was everything, and would never exist again since Albertine was dead. And so my love for Albertine, which had drawn me towards these women, made me indifferent to them, and my regret for Albertine and the persistence of my jealousy, which had already outlasted my most pessimistic calculations, would perhaps never have altered appreciably if their existence, isolated from the rest of my life, had been subjected merely to the play of my memories, to the actions and reactions of a psychology applicable to immobile states, and had not been drawn into a vaster system in which souls move in time as bodies move in space.

As there is a geometry in space, so there is a psychology in time, in which the calculations of a plane psychology would no longer be accurate because we should not be taking account of Time and one of the forms that it assumes, forgetting—forgetting, the force of which I was beginning to feel and which is so powerful an instrument of adaptation to reality because it gradually destroys in us the surviving past which is in perpetual contradiction with it. And I really ought to have discovered sooner that one day I should no longer be in love with Albertine. When I had realised, from the difference that existed between what the importance of her person and of her actions was to me and what it was to other people, that my love was not so much a love for her as a love in myself, I might have drawn various conclusions from this subjective nature of my love and in particular deduced that, being a mental state, it might survive the person for some time, but also that, having no real connexion with that person, having no support outside itself, it must, like every mental state, even the most lasting, find itself one day obsolete, be “replaced,” and that when that day came everything that seemed to attach me so sweetly, indissolubly, to the memory of Albertine would no longer exist for me. It is the tragedy of other people that they are merely showcases for the very perishable collections of one's own mind. For this very reason one bases upon them projects which have all the fervour of thought; but thought languishes and memory decays: the day would come when I would readily admit the first comer to Albertine's room, as I had without the slightest regret given Albertine the agate marble or other gifts that I had received from Gilberte.

## Chapter Seventeen

### MADEMOISELLE DE FORCHEVILLE

**I**t was not that I did not still love Albertine, but I no longer loved her in the same fashion as in the final phase. No, it was in the fashion of the earlier days, when everything connected with her, places or people, made me feel a curiosity in which there was more charm than suffering. And indeed I was well aware now that before I forgot her altogether, before I got back to the initial stage of indifference, I should have to traverse in the opposite direction, like a traveller who returns by the same route to his starting-point, all the sentiments through which I had passed before arriving at my great love. But these stages, these moments of the past are not immobile; they have retained the tremendous force, the happy ignorance of the hope that was then soaring towards a time which has now become the past, but which a hallucination makes us for a moment mistake retrospectively for the future. I read a letter from Albertine in which she had announced her intention of coming to see me that evening, and I felt for an instant the joy of expectation. In these return journeys along the same line from a place to which one will never return, when one recognises the names and the appearance of all the places through which one passed on the outward journey, it happens that, while one's train is halted at one of the stations, for an instant one has the illusion of setting off again, but in the direction of the place from which one has come, as on the first occasion. The illusion vanishes at once, but for an instant one had felt oneself being carried towards it once more: such is the cruelty of memory.

And yet if, before returning to the state of indifference from which one started, one cannot avoid covering in the reverse direction the distances one had traversed in order to arrive at love, the itinerary one follows, the line one takes, are not necessarily the same. They have this in common, that they are not direct, because the process of forgetting is no more regular than that of love. But they do not necessarily take the same routes. And on the route which I followed on my return journey there were three stages, when I was already well on the way towards my destination, which I remember particularly, doubtless because I perceived in them things that had no part in my love for Albertine, or at most were linked to it only to the extent to which what existed already in one's heart before a great love becomes associated with it, whether by fostering it, or by combating it, or by offering contrasts with it or images of it for one's intelligence to analyse.

The first of these stages began early one winter, on a fine Sunday, which was also All Saints' Day, when I had gone out. As I approached the Bois, I remembered sadly how Albertine had come back to join me from the Trocadéro, for it was the same day, only without Albertine. Sadly and yet not without pleasure all the same, for the repetition in the minor, in a melancholy key, of the same motif that had filled that earlier day, the very absence of Françoise's telephone message, of Albertine's return, which was not something negative but the suppression in reality of what I remembered, gave the day a certain sadness, made of it something more beautiful than a simple, unbroken day, because what was no longer there, what had been torn from it, remained as it were etched upon it. In the Bois, I hummed a few phrases of Vinteuil's sonata. The thought that Albertine had so often played it to me no longer saddened me unduly, for almost all my memories of her had entered into that secondary chemical state in which they no longer cause an anxious oppression of the heart, but rather a certain sweetness. From time to time, in the passages which she used to play most often, when she was in the habit of making some observation which at the time I thought charming, of suggesting some reminiscence, I said to myself: "Poor child," but not sadly, merely investing the musical phrase with an additional value, as it were a historical, a curiosity value, like that which the portrait of Charles I by Van Dyck, already so beautiful in itself, acquires from the fact that it found its way into the national collection because of Mme du Barry's desire to impress the King. When the little phrase, before disappearing altogether, dissolved into its various elements in which it floated still for a moment in scattered fragments, it was not for me, as it had been for Swann, a messenger from a vanishing Albertine. It was not altogether the same associations of ideas that the little phrase had aroused in me as in Swann. I had been struck most of all by the elaboration, the trial runs, the repetitions, the gradual evolution of a phrase which developed through the course of the sonata as that love had developed through the course of my life. And now, aware that, day by day, one element after another of my love was vanishing, the jealous side of it, then some other, drifting gradually back in a vague remembrance to the first tentative beginnings, it was my love that, in the scattered notes of the little phrase, I seemed to see disintegrating before my eyes.

As I followed the paths through thickets whose gauzy screen of leaves grew thinner each day, the memory of a drive during which Albertine was by my side in the carriage on the way home with me, and during which I felt that my life was wrapped up in her, now floated round about me, in the vague mist of the darkening branches in the midst of which the setting sun lit up the tenuous horizontal strips of golden foliage so that they seemed suspended in the empty air. My heart kept fluttering from moment to moment, as happens to anyone who is haunted by an obsession which gives to every woman standing at the end of a path the resemblance or even the possible identity with the woman he is thinking of. "Perhaps it is she!" One looks round, the carriage continues on its way, and one does not go back. I did not simply contemplate this foliage

with the eyes of memory; it interested me, touched me, like those purely descriptive pages into which an artist, to make them more complete, introduces a fiction, a whole romance; and this work of nature thus assumed the sole charm of melancholy which was capable of reaching my heart. The reason for this charm seemed to me to be that I still loved Albertine as much as ever, whereas the true reason was on the contrary that oblivion was continuing to make such headway in me that the memory of Albertine was no longer painful to me, that is to say had changed; but however clearly we may discern our impressions, as I then thought that I could discern the reason for my melancholy, we are unable to trace them back to their more distant meaning. Like those symptoms which the doctor hears his patient describe to him and with the help of which he works back to a deeper cause of which the patient is unaware, similarly our impressions, our ideas, have only a symptomatic value. My jealousy being kept in abeyance by the impression of charm and sweet sadness which I was feeling, my senses reawakened. Once again, as when I had ceased to see Gilberte, the love of women arose in me, relieved of any exclusive association with a particular woman already loved, and floated like those essences that have been liberated by previous destructions and stray suspended in the springtime air, asking only to be reunited with a new creature. Nowhere do so many flowers, "forget-me-nots" though they be styled, germinate as in a cemetery. I looked at the girls with whom this fine day was so multitudinously afflower, as I would have looked at them long ago from Mme de Villeparisis's carriage or from the carriage in which, on a similar Sunday, I had come there with Albertine. At once, the glance which I now gave one or other of them was matched immediately by the curious, furtive, speculative glance, reflecting unimaginable thoughts, which Albertine would surreptitiously have cast at them and which, duplicating my own with a mysterious, swift, steel-blue wing, wafted along these paths, so natural until then, the tremor of an unknown life with which my own desire would not have sufficed to animate them had it remained alone, for it, to me, contained nothing that was unfamiliar. At times the reading of a novel that was at all sad carried me suddenly back, for certain novels are like great but temporary bereavements, abolishing habit, bringing us back into contact with the reality of life, but for a few hours only, like a nightmare, since the force of habit, the oblivion it creates, the gaiety it restores through the powerlessness of the brain to fight against it and to re-create the truth, infinitely outweigh the almost hypnotic suggestion of a good book which, like all such influences, has very transient effects.

At Balbec, when I had first longed to know Albertine, was it not because she had seemed to me representative of those girls the sight of whom had so often brought me to a standstill in the streets of towns or on country roads, and because she might epitomise their life for me? And was it not natural that now the waning star of my love in which they had been condensed should disperse once again in this scattered dust of nebulae? All of them seemed to me Albertines—the image that I carried inside me making me find her everywhere—and indeed, at the bend of an avenue, a girl getting into a motor-car recalled her so strongly, was so exactly of the same build, that I wondered for an instant whether it was not her that I had just seen, whether people had not been deceiving me when they sent me the report of her death. I recalled her thus at the corner of an avenue, perhaps at Balbec, getting into a car in the same way, at a time when she was so full of confidence in life. And I did not merely record with my eyes, as one of those superficial phenomena which occur so often in the course of a walk, this other girl's action in climbing into the car: become a sort of sustained action, it seemed to me to extend also into the past by virtue of the memory which had been superimposed upon it and which pressed so voluptuously, so sadly against my heart. But by this time the girl had vanished.

A little further on I saw a group of three girls, slightly older, young women perhaps, whose elegant and energetic appearance corresponded so closely with what had attracted me on the day when I first saw Albertine and her friends that I hastened in pursuit of them and, when they stopped a carriage, looked frantically in every direction for another. I found one, but it was too late. I failed to overtake them. A few days later, however, on coming home, I saw emerging from the portico of our house the three girls whom I had followed in the Bois. They were absolutely typical, the two dark ones especially, except that they were slightly older, of those wellborn girls who so often, seen from my window or encountered in the street, had made me form countless plans, had given me a taste for life, but whom I had never succeeded in getting to know. The fair one had a rather more delicate, almost an invalid air, which appealed to me less. It was she, nevertheless, who was responsible for my not contenting myself with gazing at them for a moment, having stopped dead, with one of those looks which, by their fixed absorption, their application as to a problem, seem to be concerned with something far beyond what meets the eye. I should doubtless have allowed them to disappear, as I had allowed so many others, if, as they walked past me, the fair-haired one—was it because I was scrutinising them so closely?—had not darted a furtive glance at me and then, turning round after having passed me, a second one that set me aflame. However, as she ceased to pay attention to me and resumed her conversation with her friends, my ardour would doubtless have subsided, had it not been increased a hundredfold by the following discovery. When I asked the concierge who they were, "They asked for Mme la Duchesse," he informed me. "I think only one of them knows her and the others were simply accompanying her as far as the door. Here's the name, I don't know whether I've taken it down properly." And I read: "Mlle Déporcheville," which it was easy to correct to "d'Eporcheville," that is to say the name, more or less, so far as I could remember, of the girl of excellent family, vaguely connected with the Guermantes, whom Robert had told me that he had met in a disorderly house and with whom he had had relations. I now understood the meaning of her glance, why she had turned round without letting her companions see. How often I had thought about her, trying to visualise her from the name that Robert had given me! And here I had just seen her, in no way different from her friends, but for that clandestine glance which established between herself

and me a secret entry into the parts of her life which were evidently hidden from her friends and which made her appear more accessible—already almost half mine—and more soft-hearted than girls of the aristocracy usually are. In the mind of this girl, she and I now had in common the hours that we might have spent together if she was free to make an assignation with me. Was it not this that her glance had sought to express to me with an eloquence that was intelligible to me alone? My heart beat wildly. I could not have given an exact description of Mlle d'Eporcheville's appearance, I could only picture vaguely a fair-skinned face viewed from the side; but I was madly in love with her. All of a sudden I realised that I was reasoning as though, of the three girls, Mlle d'Eporcheville must be the fair one who had turned round and looked at me twice. But the concierge had not told me this. I returned to his lodge and questioned him again. He told me that he could not enlighten me on the subject, because they had come today for the first time and while he was not there. But he would ask his wife who had seen them once before. She was busy at the moment scrubbing the service stairs. Which of us has not experienced in the course of his life exquisite uncertainties more or less similar to this? A charitable friend, to whom one describes a girl one has seen at a ball, concludes from the description that she must be one of his friends and invites one to meet her. But among so many others, and on the basis of a mere verbal portrait, is there not a possibility of error? The girl you are about to see may well turn out to be a different girl from the one you desire. On the other hand, you may be about to see, holding out her hand to you with a smile, precisely the girl whom you hoped that she would be. This latter case is not infrequent, and, without being justified always by a reasoning as convincing as mine with respect to Mlle d'Eporcheville, arises from a sort of intuition as well as from that wind of fortune which favours us at times. Then, on seeing her, one says to oneself: "She was the one." I remembered that, among the little band of girls who used to parade along the beach, I had guessed correctly which was named Albertine Simonet. This memory caused me a sharp but transient pang, and while the concierge went in search of his wife, my chief anxiety—as I thought of Mlle d'Eporcheville, and since in those minutes spent waiting during which a name or piece of information which we have for some reason or other fitted to a face finds itself free for an instant and floats between several, ready, if it belongs to a new one, to make the original face to which it had applied retrospectively strange, innocent, elusive—was that the concierge was perhaps going to inform me that Mlle d'Eporcheville was, on the contrary, one of the two dark girls. In that event, the being in whose existence I believed would vanish, the being whom I already loved, whom I now thought only of possessing, that sly, blonde Mlle d'Eporcheville whom the fateful answer must then separate into two distinct elements, which I had arbitrarily united after the fashion of a novelist who blends diverse elements borrowed from reality in order to create an imaginary character, elements which, taken separately—the name failing to corroborate the supposed intention of the glance—lost all their meaning. In that case my arguments would be nullified, but how greatly, on the contrary, they found themselves strengthened when the concierge returned to tell me that Mlle d'Eporcheville was indeed the fair girl.

From then on I could no longer believe that it was a case of homonymy. It would have been too great a coincidence that of these three girls one should be named Mlle d'Eporcheville, that she should be precisely (and this was an initial, highly relevant corroboration of my supposition) the one who had looked at me in that way, almost smiling at me, and that it should not be she who frequented houses of assignation.

Then began a day of wild excitement. Even before setting out to buy everything in which I thought it proper to array myself in order to create a favourable impression when I went to call upon Mme de Guermantes two days later, when (the concierge had informed me) the young lady would be coming back to see the Duchess, in whose house I should thus find a willing girl with whom I would arrange a rendezvous (for I could easily find an opportunity of speaking to her alone in a corner of the drawingroom), I decided, to make assurance doubly sure, to telegraph Robert to ask him for the girl's exact name and description, hoping to have his reply within forty-eight hours (I did not think for an instant of anything else, not even of Albertine), for I was determined, whatever might happen to me in the meantime, even if I had to be carried down in a chair because I was too ill to walk, to pay a call on the Duchess at the appropriate hour. If I telegraphed to Saint-Loup it was not that I had any lingering doubt as to the identity of the person, it was not that the girl whom I had seen and the girl of whom he had spoken were still distinct personalities in my mind. I had no doubt whatever that they were the same person. But in my impatience at the enforced interval of forty-eight hours, it was a pleasure to me, it gave me already a sort of secret power over her, to receive a telegram concerning her, filled with detailed information. At the telegraph office, as I drafted my message with the animation of a man who is fired by hope, I remarked how much less helpless I was now than in my boyhood, and in relation to Mlle d'Eporcheville than I had been in relation to Gilberte. I had merely had to take the trouble to write out my telegram, and thereafter the clerk had only to take it from me, and the swiftest channels of electric communication to transmit it, and the whole length and breadth of France and the Mediterranean, together with the whole of Robert's roistering life applied to the identification of the person I had just met, would be placed at the service of the romance which I had just sketched out and to which I need no longer give a thought, for they would undertake to bring it to a conclusion one way or the other before twenty-four hours had passed. Whereas in the old days, brought home by Françoise from the Champs-Élysées, brooding alone in the house over my impotent desires, unable to make use of the practical devices of civilisation, I loved like a savage, or indeed, for I was not even free to move about, like a flower. From this moment onwards I was in a continual fever; a request from my father to go away with him for a couple of days, which would have obliged me to forgo my visit to the Duchess, filled me with such rage and despair that my mother intervened and persuaded my father to allow me to remain in Paris. But for several hours my fury refused to be allayed, while my desire for Mlle d'Eporcheville was increased a hundredfold by the obstacle that had been placed between

us, by the fear which I had felt for a moment that those hours of my visit to Mme de Guermantes, at the prospect of which I smiled in constant anticipation, as at an assured blessing of which nothing could deprive me, might not occur. Certain philosophers assert that the external world does not exist, and that it is within ourselves that we develop our lives. However that may be, love, even in its humblest beginnings, is a striking example of how little reality means to us. Had I been obliged to draw from memory a portrait of Mlle d'Eparcheville, to furnish a description of her, or even to recognise her in the street, I should have found it impossible. I had glimpsed her in profile, on the move, and she had struck me as being simple, pretty, tall and fair; I could not have said more. But all the reflexes of desire, of anxiety, of the mortal blow struck by the fear of not seeing her if my father took me away, all these things, associated with an image of which on the whole I knew nothing, and as to which it was enough that I knew it to be agreeable, already constituted a state of love. At last, on the following morning, after a night of happy sleeplessness I received Saint-Loup's telegram: "De l'Orgeville, *de* particle, *orge* barley, like rye, *ville*, like town, small, dark, plump, is at present in Switzerland." It was not the girl.

A moment later my mother came into my room with the mail, put it down carelessly on my bed as though she were thinking of something else, and withdrew at once to leave me on my own. And I, who was familiar with my dear Mamma's little subterfuges and knew that one could always read the truth in her face without fear of being mistaken, if one took as a key to the cipher her desire to give pleasure to others, I smiled and thought: "There must be something interesting for me in the post, and Mamma assumed that indifferent, absent-minded air so that my surprise might be complete and so as not to be like the people who take away half your pleasure by telling you of it beforehand. And she didn't stay with me because she was afraid that out of pride I might conceal my pleasure and so feel it less keenly." Meanwhile, on reaching the door, my mother had run into Françoise who was coming into the room, and forcing her to turn back, had dragged her out with her, somewhat alarmed, offended and surprised; for Françoise considered that her duties conferred upon her the privilege of entering my room at any hour of the day and of remaining there if she chose. But already, upon her features, astonishment and anger had vanished beneath a dark and sticky smile of transcendent pity and philosophical irony, a viscous liquid secreted, in order to heal her wound, by her outraged self-esteem. So that she might not feel herself despised, she despised us. Moreover she knew that we were masters, in other words capricious creatures, who, not being conspicuously intelligent, take pleasure in imposing by fear upon clever people, upon servants, in order to prove that they are the masters, absurd tasks such as boiling water in times of epidemic, washing down a room with a damp cloth, and leaving it at the very moment when you wanted to come into it. Mamma had placed the post by my side, so that I might not overlook it. I could see however that it consisted only of newspapers. No doubt there was some article by a writer whom I admired, which, as he wrote seldom, would be a surprise for me. I went to the window, and drew back the curtains. Above the pale and misty daylight, the sky glowed pink, like the stoves that are being lighted in kitchens at that hour, and the sight of it filled me with hope and with a longing to spend the night in a train and awake at the little country station where I had seen the milk-girl with the rosy cheeks.

I opened the *Figaro*. What a bore! The main article had the same title as the article which I had sent to the paper and which had not appeared. But not merely the same title ... why, here were several words that were absolutely identical. This was really too bad. I must write and complain. Meanwhile I could hear Françoise who, indignant at having been banished from my room, into which she considered that she had the right of entry, was grumbling: "It's a proper shame, a kid I saw brought into the world. I didn't see him when his mother bore him, to be sure. But when I first knew him, to say the most, it wasn't five years since he was birthed!" But it wasn't merely a few words, it was the whole thing, and there was my signature ... It was my article that had appeared at last! But my brain which, even at that period, had begun to show signs of age and to tire easily, continued for a moment longer to reason as though it had not understood that this was my article, like an old man who is obliged to complete a movement that he has begun even if it has become unnecessary, even if an unforeseen obstacle, in the face of which he ought at once to draw back, makes it dangerous. Then I considered the spiritual bread of life that a newspaper is, still warm and damp from the press and the morning fog in which it is distributed, at daybreak, to the housemaids who bring it to their masters with their morning coffee, a miraculous, self-multiplying bread which is at the same time one and ten thousand, which remains the same for each person while penetrating innumerable into every house at once.

What I was holding in my hand was not a particular copy of the newspaper, but one out of the ten thousand; it was not merely what had been written by me, but what had been written by me and read by everyone. To appreciate exactly the phenomenon which was occurring at this moment in other houses, it was essential that I read this article not as its author but as one of the readers of the paper; what I was holding in my hand was not only what I had written, it was the symbol of its incarnation in so many minds. But then came an initial anxiety. Would the reader who had not been forewarned see this article? I opened the paper carelessly as would such a reader, even assuming an air of not knowing what there was this morning in my paper, of being in a hurry to look at the social and political news. But my article was so long that my eye, which was avoiding it (in order to be absolutely fair and not load the dice in my favour, as a person who is waiting counts very slowly on purpose) picked up a fragment of it in passing. But many of those readers who notice the main article and even read it do not look at the signature; I myself would be quite incapable of saying who had written the main article of the day before. And I now made up my mind always to read them, and the author's name too; but, like a jealous lover who refrains from being unfaithful to his mistress in order to believe in her fidelity, I reflected sadly that my own future attention would not compel, had not compelled the reciprocal attention of other people. And besides, there were those who would have gone out shooting, and those who



would have left the house too early. But still, a few people would read it. I did as they would do: I began. Although I was well aware that many people who read this article would find it detestable, at the moment of reading it the meaning that each word conveyed to me seemed to me to be printed on the paper, and I could not believe that every other reader on opening his eyes would not see directly the images that I saw, assuming—with the same naivety as those who believe that it is the actual speech they have uttered that proceeds just as it is along the telephone wires—that the author's thought is directly perceived by the reader, whereas quite other thoughts form in the latter's mind; at the very moment in which I was trying to be an ordinary reader, my mind was rewriting my article while reading it. If M. de Guermantes did not understand some sentence which would appeal to Bloch, he might, on the other hand, be amused by some reflexion which Bloch would scorn. Thus, a fresh admirer presenting himself for each section which the previous reader seemed to disregard, the article as a whole was lifted to the skies by a swarm of readers and prevailed over my own self-distrust, since I no longer needed to bolster it. The truth of the matter is that the value of an article, however remarkable it may be, is like that of those passages in parliamentary reports in which the words "We shall see," uttered by the Minister, only take on their full consequence when read thus: THE PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS: "We shall see!" (*Loud exclamations on the extreme Left. "Hear, hear," from some Left and Centre benches*)—an ending better than the middle and worthy of the beginning. Part of the beauty—and it is the original flaw in this type of literature, from which the famous *Lundis* are not exempt—lies in the impression made on the readers. It is a collective Venus, of which we have but one truncated limb if we confine ourselves to the thought of the author, for it is fully realised only in the minds of his readers. In them it finds completion. And since a crowd, even a select crowd, is not an artist, this final seal which it sets upon the article must always retain a trace of the commonplace. Thus Sainte-Beuve, on a Monday, could imagine Mme de Boigne in her four-poster bed reading his article in the *Constitutionnel*, and appreciating some pretty sentence which he had taken a long delight in composing and which might never, perhaps, have flowed from his pen had he not thought it opportune to stuff it into his article in order to make a more far-reaching impression. Doubtless the Chancellor,<sup>27</sup> reading it too, would mention it during the visit he would pay to his old friend and mistress a little later. And when he dropped him home in his carriage that evening, the Duc de Noailles in his grey trousers would tell him what had been thought of it in society, if a note from Mme d'Arbouville had not already informed him.

And setting my own self-distrust against the ten-thousand-fold approbation which now sustained me, I drew as much strength and hope for my talent from reading the article at this moment as I drew misgivings when what I had written was addressed only to myself. I saw at that same hour my thought—or at least, failing my thought for those who were incapable of understanding it, the repetition of my name and as it were an embellished evocation of my person—shine on countless people, colour their own thoughts in an auroral light which filled me with more strength and triumphant joy than the multiple dawn which at that moment was blushing at every window. I saw Bloch, the Guermantes, Legrandin, Andrée, extracting from every sentence the images that it enclosed at the very moment in which I was endeavouring to be an ordinary reader, while reading as author, but not only as author. In order that the impossible creature I was endeavouring to be should combine all the opposites that might be most favourable to me, if I read as an author I judged myself as a reader, without any of the qualms that may be felt about a written text by him who compares it with the ideal which he has sought to express in it. Those passages which, when I wrote them, were so colourless in comparison with my thought, so complicated and opaque in comparison with my harmonious and transparent vision, so full of gaps which I had not managed to fill, that the reading of them was a torture to me, had only accentuated in me the sense of my own impotence and of my incurable lack of talent. But now, in forcing myself to be a reader, I transferred to others the painful duty of judging me, and I succeeded at least in making a clean sweep of what I had attempted to do in reading what I had written. I read the article while forcing myself to imagine that it had been written by someone else. Then all my images, all my reflexions, all my epithets taken in themselves, untarnished by the memory of the failure which they represented in relation to my aims, charmed me by their brilliance, their unexpectedness, their profundity. And when I became aware of too blatant a weakness, taking refuge in the spirit of the ordinary and astonished reader, I said to myself: "Bah! how could a reader possibly notice that? There may well be something lacking there, but good heavens, they ought to be pleased! There are enough good things in it to be getting on with, more than they usually get."

And thus, no sooner had I finished this comforting perusal than I who had not had the courage to re-read my manuscript wanted to start again immediately, for there is nothing of which one can say more aptly than of an old article by oneself that "it bears re-reading." I made up my mind to send Françoise out to buy more copies—in order to give them to my friends, I would tell her, but in reality to feel at first hand the miracle of the multiplication of my thought and to read, as though I were another person who had just opened the *Figaro*, the same sentences in another copy. It was, as it happened, a very long time since I had seen the Guermantes: I would go and pay them a visit in order to find out what people thought of my article.

I thought of some female reader into whose room I would have loved to penetrate and to whom the newspaper would convey, if not my thought, which she would be incapable of understanding, at least my name, like a eulogy of me. But eulogies awarded to somebody one doesn't love do not captivate the heart any more than the thoughts of a mind one is unable to penetrate attract the mind. With regard to other friends, however, I told myself that if the state of my health continued to grow worse and I could no longer see them, it would be pleasant to continue to write, in order thus to have access to them still, to speak to them between the lines, to make them share my thoughts, to please them, to be received into their hearts. I told myself this

because, social relations having hitherto had a place in my daily life, a future in which they would no longer figure alarmed me, and because this expedient which would enable me to remain in the thoughts of my friends, perhaps to arouse their admiration, until the day when I should be well enough to begin to see them again, was a solace to me; I told myself this, but I was well aware that it was not true, that although I chose to imagine their attention as the object of my pleasure, that pleasure was an internal, spiritual, self-generated pleasure which they could not give me and which I could find not in conversing with them, but in writing far away from them, and that if I began to write in the hope of seeing them indirectly, in the hope they might have a better idea of me, in the hope of preparing for myself a better position in society, perhaps writing would relieve me of the wish to see them, and I should no longer have any desire to enjoy the position in society which literature might have given me, because my pleasure would be no longer in society but in literature.

After lunch, when I went down to Mme de Guermantes, it was less for the sake of Mlle d'Éparcheville, who had been stripped, by Saint-Loup's telegram, of the better part of her personality, than in the hope of finding in the Duchess herself one of those readers of my article who would enable me to form an idea of the impression that it had made upon those members of the public who were subscribers to or purchasers of the *Figaro*. It was not, incidentally, without pleasure that I went to see Mme de Guermantes. Although I told myself that what made her house different to me from all the rest was the fact that it had for so long haunted my imagination, by knowing the reason for this difference I did not abolish it. Moreover, the name Guermantes existed for me in many forms. If the form which my memory had merely noted down as in an address-book was not accompanied by any poetry, older forms, those which dated from the time when I did not know Mme de Guermantes, were liable to renew themselves in me, especially when I had not seen her for some time and the glaring light of the person with human features did not quench the mysterious radiance of the name. Then once again I began to think of Mme de Guermantes's dwelling as of something that was beyond the bounds of reality, in the same way as I began to think again of the misty Balbec of my early day-dreams as though I had not since then made that journey, or of the 1.22 train as though I had never taken it. I forgot for an instant my own knowledge that none of this existed, as we think at times of a beloved friend forgetting for an instant that he is dead. Then the idea of reality returned as I entered the Duchess's hall. But I consoled myself with the reflexion that in spite of everything she was for me the real point of intersection between reality and dream.

On entering the drawing-room, I saw the fair girl whom I had supposed for twenty-four hours to be the girl of whom Saint-Loup had spoken to me. It was she who asked the Duchess to "reintroduce" me to her. And indeed, the moment I came into the room I had the impression that I knew her quite well, an impression which the Duchess however dispelled by saying: "Oh! so you've met Mlle de Forcheville before?" For, on the contrary, I was certain that I had never been introduced to any girl of that name, which would certainly have struck me, so familiar was it in my memory ever since I had been given a retrospective account of Odette's love-affairs and Swann's jealousy. In itself my twofold error as to the name, in having remembered "de l'Orgeville" as "d'Éparcheville" and in having reconstructed as "d'Éparcheville" what was in reality "Forcheville," was in no way extraordinary. Our mistake lies in supposing that things present themselves as they really are, names as they are written, people as photography and psychology give an unalterable notion of them. But in reality this is not at all what we ordinarily perceive. We see, we hear, we conceive the world in a lopsided fashion. We repeat a name as we have heard it spoken until experience has corrected our mistake—something that does not always happen. Everyone at Combray had spoken to Françoise for twenty-five years of Mme Sazerat and Françoise continued to say "Mme Sazerin," not from that deliberate and proud perseverance in error which was habitual with her, which was strengthened by our contradictions, and which was all that she had added of the egalitarian principles of 1789 to the France of Saint-André-des-Champs in her make-up (she claimed only one civic right, that of not pronouncing words as we did and of maintaining that "hotel," "été" and "air" were of the feminine gender), but because she really did continue to hear "Sazerin." This perpetual error, which is precisely "life," does not bestow its countless forms merely upon the visible and the audible universe, but upon the social universe, the sentimental universe, the historical universe, and so forth. The Princesse de Luxembourg is no better than a prostitute in the eyes of the judge's wife, which of course is of little consequence; what is of slightly more consequence is the fact that Odette is in Swann's eyes a difficult woman to conquer, whence he builds up a whole romance which becomes all the more painful when he discovers his error; what is of even more consequence still, the French are thinking only of revenge in the eyes of the Germans. We have of the universe only inchoate, fragmentary visions, which we complement by arbitrary associations of ideas, creative of dangerous illusions. I should therefore have had no reason to be surprised when I heard the name Forcheville (and I was already wondering whether she was related to the Forcheville of whom I had so often heard) had not the fair girl said to me at once, anxious no doubt to forestall, tactfully, questions which would have been disagreeable to her: "Don't you remember that you knew me well long ago ... you used to come to our house ... your friend Gilberte. I could see that you didn't recognise me. I recognised you at once." (She said this as if she had recognised me at once in the drawing-room, but the truth is that she had recognised me in the street and had greeted me, and later Mme de Guermantes informed me that she had told her, as something very comic and extraordinary, that I had followed her and brushed against her, mistaking her for a tart.) I did not discover until after her departure why she was called Mlle de Forcheville. After Swann's death, Odette, who astonished everyone by her profound, prolonged and sincere grief, found herself an extremely rich widow. Forcheville married her, after making a long round of country houses and ascertaining that his family would acknowledge his wife. (The family raised some difficulties at first, but yielded to the material advantage of no longer having to provide for

the expenses of a needy relative who was about to pass from comparative penury to opulence.) Shortly after this, an uncle of Swann's, in whose hands the successive demise of innumerable relatives had accumulated an enormous inheritance, died, leaving the whole of his fortune to Gilberte who thus became one of the richest heiresses in France. But this was a time when in the aftermath of the Dreyfus case an anti-Semitic trend had arisen parallel to a growing trend towards the penetration of society by Jews. The politicians had not been wrong in thinking that the discovery of the judicial error would be a severe blow to anti-semitism. But, temporarily at least, a form of social anti-semitism was on the contrary enhanced and exacerbated thereby. Forcheville, who, like every petty nobleman, had derived from conversations in the family circle the certainty that his name was more ancient than that of La Rochefoucauld, considered that, in marrying the widow of a Jew, he had performed a similar act of charity to that of a millionaire who picks up a prostitute in the street and rescues her from poverty and squalor. He was prepared to extend his bounty to Gilberte, whose prospects of marriage would be assisted by all her millions but hindered by that absurd name "Swann." He declared that he would adopt her. We know that Mme de Guermantes, to the astonishment of her friends—which she enjoyed and was in the habit of provoking—had refused, after Swann's marriage, to meet his daughter as well as his wife. This refusal had appeared all the more cruel inasmuch as what the possibility of marriage to Odette had long represented to Swann was the prospect of introducing his daughter to Mme de Guermantes. And doubtless he ought to have known, he who had already had so long an experience of life, that these scenes which we picture to ourselves are never realised for a diversity of reasons, among which there is one which meant that he seldom regretted his inability to effect that introduction. This reason is that, whatever the image may be—from the prospect of eating a trout at sunset, which makes a sedentary man decide to take the train, to the desire to be able to astonish the proud lady at a cash desk one evening by stopping outside her door in a magnificent carriage, which makes an unscrupulous man decide to commit murder or to long for the death of rich relatives, according to whether he is brave or lazy, whether he follows his ideas through or remains fondling the first link in the chain—the act which is destined to enable us to attain to it, whether the act be travel, marriage, crime or whatever, modifies us so profoundly that not merely do we cease to attach any importance to the reason which made us perform it, but the image conceived by the man who was not then a traveller, or a husband, or a criminal, or a recluse (who has set himself to work with the idea of fame and simultaneously lost all desire for fame), may perhaps never even once recur to his mind. Moreover, even if we are stubbornly determined to prove that our wish to act was not an idle one, it is probable that the sunset effect would fail to materialise, that feeling cold at that moment we would long for a bowl of soup by the fireside and not for a trout in the open air, that our carriage would fail to impress the cashier who perhaps for wholly different reasons had a great regard for us and in whom this sudden opulence would arouse suspicion. In short, we have seen Swann, once married, attach importance above all else to the relations of his wife and daughter with Mme Bontemps, etc.

To all the reasons, derived from the Guermantes way of looking at social life, which had made the Duchess decide never to allow Mme and Mlle Swann to be introduced to her, we may add also that happy complacency with which people who are not in love dissociate themselves from that which they condemn in lovers and which is explained by their love. "Oh! I don't get mixed up in all that. If it amuses poor Swann to behave idiotically and ruin his life, that's his affair, but I'm not going to be dragged into that sort of thing; it may end very badly; I leave them to get on with it." It is the *suave man magno* which Swann himself recommended to me with regard to the Verdurins, when he had long ceased to be in love with Odette and no longer cared about the little clan. It is what makes so wise the judgments of third persons with regard to passions which they themselves do not feel and the complications of behaviour which those passions bring about.

Mme de Guermantes had in fact applied to the ostracism of Mme and Mlle Swann a perseverance that caused general surprise. When Mme Mole and Mme de Marsantes had begun to make friends with Mme Swann and to bring a quantity of society ladies to her house, Mme de Guermantes had not only remained intractable but had contrived to sabotage the lines of communication and to see that her cousin the Princesse de Guermantes followed her example. On one of the gravest days of the crisis during Rouvier's ministry when it was thought that there was going to be war with Germany, I dined at Mme de Guermantes's with M. de Bréauté and found the Duchess looking worried. I supposed that, since she was always dabbling in politics, this was a manifestation of her fear of war, as when, appearing at the dinner-table one evening looking similarly pensive and barely replying in monosyllables, upon somebody's inquiring timidly what was the cause of her anxiety, she had answered solemnly: "I'm worried about China." But a moment later Mme de Guermantes, herself volunteering an explanation of that preoccupied air which I had put down to fear of a declaration of war, said to M. de Bréauté: "I'm told that Marie-Aynard intends to launch the Swanns. I simply must go and see Marie-Gilbert tomorrow and get her to help me prevent it. Otherwise there'll be no society left. The Dreyfus case is all very well. But then the grocer's wife round the corner has only to call herself a nationalist and expect us to invite her to our houses in return." And this remark was in such frivolous contrast to the one I expected to hear that I felt the same astonishment as a reader who, turning to the usual column of the *Figaro* for the latest news of the Russo-Japanese war, finds instead the list of people who have given wedding-presents to Mlle de Mortemart, the importance of an aristocratic marriage having relegated the battles on land and sea to the back of the paper. Moreover the Duchess had come to derive from this immoderate perseverance of hers a self-satisfied pride which she lost no opportunity of expressing. "Babal" she said, "maintains that we are the two most elegant people in Paris because he and I are the only two people who do not allow Mme and Mlle Swann to greet us. For he assures me that elegance consists in not knowing Mme Swann." And the Duchess laughed heartily.

However, when Swann was dead, it happened that her determination not to know his daughter had ceased to provide Mme de Guermantes with all the satisfactions of pride, independence, "self-government" and cruelty which she was capable of deriving from it and which had come to an end with the passing of the man who had given her the exquisite sensation that she was resisting him, that he could not compel her to revoke her decrees. Then the Duchess had proceeded to the promulgation of other decrees which, being applied to people who were still alive, could make her feel that she was free to act as she thought fit. She did not think about the Swann girl, but, when anyone mentioned her, she would feel a certain curiosity, as about some place that she had never visited, which was no longer suppressed by the desire to stand out against Swann's pretensions. Besides, so many different sentiments may contribute to the formation of a single one that it could not be said that there was not a lingering trace of affection for Swann in this interest. No doubt—for at every level of society a worldly and frivolous life paralyses the sensibility and robs people of the power to resuscitate the dead—the Duchess was one of those people who require a personal presence—that presence which, like a true Guermantes, she excelled in protracting—in order to love truly, but also, and this is less common, in order to hate a little. So that often her friendly feeling for people, suspended during their lifetime by the irritation caused her by some action or other on their part, revived after their death. She then felt almost a longing to make reparation, because she pictured them now—though very vaguely—with only their good qualities, and stripped of the petty satisfactions, the petty pretensions, which had irritated her in them when they were alive. This imparted at times, notwithstanding the frivolity of Mme de Guermantes, something rather noble—mixed with much that was base—to her conduct. For, whereas three-quarters of the human race flatter the living and pay no attention to the dead, she often did after their deaths what those whom she had treated badly would have wished her to do while they were alive.

As for Gilberte, all the people who were fond of her and had a certain respect for her dignity could rejoice at the change in the Duchess's attitude towards her only by thinking that Gilberte, by scornfully rejecting advances coming after twenty-five years of insults, would be able to avenge them at last. Unfortunately, moral reflexes are not always identical with what common sense imagines. A man who, by an untimely insult, thinks that he has forfeited for ever all hope of winning the friendship of a person whom he cares about, finds that, on the contrary, he has thereby assured himself of it. Gilberte, who remained fairly indifferent to the people who were kind to her, never ceased to think with admiration of the insolent Mme de Guermantes, to ask herself the reasons for such insolence; once indeed (and this would have made all the people who were at all fond of her die of shame on her behalf) she had thought of writing to the Duchess to ask her what she had against a girl who had never done her any harm. The Guermantes had assumed in her eyes proportions which their birth would have been powerless to give them. She placed them not only above all the nobility, but even above all the royal houses.

Some of Swann's former women-friends took a great interest in Gilberte. When the aristocracy learned of her latest inheritance, they began to remark how well brought up she was and what a charming wife she would make. People said that a cousin of Mme de Guermantes, the Princesse de Nièvre, was thinking of Gilberte for her son. Mme de Guermantes hated Mme de Nièvre. She spread the word that such a marriage would be a scandal. Mme de Nièvre took fright and swore that she had never considered such a thing. One day, after lunch, as the sun was shining and M. de Guermantes was going to take his wife for a drive, Mme de Guermantes was arranging her hat in front of the mirror, her blue eyes gazing at their own reflexion and at her still golden hair, her maid holding in her hand various sunshades among which her mistress might choose. The sun was flooding in through the window and they had decided to take advantage of the fine weather to pay a visit to Saint-Cloud, and M. de Guermantes, all ready to set off with his pearl-grey gloves and topper, said to himself: "Oriane is really astounding still; I find her delicious," and went on, aloud, seeing that his wife seemed to be in a good humour: "By the way, I have a message for you from Mme de Virelef. She wanted to ask you to the Opera on Monday, but as she's having the Swann girl she didn't dare, and asked me to explore the ground. I don't express any opinion, I simply convey the message. But really, it seems to me that we might ..." he added evasively, for, their attitude towards people being a collective one, springing up identically in each of them, he knew from his own feelings that his wife's hostility to Mlle Swann had subsided and that she was curious to meet her. Mme de Guermantes settled her veil to her liking and chose a sunshade. "Just as you like. What difference do you suppose it makes to me? I see no objection to our meeting the child. You know quite well that I've never had anything *against* her. I simply didn't want us to appear to be countenancing the dubious establishments of our friends. That's all." "And you were perfectly right," replied the Duke. "You are wisdom incarnate, Madame, and you are more ravishing than ever in that hat." "You're very kind," said Mme de Guermantes with a smile at her husband as she made her way to the door. But, before entering the carriage, she insisted on giving him a further explanation: "Lots of people call on the mother now. Besides, she has the sense to be ill for nine months of the year ... Apparently the child is quite charming. Everybody knows that we were very fond of Swann. People will think it quite natural." And they set off together for Saint-Cloud.

A month later, the Swann girl, who had not yet taken the name of Forcheville, came to lunch with the Guermantes. They talked about a variety of things, and at the end of the meal, Gilberte said timidly: "I believe you knew my father quite well." "Why, of course we did," said Mme de Guermantes in a melancholy tone which proved that she understood the daughter's grief and with a spurious intensity as though to conceal the fact that she was not sure whether she did remember the father very clearly. "We knew him very well, I remember him *very well*." (As indeed she might, seeing that he had come to see her almost every day for twenty-five years.) "I know quite well who he was, let me tell you," she went on, as though she were seeking to

explain to the daughter what sort of man her father had been and to provide her with some information about him, "he was a great friend of my mother-in-law and he was also very attached to my brother-in-law Palamède." "He used to come here too, in fact he used to come to luncheon here," added M. de Guermantes with ostentatious modesty and a scrupulous regard for accuracy. "You remember, Oriane. What a fine man your father was! One felt that he must come of a very decent family. As a matter of fact, I once saw his father and mother long ago. What excellent people they were, he and they!"

One felt that if Swann and his parents had still been alive, the Duc de Guermantes would not have hesitated to recommend them for jobs as gardeners. And this is how the Faubourg Saint-Germain speaks to any bourgeois about other bourgeois, either to flatter him with the exception being made in his favour (for as long as the conversation lasts) or rather, or at the same time, to humiliate him. Thus it is that an anti-semitic, at the very moment when he is smothering a Jew with affability, will speak ill of Jews, in a general fashion which enables him to be wounding without being rude.

But, queen of the present moment, when she knew how to be infinitely amiable to you, and could not bring herself to let you go, Mme de Guermantes was also its slave. Swann might have managed at times to give the Duchess the illusion, in the excitement of conversation, that she was genuinely fond of him, but he could do so no longer. "He was charming," said the Duchess with a wistful smile, fastening upon Gilberte a soft and kindly gaze which would at least, if the girl should prove to be a sensitive soul, show her that she was understood and that Mme de Guermantes, had the two been alone together and had circumstances permitted, would have loved to reveal to her all the depth of her sensibility. But M. de Guermantes, whether because he was indeed of the opinion that the circumstances forbade such effusions, or because he considered that any exaggeration of sentiment was a matter for women and that men had no more part in it than in the other feminine attributions, except for food and wine which he had reserved to himself, knowing more about them than the Duchess, felt it incumbent upon him not to encourage, by taking part in it, this conversation to which he listened with visible impatience.

However, this burst of sensibility having subsided, Mme de Guermantes added with worldly frivolity, addressing Gilberte: "Why, he was not only a *ggg*reat friend of my brother-in-law Charlus, he was also on very good terms with Voisenon" (the country house of the Prince de Guermantes), not only as though Swann's acquaintance with M. de Charlus and the Prince had been a mere accident, as though the Duchess's brother-in-law and cousin were two men with whom Swann had happened to become friendly through some fortuitous circumstance, whereas Swann had been on friendly terms with all the people in that set, but also as though Mme de Guermantes wanted to explain to Gilberte roughly who her father had been, to "place" him for her by means of one of those characteristic touches whereby, when one wants to explain how it is that one happens to know somebody whom one would not naturally know, or to point up one's story, one invokes the names of his particular social sponsors.

As for Gilberte, she was all the more glad to find the subject being dropped, in that she herself was only too anxious to drop it, having inherited from Swann his exquisite tact combined with a delightful intelligence that was recognised and appreciated by the Duke and Duchess, who begged her to come again soon. Moreover, with the passion for minutiae of people whose lives are purposeless, they would discern, one after another, in the people with whom they became acquainted, qualities of the simplest kind, exclaiming at them with the artless wonderment of a townsman who on going into the country discovers a blade of grass, or on the contrary magnifying as with a microscope, endlessly commenting upon and inveighing against the slightest defects, and often applying both processes alternately to the same person. In Gilberte's case it was first of all upon her agreeable qualities that the idle perspicacity of M. and Mme de Guermantes was brought to bear: "Did you notice the way she pronounces certain words?" the Duchess said to her husband after the girl had left them; "it was just like Swann, I seemed to hear him speaking." "I was just about to say the very same thing, Oriane." "She's witty, she has exactly the same cast of mind as her father." "I consider that she's even far superior to him. Think how well she told that story about the sea-bathing. She has a vivacity that Swann never had." "Oh! but he was, after all, quite witty." "I'm not saying that he wasn't witty, I'm saying that he lacked vivacity," said M. de Guermantes in a querulous tone, for his gout made him irritable, and when he had no one else upon whom to vent his irritation, it was to the Duchess that he displayed it. But being incapable of any clear understanding of its causes, he preferred to adopt an air of being misunderstood.

This friendly attitude on the part of the Duke and Duchess meant that from now on, if the occasion arose, they would have said to her "your poor father," but this would no longer do, since it was just about this time that Forcheville adopted the girl. She addressed him as "Father," charmed all the dowagers by her politeness and distinction, and it was generally acknowledged that, if Forcheville had behaved admirably towards her, the child was very good-hearted and more than recompensed him. True, since she was able at times and anxious to show a great deal of naturalness and ease, she had reintroduced herself to me and had spoken to me about her real father. But this was an exception and no one now dared utter the name Swann in her presence.

As it happened, on entering the drawing-room I had caught sight of two sketches by Elstir which formerly had been banished to a little room upstairs where I had seen them only by chance. Elstir was now in fashion. Mme de Guermantes could not forgive herself for having given so many of his pictures away to her cousin, not because they were in fashion, but because she now appreciated them. For fashion is composed of the collective infatuation of a number of people of whom the Guermantes are typical. But she could not think of buying other pictures by him, for they had now begun to fetch madly high prices. She was determined to have

something at least by Elstir in her drawing-room and had brought down these two drawings which, she declared, she “preferred to his paintings.”

Gilberte recognised the technique. “They look like Elstirs,” she said. “Why, yes,” replied the Duchess without thinking, “in fact it was your father’s friends of ours who made us buy them. They’re admirable. To my mind, they’re superior to his paintings.”

Not having heard this conversation, I went up to one of the drawings to examine it, and exclaimed: “Why, this is the Elstir that ...” I saw Mme de Guermantes’s desperate signals. “Ah, yes, the Elstir that I admired upstairs. It looks much better here than in that passage. Talking of Elstir, I mentioned him yesterday in an article in the *Figaro*. Did you happen to read it?”

“You’ve written an article in the *Figaro*!” exclaimed M. de Guermantes with the same violence as if he had exclaimed: “Why, she’s my cousin.”

“Yes, yesterday.”

“In the *Figaro*, are you sure? I can’t believe it. Because we each of us get our *Figaro*, and if one of us had missed it, the other would certainly have noticed it. That’s so, isn’t Oriane, there was nothing.”

The Duke sent for the *Figaro* and only yielded to the evidence of his own eyes, as though up till then the probability had been that I had made a mistake as to the newspaper for which I had written.

“What’s that? I don’t understand. So you’ve written an article in the *Figaro*!” said the Duchess, making an obvious effort in speaking of something that did not interest her. “Come, Basin, you can read it afterwards.”

“No, the Duke looks so nice like that with his great beard dangling over the paper,” said Gilberte. “I shall read it as soon as I get home.”

“Yes, he wears a beard now that everybody else is clean-shaven,” said the Duchess. “He never does anything that other people do. When we were first married, he shaved not only his beard but his moustache as well. The peasants who didn’t know him by sight thought that he couldn’t be French. At that time he was called the Prince des Laumes.”

“Is there still a Prince des Laumes?” asked Gilberte, who was interested in everything that concerned the people who had refused to acknowledge her existence during all those years.

“Why, no,” the Duchess replied with a melancholy, caressing gaze.

“Such a charming title! One of the finest titles in France!” said Gilberte, a certain sort of banality springing inevitably, as a clock strikes the hour, to the lips of certain quite intelligent persons.

“Ah, yes, I’m sorry too. Basin would like his sister’s son to adopt it, but it isn’t the same thing; though it would be possible, since it doesn’t have to be the eldest son, it can be passed to a younger brother. I was telling you that in those days Basin was clean-shaven. One day, at a pilgrimage—you remember, my dear,” she turned to her husband, “that pilgrimage at Paray-le-Monial—my brother-in-law Charlus, who always enjoys talking to peasants, was saying to one after another: ‘Where do you come from?’ and as he’s extremely generous, he would give them something, take them off to have a drink. For nobody was ever at the same time simpler and more haughty than Meme. You’ll see him refuse to bow to a Duchess whom he doesn’t think duchessy enough, and heap kindnesses on a kennelman. So then I said to Basin: ‘Come, Basin, say something to them too.’ My husband, who is not always very inventive ...” (“Thank you, Oriane,” said the Duke, without interrupting his reading of my article in which he was immersed) “... went up to one of the peasants and repeated his brother’s question in so many words: ‘Where do you come from?’ ‘I’m from Les Laumes.’ ‘You’re from Les Laumes? Why, I’m your Prince.’ Then the peasant looked at Basin’s hairless face and replied: ‘That ain’t true. You’re an English.’”<sup>28</sup>

In these little anecdotes of the Duchess’s, such great and eminent titles as that of Prince des Laumes seemed to stand out in one’s mind’s eye in their true setting, in their original state and their local colour, as in certain Books of Hours one recognises amid the mediaeval crowd the soaring steeple of Bourges.

Some visiting-cards were brought to her which a footman had just left at the door. “I can’t think what’s got into her, I don’t know her. It’s to you that I’m indebted for this, Basin. Although that sort of acquaintance hasn’t done you much good, my poor dear,” and, turning to Gilberte: “I really don’t know how to explain to you who she is, you’ve certainly never heard of her, she’s called Lady Rufus Israels.”

Gilberte flushed crimson: “No, I don’t know her,” she said (which was all the more untrue in that Lady Israels and Swann had been reconciled two years before the latter’s death and she addressed Gilberte by her Christian name), “but I know quite well, from hearing about her, who it is that you mean.”

Gilberte was becoming very snobbish. Thus a girl having one day asked her out of tactlessness or malice what the name of her real, not her adoptive father was, in her confusion and as though to euphemise the name a little, instead of pronouncing it “Souann” she said “Svann,” a change, as she soon realised, for the worse, since it made this name of English origin a German patronymic. And she had even gone on to say, abasing herself with the object of self-enhancement: “All sorts of different stories have been told about my birth, but I’m not supposed to know anything about it.”

Ashamed though Gilberte must have felt at certain moments, when she thought of her parents (for even Mme Swann represented for her, and was, a good mother), of such a way of looking at life, it must alas be borne in mind that its elements were doubtless borrowed from her parents, for we do not create ourselves of our own accord out of nothing. But to a certain quantity of egoism which exists in the mother, a different egoism, inherent in the father’s family, is admixed, which does not invariably mean that it is superadded, nor even precisely that it serves as a multiple, but rather that it creates a fresh egoism infinitely stronger and more redoubtable. And ever since the world began, ever since families in which some defect exists in one form have been intermarrying with families in which the same defect exists in another, thereby creating a peculiarly

complete and detestable variety of that defect in the offspring, the accumulated egoisms (to confine ourselves, for the moment, to this defect) must have acquired such force that the whole human race would have been destroyed, did not the malady itself engender natural restrictions, capable of reducing it to reasonable proportions, comparable to those which prevent the infinite proliferation of the infusoria from destroying our planet, the unisexual fertilisation of plants from bringing about the extinction of the vegetable kingdom, and so forth. From time to time a virtue combines with this egoism to produce a new and disinterested force. The combinations by which, in the course of generations, moral chemistry thus stabilises and renders innocuous the elements that were becoming too powerful, are infinite, and would give an exciting variety to family history. Moreover, with these accumulated egoisms, such as must have existed in Gilberte, there may coexist some charming virtue of the parents; it appears for a moment to perform an interlude by itself, to play its touching part with an entire sincerity. No doubt Gilberte did not always go so far as when she insinuated that she was perhaps the natural daughter of some great personage; but as a rule she concealed her origins. Perhaps it was simply too painful for her to confess them and she preferred that people should learn of them from others. Perhaps she really believed that she was concealing them, with that dubious belief which at the same time is not doubt, which leaves room for the possibility of what we wish to be true, of which Musset furnishes an example when he speaks of hope in God.

"I don't know her personally," Gilberte went on. Did she, in fact, when she called herself Mlle de Forcheville, expect that people would not know that she was Swann's daughter? Some people, perhaps, who, she hoped, would in time become everybody. She could not be under any illusion as to their number at the moment, and doubtless knew that many people must be whispering: "That's Swann's daughter." But she knew it only with that knowledge which tells us of people taking their lives in desperation while we are going to a ball, that is to say, a remote and vague knowledge for which we are at no pains to substitute a more precise knowledge based on direct observation. Gilberte belonged, during those years at least, to the most widespread variety of human ostriches, the kind that bury their heads not in the hope of not being seen, which they consider highly improbable, but in the hope of not seeing that they can be seen, which seems to them something to the good and enables them to leave the rest to chance. As distance makes things appear smaller, more indistinct, less dangerous, Gilberte preferred not to be near other people at the moment when they made the discovery that she was by birth a Swann. And as we are near the people whom we picture to ourselves, and we can picture people reading their newspaper, Gilberte preferred the newspapers to style her Mlle de Forcheville. It is true that with the writings for which she herself was responsible, her letters, she prolonged the transition for some time by signing herself "G. S. Forcheville." The real hypocrisy in this signature was made manifest by the suppression not so much of the other letters of the name "Swann" as of those of the name "Gibertete." For, by reducing the innocent Christian name to a simple "G," Mlle de Forcheville seemed to insinuate to her friends that the similar amputation applied to the name "Swann" was due equally to the necessity of abbreviation. Indeed she gave a special significance to the "S," extending it with a sort of long tail which ran across the "G," but which one felt to be transitory and destined to disappear like the tail which, still long in the monkey, has ceased to exist in man.

In spite of all this, there was something of Swann's intelligent curiosity in her snobbishness. I remember that, in the course of that same afternoon, she asked Mme de Guermantes whether she could meet M. du Lau, and that when the Duchess replied that he was an invalid and never went out, Gilberte asked what he was like, for, she added with a faint blush, she had heard a great deal about him. (The Marquis du Lau had in fact been one of Swann's most intimate friends before the latter's marriage, and Gilberte may perhaps even have caught a glimpse of him, but at a time when she was not interested in such people.) "Would M. de Bréauté or the Prince d'Agrigente be at all like him?" she asked. "Oh! not in the least," exclaimed Mme de Guermantes, who had a keen sense of these provincial differences and drew portraits that were sober and restrained but coloured by her husky, golden voice, beneath the gentle efflorescence of her violet-blue eyes. "No, not in the least. Du Lau was very much the Périgord squire, full of charm, with all the good manners and informality of his province. At Guermantes, when we had the King of England with whom du Lau was on the friendliest terms, we used to have a little meal after the men came in from shooting. It was the hour when du Lau was in the habit of going to his room to take off his boots and put on big woollen slippers. Well, the presence of King Edward and all the grand-dukes didn't disturb him in the least, he came down to the great hall at Guermantes in his woollen slippers. He felt that he was the Marquis du Lau d'Allemands who had no reason to stand on ceremony with the King of England. He and that charming Quasimodo de Breteuil, they were the two I liked best. Actually they were great friends of ..." (she was about to say "your father" and stopped short). "No, there's no resemblance at all, either to Gri-gri or to Bréauté. He was the typical nobleman from Périgord. Incidentally, Meme quotes a page from Saint-Simon about a Marquis d'Allemands, and it's just like him."

I recited the opening words of the portrait: "M. d'Allemands, who was a man of great distinction among the nobility of Périgord, through his own birth and through his merit, and was regarded by every soul alive there as a general arbiter to whom each had recourse because of his probity, his capacity and the suavity of his manners, as it were the cock of his province."

"Yes, that's it," said Mme de Guermantes, "all the more so as du Lau was always as red as a turkeycock."

"Yes, I remember hearing that description quoted," said Gilberte, without adding that it had been quoted by her father, who was, as we know, a great admirer of Saint-Simon.

She liked also to speak of the Prince d'Agrigente and of M. de Bréauté for another reason. The Prince d'Agrigente had inherited his title from the House of Aragon, but the family domains were in Poitou. As for his country house, the house, that is to say, in which he lived, it was not the property of his own family but

had come to him from his mother's first husband, and was situated approximately halfway between Martinville and Guermantes. And so Gilberte spoke of him and of M. de Bréauté as of country neighbours who reminded her of her old home. Strictly speaking there was an element of falsehood in this attitude, since it was only in Paris, through the Comtesse Mole, that she had come to know M. de Bréauté, albeit he had been an old friend of her father's. As for her pleasure in speaking of the country round Tansonville, it may have been sincere. Snobbery is with certain people analogous to those beverages in which the agreeable is mixed with the beneficial. Gilberte took an interest in some lady of fashion because she possessed priceless books and portraits by Nattier which my former friend would probably not have taken the trouble to inspect in the Bibliothèque Nationale or the Louvre, and I imagine that, in spite of their even greater proximity, the magnetic influence of Tansonville would have had less effect in drawing Gilberte towards Mme Sazerat or Mme Goupil than towards M. d'Agrigente.

"Oh! poor Babal and poor Gri-gri," said Mme de Guermantes, "they're in a far worse state than du Lau. I'm afraid they haven't long to live, either of them."

When M. de Guermantes had finished reading my article, he complimented me in somewhat qualified terms. He regretted the slightly hackneyed style with its "turgid metaphors as in the antiquated prose of Chateaubriand;" on the other hand he congratulated me wholeheartedly for "keeping myself busy": "I like a man to do something with what God gave him. I don't like useless people who are always self-important or fidgety. A fatuous breed!"

Gilberte, who was acquiring the ways of society with extreme rapidity, declared how proud she would be to be able to say that she was the friend of an author. "You can imagine that I shall tell people that I have the pleasure, the *honour* of your acquaintance."

"You wouldn't care to come with us tomorrow to the Opéra-Comique?" the Duchess asked me; and it struck me that it would be doubtless in that same box in which I had first beheld her, and which had seemed to me then as inaccessible as the underwater realm of the Nereids. But I replied in a melancholy tone: "No, I'm not going to the theatre just now; I've lost a friend to whom I was greatly attached." I almost had tears in my eyes as I said this, and yet for the first time it gave me a sort of pleasure to speak about it. It was from that moment that I began to write to everyone saying that I had just experienced a great sorrow, and to cease to feel it.

When Gilberte had gone, Mme de Guermantes said to me: "You didn't understand my signals. I was trying to hint to you not to mention Swann." And, as I apologised: "But I absolutely sympathise: I was on the point of mentioning him myself, but I stopped short just in time, it was terrible. You know, it really is a great bore," she said to her husband, seeking to mitigate my own error by appearing to believe that I had yielded to a propensity common to everyone and difficult to resist.

"What am I supposed to do about it?" replied the Duke. "You'd better tell them to take those drawings upstairs again, since they make you think about Swann. If you don't think about Swann, you won't speak about him."

On the following day I received two congratulatory letters which surprised me greatly, one from Mme Goupil, the Combray lady, whom I had not seen for many years and to whom, even at Combray, I had scarcely ever spoken. A reading-room had given her the chance of seeing the *Figaro*. Thus, when anything occurs in one's life which makes some stir, messages come to one from people situated so far outside the zone of one's acquaintance, and one's memory of whom is already so remote, that they seem to be placed at a great distance, especially in the dimension of depth. A forgotten friendship of one's schooldays, which has had a score of opportunities of recalling itself to one's mind, gives us a sign of life, if in a negative sense. Thus for instance Bloch, whose opinion of my article I should have loved to know, did not write to me. It is true that he had read the article and was to admit it later, but as it were backhandedly. For he himself contributed an article to the *Figaro* some years later, and was anxious to inform me immediately of the event. Since what he regarded as a privilege had fallen to him as well, the envy that had made him pretend to ignore my article ceased, as though by the lifting of a compressor, and he spoke to me about it, though not at all in the way in which he hoped to hear me talk about his: "I knew that you too had written an article," he told me, "but I didn't think I ought to mention it to you, for fear of hurting your feelings, because one oughtn't to speak to one's friends about the humiliating things that happen to them. And it's obviously humiliating to write in the organ of the sabre and the aspergillum, of afternoon tea, not to mention the holy-water stoup." His character remained unaltered, but his style had become less precious, as happens to certain people who shed their mannerisms, when, ceasing to compose symbolist poetry, they take to writing serial novels.

To console myself for his silence, I re-read Mme Goupil's letter; but it was lacking in warmth, for if the aristocracy employ certain formulas which form a sort of palisade, between them, between the initial "*Monsieur*" and the "*sentiments distingués*" of the close, cries of joy and admiration may spring up like flowers, and their clusters spill over the palisade their adoring fragrance. But bourgeois conventionality enwraps even the content of letters in a tissue of "your well-deserved success," at best "your great success." Sisters-in-law, faithful to their upbringing and tight-laced in their respectable stays, think that they have overflowed into the most distressing enthusiasm if they have written "my kindest regards." "Mother joins me" is a superlative with which one is rarely indulged.

I received another letter as well as Mme Goupil's, but the name of the writer, Sanilon, was unknown to me. It was in a plebeian hand and a charming style. I was distressed not to be able to discover who had written to me.

Two days later I found myself rejoicing at the thought that Bergotte was a great admirer of my article, which he had been unable to read without envy. But a moment later my joy subsided. For Bergotte had written me



not a word. I had simply wondered whether he would have liked the article, fearing that he would not. As I was asking myself the question, Mme de Forcheville had replied that he admired it enormously and considered it the work of a great writer. But she had told me this while I was asleep: it was a dream. Almost all our dreams respond thus to the questions which we put to ourselves with complicated statements, stage productions with several characters, which however have no future.

As for Mlle de Forcheville, I could not help feeling saddened when I thought of her. What? Swann's daughter, whom he would have so loved to see at the Guermandes', whom the latter had refused to give their great friend the pleasure of inviting—to think that she was now spontaneously sought after by them, time having passed, time that renews all things, that infuses a new personality, based upon what we have been told about them, into people whom we have not seen for a long time, during which we ourselves have grown a new skin and acquired new tastes. But when, to this daughter of his, he used from time to time to say, taking her in his arms and kissing her: "How comforting it is, my darling, to have a daughter like you; one day when I'm no longer here, if people still mention your poor papa, it will be only to you and because of you," Swann, in thus pinning a timorous and anxious hope of survival on his daughter after his death, was as mistaken as an old banker who, having made a will in favour of a little dancer whom he is keeping and who has very nice manners, tells himself that though to her he is no more than a great friend, she will remain faithful to his memory. She had very nice manners while her feet under the table sought the feet of those of the old banker's friends who attracted her, but all this very discreetly, behind an altogether respectable exterior. She will wear mourning for the worthy man, will feel relieved to be rid of him, will enjoy not only the ready money, but the real estate, the motor-cars that he has bequeathed to her, taking care to remove the monogram of the former owner which makes her feel slightly ashamed, and will never associate her enjoyment of the gift with any regret for the giver. The illusions of paternal love are perhaps no less poignant than those of the other kind; many daughters regard their fathers merely as the old men who leave their fortunes to them. Gilberte's presence in a drawing-room, instead of being an occasion for people to speak of her father from time to time, was an obstacle in the way of their seizing the opportunities that might still have remained for them to do so, and that were becoming more and more rare. Even in connexion with the things he had said, the presents he had given, people acquired the habit of not mentioning him, and she who ought to have kept his memory young, if not perpetuated it, found herself hastening and completing the work of death and oblivion.

And it was not only with regard to Swann that Gilberte was gradually completing the process of forgetting; she had accelerated in me that process with regard to Albertine. Under the influence of desire, and consequently of the desire for happiness which Gilberte had aroused in me during the few hours in which I had supposed her to be someone else, a certain number of miseries, of painful preoccupations, which only a little while earlier had obsessed my mind, had slipped away from me, carrying with them a whole block of memories, probably long since crumbling and precarious, with regard to Albertine. For if many memories, which were connected with her, had at the outset helped to keep alive in me my grief for her death, in return that grief had itself fixed those memories. So that the modification of my sentimental state, prepared for no doubt obscurely day by day by the continuous erosions of forgetfulness, but realised abruptly as a whole, gave me the impression, which I remember having felt that day for the first time, of a void, of the suppression in myself of a whole segment of my associations of ideas, such as a man feels in whose brain a long-impaired artery has burst, so that a whole section of his memory is abolished or paralysed. I no longer loved Albertine. At most, on certain days, when the weather was of the sort which, by modifying, by awakening one's sensibility, brings one back into relationship with the real, I felt painfully sad in thinking of her. I was suffering from a love that no longer existed. Thus does an amputee, in certain kinds of weather, feel pain in the limb that he has lost.

The disappearance of my suffering, and of all that it carried away with it, left me diminished, as recovery from an illness which has occupied a big place in one's life often does. No doubt it is because memories are not always true that love is not eternal, and because life is made up of a perpetual renewal of cells. But this renewal, in the case of memories, is nevertheless retarded by one's attention, which temporarily arrests and freezes what is bound to change. And since it is the case with grief as with the desire for women that one magnifies it by thinking about it, having plenty of other things to do should make it easier not only to be chaste but to forget.

By another reaction, if (though it was a distraction—the desire for Mlle d'Eporcheville—that had suddenly brought home to me the tangible reality of forgetting) it remains true that it is time that gradually brings forgetfulness, forgetfulness in its turn does not fail to alter profoundly our notion of time. There are optical errors in time as there are in space. The persistence within me of an old impulse to work, to make up for lost time, to change my way of life, or rather to begin to live, gave me the illusion that I was still as young as in the past; and yet the memory of all the events that had succeeded one another in my life (and also of those that had succeeded one another in my heart, for when one has greatly changed, one is misled into supposing that one has lived longer) in the course of those last months of Albertine's existence, had made them seem to me much longer than a year, and now this forgetfulness of so many things, separating me by gulfs of empty space from quite recent events which they made me think remote, because I had had what is called "the time" to forget them, by its fragmentary, irregular interpolation in my memory—like a thick fog at sea which obliterates all the landmarks—distorted, dislocated my sense of distances in time, contracted in one place, distended in another, and made me suppose myself now further away from things, now much closer to them, than I really was. And as in the new spaces, as yet unexplored, which extended before me, there would be no more trace of my love for Albertine than there had been, in the time lost which I had just traversed, of my

love for my grandmother, my life appeared to me—offering a succession of periods in which, after a certain interval, nothing of what had sustained the previous period survived in that which followed—as something utterly devoid of the support of an individual, identical and permanent self, something as useless in the future as it was protracted in the past, something that death might as well put an end to at this point or that, without in the least concluding it, as those courses of French history in the sixth form at school which stop short indiscriminately, according to the whim of the curriculum or the professor, at the Revolution of 1830, or that of 1848, or the end of the Second Empire.

Perhaps then the fatigue and sadness that I felt arose not so much from my having loved in vain what I was already forgetting as from my beginning to enjoy the company of new living people, purely social figures, mere friends of the Guermantes, offering no interest in themselves. It was easier perhaps to reconcile myself to the discovery that she whom I had loved was no more, after a certain interval of time, than a pale memory, than to the rediscovery in myself of that futile activity which makes us waste time decorating our lives with a human vegetation which is robust but parasitic, which likewise will become nothing when it is dead, which already is alien to all that we have ever known, but which nevertheless our garrulous, melancholy, conceited senility seeks to cultivate. The newcomer who would find it easy to endure the prospect of life without Albertine had made his appearance in me, since I had been able to speak of her at Mme de Guermantes's in the language of grief without any real suffering. The possible advent of these new selves, which ought each to bear a different name from the preceding one, was something I had always dreaded, because of their indifference to the object of my love—long ago in connexion with Gilberte when her father told me that if I went to live in Oceania I would never wish to return, quite recently when I had read with such a pang in my heart the memoirs of a mediocre writer who, separated by life from a woman whom he had adored when he was young, meets her as an old man without pleasure, without any desire to see her again. Yet he was bringing me on the contrary, this newcomer, at the same time as oblivion an almost complete elimination of suffering, a possibility of comfort—this newcomer, so dreaded yet so beneficent, who was none other than one of those spare selves which destiny holds in reserve for us, and which, paying no more heed to our entreaties than a clear-sighted and thus all the more authoritative physician, it substitutes in spite of us, by a timely intervention, for the self that has been too seriously wounded. This process, as it happens, automatically occurs from time to time, like the decay and renewal of our tissues, but we notice it only if the former self contained a great grief, a painful foreign body, which we are surprised to find no longer there, in our amazement at having become another person to whom the sufferings of his predecessor are no more than the sufferings of a stranger, of which we can speak with compassion because we do not feel them. Indeed we are unconcerned about having undergone all those sufferings, since we have only a vague remembrance of having suffered them. It may well be that likewise our nightmares are horrifying. But on waking we are another person, who cares little that the person whose place he takes has had to flee from a gang of cut-throats during the night.

No doubt this self still maintained some contact with the old, as a friend who is indifferent to a bereavement speaks of it nevertheless to the persons present in a suitable tone of sorrow, and returns from time to time to the room in which the widower who has asked him to receive the company for him may still be heard weeping. I too still wept when I became once again for a moment the former friend of Albertine. But it was into a new personality that I was tending to change altogether. It is not because other people are dead that our affection for them fades; it is because we ourselves are dying. Albertine had no cause to reproach her friend. The man who was usurping his name was merely his heir. We can only be faithful to what we remember, and we remember only what we have known. My new self, while it grew up in the shadow of the old, had often heard the other speak of Albertine; through that other self, through the stories it gathered from it, it thought that it knew her, it found her lovable, it loved her; but it was only a love at second hand.

Another person in whom the process of forgetting, as far as Albertine was concerned, was probably more rapid at this time, and indirectly enabled me to register a little later a new advance which that process had made in myself (and this is my memory of my second stage before finally forgetting), was Andrée. I can scarcely indeed but cite this forgetting of Albertine as, if not the sole cause, if not even the principal cause, at any rate a conditioning and necessary cause of a conversation which occurred between Andrée and myself about six months after the conversation I have already reported, and in which her words were very different from those that she had used on the former occasion. I remember that it was in my room because at that moment I found pleasure in having semi-carnal relations with her, by reason of the collective aspect which my love for the girls of the little band had originally had and now assumed once more, a love that had long been undivided among them and only for a while associated exclusively with Albertine's person, during the months that had preceded and followed her death.

We were in my room for another reason as well which enables me to date this conversation quite accurately. This was that I had been banished from the rest of the apartment because it was Mamma's "at home" day. After some hesitation she had gone to lunch with Mme Sazerat, thinking that, since the latter always contrived, even at Combray, to invite one to meet boring people, she would be able without sacrificing any pleasure to return home in good time. And she had indeed returned in time and without regrets, Mme Sazerat having had nobody but the most deadly people who were in any case chilled by the special voice that she adopted when she had company, what Mamma called her Wednesday voice. My mother was none the less fond of her, and sympathised with her ill-fortune—the result of the indiscretions of her father who had been ruined by the Duchesse de X—which compelled her to live all the year round at Combray, with a few weeks at her cousin's house in Paris and a long "pleasure-trip" every ten years.

I remember that the day before this, after months of entreaty from me, and because the Princess was always begging her to come, Mamma had gone to call on the Princesse de Parme, who paid no calls herself and at whose house people as a rule contented themselves with signing their names, but who had insisted on my mother's coming to see her, since the rules of etiquette forbade Her Highness to come to us. My mother had come home thoroughly cross: "You sent me on a wild goose chase," she told me. "The Princesse de Parme barely greeted me. She turned back to the ladies she was talking to without paying any attention to me, and after ten minutes, as she hadn't addressed a word to me, I came away without her even offering me her hand. I was extremely annoyed. However, on the doorstep, as I was leaving, I met the Duchesse de Guermantes who was very kind and spoke to me a great deal about you. What a strange idea of yours to talk to her about Albertine! She told me that you'd said to her that her death had been a great blow to you." (I had in fact said this to the Duchess, but I didn't even recall it, and I had hardly made a point of it. But the most heedless of people often give remarkable attention to words we let slip, words which seem quite natural to us, and which excite their curiosity profoundly.) "I shall never go near the Princesse de Parme again. You've made me make a fool of myself."

The next day, which was my mother's "at home," Andrée came to see me. She did not have much time, as she had to go and call for Gisele with whom she was very anxious to dine. "I know her faults, but she's after all my best friend and the person for whom I feel most affection," she told me. And she even appeared to be slightly alarmed at the thought that I might ask her to let me dine with them. She was hungry for people, and a third person who knew her too well, such as myself, by preventing her from letting herself go, would prevent her from enjoying herself to the full in their company.

It is true that I was not there when she came; she was waiting for me, and I was about to go through my small sitting-room to join her when I realised, on hearing a voice, that I had another visitor. Impatient to see Andrée, and not knowing who the other person was (who evidently did not know her since he had been put in another room), I listened for a moment at the door of the small sitting-room; for my visitor was not alone, he was speaking to a woman. "Oh, my darling, it is in my heart!" he warbled to her, quoting the verses of Armand Silvestre. "Yes, you will always remain my darling in spite of everything you've done to me:

The dead are sleeping peacefully beneath earth's crust.  
And so must sleep the feelings time effaces.  
Those relics of the heart, they also have their dust;  
Do not lay hands upon their sacred traces.<sup>29</sup>

It's a bit outmoded, but how pretty it is! And also what I might have said to you from the first:

You will make them weep, child beloved and lovely ...

What, you don't know it?

... All those urchins, men of the future,  
Already they hang their youthful reverie  
Upon your eyelashes caressing and pure.

Ah! for a moment I thought I could say to myself:

The very first night that he came here  
I had for my pride no further fear.  
I told him: 'You will love me, dear,  
For just as long as you are able.'  
In his arms I slept like an angel."

Curious to see the woman to whom this deluge of poems was addressed, even though it meant postponing for a moment my urgent meeting with Andrée, I opened the door. They were being recited by M. de Charlus to a young soldier whom I soon recognised as Morel, and who was about to set off for his fortnight's training. He was no longer on friendly terms with M. de Charlus, but saw him from time to time to ask some favour of him. M. de Charlus, who usually gave a more masculine style to his love-making, also had his tender moments. Moreover, during his childhood, in order to be able to feel and understand the words of the poets, he had been obliged to imagine them as being addressed not to faithless beauties but to young men. I left them as soon as I could, although I sensed that paying visits with Morel was an immense satisfaction to M. de Charlus, to whom it gave the momentary illusion of having married again. And besides, he combined in his person the snobbery of queens with the snobbery of servants.

The memory of Albertine had become so fragmentary that it no longer caused me any sadness and was no more now than a transition to fresh desires, like a chord which announces a change of key. And indeed, any idea of a passing sensual whim being ruled out, in so far as I was still faithful to Albertine's memory, I was happier at having Andrée in my company than I would have been at having an Albertine miraculously restored. For Andrée could tell me more things about Albertine than Albertine herself had ever told me. Now the problems concerning Albertine still remained in my mind although my tenderness for her, both physically and emotionally, had already vanished. And my desire to know about her life, because it had diminished less, was now relatively greater than my need of her presence. Moreover, the idea that a woman had perhaps had relations with Albertine no longer aroused in me anything save the desire to have relations with that woman myself. I told Andrée this, caressing her as I spoke. Then, without making the slightest effort to make her words consistent with those of a few months earlier, Andrée said to me with a lurking smile: "Ah! yes, but

you're a man. And so we can't do quite the same things as I used to do with Albertine." And whether because she felt that it would increase my desire (in the hope of extracting confidences, I had told her that I would like to have relations with a woman who had had them with Albertine) or my grief, or perhaps destroy a sense of superiority to herself which she might suppose me to feel at being the only person who had had relations with Albertine, she went on: "Ah! we spent many happy hours together; she was so caressing, so passionate. But it wasn't only with me that she liked to enjoy herself. She had met a handsome young fellow at Mme Verdurin's called Morel. They came to an understanding at once. He undertook—having her permission to enjoy them himself, for he liked little novices, and as soon as he had set them on the path of evil would abandon them—he undertook to entice young fisher-girls in remote villages, or young laundry-girls, who would fall for a boy but might not have responded to a girl's advances. As soon as a girl was well under his control, he'd bring her to a safe place and hand her over to Albertine. For fear of losing Morel, who took part in it all too, the girl always obeyed, and yet she lost him all the same, because, as he was afraid of what might happen and also as once or twice was enough for him, he would run off leaving a false address. Once he had the nerve to bring one of these girls, with Albertine, to a brothel at Couliville, where four or five of the women had her together, or in turn. That was his passion, and Albertine's too. But Albertine suffered terrible remorse afterwards. I believe that when she was with you she had conquered her passion and put off indulging it from day to day. Besides, her affection for you was so great that she had scruples. But it was quite certain that if she ever left you she'd begin again. Only I think that after having left you, if she succumbed to that overpowering urge, her remorse must have been even greater. She hoped that you would rescue her, that you would marry her. She felt in her heart that her obsession was a sort of criminal lunacy, and I've often wondered whether it wasn't after an incident of that sort, which had led to a suicide in a family, that she killed herself on purpose. I must confess that in the early days of her stay with you she hadn't entirely given up her games with me. There were days when she seemed to need it, so much so that once, when it would have been so easy elsewhere, she couldn't bring herself to say good-bye without taking me to bed with her, in your house. We were out of luck, and were very nearly caught. She'd taken advantage of the fact that Françoise had gone out to do some shopping, and you weren't yet home. Then she'd turned out all the lights so that when you let yourself in with your key it would take you some time to find the switch; and she'd left the door of her room open. We heard you come upstairs, and I only just had time to tidy myself up and come down. Which was quite unnecessary as it happened, for by an incredible chance you'd left your key at home and had to ring the bell. But we lost our heads all the same, so that to conceal our embarrassment we both of us, without having a chance to consult each other, had the same idea: to pretend to dread the scent of syringa which as a matter of fact we adored. You were bringing a big branch of it home with you, which enabled me to turn my head away and hide my confusion. This didn't prevent me from telling you in the most idiotic way that perhaps Françoise had come back and would let you in, when a moment earlier I had told you the lie that we'd only just come in from our drive and that when we arrived Françoise hadn't yet left the house (which was true). But the big mistake we made—assuming that you had your key—was to turn out the light, for we were afraid that as you came upstairs you'd see it being turned on again; or at least we hesitated too long. And for three nights on end Albertine couldn't get a wink of sleep because she was constantly afraid that you might be suspicious and ask Françoise why she hadn't turned on the light before leaving the house. For Albertine was terribly afraid of you, and at times she maintained that you were treacherous and nasty and that you hated her really. After three days she gathered from your calm that you hadn't thought of asking Françoise, and she was able to sleep again. But she never resumed her relations with me after that, either from fear or from remorse, for she made out that she did really love you, or perhaps she was in love with someone else. At all events, nobody could ever mention syringa again in her hearing without her turning crimson and putting her hand over her face in the hope of hiding her blushes."

Like certain strokes of fortune, there are strokes of misfortune that come too late, and do not assume the magnitude they would have had in our eyes a little earlier. One such was the misfortune that Andrée's terrible revelation was to me. No doubt, even when a piece of bad news is bound to make us unhappy, it may happen that, in the involvement, the give and take of conversation, it will pass in front of us without stopping and, preoccupied as we are by all the things we have to say in reply, transformed into someone else by the desire to please our present interlocutors, protected for a few moments in this new context against the affections and the sufferings that we discarded upon entering it and will return to when the brief spell is broken, we do not have the time to take them in. However, if these affections and these sufferings are too predominant, we enter only distractedly into the zone of a new and momentary world, in which, too faithful to our sufferings, we are incapable of becoming other; and then the words that we hear said enter at once into relation with our heart, which has not been neutralised. But for some time past words that concerned Albertine, like a poison that has evaporated, had lost their toxic power. She was already too remote from me. As an afternoon stroller, seeing a misty crescent in the sky, thinks: "So that's the vast moon," I said to myself: "What, so that truth which I've sought for so long, which I've so dreaded, is nothing more than these few words uttered in the course of conversation, words to which one cannot even give one's whole attention because one isn't alone!" Besides, it took me at a serious disadvantage, as I had exhausted myself with Andrée. Really, I would have liked to have more strength to devote to a truth of such magnitude; it remained extraneous to me, but this was because I had not yet found a place for it in my heart. We would like the truth to be revealed to us by novel signs, not by a sentence, a sentence similar to those which we have constantly repeated to ourselves. The habit of thinking prevents us at times from experiencing reality, immunises us against it, makes it seem no more than

another thought. There is no idea that does not carry in itself its possible refutation, no word that does not imply its opposite.

In any case, if it was true, it was by this time the sort of useless truth about the life of a dead mistress that rises up from the depths and reveals itself when we can no longer have any use for it. Then, thinking doubtless of some other woman whom we now love and with regard to whom the same thing may occur (for to her whom we have forgotten we no longer give a thought), we lament. We say to ourselves: "If she were alive!" We say to ourselves: "If she who is alive could only understand all this and realise that when she is dead I shall know everything that she is hiding from me!" But it is a vicious circle. If I could have caused Albertine to live, I should at the same time have caused Andrée to reveal nothing. It is to some extent the same thing as the everlasting "You'll see when I no longer love you," which is so true and so absurd, since one would indeed elicit much if one no longer loved, but one would no longer be interested in eliciting it. In fact it is precisely the same thing. For if the woman you see again when you no longer love her then tells you all, it is because it is no longer she, or because it is no longer you: the person who loved has ceased to exist. There too death has passed by, and has made everything simple and pointless. I pursued these reflexions basing myself on the assumption that Andrée was truthful—which was possible—and had been prompted to sincerity with me precisely because she had now had relations with me, from that Saint-André-des-Champs side of her nature which Albertine too had shown me at the start. She was encouraged in this case by the fact that she was no longer afraid of Albertine, for the reality of other people survives their death for only a short time in our minds, and after a few years they are like those gods of obsolete religions whom one offends without fear because one has ceased to believe in their existence. But the fact that Andrée no longer believed in the reality of Albertine might mean that she no longer feared (any more than to betray a secret which she had promised not to reveal) to concoct a lie which retrospectively slandered her alleged accomplice. Had this absence of fear permitted her to reveal the truth at last in telling me all that, or else to concoct a lie, if, for some reason, she supposed me to be full of happiness and pride and wished to cause me pain? Perhaps she was irritated with me (an irritation that had been held in abeyance so long as she saw that I was miserable, disconsolate) because I had had relations with Albertine and she envied me, perhaps—supposing that I considered myself on that account more favoured than her—an advantage which she herself had never, perhaps, obtained, nor even sought. Thus it was that I had often heard her say how ill they were looking to people whose look of radiant health, and in particular their awareness of it, exasperated her, and add, in the hope of annoying them, that she herself was very well, a fact that she never ceased to proclaim when she was seriously ill until the day when, in the detachment of death, it no longer mattered to her that others should be well and should know that she herself was dying. But that day was still remote. Perhaps she was angry with me, for what reason I had no idea, as long ago she had been filled with rage against the young man so learned in sporting matters, so ignorant of everything else, whom we had met at Balbec, who since then had been living with Rachel, and on the subject of whom Andrée poured forth defamatory remarks, hoping to be sued for slander in order to be able to formulate discreditable accusations against his father the falseness of which he would be unable to prove. Quite possibly this rage against myself had simply revived, having doubtless ceased when she saw how miserable I was. For the very same people whom, her eyes flashing with rage, she had longed to disgrace, to kill, to send to prison, by false testimony if need be, had only to reveal themselves to be unhappy or humiliated, for her to cease to wish them any harm, and to be ready to overwhelm them with kindness. For she was not fundamentally wicked, and if her unapparent, slightly deeper nature was not the niceness which one assumed at first from her delicate attentions, but rather envy and pride, her third nature, deeper still, the true but not entirely realised nature, tended towards kindness and the love of her fellow-creatures. Only, like all those people who in a certain state desire a better one, but, knowing it only through desiring it, do not realise that the first condition is to break away from the former state—like neurasthenics or drug-addicts who are anxious to be cured, but at the same time not to be deprived of their neuroses or their drugs, or like those world-loving religious or artistic spirits who long for solitude but seek none the less to envisage it as not implying an absolute renunciation of their former existence—Andrée was prepared to love all her fellow-creatures, but on the condition that she should first of all have succeeded in not having to visualise them as triumphant, and to that end should have humiliated them in advance. She did not understand that one should love even the proud, and conquer their pride by love and not by an even more overweening pride. But the fact is that she was like those invalids who wish to be cured by the very means that prolong their disease, which they like and would cease at once to like if they renounced them. But people wish to learn to swim and at the same time to keep one foot on the ground.

As regards the young sportsman, the Verdurins' nephew, whom I had met during my two visits to Balbec, it may be recounted here, incidentally and prematurely, that, some time after Andrée's visit, the account of which will be resumed in a moment, certain events occurred which caused a great sensation. First of all, this young man (perhaps in memory of Albertine with whom I did not then know that he had been in love) became engaged to Andrée and married her, to the despair of Rachel, of which he took no notice. Andrée no longer said then (that is to say some months after the visit of which I have been speaking) that he was a wretch, and I realised later on that she had said so only because she was madly in love with him and felt that he did not want her. But another fact made an even greater impression. This young man produced certain sketches for the theatre, with settings and costumes designed by himself, which effected in contemporary art a revolution at least equal to that brought about by the Russian ballet. In fact, the best-qualified critics regarded his works as being of cardinal importance, almost works of genius, and indeed I agree with them, confirming thus, to my own astonishment, the opinion long held by Rachel. The people who had known him at Balbec,

intent only on seeing whether the cut of the clothes of the men with whom he associated was elegant or not, spending all his time at baccarat, at the races, on the golf-course or on the polo-ground, who knew that at school he had always been a dunce and had even been expelled from the lycée (to annoy his parents, he had gone to live for two months in the smart brothel in which M. de Charlus had hoped to surprise Morel), thought that perhaps his productions were the work of Andrée, who was prepared out of love to allow him all the glory, or that more probably he was paying, out of his huge personal fortune at which his excesses had barely nibbled, some inspired but needy professional to create them (this kind of wealthy society, unpolished by contact with the aristocracy and having no idea of what constitutes an artist—who to them is either an actor whom they engage to recite monologues at their daughter's engagement party, handing him his fee discreetly there and then in another room, or a painter to whom they make her sit once she is married, before the children come and when she is still at her best—are apt to believe that all the society people who write, compose or paint have their work done for them and pay to obtain a reputation as a creative artist as other men pay to secure a seat in Parliament). But all this was untrue, and this young man was indeed the author of those admirable works. When I learned this, I found myself torn between a number of different suppositions. Either he had indeed been for long years the "thickhead" that he appeared to be, and some physiological cataclysm had awakened the dormant genius in him, like a Sleeping Beauty; or else at the time of his turbulent schooldays, of his failures to matriculate, of his heavy gambling losses at Balbec, of his reluctance to get into the little "tram" with his aunt Verdurin's faithful because of their hideous clothes, he was already a man of genius, distracted perhaps from his genius, which he had left in abeyance in the effervescence of juvenile passions; or again, already a conscious man of genius, and at the bottom of his class only because, while the master was spouting platitudes about Cicero, he himself was reading Rimbaud or Goethe. True, there were no grounds for any such hypothesis when I met him at Balbec, where his interests seemed to me to be centred exclusively on turning out a smart carriage and pair and mixing cocktails. But even this is not an irrefutable objection. He may have been extremely vain—something that is not incompatible with genius—and have sought to shine in the manner which he knew was best calculated to dazzle in the world in which he lived, that is to say, not by showing a profound knowledge of *Elective Affinities*, but far rather a knowledge of how to drive four-in-hand. Moreover, I am not at all sure that later on, when he had become the creator of those fine and original works, he would have cared greatly, outside the theatres in which he was known, to greet anyone who was not in evening dress, like the "faithful" in their earlier manner, which would be a proof in him not of stupidity but of vanity, and indeed of a certain practical sense, a certain perceptiveness in adapting his vanity to the mentality of the imbeciles whose esteem he valued and in whose eyes a dinner-jacket might perhaps shine with greater brilliance than the gaze of a thinker. Who can say whether, seen from without, some man of talent, or even a man devoid of talent but a lover of the things of the mind, myself for instance, would not have appeared, to anyone who met him at Rivebelle, in the hotel at Balbec, or on the esplanade, the most perfect and pretentious fool? Not to mention that for Octave matters of art must have been something so intimate, inhabiting the most secret recesses of his being, that doubtless it would never have occurred to him to speak of them, as Saint-Loup, for instance, would have done, Saint-Loup for whom the arts had all the glamour that horses and carriages had for Octave. And then he may have had a passion for gambling, and it is said that he retained it. But all the same, if the piety which brought to light the unknown work of Vinteuil emerged from the murky environment of Montjouvain, I was no less struck by the thought that what were perhaps the most extraordinary masterpieces of our day had emerged not from the *concours general*, from a model, academic education in the manner of the Broglie family, but from the frequentation of paddocks and fashionable bars. In any case, in those days at Balbec, the reasons which made me anxious to know him, and which made Albertine and her friends anxious that I should not know him, were equally extraneous to his merit, and could only have illustrated the eternal misunderstanding between an "intellectual" (represented in this instance by myself) and society (represented by the little band) with regard to a social personality (the young golfer). I had no inkling of his talent, and his prestige in my eyes—like that of Mme Blatin long ago—had been that of being, whatever they might say, the friend of my girlfriends, and more one of their band than myself. On the other hand, Albertine and Andrée, symbolising in this respect the incapacity of society people to bring a sound judgment to bear upon the things of the mind and their propensity to attach themselves in that connexion to false appearances, not only thought me almost idiotic because I took an interest in such an imbecile, but were astonished above all that, golfer for golfer, my choice should have fallen upon the poorest player of them all. If, for instance, I had chosen to make friends with young Gilbert de Belloyeuve, apart from golf he was a boy who had a certain amount of conversation, who had almost succeeded in the *concours general* and was an agreeable versifier (as a matter of fact he was the stupidest of them all). Or again, if my object had been to "make a study for a book," Guy Saumoy, who was completely insane, who had abducted two girls, was at least a singular type who might "interest" me. These two might have been allowed me, but the other, what attraction could I find in him? He was the epitome of the "great lout," of the "thickhead."

To return to Andrée's visit, after the disclosure that she had just made to me of her relations with Albertine, she added that the main reason for which Albertine had left me was concern about what her friends of the little band, and other people as well, might think of her living like that with a young man to whom she was not married: "Of course I know it was in your mother's house. But that makes no difference. You can't imagine what that sort of girls' community is like, what they conceal from one another, how they dread one another's opinion of them. I've seen some of them being terribly severe with young men simply because they knew their friends and they were afraid that certain things might be repeated, and then I've happened by chance to see those very same girls in a totally different light, much to their chagrin."

A few months earlier, this knowledge which Andrée appeared to possess of the motives that swayed the girls of the little band would have seemed to me the most precious thing in the world. What she said was perhaps sufficient to explain why Albertine, who had given herself to me afterwards in Paris, had refused to do so at Balbec where I was constantly meeting her friends, a fact which I had absurdly supposed to be so advantageous for being on better terms with her. Perhaps indeed it was because she had seen signs of my confiding in Andrée, or because I had rashly told the latter that she was coming to spend the night at the Grand Hotel, that Albertine, who an hour earlier was perhaps ready to let me enjoy certain favours as though that were the simplest thing in the world, had abruptly changed her mind and threatened to ring the bell. But then, she must have been accommodating to lots of others. This thought rekindled my jealousy and I told Andrée that there was something that I wished to ask her.

"You did those things in your grandmother's empty apartment?"

"Oh, no, never, we'd have been disturbed."

"Why, I thought ... it seemed to me ..."

"Besides, Albertine chiefly liked doing it in the country."

"Oh! where?"

"Originally, when she hadn't time to go very far, we used to go to the Buttes-Chaumont. She knew a house there. Or else we would lie under the trees, there's never anyone about. In the grotto of the Petit Trianon, too."

"There, you see; how am I to believe you? You swore to me, not a year ago, that you'd never done anything at the Buttes-Chaumont."

"I was afraid of hurting you."

As I have said, I thought (although not until much later) that on the contrary it was on this second occasion, the day of her confessions, that Andrée had sought to hurt me. And this thought would have occurred to me at once, because I should have felt the need of it, if I had still been as much in love with Albertine. But Andrée's words did not hurt me sufficiently to make it essential for me to dismiss them immediately as untrue. On the whole, if what Andrée said was true, and I did not doubt it at the time, the real Albertine whom I now discovered, after having known so many diverse forms of Albertine, differed very little from the young bacchante who had loomed up and at once been detected that first day, on the front at Balbec, and who had offered me so many different aspects in succession, as a town alters the disposition of its buildings one after the other as we approach it, to the point of crushing, obliterating the principal monument which alone we could see from a distance, until finally, when we know it well and can judge it exactly, its true proportions prove to be those which the perspective of the first glance had indicated, the rest, through which we passed, being no more than that succession of lines of defence which everything in creation raises against our vision, and which we must cross one after another, at the cost of how much suffering, before we arrive at the heart. If, however, I had no need to believe absolutely in Albertine's innocence because my suffering had diminished, I can say that conversely, if I did not suffer unduly at this revelation, it was because, some time since, the belief in Albertine's innocence that I had fabricated for myself had been gradually replaced, without my realising it, by the belief, ever present in my mind, in her guilt. Now if I no longer believed in Albertine's innocence, it was because I had already ceased to feel the need, the passionate desire to believe in it. It is desire that engenders belief, and if we are not as a rule aware of this, it is because most belief-creating desires—unlike the desire which had persuaded me that Albertine was innocent—end only with our own life. To all the evidence that corroborated my original version, I had stupidly preferred mere assertions by Albertine. Why had I believed them? Lying is essential to humanity. It plays as large a part perhaps as the quest for pleasure, and is moreover governed by that quest. One lies in order to protect one's pleasure, or one's honour if the disclosure of one's pleasure runs counter to one's honour. One lies all one's life long, even, especially, perhaps only, to those who love one. For they alone make us fear for our pleasure and desire their esteem. I had at first thought Albertine guilty, and it was only my desire, by utilising the powers of my intelligence to construct an edifice of doubt, that had put me on the wrong track. Perhaps we live surrounded by electric, seismic signs which we must interpret in good faith in order to know the truth about people's characters. If the truth be told, saddened as I was in spite of everything by Andrée's words, I thought it fitter that the reality should finally turn out to accord with what my instinct had originally foreboded rather than with the wretched optimism to which I had later so cravenly surrendered. I preferred that life should remain on the same level as my intuitions. Those, moreover, that I had had that first day on the beach, when I had believed that these girls were the incarnation of frenzied pleasure, of vice, and again on the evening when I had seen Albertine's governess leading that passionate girl home to the little villa, as one drives into its cage a wild animal which nothing, later on, despite appearances, will ever succeed in taming—did not those intuitions accord with what Bloch had told me when he had made the world seem so fair to my eyes by showing me, making me quiver with excitement on all my walks, at every encounter, the universality of desire? Perhaps, when all was said, it was better that I should not have found those first intuitions verified afresh until now. While the whole of my love for Albertine endured, they would have made me suffer too acutely and it was better that there should have subsisted of them only a trace, my perpetual suspicion of things which I did not see and which nevertheless happened continually so close to me, and perhaps another trace as well, earlier, vaster, which was *my love itself*. For was it not, despite all the denials of my reason, tantamount to knowing Albertine in all her hideousness, actually to choose her, to love her? And even in the moments when mistrust is stilled, is not love the persistence of that mistrust and a transformation of it, is it not a proof of clairvoyance (a proof unintelligible to the lover himself), since desire, reaching out always towards what is

most opposite to oneself, forces one to love what will make one suffer? There is no doubt that, inherent in a woman's charm, in her eyes, her lips, her figure, are the elements, unknown to us, most calculated to make us unhappy, so much so that to feel attracted to her, to begin to love her, is, however innocent we may pretend it to be, to read already, in a different version, all her betrayals and her misdeeds. And may not those charms which, to attract me, corporealised thus the raw, dangerous, fatal elements of a person, have stood in a more direct relation of cause and effect to those secret poisons than do the seductive luxuriance and the toxic juice of certain venomous flowers? It was perhaps, I told myself, Albertine's vice itself, the cause of my future sufferings, that had produced in her that honest, frank manner, creating the illusion that one enjoyed with her the same loyal and unqualified comradeship as with a man, just as a parallel vice had produced in M. de Charlus a feminine delicacy of sensibility and mind. In the midst of the most complete blindness, perspicacity subsists in the form of predilection and tenderness; so that it is a mistake to speak of a bad choice in love, since as soon as there is a choice it can only be a bad one.

"Did those excursions to the Buttes-Chaumont take place when you used to call for her here?" I asked Andrée.

"Oh! no, from the day Albertine came back from Balbec with you, except the time I told you about, she never did anything again with me. She wouldn't even allow me to mention such things to her."

"But my dear Andrée, why go on lying to me? By the merest chance, for I never try to find out anything, I've learned in the minutest detail things of that sort which Albertine did, I can tell you exactly, on the bank of a river with a laundry-girl, only a few days before her death."

"Ah! perhaps after she'd left you, that I can't say. She felt that she'd failed, that she'd never again be able to regain your trust."

These last words shattered me. Then I thought again of the evening of the syringa, and remembered that about a fortnight later, as my jealousy kept changing its object, I had asked Albertine whether she had ever had relations with Andrée, and she had replied: "Oh! never! Of course, I adore Andrée; I have a deep affection for her, but as I might have for a sister, and even if I had the tastes which you seem to suppose, she's the last person I should have thought of in that connexion. I can swear to you by anything you like, the honour of my aunt, the grave of my poor mother." I had believed her. And yet even if my suspicions had not been aroused by the contradiction between her former partial admissions with regard to certain matters and the vehemence with which she had afterwards denied them as soon as she saw that I was not indifferent to them, I ought to have remembered Swann, convinced of the platonic nature of M. de Charlus's friendships and assuring me of it on the evening of the very day I had seen the tailor and the Baron in the courtyard; I ought to have reflected that there are two worlds one behind the other, one consisting of the things that the best, the sincerest people say, and behind it the world composed of the sequence of what those same people do; so that when a married woman says to you of a young man: "Oh! it's perfectly true that I have an immense affection for him, but it's something quite innocent, quite pure, I could swear it on the memory of my parents," one ought oneself, instead of feeling any hesitation, to swear to oneself that she has probably just come out of the bathroom into which, after every assignation she has with the young man in question, she rushes in order not to have a child. The spray of syringa made me profoundly sad, as did also the thought that Albertine could have believed, and said, that I was treacherous and hostile; and most of all perhaps, certain lies so unexpected that I had difficulty in grasping them. One day Albertine had told me that she had been to an aerodrome where one of the airmen was a friend of hers (this doubtless in order to divert my suspicions from women, thinking that I was less jealous of men), and that it had been amusing to see how dazzled Andrée was by the said airman, by all the compliments he paid Albertine, until finally Andrée had wanted to go up in his aeroplane with him. Now this was a complete fabrication; Andrée had never visited the aerodrome in question.

When Andrée left me, it was dinner-time. "You'll never guess who has been to see me and stayed at least three hours," said my mother. "I call it three hours, but it was perhaps longer. She arrived almost on the heels of my first visitor, who was Mme Cottard, sat still and watched everybody come and go—and I had more than thirty callers—and left me only a quarter of an hour ago. If you hadn't had your friend Andrée with you, I'd have sent for you."

"Well, who was it?"

"A person who never pays calls."

"The Princesse de Parme?"

"Why, I have a cleverer son than I thought. It's no fun making you guess a name; you hit on it at once."

"Did she apologise for her coldness yesterday?"

"No, that would have been stupid. The visit itself was her apology. Your poor grandmother would have thought it admirable. It seems that about two o'clock she sent a footman to ask whether I had an 'at home.' She was told that this was the very day and so up she came."

My first thought, which I did not dare mention to Mamma, was that the Princesse de Parme, surrounded the day before by people of rank and fashion with whom she was on intimate terms and enjoyed conversing, on seeing my mother come into the room had felt an annoyance which she had made no attempt to conceal. And it was quite in the style of the great ladies of Germany, which for that matter the Guermantes had largely adopted—that haughtiness for which they thought to atone by a scrupulous affability. But my mother believed, and I came in time to share her opinion, that the Princesse de Parme, having simply failed to recognise her, had not felt bound to pay any attention to her, and that she had learned after my mother's departure who she was, either from the Duchesse de Guermantes whom my mother had met below or from the list of her visitors, whose names were requested by the ushers before they entered her presence and inscribed in a register. She



had felt that it would be ungracious to send word or to say to my mother: "I didn't recognise you," and instead—and this was no less in keeping with the code of manners of the German courts and with the ways of the Guermantes than my original version—had thought that a visit, an exceptional action on the part of a royal personage, and what was more a visit of several hours' duration, would convey the explanation to my mother in an indirect but no less convincing form, which is just what did happen.

But I did not stay to hear my mother's account of the Princess's visit, for I had just recalled a number of facts concerning Albertine as to which I had intended but had forgotten to question Andrée. How little, for that matter, did I know, would I ever know, of this story of Albertine, the only story that really interested me, or was at least beginning to interest me again at certain moments. For man is that ageless creature who has the faculty of becoming many years younger in a few seconds, and who, surrounded by the walls of the time through which he has lived, floats within them as in a pool the surface-level of which is constantly changing so as to bring him within range now of one epoch, now of another. I wrote to Andrée asking her to come again. She was unable to do so until a week later. Almost as soon as she entered the room I said to her: "Very well, then, since you maintain that Albertine never did that sort of thing while she was staying here, according to you it was to be able to do it more freely that she left me, but for which of her friends?"

"Certainly not, it wasn't that at all."

"Then because I was too disagreeable?"

"No, I don't think so. I think she was forced to leave you by her aunt who had designs for her future upon that guttersnipe, you know, the young man you used to call 'I'm a wash-out,' the young man who was in love with Albertine and had asked for her hand. Seeing that you weren't marrying her, they were afraid that the shocking length of her stay in your house might prevent the young man from doing so. And so Mme Bontemps, on whom the young man was constantly bringing pressure to bear, summoned Albertine home. Albertine after all needed her uncle and aunt, and when she realised that they were forcing her hand she left you."

I had never in my jealousy thought of this explanation, but only of Albertine's desire for women and of my own surveillance of her; I had forgotten that there was also Mme Bontemps who might eventually regard as strange what had shocked my mother from the first. At least Mme Bontemps was afraid that it might shock this possible husband whom she was keeping in reserve for Albertine in case I failed to marry her.

So that it was possible that a long debate had gone on in Albertine's mind between staying with me and leaving me, but that her decision to leave me had been made on account of her aunt, or of that young man, and not on account of women to whom perhaps she had never given a thought. The most disturbing thing to my mind was that Andrée, who after all no longer had anything to conceal from me as to Albertine's morals, swore to me that nothing of the sort had ever occurred between Albertine on the one hand and Mlle Vinteuil or her friend on the other (Albertine herself was unconscious of her own proclivities when she first met them, and they, from the fear of being mistaken in the object of one's desire which breeds as many errors as desire itself, regarded her as extremely hostile to that sort of thing. Perhaps later on they had learned that her tastes were similar to their own, but by that time they knew Albertine and Albertine knew them too well for there to be any question of their doing those things together).

"But, my dear Andrée, you're lying again. Remember—you admitted it to me yourself when I telephoned to you the evening before, don't you remember?—that Albertine had been so anxious, and kept it from me as though it was something that I mustn't know about, to go to the afternoon party at the Verdurins' at which Mlle Vinteuil was expected."

"Yes, but Albertine hadn't the slightest idea that Mlle Vinteuil was to be there."

"What? You yourself told me that she'd met Mme Verdurin a few days earlier. Besides, Andrée, there's no point in our trying to deceive one another. I found a note one morning in Albertine's room, a note from Mme Verdurin urging her to come that afternoon."

And I showed her this note which, as a matter of fact, Françoise had taken care to bring to my notice by placing it on top of Albertine's belongings a few days before her departure, and, I regret to say, leaving it there to make Albertine suppose that I had been rummaging among her things, to let her know in any case that I had seen it. And I had often wondered whether Françoise's ruse had not been largely responsible for the departure of Albertine, who saw that she could no longer conceal anything from me, and felt disheartened, defeated. I showed Andrée the note: *I feel no compunction, on the strength of this genuine family feeling ...* "You know very well, Andrée, that Albertine used always to say that Mlle Vinteuil's friend was indeed a mother, an elder sister to her."

"But you've misinterpreted this note. The person Mme Verdurin wished Albertine to meet that afternoon wasn't Mlle Vinteuil's friend at all, it was the young man you call 'I'm a wash-out,' and the family feeling is what Mme Verdurin felt for the brute, who is after all her nephew. However, I think Albertine did hear afterwards that Mlle Vinteuil was to be there—Mme Verdurin may have let her know incidentally. And of course the thought of seeing her friend again gave her pleasure, reminded her of happy times in the past, just as you'd be glad, if you were going somewhere, to know that Elstir would be there, but no more than that, not even as much. No, if Albertine was unwilling to say why she wanted to go to Mme Verdurin's, it was because it was a rehearsal to which Mme Verdurin had invited a very small party, including that nephew of hers whom you met at Balbec, to whom Mme Bontemps was hoping to marry Albertine off and to whom Albertine wanted to talk. He was a real blackguard ..."

And so Albertine, contrary to what Andrée's mother used to think, had had after all the prospect of a wealthy marriage. And when she had wanted to visit Mme Verdurin, when she had spoken to her in secret, when she had been so annoyed that I should have gone there that evening without warning her, the intrigue

between her and Mme Verdurin had had as its object her meeting not Mlle Vinteuil but the nephew who loved Albertine and for whom Mme Verdurin, with that satisfaction of working towards the realisation of one of those marriages which surprise one in some families into whose state of mind one does not enter completely, did not desire a rich bride. Now I had never given another thought to this nephew who had perhaps been the initiator thanks to whom I had received Albertine's first kiss. And for the whole structure of Albertine's anxieties which I had built up, I must now substitute another, or rather superimpose it, for perhaps it did not exclude the other, a taste for women not being incompatible with marriage. Was this marriage really the reason for Albertine's departure, and had she, out of self-respect, so as not to appear to be dependent on her aunt, or to force me to marry her, preferred not to mention it? I was beginning to realise that the system of multiple motives for a single action, of which Albertine showed her mastery in her relations with her friends when she allowed each of them to suppose that it was for her sake that she had come, was only a sort of symbol, artificial and premeditated, of the different aspects that an action assumes according to the point of view from which we look at it. It was not the first time I had felt astonishment and a sort of shame at never once having told myself that Albertine was in a false position in my house, a position that might give offence to her aunt; it was not the first, nor was it the last. How often has it happened to me, after having sought to understand the relations between two people and the crises that they entail, to hear all of a sudden a third person speak to me of them from his own point of view, for he has even closer relations with one of the two, a point of view which has perhaps been the cause of the crisis! And if people's actions remain so unpredictable, how should not the people themselves be equally so? Listening to the people who maintained that Albertine was a schemer who had tried to get one man after another to marry her, it was not difficult to imagine how they would have defined her life with me. And yet to my mind she had been a victim, a victim who perhaps was not altogether pure, but in that case guilty for other reasons, on account of vices which people did not mention.

But above all we must remember this: on the one hand, lying is often a trait of character; on the other hand, in women who would not otherwise be liars, it is a natural defence, improvised at first, then more and more organised, against that sudden danger which would be capable of destroying all life: love. Furthermore, it is not by mere chance that sensitive, intellectual men invariably give themselves to insensitive and inferior women, and moreover remain attached to them, and that the proof that they are not loved does not in the least cure them of the urge to sacrifice everything to keep such women with them. If I say that such men need to suffer, I am saying something that is accurate while suppressing the preliminary truths which make that need—involuntary in a sense—to suffer a perfectly understandable consequence of those truths. Not to mention the fact that, all-round natures being rare, a man who is highly sensitive and highly intellectual will generally have little will-power, will be the plaything of habit and of that fear of suffering in the immediate present which condemns to perpetual suffering—and that in these conditions he will never be prepared to repudiate the woman who does not love him. One may be surprised that he should be content with so little love, but one ought rather to picture to oneself the anguish that may be caused him by the love which he himself feels. An anguish which one ought not to pity unduly, for those terrible commotions that are caused by an unrequited love, by the departure or the death of a mistress, are like those attacks of paralysis which at first leave us helpless, but after which the muscles tend gradually to recover their vital elasticity and energy. What is more, this anguish does not lack compensation. These sensitive and intellectual persons are as a rule little inclined to falsehood. It takes them all the more unawares in that, however intelligent they may be, they live in the world of the possible, live in the anguish which a woman has just inflicted on them rather than in the clear perception of what she wanted, what she did, what she loved, a perception granted chiefly to self-willed natures which need it in order to prepare against the future instead of lamenting the past. And so these persons feel that they are betrayed without quite knowing how. Wherefore the mediocre woman whom we are astonished to see them loving enriches the universe for them far more than an intelligent woman would have done. Behind each of her words, they feel that a lie is lurking, behind each house to which she says that she has gone, another house, behind each action, each person, another action, another person. Of course they do not know what or whom, they do not have the energy, would not perhaps find it possible, to discover. A lying woman, by an extremely simple trick, can beguile, without taking the trouble to change her method, any number of people, and, what is more, the very person who ought to have discovered the trick. All this confronts the sensitive intellectual with a universe full of depths which his jealousy longs to plumb and which are not without interest to his intelligence.

Without being precisely a man of that category, I was going perhaps to learn, now that Albertine was dead, the secret of her life. Here again, do not these indiscretions which come to light only after a person's life on earth is ended prove that nobody really believes in a future life? If these indiscretions are true, one ought to fear the resentment of a woman whose actions one reveals fully as much in anticipation of meeting her in heaven as one feared it while she was alive and one felt bound to keep her secret. And if these indiscretions are false, invented because she is no longer present to contradict them, one ought to be even more afraid of the dead woman's wrath if one believed in heaven. But no one does believe in it.

On the whole, I did not understand any better than before why Albertine had left me. If the face of a woman can with difficulty be grasped by the eyes, which cannot take in the whole of its mobile surface, or by the lips, or still less by the memory, if it is shrouded in obscurity according to her social position, according to the level at which we are situated, how much thicker is the veil drawn between those of her actions which we see and her motives! Motives are situated at a deeper level, which we do not perceive, and moreover engender actions other than those of which we are aware and often in absolute contradiction to them. When has there

not been some man in public life, regarded as a saint by his friends, who is discovered to have forged documents, robbed the State, betrayed his country? How often is a great nobleman robbed by a steward whom he has brought up from childhood, ready to swear that he was an excellent man, as possibly he was! And how much more impenetrable does it become, this curtain that screens another's motives, if we are in love with that person, for it clouds our judgment and also obscures the actions of one who, feeling that she is loved, ceases suddenly to set any store by what otherwise would have seemed to her important, such as wealth for example. Perhaps also it induces her to feign to some extent this scorn for wealth in the hope of obtaining more by making us suffer. The bargaining instinct may also enter into everything else; and even actual incidents in her life, an intrigue which she has confided to no one for fear of its being revealed to us, which many people might for all that have discovered had they felt the same passionate desire to know it as we ourselves while preserving a greater equanimity of mind and arousing fewer suspicions in the guilty party, an intrigue of which certain people have in fact not been unaware—but people whom we do not know and would not know how to find. And among all these reasons for her adopting an inexplicable attitude towards us, we must include those idiosyncrasies of character which impel people, whether from indifference to their own interests, or from hatred, or from love of freedom, or under the impulse of anger, or from fear of what certain people will think, to do the opposite of what we expected. And then there are the differences of environment, of upbringing, in which we refuse to believe because, when we are talking together, they are effaced by our words, but which return when we are apart to direct the actions of each of us from so opposite a point of view that no true meeting of minds is possible.

"Anyhow there's no need to seek out all these explanations," Andrée went on. "Heaven knows I was fond of Albertine, and she was a really nice creature, but, especially after she had typhoid (a year before you first met us all), she was an absolute madcap. All of a sudden she would get sick of what she was doing, all her plans would have to be changed that very minute, and she herself probably couldn't say why. You remember the year when you first came to Balbec, the year when you met us all? One fine day she got somebody to send her a telegram calling her back to Paris; she barely had time to pack her trunks. But there was absolutely no reason for her to go. All the pretexts she gave were false. Paris would be a deadly bore at that moment. We were all of us still at Balbec. The golf club wasn't closed, indeed the heats for the cup which she was so keen on winning weren't finished. She'd certainly have won it. It only meant staying on for another week. Well, off she went at a gallop. I often spoke to her about it later. She said herself that she didn't know why she had left, that she felt homesick (the home being Paris, you can imagine how likely that was), that she didn't feel happy at Balbec, that she thought there were people there who sneered at her."

And I told myself there was this much truth in what Andrée said: that if differences between minds account for the different impressions produced upon one person and another by the same work, and differences of feeling account for the impossibility of captivating a person who does not love you, there are also differences between characters, peculiarities in a single character, which are also motives for action. Then I ceased to think about this explanation and said to myself how difficult it is to know the truth in this world.

I had indeed noticed Albertine's desire to go to Mme Verdurin's and her concealment of it: I had not been mistaken on that point. But then even if we do thus manage to grasp one fact, all the others, which we perceive only in their outward appearance, escape us, and we see only a succession of flat silhouettes of which we say to ourselves: it is this, it is that, it is because of her, or it is because of someone else. The revelation that Mlle Vinteuil was expected had seemed to me the true explanation, all the more so because Albertine, forestalling me, had spoken to me about it. And subsequently had she not refused to swear to me that Mlle Vinteuil's presence gave her no pleasure? And here, with regard to this young man, I remembered a point which I had forgotten. A short time before, while Albertine was living with me, I had met him, and he had been—in contrast to his attitude at Balbec—extremely friendly, even affectionate towards me, had begged me to allow him to call on me, a request which I had refused for a number of reasons. And now I realised that it was quite simply because, knowing that Albertine was living in my house, he had wanted to be on good terms with me so as to have every facility for seeing her and for carrying her off from me, and I concluded that he was a scoundrel. Some time later, when I attended the first performances of this young man's work, although I continued to think that if he had been so anxious to call on me, it was for Albertine's sake, and although I felt this to be reprehensible, I remembered that in the past, if I had gone down to Doncières to see Saint-Loup, it was really because I was in love with Mme de Guermantes. It is true that the two cases were not quite the same: Saint-Loup not being in love with Mme de Guermantes, there was in my display of affection for him a trace of duplicity perhaps, but no treason. But I reflected afterwards that this affection which one feels for the person who possesses the object of one's desire is something that one feels equally even if he himself also loves that object. No doubt, one ought in that case to resist a friendship which will lead one straight to betrayal. And I think that this is what I have always done. But in the case of those who lack the strength to resist, we cannot say that the friendship they affect for their rival is a mere sham; they feel it sincerely and for that reason display it with a fervour which, once the betrayal has been accomplished, can cause the betrayed husband or lover to say with amazed indignation: "If you had heard the protestations of affection that the wretch showered on me! That a person should come to rob a man of his treasure, that I can understand. But that he should feel the diabolical need to assure him of his friendship first of all strikes me as a degree of ignominy and perversity almost impossible to imagine." No, in fact, there is no perverse pleasure in it, nor even an absolutely conscious lie.

The affection of this sort which Albertine's pseudofiancé had manifested for me that day had yet another excuse, being more complex than a simple by-product of his love for Albertine. It was only a short time since

he had known himself to be, confessed himself to be, been anxious to be proclaimed an intellectual. For the first time, values other than sporting or hedonistic existed for him. The fact that I enjoyed the esteem of Elstir and Bergotte, that Albertine had perhaps told him of the way I talked about writers, which had led her to imagine that I might myself be able to write, meant that all of a sudden I had become to him (to the new man whom he at last realised himself to be) an interesting person whose friendship he would have liked to cultivate, to whom he would have liked to confide his plans, whom he might perhaps have asked for an introduction to Elstir. So that he was in fact sincere when he asked if he might call on me, expressing a regard for me to which intellectual reasons as well as a reflexion of Albertine imparted a certain veracity. No doubt it was not *for that* that he was so anxious to come and see me and would have dropped everything in order to do so. But of this last reason, which did little more than raise to a sort of impassioned paroxysm the two other reasons, he was perhaps unaware himself, and the other two existed really, as might really have existed in Albertine, when she had been anxious to go to Mme Verdurin's on the afternoon of the rehearsal, the perfectly respectable pleasure that she would feel in meeting again friends of her childhood who in her eyes were no more depraved than she was in theirs, in talking to them, in showing them, by the mere fact of her presence at the Verdurins', that the poor little girl whom they had known was now invited to a noted salon, the pleasure also that she might perhaps have felt in listening to Vinteuil's music. If all this was true, the blush that had risen to Albertine's cheeks when I had mentioned Mlle Vinteuil was due to the fact that I had done so in the context of that afternoon party which she had tried to keep secret from me because of the marriage proposal of which I was not to know. Albertine's refusal to swear to me that she would have felt no pleasure in meeting Mlle Vinteuil again at that party had at the moment intensified my torment, strengthened my suspicions, but proved to me in retrospect that she had wanted to be sincere, even over an innocent matter, perhaps simply because it was an innocent matter. There nevertheless remained what Andrée had told me about her relations with Albertine. Perhaps, however, even without going so far as to believe that Andrée had invented them solely that I should not be happy, or able to feel superior to her, I could still suppose that she had slightly exaggerated her account of what she used to do with Albertine, and that Albertine, by a mental reservation, also minimised slightly what she had done with Andrée, making use Jesuitically of certain definitions which I had stupidly formulated on the subject, judging that her relations with Andrée did not fall into the category of what she was obliged to confess to me and that she could deny them without lying. But why should I believe that it was she rather than Andrée who was lying? Truth and life are very difficult to fathom, and I retained of them, without really having got to know them, an impression in which sadness was perhaps actually eclipsed by exhaustion.

## *Chapter Eighteen*

### SOJOURN IN VENICE

**M**y mother had taken me to spend a few weeks in Venice, and—as beauty may exist in the most precious as well as in the humblest things—I received there impressions analogous to those which I had felt so often in the past at Combray, but transposed into a wholly different and far richer key. When, at ten o'clock in the morning, my shutters were thrown open, I saw blazing there, instead of the gleaming black marble into which the slates of Saint-Hilaire used to turn, the golden angel on the campanile of St Mark's. Glittering in a sunlight which made it almost impossible to keep one's eyes upon it, this angel promised me, with its outstretched arms, for the moment when I appeared on the Piazzetta half an hour later, a joy more certain than any that it could ever in the past have been bidden to announce to men of good will. I could see nothing else so long as I remained in bed, but as the whole world is merely a vast sundial, a single sunlit segment of which enables us to tell what time it is, on the very first morning I was reminded of the shops in the Place de l'Eglise at Combray, which, on Sunday mornings, were always on the point of shutting when I arrived for mass, while the straw in the marketplace smelt strongly in the already hot sunlight. But on the second morning, what I saw on awakening, what made me get out of bed (because they had taken the place in my memory and in my desire of the recollections of Combray), were the impressions of my first morning stroll in Venice, in Venice where everyday life was no less real than in Combray, where as in Combray on Sunday mornings one had the pleasure of stepping down into a festive street, but where that street was entirely paved with sapphire-blue water, cooled by warm breezes and of a colour so durable that my tired eyes might rest their gaze upon it in search of relaxation without fear of its blenching. Like the good folk of the Rue de l'Oiseau at Combray, so also in this strange town, the inhabitants actually emerged from houses lined up side by side along the main street, but the role played there by houses of casting a patch of shade at their feet was entrusted in Venice to palaces of porphyry and jasper, above the arched doors of which the head of a bearded god (breaking the alignment, like the knocker on a door at Combray) had the effect of darkening with its shadow, not the brownness of the earth, but the splendid blueness of the water. On the Piazza, the shadow that would have been produced at Combray by the awning over the draper's shop and the barber's pole was a carpet of little blue flowers strewn at its feet upon the desert of sun-scorched flagstones by the relief of a Renaissance façade, which is not to say that, when the sun beat down, one was not obliged, in Venice as at Combray, to pull down the blinds, even beside the canal, but they hung between the quatrefoils and foliage of Gothic windows. Of this sort was the window in our hotel behind the balusters of which my mother sat waiting for me, gazing at the canal with a patience which she would not have displayed in the old days at Combray, at a time when, cherishing hopes for my future which had never been realised, she was unwilling to let me see how much she loved me. Nowadays she was well aware that an apparent coldness on her part would alter nothing, and the affection she lavished upon me was like those forbidden foods which are no longer withheld from invalids when it is certain that they are past recovery. True, the humble details which gave an individuality to the window of my aunt Leonie's bedroom seen from the Rue de l'Oiseau, the impression of asymmetry caused by its unequal distance from the windows on either side of it, the exceptional height of its wooden ledge, the angled bar which served to open the shutters, the two curtains of glossy blue satin tied back with loops—the equivalent of all these things existed in this hotel in Venice where I could hear also those words, so distinctive and so eloquent, which enable us to recognise from a distance the dwelling to which we are going home to lunch, and afterwards remain in our memory as testimony that, for a certain period of time, that dwelling was ours; but the task of uttering them had, in Venice, devolved not, as at Combray and most other places, upon the simplest, not to say the ugliest things, but upon the ogive, still half Arab, of a façade which is reproduced in all the architectural museums and all the illustrated art books as one of the supreme achievements of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages; from a long way away and when I had barely passed San Giorgio Maggiore, I caught sight of this ogival window which had already seen me, and the thrust of its pointed arches added to its smile of welcome the distinction of a loftier, scarcely comprehensible gaze. And because, behind its multi-coloured marble balusters, Mamma was sitting reading while she waited for me to return, her face shrouded in a tulle veil as heartrending in its whiteness as her hair to me who sensed that, hiding her tears, she had pinned it to her straw hat not so much with the idea of appearing "dressed" in the eyes of the hotel staff as in order to appear to me to be less in mourning, less sad, almost consoled for the death of my grandmother; because, not having recognised me at first, as soon as I called to her from the gondola, she sent out to me, from the bottom of her heart, a love which stopped only where there was no longer any corporeal matter to sustain it, on the surface of her impassioned gaze which she brought as close to me as possible, which she tried to thrust forward to the advanced post of her lips, in a smile which seemed to be kissing me, within the frame and beneath the canopy of the more discreet smile of the arched window lit up by the midday sun—because of this, that window has assumed in my memory the precious quality of things that have had, simultaneously with us, side by side with us, their share in a certain hour that struck, the same

for us and for them; and however full of admirable tracery its mullions may be, that illustrious window retains in my eyes the intimate aspect of a man of genius with whom we have spent a month in some holiday resort, where he has acquired a friendly regard for us; and if, ever since then, whenever I see a cast of that window in a museum, I am obliged to hold back my tears, it is simply because it says to me the thing that touches me more than anything else in the world: "I remember your mother so well."

And as I went indoors to join my mother who by now had left the window, on leaving the heat of the open air I had the same sensation of coolness that I experienced long ago at Combray when I went upstairs to my room; but in Venice it was a breeze from the sea that kept the air cool, and no longer on a little wooden staircase with narrow steps, but on the noble surfaces of marble steps continually splashed by shafts of blue-green sunlight, which, to the valuable instruction in the art of Chardin acquired long ago, added a lesson in that of Veronese. And since, in Venice, it is works of art, things of priceless beauty, that are entrusted with the task of giving us our impressions of everyday life, it is to falsify the character of that city, on the grounds that the Venice of certain painters is coldly aesthetic in its most celebrated parts (let us make an exception of the superb studies of Maxime Dethomas), to represent only its poverty-stricken aspects, in the districts where nothing of its splendour is to be seen, and, in order to make Venice more intimate and more genuine, to give it a resemblance to Aubervilliers. It has been the mistake of some very great artists, from a quite natural reaction against the artificial Venice of bad painters, to concentrate exclusively on the Venice of the more humble *campi*, the little deserted *rii*, which they found more real.

It was this Venice that I used often to explore in the afternoon, when I did not go out with my mother. The fact was that it was easier to find there women of the people, match-sellers, pearl-stringers, glass or lace makers, young seamstresses in black shawls with long fringes, whom there was nothing to prevent me from loving, because I had to a large extent forgotten Albertine, and who seemed to me more desirable than others, because I still remembered her a little. Who, in any case, could have told me precisely, in this passionate quest of mine for Venetian women, how much there was of themselves, how much of Albertine, how much of my old, long-cherished desire to visit Venice? Our slightest desire, though unique as a chord, nevertheless includes the fundamental notes on which the whole of our life is built. And sometimes, if we were to eliminate one of them, even one that we do not hear, that we are not aware of, one that has no connexion with the object of our quest, we would nevertheless see our whole desire for that object disappear. There were many things that I made no attempt to identify in the excitement I felt as I went in search of Venetian women.

My gondola followed the course of the small canals; like the mysterious hand of a genie leading me through the maze of this oriental city, they seemed, as I advanced, to be cutting a path for me through the heart of a crowded quarter which they bisected, barely parting, with a slender furrow arbitrarily traced, the tall houses with their tiny Moorish windows; and as though the magic guide had been holding a candle in his hand and were lighting the way for me, they kept casting ahead of them a ray of sunlight for which they cleared a route. One felt that between the mean dwellings which the canal had just parted, and which otherwise would have formed a compact whole, no open space had been reserved; so that a campanile or a garden trellis vertically overhung the *rio*, as in a flooded city. But, for both churches and gardens, thanks to the same transposition as in the Grand Canal, the sea so readily served as means of communication, as substitute for street or alley, that on either side of the *canaletto* the belfries rose from the water in this poor and populous district like those of humble and much-frequented parish churches bearing the stamp of their necessity, of their use by crowds of simple folk, the gardens traversed by the canal cutting trailed their startled leaves and fruit in the water, and on the ledges of the houses whose crudely cut stone was still rough as though it had only just been sawn, urchins surprised by the gondola sat back trying to keep their balance and allowing their legs to dangle vertically, like sailors seated upon a swing-bridge the two halves of which have been swung apart, allowing the sea to pass between them. Now and again would appear a handsomer building that happened to be there like a surprise in a box which one has just opened, a little ivory temple with its Corinthian columns and an allegorical statue on its pediment, somewhat out of place among the ordinary surroundings in the midst of which, for all that we tried to make space for it, the peristyle with which the canal had provided it retained the look of a landing-stage for market gardeners. I had the impression, which my desire strengthened further, of not being outside, but of entering more and more into the depths of something secret, because each time I found something new which came to place itself on one side of me or the other, a small monument or an unexpected *campo*, keeping the surprised expression of beautiful things which one sees for the first time and of which one doesn't yet perfectly understand the intended purpose or the utility.

I returned on foot through narrow lanes; I accosted plebeian girls as Albertine perhaps had done, and I should have liked to have her with me. Yet these could not be the same girls; at the time when Albertine had been in Venice, they would have been children still. But, after having been unfaithful in the past, in a basic sense and out of cowardice, to each of the desires that I had conceived as unique—since I had sought an analogous object and not the same one, which I despaired of finding again—now I systematically sought women whom Albertine had not known, just as I no longer sought those that I had desired in the past. True, it often happened to me to recall, with an extraordinary violence of desire, some wench of Méséglise or Paris, or the milk-girl I had seen early in the morning at the foot of a hill during my first journey to Balbec. But alas! I remembered them as they were then, that is to say as they certainly would not be now. So that if in the past I had been led to qualify my impression of the uniqueness of a desire by seeking, in place of a convent-girl I had lost sight of, a similar convent-girl, now, in order to recapture the girls who had troubled my adolescence or that of Albertine, I had to consent to a further departure from the principle of the individuality of desire:

what I must look for was not those who were sixteen then, but those who were sixteen today, for now, in the absence of that which was most distinctive in the person and which eluded me, what I loved was youth. I knew that the youth of those I had known existed no longer except in my impassioned recollection, and that it was not them, however anxious I might be to make contact with them when my memory recalled them to me, that I must cull if I really wished to harvest the youth and the blossom of the year.

The sun was still high in the sky when I went to meet my mother on the Piazzetta. We would call for a gondola. "How your poor grandmother would have loved this simple grandeur!" Mamma would say to me, pointing to the Doges' Palace which stood contemplating the sea with the thoughtful expression that had been bequeathed to it by its architect and that it faithfully retained in its mute attendance on its vanished lords. "She would even have loved those soft pink tints, because they are unmawkish. How she would have loved the whole of Venice, and what informality, worthy of nature itself, she would have found in all these beauties, this plethora of objects that seem to need no formal arrangement but present themselves just as they are—the Doges' Palace with its cubic shape, the columns which you say are those of Herod's palace, slap in the middle of the Piazzetta, and, even less deliberately placed, put there as though for want of anywhere better, the pillars from Acre, and those horses on the balcony of St Mark's! Your grandmother would have had as much pleasure seeing the sun setting over the Doges' Palace as over a mountain." And there was indeed an element of truth in what my mother said, for, as the gondola brought us back along the Grand Canal, we watched the double line of palaces between which we passed reflect the light and angle of the sun upon their pink flanks, and alter with them, seeming not so much private habitations and historic buildings as a chain of marble cliffs at the foot of which one goes out in the evening in a boat to watch the sunset. Seen thus, the buildings arranged along either bank of the canal made one think of objects of nature, but of a nature which seemed to have created its works with a human imagination. But at the same time (because of the always urban character of the impressions which Venice gives almost in the open sea, on those waters whose ebb and flow makes itself felt twice daily, and which alternately cover at high tide and uncover at low tide the splendid outside stairs of the palaces), as we should have done in Paris on the boulevards, in the Champs-Élysées, in the Bois, in any wide and fashionable avenue, we passed the most elegant women in the hazy evening light, almost all foreigners, who, languidly reclining against the cushions of their floating carriages, followed one another in procession, stopped in front of a palace where they had a friend to call on, sent to inquire whether she was at home, and while, as they waited for the answer, they prepared to leave a card just in case, as they would have done at the door of the Hotel de Guermentes, turned to their guidebooks to find out the period and the style of the palace, being shaken the while, as though upon the crest of a blue wave, by the wash of the glittering, swirling water, which took alarm on finding itself pent between the dancing gondola and the resounding marble. And thus any outing, even when it was only to pay calls or to leave visiting-cards, was threefold and unique in this Venice where the simplest social coming and going assumed at the same time the form and the charm of a visit to a museum and a trip on the sea.

Several of the palaces on the Grand Canal had been converted into hotels, and for the sake of a change or out of hospitality towards Mme Sazerat whom we had encountered—the unexpected and inopportune acquaintance whom one invariably meets when one travels abroad—and whom Mamma had invited to dine with us, we decided one evening to try a hotel which was not our own and in which we had been told that the food was better. While my mother was paying the gondolier and taking Mme Sazerat to the drawing-room which she had engaged, I slipped away to inspect the great hall of the restaurant with its fine marble pillars and walls and ceiling that were once entirely covered with frescoes, recently and badly restored. Two waiters were conversing in an Italian which I translate:

"Are the old people going to dine in their room? They never let us know. It's annoying; I never know whether I ought to keep their table for them (*non so se bisogna conserva lora la tavola*). Serve them right if they come down and find it's been taken! I don't understand how they can take in *forestieri* (foreigners) like that in such a smart hotel. They're not our sort of people."

Notwithstanding his scorn, the waiter was anxious to know what action he was to take with regard to the table, and was about to send the lift-boy upstairs to inquire when, before he had had time to do so, he received his answer: he had just caught sight of the old lady who was entering the room. I had no difficulty, despite the air of melancholy and weariness that comes with the weight of years, and despite a sort of eczema, of red leprosy that covered her face, in recognising beneath her bonnet, in her black jacket made by W—but to the untutored eye exactly like that of an old concierge, the Marquise de Villeparisis. The place where I was standing, engaged in studying the remains of a fresco between two of the beautiful marble panels, happened by chance to be immediately behind the table at which Mme de Villeparisis had just sat down.

"Then M. de Villeparisis won't be long. They've been here a month now, and they've only once not eaten together," said the waiter.

I was wondering who could be the relative with whom she was travelling and who was named M. de Villeparisis, when a few moments later I saw her old lover, M. de Norpois, advance towards the table and sit down beside her.

His great age had weakened the resonance of his voice, but had in compensation imparted to his speech, formerly so reserved, a positive intemperance. The cause of this was perhaps to be sought in ambitions for the realisation of which he felt that little time remained to him and which filled him with all the more vehemence and ardour; perhaps in the fact that, cut off from a world of politics to which he longed to return, he imagined, in the naivety of his desire, that he could turn out of office, by the savage criticisms which he launched at them, the men he was determined to replace. Thus do we see politicians convinced that the

Cabinet of which they are not members cannot hold out for three days. It would, however, be an exaggeration to suppose that M. de Norpois had entirely forgotten the traditions of diplomatic speech. Whenever "important matters" were at issue, he became once more, as we shall see, the man whom we remember in the past, but for the rest of the time he would inveigh against this man and that with the senile violence which makes certain octogenarians hurl themselves at women to whom they are no longer capable of doing any serious damage.

Mme de Villeparisis preserved, for some minutes, the silence of an old woman who in the exhaustion of age finds it difficult to rise from recollection of the past to consideration of the present. Then, turning to one of those eminently practical questions that indicate the survival of a mutual affection:

"Did you call at Salviati's?"

"Yes."

"Will they send it tomorrow?"

"I brought the bowl back myself. You shall see it after dinner. Let us look at the menu."

"Did you send instructions about my Suez shares?"

"No; at the present moment the Stock Exchange is entirely taken up with oil shares. But there's no hurry, in view of the propitious state of the market. Here is the menu. As a first course there is red mullet. Shall we try them?"

"I shall, but you are not allowed them. Ask for a risotto instead. But they don't know how to cook it."

"Never mind. Waiter, some mullet for Madame and a risotto for me."

A fresh and prolonged silence.

"Here, I've brought you the papers, the *Corriere della Sera*, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, and all the rest of them. Did you know that there is a strong likelihood of a diplomatic reshuffle in which the first scapegoat will be Paléologue, who is notoriously inadequate in Serbia. He may perhaps be replaced by Lozé, and there will be a vacancy at Constantinople. But," M. de Norpois hastened to add in a biting tone, "for an Embassy of such scope, in a capital where it is obvious that Great Britain must always, whatever happens, occupy the chief place at the council-table, it would be prudent to turn to men of experience better equipped to counter the subterfuges of the enemies of our British ally than are diplomats of the modern school who would walk blindfold into the trap." The angry volubility with which M. de Norpois uttered these last words was due principally to the fact that the newspapers, instead of suggesting his name as he had recommended them to do, named as a "hot favourite" a young minister of Foreign Affairs. "Heaven knows that the men of years and experience are far from eager to put themselves forward, after all manner of tortuous manoeuvres, in the place of more or less incapable recruits. I have known many of these self-styled diplomats of the empirical school who centred all their hopes in flying a kite which it didn't take me long to shoot down. There can be no question that if the Government is so lacking in wisdom as to entrust the reins of state to unruly hands, at the call of duty any conscript will always answer 'Present!' But who knows" (and here M. de Norpois appeared to know perfectly well to whom he was referring) "whether it would not be the same on the day when they came in search of some veteran full of wisdom and skill. To my mind, though everyone may have his own way of looking at things, the post at Constantinople should not be accepted until we have settled our existing difficulties with Germany. We owe no man anything, and it is intolerable that every six months they should come and demand from us, by fraudulent machinations and under protest, some full discharge or other which is invariably advocated by a venal press. This must cease, and naturally a man of high distinction who has proved his merit, a man who would have, if I may say so, the Emperor's ear, would enjoy greater authority than anyone else in bringing the conflict to an end."

A gentleman who was finishing his dinner bowed to M. de Norpois.

"Why, there's Prince Foggi," said the Marquis.

"Ah, I'm not sure that I know who you mean," muttered Mme de Villeparisis.

"But, of course you do—Prince Odo. He's the brother-in-law of your cousin Doudeauville. Surely you remember that I went shooting with him at Bonnétable?"

"Ah! Odo, is he the one who went in for painting?"

"Not at all, he's the one who married the Grand Duke N—'s sister."

M. de Norpois uttered these remarks in the cross tone of a schoolmaster who is dissatisfied with his pupil, and stared fixedly at Mme de Villeparisis out of his blue eyes.

When the Prince had drunk his coffee and was leaving his table, M. de Norpois rose, hastened towards him and with a majestic sweep of his arm, stepping aside himself, presented him to Mme de Villeparisis. And during the few minutes that the Prince was standing beside their table, M. de Norpois never ceased for an instant to keep his azure pupils trained on Mme de Villeparisis, with the mixture of indulgence and severity of an old lover, but principally from fear of her committing one of those verbal solecisms which he had relished but which he dreaded. Whenever she said anything to the Prince that was not quite accurate he corrected her mistake and stared into the eyes of the abashed and docile Marquise with the steady intensity of a hypnotist.

A waiter came to tell me that my mother was waiting for me. I went to join her and made my apologies to Mme Sazerat, saying that I had been amused to see Mme de Villeparisis. At the sound of this name, Mme Sazerat turned pale and seemed about to faint. Controlling herself with an effort: "Mme de Villeparisis who was Mlle de Bouillon?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"Couldn't I just get a glimpse of her for a moment? It has been the dream of my life."



"Then there's no time to lose, Madame, for she will soon have finished her dinner. But how do you come to take such an interest in her?"

"Because Mme de Villeparisis was, before her second marriage, the Duchesse d'Havr , beautiful as an angel, wicked as a demon, who drove my father to distraction, ruined him and then abandoned him immediately. Well, she may have behaved to him like the lowest prostitute, she may have been the cause of our having had to live, my family and myself, in humble circumstances at Combray, but now that my father is dead, my consolation is to think that he loved the most beautiful woman of his generation, and as I've never set eyes on her, it will be a sort of solace in spite of everything ..."

I escorted Mme Sazerat, trembling with emotion, to the restaurant and pointed out Mme de Villeparisis.

But, like a blind person who looks everywhere but in the right direction, Mme Sazerat did not bring her eyes to rest upon the table at which Mme de Villeparisis was dining, but, looking towards another part of the room, said:

"But she must have gone, I don't see her where you say she is."

And she continued to gaze round the room in quest of the loathed, adored vision that had haunted her imagination for so long.

"Yes, there she is, at the second table."

"Then we can't be counting from the same point. At what I count as the second table there's only an old gentleman and a little hunchbacked, red-faced, hideous woman."

"That's her!"

Meanwhile, Mme de Villeparisis having asked M. de Norpois to invite Prince Foggi to sit down, a friendly conversation ensued among the three of them. They discussed politics, and the Prince declared that he was indifferent to the fate of the Cabinet and would spend another week at least in Venice. He hoped that by that time all risk of a ministerial crisis would have been avoided. Prince Foggi thought for a few moments that these political topics did not interest M. de Norpois, for the latter, who until then had been expressing himself with such vehemence, had become suddenly absorbed in an almost angelic silence which seemed capable of blossoming, should his voice return, only into some innocent and tuneful melody by Mendelssohn or Cesar Franck. The Prince supposed also that this silence was due to the reserve of a Frenchman who naturally would not wish to discuss Italian affairs in the presence of an Italian. Now in this the Prince was completely mistaken. Silence and an air of indifference had remained, in M. de Norpois, not a sign of reserve but the habitual prelude to an intervention in important affairs. The Marquis had his eye upon nothing less (as we have seen) than Constantinople, after the prior settlement of the German question, with a view to which he hoped to force the hand of the Rome Cabinet. He considered, in fact, that an action on his part of international significance might be the worthy consummation of his career, perhaps even a prelude to fresh honours, to difficult tasks to which he had not relinquished his pretensions. For old age makes us incapable of doing but not, at first, of desiring. It is only in a third period that those who live to a very great age relinquish desire, as they have already had to forgo action. They no longer even present themselves as candidates in futile elections where they have so often tried to win success, such as that for the Presidency of the Republic. They content themselves with taking the air, eating, reading the newspapers; they have outlived themselves.

The Prince, to put the Marquis at his ease and to show him that he regarded him as a compatriot, began to speak of the possible successors to the Prime Minister then in office. Successors who would have a difficult task before them. When Prince Foggi had mentioned more than twenty names of politicians who seemed to him suitable for office, names to which the ex-Ambassador listened with his eyelids drooping over his blue eyes and without moving a muscle, M. de Norpois broke his silence at length to utter the words which were to provide the chancelleries with food for conversation for many years to come, and afterwards, when they had been forgotten, would be exhumed by some personage signing himself "One Who Knows" or "Testis" or "Machiavelli" in a newspaper in which the very oblivion into which they had fallen enabled them to create a fresh sensation. So, Prince Foggi had mentioned more than twenty names to the diplomat who remained as motionless and silent as a deaf-mute, when M. de Norpois raised his head slightly, and, in the form in which his most pregnant and far-reaching diplomatic interventions had been couched, albeit this time with greater audacity and less brevity, shrewdly inquired: "And has no one mentioned the name of Signor Giolitti?" At these words the scales fell from Prince Foggi's eyes; he could hear a celestial murmur. Then at once M. de Norpois began to speak about one thing and another, no longer afraid to make a noise, as, when the last note of a sublime aria by Bach has died away, the audience are no longer afraid to talk aloud, to go and look for their hats and coats in the cloakroom. He made the break even more marked by begging the Prince to pay his most humble respects to Their Majesties the King and Queen when next he should see them, a farewell phrase corresponding to the shout for a coachman at the end of a concert: "Auguste, from the Rue de Belloy." We cannot say what exactly were Prince Foggi's impressions. He must certainly have been delighted to have heard the gem: "And has no one mentioned Signor Giolitti's name?" For M. de Norpois, in whom age had extinguished or deranged his most outstanding qualities, had on the other hand, as he grew older, perfected his bravura, as certain aged musicians, who in all other respects have declined, acquire and retain until the end, in the field of chamber-music, a perfect virtuosity which they did not formerly possess.

However that may be, Prince Foggi, who had intended to spend a fortnight in Venice, returned to Rome that very night and was received a few days later in audience by the King in connexion with certain properties which, as we may perhaps have mentioned already, the Prince owned in Sicily. The Cabinet hung on for longer than might have been expected. When it fell, the King consulted various statesmen as to the most suitable leader of a new Cabinet. Then he sent for Signor Giolitti, who accepted. Three months later a

newspaper reported Prince Foggi's meeting with M. de Norpois. The conversation was reported as we have given it here, with the difference that, instead of: "M. de Norpois shrewdly inquired," one read: "M. de Norpois said with that shrewd and charming smile which is so characteristic of him." M. de Norpois considered that "shrewdly" had in itself sufficient explosive force for a diplomat and that this addition was, to say the least, excessive. He had even asked the Quai d'Orsay to issue an official denial, but the Quai d'Orsay did not know which way to turn. For, ever since the conversation had been made public, M. Barrère had been telegraphing several times hourly to Paris complaining of this unofficial ambassador to the Quirinal and describing the indignation with which the incident had been received throughout the whole of Europe. This indignation was non-existent, but the other ambassadors were too polite to contradict M. Barrère's assertion that everyone was up in arms. M. Barrère, guided only by his own reaction, mistook this courteous silence for assent. Immediately he telegraphed to Paris: "I have just had an hour's conversation with the Marchese Visconti-Venosta," and so forth. His secretaries were worn out.

M. de Norpois, however, had at his disposal a French newspaper of very long standing, which already in 1870, when he was French Minister in a German capital, had been of great service to him. This paper (especially its leading article, which was unsigned) was admirably written. But the paper became a thousand times more interesting whenever this leading article (styled "premier-Paris" in those far-off days and now, no one knows why, "editorial") was on the contrary badly expressed, with endless repetitions of words. Everyone sensed then, with great excitement, that the article had been "inspired." Perhaps by M. de Norpois, perhaps by some other man of the hour. To give an anticipatory idea of the Italian incident, let us show how M. de Norpois made use of this paper in 1870, to no purpose, it may be thought, since war broke out nevertheless, but most efficaciously, according to M. de Norpois, whose axiom was that one ought first and foremost to prepare public opinion. His articles, every word in which was weighed, resembled those optimistic bulletins which are at once followed by the death of the patient. For instance, on the eve of the declaration of war in 1870, when mobilisation was almost complete, M. de Norpois (remaining, of course, in the background) had felt it his duty to send to this famous newspaper the following "editorial":

"The opinion seems to prevail in authoritative circles that, since the afternoon hours of yesterday, the situation, without of course being of an alarming nature, might well be envisaged as serious and even, from certain angles, as susceptible of being regarded as critical. M. le Marquis de Norpois would appear to have had several conversations with the Prussian Minister, with a view to examining, in a firm and conciliatory spirit, and in a wholly concrete fashion, the various existing causes of friction, if one may so put it. Unfortunately, we have not yet heard, at the time of going to press, whether Their Excellencies have been able to agree upon a formula that may serve as the basis for a diplomatic instrument."

*Stop press:* "It has been learned with satisfaction in well-informed circles that a slight slackening of tension seems to have occurred in Franco-Prussian relations. Particular importance would appear to be attached to the fact that M. de Norpois is reported to have met the British Minister 'unter den Linden' and to have conversed with him for fully twenty minutes. This report is regarded as highly satisfactory." (There was added, in brackets, after the word "satisfactory" its German equivalent "*befriedigend*") And on the following day one read in the editorial: "It would appear that, notwithstanding all the dexterity of M. de Norpois, to whom everyone must hasten to render homage for the skill and energy with which he has defended the inalienable rights of France, a rupture is now, one might say, virtually inevitable."

The newspaper could not refrain from following an editorial couched in this vein with a selection of comments, furnished of course by M. de Norpois. The reader may perhaps have observed in these last pages that the conditional was one of the Ambassador's favourite grammatical forms in the literature of diplomacy. ("Particular importance would appear to be attached" for "Particular importance is attached.") But the present indicative employed not in its usual sense but in that of the old "optative" was no less dear to M. de Norpois. The comments that followed the editorial were as follows:

"Never has the public shown itself so admirably calm" (M. de Norpois would have liked to believe that this was true but feared that it was precisely the opposite of the truth). "It is weary of fruitless agitation and has learned with satisfaction that the Government of His Majesty the Emperor would assume their responsibilities whatever the eventualities that might occur. The public asks" (optative) "nothing more. To its admirable composure, which is in itself a token of success, we shall add a piece of intelligence eminently calculated to reassure public opinion, were there any need of that. We are assured that M. de Norpois who, for reasons of health, was ordered long ago to return to Paris for medical treatment, would appear to have left Berlin where he considered that his presence no longer served any purpose."

*Stop press:* "His Majesty the Emperor left Compiègne this morning for Paris in order to confer with the Marquis de Norpois, the Minister for War and Marshal Bazaine in whom public opinion has especial confidence. H. M. the Emperor has cancelled the banquet which he was to give for his sister-in-law the Duchess of Alba. This action created everywhere, as soon as it became known, a particularly favourable impression. The Emperor has held a review of his troops, whose enthusiasm is indescribable. Several corps, by virtue of a mobilisation order issued immediately upon the Sovereign's arrival in Paris, are, in any contingency, ready to move in the direction of the Rhine."\*

Sometimes at dusk as I returned to the hotel I felt that the Albertine of long ago, invisible to my eyes, was nevertheless enclosed within me as in the lead-covered cells of an inner Venice, the tight lid of which some incident occasionally lifted to give me a glimpse of that past.

Thus for instance one evening a letter from my stockbroker reopened for me for an instant the gates of the prison in which Albertine dwelt within me, alive, but so remote, so profoundly buried that she remained inaccessible to me. Since her death I had ceased to indulge in the speculations that I had made in order to have more money for her. But time had passed; the wisest judgments of the previous generation had been belied by the next, as had occurred in the past to M. Thiers who had said that railways could never prove successful; and the stocks of which M. de Norpois had said to us: "The income from them may not be very great, but at least the capital will never depreciate," were, more often than not, those which had declined most in value. In the case of my English Consols and Raffineries Say shares alone, I had to pay out such considerable sums in brokers' commissions, as well as interest and contango fees, that in a rash moment I decided to sell out everything and found that I now possessed barely a fifth of what I had inherited from my grandmother and still possessed when Albertine was alive. This became known at Combray among the surviving members of our family and their friends who, knowing that I went about with the Marquis de Saint-Loup and the Guermantes family, said to themselves: "Pride goes before a fall!" They would have been greatly astonished to learn that it was for a girl of Albertine's modest background, almost a protegee of my grandmother's former piano-teacher, Vinteuil, that I had made these speculations. Besides, in that Combray world in which everyone is classified for ever, as in an Indian caste, according to the income he is known to enjoy, no one would have been capable of imagining the great freedom that prevailed in the world of the Guermantes, where no importance was attached to wealth and where poverty was regarded as being as disagreeable as, but no more degrading, having no more effect on a person's social position, than a stomachache. Doubtless people at Combray imagined, on the contrary, that Saint-Loup and M. de Guermantes must be ruined aristocrats with heavily mortgaged estates, to whom I had been lending money, whereas if I had been ruined they would have been the first to offer, unavailingly, to come to my assistance. As for my comparative penury, it was all the more awkward at the moment, inasmuch as my Venetian interests had been concentrated for some little time past on a young vendor of glassware whose blooming complexion offered to the delighted eye a whole range of orange tones and filled me with such a longing to see her daily that, realising that my mother and I would soon be leaving Venice, I had made up my mind to try to create some sort of position for her in Paris which would save me from being parted from her. The beauty of her seventeen years was so noble, so radiant, that it was like acquiring a genuine Titian before leaving the place. But would the scant remains of my fortune be enough to tempt her to leave her native land and come to live in Paris for my sole convenience?

But as I came to the end of the stockbroker's letter, a passage in which he said: "I shall look after your credits" reminded me of a scarcely less hypocritically professional expression which the bath-attendant at Balbec had used in speaking to Aimé of Albertine: "It was I who looked after her," she had said. And these words which had never recurred to my mind acted like an "Open sesame!" upon the hinges of the prison door. But a moment later the door closed once more upon the immured victim—whom I was not to blame for not wishing to join since I was no longer able to see her, to call her to mind, and since other people exist for us only through the idea that we have of them—but who for a moment had been rendered more touching by my desertion of her, albeit she was unaware of it, so that for the duration of a lightning-flash I had thought with longing of the time, already remote, when I used to suffer night and day from the companionship of her memory. Another time, in San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, an eagle accompanying one of the Apostles, and conventionalised in the same manner, revived the memory and almost the suffering caused by the two rings the similarity of which Françoise had revealed to me, and as to which I had never learned who had given them to Albertine.

One evening, however, an incident occurred of such a nature that it seemed as though my love must revive. No sooner had our gondola stopped at the hotel steps than the porter handed me a telegram which the messenger had already brought three times to the hotel, for owing to the inaccurate rendering of the addressee's name (which I recognised nevertheless, through the corruptions introduced by the Italian clerks, as my own) the post office required a signed receipt certifying that the telegram was indeed for me. I opened it as soon as I was in my room, and, glancing through the message which was filled with inaccurately transmitted words, managed nevertheless to make out: "My dear friend, you think me dead, forgive me, I am quite alive, I long to see you, talk about marriage, when do you return? Affectionately. Albertine." Then there occurred in me in reverse order a process parallel to that which had occurred in the case of my grandmother. When I had learned the fact of my grandmother's death, I had not at first felt any grief. And I had been really grieved by her death only when certain involuntary memories had brought her alive again for me. Now that Albertine no longer lived for me in my thoughts, the news that she was alive did not cause me the joy that I might have expected. Albertine had been no more to me than a bundle of thoughts, and she had survived her physical death so long as those thoughts were alive in me; on the other hand, now that those thoughts were dead, Albertine did not rise again for me with the resurrection of her body. And when I realised that I felt no joy at the thought of her being alive, that I no longer loved her, I ought to have been more shattered than a man who, looking at his reflexion in a mirror, after months of travel or sickness, discovers that he has white hair and a different face, that of a middle-aged or an old man. This is shattering because its message is: "the man that I was, the fair-haired young man, no longer exists, I am another person." And yet, was not the impression that I now felt the proof of as profound a change, as total a death of my former self and of the no less complete substitution of a new self for that former self, as the sight of a wrinkled face topped with a white wig instead of the face of long ago? But one is no more distressed at having become another person, after a lapse of years and in the natural sequence of time, than one is at any given moment by the fact of

being, one after another, the incompatible persons, malicious, sensitive, refined, caddish, disinterested, ambitious which one can be, in turn, every day of one's life. And the reason why one is not distressed is the same, namely that the self which has been eclipsed—momentarily in this latter case and when it is a question of character, permanently in the former case and when the passions are involved—is not there to deplore the other, the other which is for the moment, or from then onwards, one's whole self; the caddish self laughs at his caddishness because one is the cad, and the forgetful self does not grieve about his forgetfulness precisely because he has forgotten.

I should have been incapable of resuscitating Albertine because I was incapable of resuscitating myself, of resuscitating the self of those days. Life, in accordance with its habit which is, by unceasing, infinitesimal labours, to change the face of the world, had not said to me on the morrow of Albertine's death: "Become another person," but, by changes too imperceptible for me to be conscious even that I was changing, had altered almost everything in me, with the result that my mind was already accustomed to its new master—my new self—when it became aware that it had changed; it was to this new master that it was attached. My feeling for Albertine, my jealousy, stemmed, as we have seen, from the irradiation, by the association of ideas, of certain pleasant or painful impressions, the memory of Mlle Vinteuil at Montjouvain, the precious good-night kisses that Albertine used to give me on the neck. But in proportion as these impressions had grown fainter, the vast field of impressions which they coloured with a hue that was agonising or soothing reverted to neutral tones. As soon as oblivion had taken hold of certain dominant points of suffering and pleasure, the resistance offered by my love was overcome, I no longer loved Albertine. I tried to recall her image to my mind. I had been right in my presentiment when, a couple of days after Albertine's flight, I was appalled by the discovery that I had been able to live for forty-eight hours without her. It had been the same as when I wrote to Gilberte long ago saying to myself: "If this goes on for a year or two, I shall no longer love her." And if, when Swann asked me to come and see Gilberte again, this had seemed to me as embarrassing as greeting a dead woman, in Albertine's case death—or what I had supposed to be death—had achieved the same result as a prolonged breach in Gilberte's. Death merely acts in the same way as absence. The monster at whose apparition my love had trembled, oblivion, had indeed, as I had feared, ended by devouring that love. Not only did the news that she was alive fail to revive my love, not only did it enable me to realise how far I had already proceeded along the road towards indifference, it at once and so abruptly accelerated that process that I wondered retrospectively whether the opposite report, that of Albertine's death, had not, conversely, by completing the effect of her departure, rekindled my love and delayed its decline. Yes, now that the knowledge that she was alive and the possibility of our reunion made her suddenly cease to be so precious to me, I wondered whether Françoise's insinuations, our rupture itself, and even her death (imaginary, but believed to be real) had not prolonged my love, to such an extent do the efforts of third persons, and even those of fate, to separate us from a woman succeed only in attaching us to her. Now it was the contrary process that had occurred. Anyhow, I tried to recall her image and perhaps because I had only to raise a finger for her to be mine once more, the memory that came to me was that of a somewhat stout and mannish-looking girl from whose faded features protruded already, like a sprouting seed, the profile of Mme Bontemps. What she might or might not have done with Andrée or with other girls no longer interested me. I no longer suffered from the malady which I had so long thought to be incurable, and really I might have foreseen this. Certainly, regret for a lost mistress and surviving jealousy are physical maladies fully as much as tuberculosis or leukaemia. And yet among physical maladies it is possible to distinguish those which are caused by a purely physical agency, and those which act upon the body only through the medium of the intelligence. Above all, if the part of the mind which serves as carrier is the memory—that is to say if the cause is obliterated or remote—however agonising the pain, however profound the disturbance to the organism may appear to be, it is very seldom (the mind having a capacity for renewal or rather an incapacity for conservation which the tissues lack) that the prognosis is not favourable. At the end of a given period after which someone who has been attacked by cancer will be dead, it is very seldom that the grief of an inconsolable widower or father is not healed. Mine was healed. Was it for this girl whom I saw in my mind's eye so bloated and who had certainly aged, as the girls whom she had loved had aged—was it for her that I must renounce the dazzling girl who was my memory of yesterday, my hope for tomorrow, to whom I could no longer give a sou, any more than to any other, if I married Albertine, that I must renounce this "new Albertine" whom I loved "not as Hades had beheld her ... but faithful, but proud, and even rather shy"?<sup>30</sup> It was she who was now what Albertine had been in the past: my love for Albertine had been but a transitory form of my devotion to youth. We think that we are in love with a girl, whereas we love in her, alas! only that dawn the glow of which is momentarily reflected on her face.

The night went by. In the morning I gave the telegram back to the hotel porter explaining that it had been brought to me by mistake and that it was not for me. He told me that now it had been opened he might get into trouble, that it would be better if I kept it; I put it back in my pocket, but made up my mind to behave as though I had never received it. I had finally ceased to love Albertine. So that this love, after departing so greatly from what I had anticipated on the basis of my love for Gilberte, after obliging me to make so long and painful a detour, had ended too, after having proved an exception to it, by succumbing, like my love for Gilberte, to the general law of oblivion.

But then I thought to myself: I used to value Albertine more than myself; I no longer value her now because for a certain time past I have ceased to see her. My desire not to be parted from myself by death, to rise again after my death—that desire was not like the desire never to be parted from Albertine; it still persisted. Was this due to the fact that I valued myself more highly than her, that when I loved her I loved myself more? No,

it was because, having ceased to see her, I had ceased to love her, whereas I had not ceased to love myself because my everyday links with myself had not been severed like those with Albertine. But if my links with my body, with myself, were severed also ...? Obviously, it would be the same. Our love of life is only an old liaison of which we do not know how to rid ourselves. Its strength lies in its permanence. But death which severs it will cure us of the desire for immortality.

After lunch, when I was not going to roam about Venice by myself, I went up to my room to get ready to go out with my mother and to collect the exercise books in which I would take notes for some work I was doing on Ruskin. In the abrupt angles of the walls I sensed the restrictions imposed by the sea, the parsimony of the soil. And when I went downstairs to join Mamma who was waiting for me, at that hour when at Combray it was so pleasant to feel the sun close at hand in the darkness preserved by the closed shutters, here, from top to bottom of the marble staircase where one could no more tell than in a Renaissance picture whether it was in a palace or on a galley, the same coolness and the same sense of the splendour of the scene outside were imparted thanks to the awnings which stirred outside the ever-open windows through which, upon an incessant stream of air, the warm shade and the greenish sunlight flowed as if over a liquid surface and suggested the mobile proximity, the glitter, the shimmering instability of the sea.

As often as not we would set off for St Mark's, with all the more pleasure because, since one had to take a gondola to go there, the church represented for me not simply a monument but the terminus of a voyage on these vernal, maritime waters, with which, I felt, St Mark's formed an indivisible and living whole. My mother and I would enter the baptistery, treading underfoot the marble and glass mosaics of the paving, in front of us the wide arcades whose curved pink surfaces have been slightly warped by time, thus giving the church, wherever the freshness of this colouring has been preserved, the appearance of having been built of a soft and malleable substance like the wax in a giant honeycomb, and, where on the contrary time has shrivelled and hardened the material and artists have embellished it with gold tracery, of being the precious binding, in the finest Cordoba leather, of the colossal Gospel of Venice. Seeing that I needed to spend some time in front of the mosaics representing the Baptism of Christ, and feeling the icy coolness that pervaded the baptistery, my mother threw a shawl over my shoulders. When I was with Albertine at Balbec, I felt that she was revealing one of those insubstantial illusions which clutter the minds of so many people who do not think clearly, when she used to speak of the pleasure—to my mind baseless—that she would derive from seeing works of art with me. Today I am sure that the pleasure does exist, if not of seeing, at least of having seen, a beautiful thing with a particular person. A time has now come when, remembering the baptistery of St Mark's—contemplating the waters of the Jordan in which St John immerses Christ, while the gondola awaited us at the landing-stage of the Piazzetta—it is no longer a matter of indifference to me that, beside me in that cool penumbra, there should have been a woman draped in her mourning with the respectful and enthusiastic fervour of the old woman in Carpaccio's *St Ursula* in the Accademia, and that that woman, with her red cheeks and sad eyes and in her black veils, whom nothing can ever remove from that softly lit sanctuary of St Mark's where I am always sure to find her because she has her place reserved there as immutably as a mosaic, should be my mother.

Carpaccio, as it happens, who was the painter we visited most readily when I was not working in St Mark's, almost succeeded one day in reviving my love for Albertine. I was seeing for the first time *The Patriarch of Grado exorcising a demoniac*. I looked at the marvellous rose-pink and violet sky and the tall encrusted chimneys silhouetted against it, their flared stacks, blossoming like red tulips, reminiscent of so many Whistlers of Venice. Then my eyes travelled from the old wooden Rialto to that fifteenth-century Ponte Vecchio with its marble palaces decorated with gilded capitals, and returned to the canal on which the boats are manoeuvred by adolescents in pink jackets and plumed toques, the spitting image of those avowedly inspired by Carpaccio in that dazzling *Legend of Joseph* by Sert, Strauss and Kessler. Finally, before leaving the picture, my eyes came back to the shore, swarming with the everyday Venetian life of the period. I looked at the barber wiping his razor, at the negro humping his barrel, at the Muslims conversing, at the noblemen in wide-sleeved brocade and damask robes and hats of cerise velvet, and suddenly I felt a slight gnawing at my heart. On the back of one of the *Compagni della Calza* identifiable from the emblem, embroidered in gold and pearls on their sleeves or their collars, of the merry confraternity to which they were affiliated, I had just recognised the cloak which Albertine had put on to come with me to Versailles in an open carriage on the evening when I so little suspected that scarcely fifteen hours separated me from the moment of her departure from my house. Always ready for anything, when I had asked her to come out with me on that melancholy occasion which she was to describe in her last letter as "a double twilight since night was falling and we were about to part," she had flung over her shoulders a Fortuny cloak which she had taken away with her next day and which I had never thought of since. It was from this Carpaccio picture that that inspired son of Venice had taken it, it was from the shoulders of this *Compagno della Calza* that he had removed it in order to drape it over the shoulders of so many Parisian women who were certainly unaware, as I had been until then, that the model for it existed in a group of noblemen in the foreground of the *Patriarch of Grado* in a room in the Accademia in Venice. I had recognised it down to the last detail, and, that forgotten cloak having restored to me as I looked at it the eyes and the heart of him who had set out that evening with Albertine for Versailles, I was overcome for a few moments by a vague and soon dissipated feeling of desire and melancholy.

There were days when my mother and I were not content with visiting the museums and churches of Venice only, and once, when the weather was particularly fine, in order to see the "Virtues" and "Vices" of which M. Swann had given me reproductions that were probably still hanging on the wall of the schoolroom at Combray, we went as far afield as Padua. After walking across the garden of the Arena in the glare of the sun, I entered the Giotto chapel, the entire ceiling of which and the background of the frescoes are so blue that it

seems as though the radiant daylight has crossed the threshold with the human visitor in order to give its pure sky a momentary breather in the coolness and shade, a sky merely of a slightly deeper blue now that it is rid of the glitter of the sunlight, as in those brief moments of respite when, though no cloud is to be seen, the sun has turned its gaze elsewhere and the azure, softer still, grows deeper. This sky transplanted on to the blue-washed stone was peopled with flying angels which I was seeing for the first time, for M. Swann had given me reproductions only of the Vices and Virtues and not of the frescoes depicting the life of the Virgin and of Christ. Watching the flight of these angels, I had the same impression of actual movement, literally real activity, that the gestures of Charity and Envy had given me. For all the celestial fervour, or at least the childlike obedience and application, with which their minuscule hands are joined, they are represented in the Arena chapel as winged creatures of a particular species that had really existed, that must have figured in the natural history of biblical and apostolic times. Constantly flitting about above the saints whenever the latter walk abroad, these little beings, since they are real creatures with a genuine power of flight, can be seen soaring upwards, describing curves, "looping the loop," diving earthwards head first, with the aid of wings which enable them to support themselves in positions that defy the laws of gravity, and are far more reminiscent of an extinct species of bird, or of young pupils of Garros practising gliding,<sup>31</sup> than of the angels of the Renaissance and later periods whose wings have become no more than emblems and whose deportment is generally the same as that of heavenly beings who are not winged.

On returning to the hotel I would meet young women, mainly Austrians, who came to Venice to spend the first fine days of this flowerless spring. There was one in particular whose features did not resemble Albertine's but who attracted me by the same fresh complexion, the same gay, light-hearted look. Soon I became aware that I was beginning to say the same things to her as I had said to Albertine at the start, that I concealed the same misery when she told me she would not be seeing me the following day because she was going to Verona, and that I immediately wanted to go to Verona too. It did not last—she was soon to leave for Austria and I would never see her again—but already, vaguely jealous as one is when one begins to fall in love, looking at her charming and enigmatic face I wondered whether she too loved women, whether what she had in common with Albertine, that clear complexion, that bright-eyed look, that air of friendly candour which charmed everyone and which stemmed more from the fact that she was not in the least interested in knowing about other people's actions, which interested her not at all, than that she was confessing her own, which on the contrary she concealed beneath the most puerile lies—I wondered whether all this constituted the morphological characteristics of the woman who loves other women. Was it this about her that, without my being able rationally to grasp why, exercised its attraction upon me, caused my anxieties (perhaps a deeper cause of my attraction towards her by virtue of the fact that we are drawn towards that which will make us suffer), gave me when I saw her so much pleasure and sadness, like those magnetic elements in the air of certain places which we do not see but which cause us such physical discomfort? Alas, I should never know. I should have liked, when I tried to read her face, to say to her: "You really should tell me, it would interest me as an example of human natural history," but she would never tell me. She professed an especial loathing for anything that resembled that vice, and was extremely distant towards her women friends. Perhaps indeed this was proof that she had something to hide, perhaps that she had been mocked or reviled for it, and the air that she assumed in order that people should not think such things of her was like an animal's instinctive and revealing recoil from someone who has beaten it. As for my finding out about her life, it was impossible; even in the case of Albertine, how long it had taken me to get to know anything! It had taken her death to loosen people's tongues, such prudent circumspection had Albertine, like this young woman, observed in all her conduct. And in any case, could I be certain that I had discovered anything about Albertine? Moreover, just as the conditions of life that we most desire become a matter of indifference to us if we cease to love the person who, without our realising it, made us desire them because they enabled us to be close to her, to be in a position to please her, so it is with certain kinds of intellectual curiosity. The scientific importance which I attached to knowing the particular kind of desire that lay hidden beneath the delicate pink petals of those cheeks, in the brightness, a sunless brightness as at daybreak, of those pale eyes, in those days that were never accounted for, would doubtless subside when I had entirely ceased to love Albertine or when I had entirely ceased to love this young woman.

After dinner, I went out alone, into the heart of the enchanted city where I found myself in the middle of strange purlieus like a character in the *Arabian Nights*. It was very seldom that, in the course of my wanderings, I did not come across some strange and spacious *piazza* of which no guidebook, no tourist had ever told me. I had plunged into a network of little alleys, or *calli*. In the evening, with their high bell-mouthed chimneys on which the sun throws the brightest pinks, the clearest reds, it is a whole garden blossoming above the houses, its shades so various that you would have said it was the garden of some tulip lover of Delft or Haarlem, planted on top of the town. Moreover, the extreme proximity of the houses made of every casement a frame from which a day-dreaming cook gazed out, or in which a seated girl was having her hair combed by an old woman whose face in the dark looked like a witch's—made of each humble quiet house, so close because of the narrowness of the *calli*, a display of a hundred Dutch paintings placed side by side. Packed tightly together, these *calli* divided in all directions with their furrows a chunk of Venice carved out between a canal and the lagoon, as if it had crystallised in accordance with these innumerable, tenuous and minute patterns. Suddenly, at the end of one of these alleys, it seemed as though a distension had occurred in the crystallised matter. A vast and splendid *campo* of which, in this network of little streets, I should never have guessed the scale, or even found room for it, spread out before me surrounded by charming palaces silvery in the moonlight. It was one of those architectural ensembles towards which, in any other town, the streets converge, lead you and



point the way. Here it seemed to be deliberately concealed in an interlacement of alleys, like those palaces in oriental tales whither mysterious agents convey by night a person who, brought back home before daybreak, can never find his way back to the magic dwelling which he ends by believing that he visited only in a dream.

The next day, I set out in quest of my beautiful nocturnal *piazza*, following *calle* after *calle* which were exactly like one another and refused to give me the smallest piece of information, except such as would lead me further astray. Sometimes a vague landmark which I seemed to recognise led me to suppose that I was about to see appear, in its seclusion, solitude and silence, the beautiful exiled *piazza*. At that moment, some evil genie which had assumed the form of a new *calle* made me unwittingly retrace my steps, and I found myself suddenly brought back to the Grand Canal. And as there is no great difference between the memory of a dream and the memory of a reality, I finally wondered whether it was not during my sleep that there had occurred, in a dark patch of Venetian crystallisation, that strange mirage which offered a vast *piazza* surrounded by romantic palaces to the meditative eye of the moon.

But, far more than certain places, it was the desire not to lose for ever certain women that kept me while in Venice in a state of agitation which became febrile when, towards the end of the day on which my mother had decided that we should leave, and our luggage was already on the way to the station in a gondola, I read in the register of guests expected at the hotel: "Mme Putbus and attendants." At once, the thought of all the hours of casual pleasure of which our departure would deprive me raised this desire, which existed in me in a chronic state, to the level of a feeling, and drowned it in a vague melancholy. I asked my mother to put off our departure for a few days, and her air of not for a moment taking my request into consideration, of not even listening to it seriously, reawakened in my nerves, exacerbated by the Venetian springtime, that old desire to rebel against an imaginary plot woven against me by my parents, who imagined that I would be forced to obey them, that defiant spirit which drove me in the past to impose my will brutally upon the people I loved best in the world, though finally conforming to theirs after I had succeeded in making them yield. I told my mother that I would not leave Venice, but she, thinking it wiser not to appear to believe that I was saying this seriously, did not even answer. I went on to say that she would soon see whether I was serious or not. The porter brought us three letters, two for her, and one for me which I put in my wallet among several others without even looking at the envelope. And when the hour came at which, accompanied by all my belongings, she set off for the station, I ordered a drink to be brought out to me on the terrace overlooking the canal, and settled down there to watch the sunset, while from a boat that had stopped in front of the hotel a musician sang *O sole mio*.

The sun continued to sink. My mother must be nearing the station. Soon she would be gone, and I should be alone in Venice, alone with the misery of knowing that I had distressed her, and without her presence to comfort me. The hour of the train's departure was approaching. My irrevocable solitude was so near at hand that it seemed to me to have begun already and to be complete. For I felt myself to be alone; things had become alien to me; I no longer had calm enough to break out of my throbbing heart and introduce into them a measure of stability. The town that I saw before me had ceased to be Venice. Its personality, its name, seemed to me to be mendacious fictions which I no longer had the will to impress upon its stones. I saw the palaces reduced to their basic elements, lifeless heaps of marble with nothing to choose between them, and the water as a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, eternal, blind, anterior and exterior to Venice, oblivious of the Doges or of Turner. And yet this unremarkable place was as strange as a place at which one has just arrived, which does not yet know one, or a place which one has left and which has forgotten one already. I could no longer tell it anything about myself, I could leave nothing of myself imprinted upon it; it contracted me into myself until I was no more than a beating heart and an attention strained to follow the development of *O sole mio*. In vain might I fix my mind despairingly upon the beautiful and distinctive curve of the Rialto, it seemed to me, with the mediocrity of the obvious, a bridge not merely inferior to but as alien to the notion I had of it as an actor of whom, in spite of his blond wig and black garments, we know quite well that in his essence he is not Hamlet. So it was with the palaces, the canal, the Rialto, divested of the idea that constituted their reality and dissolved into their vulgar material elements. But at the same time this mediocre place seemed distant to me. In the dock basin of the Arsenal, because of an element which itself also was scientific, namely latitude, there was that singularity in things whereby, even when similar in appearance to those of our own land, they reveal themselves to be alien, in exile beneath other skies; I felt that that horizon so close at hand, which I could have reached in an hour by boat, was a curvature of the earth quite different from that of France, a distant curvature which, by the artifice of travel, happened to be moored close to where I was; so that the dock basin of the Arsenal, at once insignificant and remote, filled me with that blend of distaste and alarm which I had felt as a child when I first accompanied my mother to the Deligny baths, where, in that weird setting of a pool of water reflecting neither sky nor sun, which nevertheless amid its fringe of cabins one felt to be in communication with invisible depths crowded with human bodies in swimming-trunks, I had asked myself whether those depths, concealed from mortal eyes by hutments which made their existence impossible to divine from the street, were not the entry to arctic seas which began at that point, in which the poles were comprised, and whether that narrow space was not indeed the open water that surrounds the pole; and in this lonely, unreal, icy, unfriendly setting in which I was going to be left alone, the strains of *O sole mio*, rising like a dirge for the Venice I had known, seemed to bear witness to my misery. No doubt I ought to have ceased to listen to it if I wished to be able to join my mother and take the train with her; I ought to have made up my mind to leave without losing another second. But this was precisely what I was powerless to do; I remained motionless, incapable not merely of rising, but even of deciding that I would rise from my chair. My mind, no doubt in order not to have to consider the decision I had to take, was entirely occupied in following

the course of the successive phrases of *O sole mio*, singing them to myself with the singer, anticipating each surge of melody, soaring aloft with it, sinking down with it once more.

No doubt this trivial song which I had heard a hundred times did not interest me in the least. I could give no pleasure to myself or anyone else by listening to it religiously to the end. After all, none of the already familiar phrases of this sentimental ditty was capable of furnishing me with the resolution I needed; what was more, each of these phrases, when it came and went in its turn, became an obstacle in the way of my putting that resolution into effect, or rather it forced me towards the contrary resolution not to leave Venice, for it made me too late for the train. Wherefore this occupation, devoid of any pleasure in itself, of listening to *O sole mio* was charged with a profound, almost despairing melancholy. I was well aware that in reality it was the resolution not to go that I was making by remaining there without stirring, but to say to myself: "I'm not going," which in that direct form was impossible, became possible in this indirect form: "I'm going to listen to one more phrase of *O sole mio*;" but the practical significance of this figurative language did not escape me and, while I said to myself: "After all, I'm only listening to one more phrase," I knew that the words meant: "I shall remain by myself in Venice." And it was perhaps this melancholy, like a sort of numbing cold, that constituted the despairing but hypnotic charm of the song. Each note that the singer's voice uttered with a force and ostentation that were almost muscular stabbed me to the heart. When the phrase was completed down below and the song seemed to be at an end, the singer had still not had enough and resumed at the top as though he needed to proclaim once more my solitude and despair.

My mother must by now have reached the station. In a little while she would be gone. I was gripped by the anguish that was caused me by the sight of the Canal which had become diminutive now that the soul of Venice had fled from it, of that commonplace Rialto which was no longer the Rialto, and by the song of despair which *O sole mio* had become and which, bellowed thus beside the insubstantial palaces, finally reduced them to dust and ashes and completed the ruin of Venice; I looked on at the slow realisation of my distress, built up artistically, without haste, note by note, by the singer as he stood beneath the astonished gaze of the sun arrested in its course beyond San Giorgio Maggiore, with the result that the fading light was to combine for ever in my memory with the shiver of my emotion and the bronze voice of the singer in an equivocal, unalterable and poignant alloy.

Thus I remained motionless, my will dissolved, no decision in sight. Doubtless at such moments our decision has already been made: our friends can often predict it, but we ourselves are unable to do so, otherwise we should be spared a great deal of suffering.

But suddenly, from caverns darker than those from which flashes the comet which we can predict—thanks to the unsuspected defensive power of inveterate habit, thanks to the hidden reserves which by a sudden impulse it hurls at the last moment into the fray—my will to action arose at last; I set off in hot haste and arrived, when the carriage doors were already shut, but in time to find my mother flushed with emotion and with the effort to restrain her tears, for she thought that I was not coming. "You know," she said, "your poor grandmother used to say: It's curious, there's nobody who can be as unbearable or as nice as that child." Then the train started and we saw Padua and Verona come to meet us, to speed us on our way, almost on to the platforms of their stations, and, when we had drawn away from them, return—they who were not travelling and were about to resume their normal life—one to its plain, the other to its hill.

The hours went by. My mother was in no hurry to read her two letters, which she had merely opened, and tried to prevent me from pulling out my pocket-book at once to take from it the letter which the hotel porter had given me. She was always afraid of my finding journeys too long and too tiring, and put off as long as possible, so as to keep me occupied during the final hours, the moment at which she would seek fresh distractions for me, bring out the hard-boiled eggs, hand me the newspapers, untie the parcel of books which she had bought without telling me. We had long passed Milan when she decided to read the first of her two letters. At first I sat watching her, as she read it with an air of astonishment, then raised her head, her eyes seeming to come to rest upon a succession of distinct and incompatible memories which she could not succeed in bringing together. Meanwhile I had recognised Gilberte's handwriting on the envelope which I had just taken from my pocket-book. I opened it. Gilberte wrote to inform me that she was marrying Robert de Saint-Loup. She told me that she had sent me a telegram about it to Venice but had had no reply. I remembered that I had been told that the telegraphic service there was inefficient. I had never received her telegram. Perhaps she would refuse to believe this. All of a sudden I felt in my brain a fact, which was installed there in the guise of a memory, leave its place and surrender it to another fact. The telegram that I had received a few days earlier, and had supposed to be from Albertine, was from Gilberte. As the somewhat laboured originality of Gilberte's handwriting consisted chiefly, when she wrote a line, in introducing into the line above it the strokes of her t's which appeared to be underlining the words, or the dots over her t's which appeared to be punctuating the sentence above them, and on the other hand in interspersing the line below with the tails and flourishes of the words immediately above, it was quite natural that the clerk who dispatched the telegram should have read the loops of s's or y's in the line above as an "-ine" attached to the word "Gilberte." The dot over the i of Gilberte had climbed up to make a suspension point. As for her capital G, it resembled a Gothic A. The fact that, in addition to this, two or three words had been misread, had dovetailed into one another (some of them indeed had seemed to me incomprehensible), was sufficient to explain the details of my error and was not even necessary. How many letters are actually read into a word by a careless person who knows what to expect, who sets out with the idea that the message is from a certain person? How many words into the sentence? We guess as we read, we create; everything starts from an initial error; those that follow (and this applies not only to the reading of letters and telegrams, not only to all



reading), extraordinary as they may appear to a person who has not begun at the same place, are all quite natural. A large part of what we believe to be true (and this applies even to our final conclusions) with an obstinacy equalled only by our good faith, springs from an original mistake in our premises.

## Chapter Nineteen

### A NEW ASPECT OF ROBERT DE SAINT-LOUP

"Oh, it's too incredible," said my mother. "You know at my age one has ceased to be astonished at anything, but I assure you that nothing could be more unexpected than the news I've just read in this letter."

"Well," I replied, "I don't know what it is, but however astonishing it may be, it can't be quite so astonishing as what I've learnt from mine. It's a marriage. Robert de Saint-Loup is marrying Gilberte Swann."

"Ah!" said my mother, "then that must be what's in the other letter, which I haven't yet opened, for I recognised your friend's hand."

And my mother smiled at me with that faint trace of emotion which, ever since she had lost her own mother, she felt at every event, however insignificant, that concerned human creatures who were capable of grief and recollection and who themselves also mourned their dead. And so my mother smiled at me and spoke to me in a gentle voice, as though she were afraid, by treating this marriage lightly, of belittling the melancholy feelings that it might arouse in Swann's widow and daughter, in Robert's mother who had resigned herself to being parted from her son, all of whom Mamma, in her kindness of heart, in her gratitude for their kindness to me, endowed with her own faculty of filial, conjugal and maternal emotion.

"Was I right in saying that you wouldn't produce anything as astonishing?" I asked her.

"On the contrary," she replied in a gentle tone, "it's I who have the most extraordinary news, I shan't say the greatest or the smallest, for that quotation from Sevigne which everyone produces who knows nothing else that she ever wrote used to sicken your grandmother as much as 'What a pretty thing hay-making is.' We don't deign to collect such hackneyed Sevigne. This letter is to announce the marriage of the Cambremer boy."

"Oh!" I remarked with indifference, "to whom? But in any case the personality of the bridegroom robs this marriage of any sensational character."

"Unless the bride's personality supplies it."

"And who is the bride in question?"

"Ah, if I tell you straight away, that will spoil the fun. Come on, see if you can guess," said my mother who, seeing that we had not yet reached Turin, wished to keep something in reserve for me as meat and drink for the rest of the journey.

"But how do you expect me to know? Is it someone brilliant? If Legrandin and his sister are satisfied, we may be sure that it's a brilliant marriage."

"I can't answer for Legrandin, but the person who informs me of the marriage says that Mme de Cambremer is delighted. I don't know whether you will call it a brilliant marriage. To my mind, it suggests the days when kings used to marry shepherdesses, and in this case the shepherdess is even humbler than a shepherdess, charming as she is. It would have amazed your grandmother, but would not have displeased her."

"But who in the world is this bride?"

"It's Mlle d'Oloron."

"That sounds to me tremendous and not in the least shepherdessy, but I don't quite gather who she can be. It's a title that used to be in the Guermantes family."

"Precisely, and M. de Charlus conferred it, when he adopted her, upon Jupien's niece. It's she who's marrying the young Cambremer."

"Jupien's niece! It isn't possible!"

"It's the reward of virtue. It's a marriage from the last chapter of one of Mme Sand's novels," said my mother. ("It's the wages of vice, a marriage from the end of a Balzac novel," thought I.)

"After all," I said to my mother, "it's quite natural, when you think of it. Here are the Cambremers established in that Guermantes clan among which they never hoped to pitch their tent; what is more, the girl, adopted by M. de Charlus, will have plenty of money, which was indispensable since the Cambremers have lost theirs; and after all she's the adopted daughter, and in the Cambremers' eyes probably the real daughter—the natural daughter—of a person whom they regard as a Prince of the Blood. A bastard of a semi-royal house has always been regarded as a flattering alliance by the nobility of France and other countries. Indeed, without going so far back, to the Lucinges,<sup>32</sup> only the other day, not more than six months ago, you remember the marriage of Robert's friend and that girl whose only social qualification was that she was supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be the natural daughter of a sovereign prince."

My mother, without abandoning the caste ethos of Combray in the light of which my grandmother ought to have been scandalised by such a marriage, being anxious above all to show the validity of her mother's judgment, added: "Anyhow, the girl is worth her weight in gold, and your dear grandmother wouldn't have had to draw upon her immense goodness, her infinite tolerance, to keep her from condemning young Cambremer's choice. Do you remember how distinguished she thought the girl was, long ago, when she went into the shop to have a stitch put in her skirt? She was only a child then. And now, even if she has rather run

to seed and become an old maid, she's a different woman, a thousand times more perfect. But your grandmother saw all that at a glance. She found the little niece of a jobbing tailor more 'noble' than the Duc de Guermantes."

But even more necessary than to extol my grandmother was it for my mother to decide that it was "better" for her that she had not lived to see the day. This was the culmination of her daughterly love, as though she were sparing my grandmother a final grief.

"And yet, can you imagine for a moment," my mother said to me, "what old Swann—not that you ever knew him, of course—would have felt if he could have known that he would one day have a great-grandchild in whose veins the blood of old mother Moser who used to say: 'Ponchour Mezieurs' would mingle with the blood of the Duc de Guise!"

"But you know, Mamma, it's much more surprising than that. Because the Swanns were very respectable people, and, given the social position that their son acquired, his daughter, if he himself had made a decent marriage, might have married very well indeed. But everything had to start again from scratch because he married a whore."

"Oh, a whore, you know, people were perhaps rather malicious. I never quite believed it all."

"Yes, a whore; indeed I shall let you have some ... family revelations one of these days."

Lost in reverie, my mother said: "To think of the daughter of a woman whom your father would never allow me to greet marrying the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis on whom your father wouldn't allow me to call at first because he thought her too grand for me!" Then: "And the son of Mme de Cambremer to whom Legrandin was so afraid of having to give us a letter of introduction because he didn't think us smart enough, marrying the niece of a man who would never dare to come to our flat except by the service stairs! ... All the same, your poor grandmother was absolutely right—you remember—when she said that the high aristocracy did things that would shock the middle classes and that Queen Marie-Amélie was spoiled for her by the overtures she made to the Prince de Condé's mistress to get her to persuade him to make his will in favour of the Duc d'Aumale. You remember too how it shocked her that for centuries past daughters of the house of Gramont who were veritable saints had borne the name Corisande in memory of Henri IV's liaison with one of their ancestresses. These things may perhaps also occur among the middle classes, but they conceal them better. Can't you imagine how it would have amused your poor grandmother!" Mamma added sadly, for the joys which it grieved us to think that my grandmother was deprived of were the simplest joys of life—an item of news, a play, or even something more trifling still, a piece of mimicry, which would have amused her. "Can't you imagine her astonishment! But still, I'm sure that your grandmother would have been shocked by these marriages, that they would have grieved her; I feel that it's better that she never knew about them," my mother went on, for, when confronted with any event, she liked to think that my grandmother would have received an utterly distinctive impression from it which would have stemmed from the marvellous singularity of her nature and have been uniquely significant. If anything sad or painful occurred which could not have been foreseen in the past—the disgrace or ruin of one of our old friends, some public calamity, an epidemic, a war, a revolution—my mother would say to herself that perhaps it was better that Grandmamma had known nothing about it, that it would have grieved her too much, that perhaps she would not have been able to endure it. And when it was a question of something shocking like these two marriages, my mother, by an impulse directly opposite to that of the malicious people who are pleased to imagine that others whom they do not like have suffered more than is generally supposed, would not, in her tenderness for my grandmother, allow that anything sad or diminishing could ever have happened to her. She always imagined my grandmother as being above the assaults even of any evil which might not have been expected to occur, and told herself that my grandmother's death had perhaps been a blessing on the whole, inasmuch as it had shut off the too ugly spectacle of the present day from that noble nature which could never have become resigned to it. For optimism is the philosophy of the past. The events that have occurred being, among all those that were possible, the only ones which we have known, the harm that they have caused seems to us inevitable, and we give them the credit for the slight amount of good that they could not help bringing with them, for we imagine that without them it would not have occurred. My mother sought at the same time to form a more accurate idea of what my grandmother would have felt when she learned these tidings, and to believe that it was impossible for our minds, less exalted than hers, to form any such idea. "Can't you imagine," she said to me first of all, "how astonished your poor grandmother would have been!" And I felt that my mother was distressed by her inability to tell her the news, regretting that my grandmother would never know it, and feeling it to be somehow unjust that the course of life should bring to light facts which my grandmother would never have believed, thus rendering erroneous and incomplete, retrospectively, the knowledge of people and society which my grandmother had taken to the grave, the marriage of the Jupien girl and Legrandin's nephew being calculated to modify her general notions of life, no less than the news—had my mother been able to convey it to her—that people had succeeded in solving the problems, which my grandmother had regarded as insoluble, of aerial navigation and wireless telegraphy. But as we shall see, this desire that my grandmother should share in the blessings of our modern science was soon, in its turn, to appear too selfish to my mother.

What I was to learn later on—for I had been unable to keep in touch with it all from Venice—was that Mlle de Forcheville's hand had been sought both by the Duc de Châtellerauld and by the Prince de Silistrie, while Saint-Loup was seeking to marry Mlle d'Entragues, the Duc de Luxembourg's daughter.

This is what had occurred. Mlle de Forcheville possessing a hundred million francs, Mme de Marsantes had decided that she would be an excellent match for her son. She made the mistake of saying that the girl was charming, that she herself had not the slightest idea whether she was rich or poor, that she did not wish to know, but that even without a dowry it would be a piece of good luck for the most exacting young man to find such a wife. This was going rather too far for a woman who was tempted only by the hundred million, which made her shut her eyes to everything else. People realised at once that she was thinking of the girl for her own son. The Princesse de Silistrie went round protesting loudly, expatiating on Saint-Loup's social grandeur, and proclaiming that if he should marry the daughter of Odette and a Jew then it was the end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme de Marsantes, sure of herself as she was, dared not proceed further and retreated before the indignant protests of the Princesse de Silistrie, who immediately made a proposal on behalf of her own son. She had protested only in order to keep Gilberte for herself. Meanwhile Mme de Marsantes, refusing to own herself defeated, had turned at once to Mlle d'Enragues, the Duc de Luxembourg's daughter. Having no more than twenty million, the latter suited her purpose less, but Mme de Marsantes told everyone that a Saint-Loup could not marry a Mlle Swann (there was no longer any mention of Forcheville). Some time later, somebody having thoughtlessly remarked that the Duc de Châtellerauld was thinking of marrying Mlle d'Enragues, Mme de Marsantes, who was the most punctilious woman in the world, mounted her high horse, changed her tactics, returned to Gilberte, made a formal offer of marriage on Saint-Loup's behalf, and the engagement was immediately announced.

This engagement was to provoke keen comment in the most different social circles. Several of my mother's friends, who had met Saint-Loup in our house, came to her "day," and inquired whether the bridegroom was indeed the same person as my friend. Certain people went so far as to maintain, with regard to the other marriage, that it had nothing to do with the Legrandin-Cambremer. They had this on good authority, for the Marquise, *née* Legrandin, had denied it on the very eve of the day on which the engagement was announced. I, for my part, wondered why M. de Charlus on the one hand, Saint-Loup on the other, each of whom had had occasion to write to me shortly before and had spoken in such friendly terms of various travel plans the realisation of which must have precluded the wedding ceremonies, had said nothing whatever to me about them. I came to the conclusion, forgetting the secrecy which people maintain until the last moment in affairs of this sort, that I was less their friend than I had supposed, a conclusion which, so far as Saint-Loup was concerned, saddened me. Though why, when I had already remarked that the affability, the egalitarian, "man-to-man" attitude of the aristocracy was all a sham, should I be surprised to find myself left out of it? In the establishment for women—where men were now to be procured in increasing numbers—in which M. de Charlus had spied on Morel, and in which the "assistant matron,"<sup>33</sup> a great reader of the *Gaulois*, used to discuss the social gossip with her clients, this lady, while conversing with a stout gentleman who used to come to her to drink bottle after bottle of champagne with young men, because, being already very stout, he wished to become obese enough to be certain of not being called up should there ever be a war, declared: "It seems young Saint-Loup is 'one of those,' and young Cambremer too. Poor wives! In any case, if you know these bridegrooms, you must send them to us. They'll find everything they want here, and there's plenty of money to be made out of them." Whereupon the stout gentleman, albeit he was himself "one of those," indignantly retorted, being something of a snob, that he often met Cambremer and Saint-Loup at his cousins' the Ardonvillers, and that they were great womanisers, and quite the opposite of "those." "Ah!" the assistant matron concluded in a sceptical tone, but possessing no proof of the assertion, and convinced that in our century the perversity of morals was rivalled only by the absurd exaggeration of slanderous tittle-tattle.

Certain people whom I no longer saw wrote to me and asked me "what I thought" of these two marriages, precisely as though they were conducting an inquiry into the height of women's hats in the theatre or the psychological novel. I had not the heart to answer these letters. Of these two marriages I thought nothing at all, but I felt an immense sadness, as when two parts of one's past existence, which have been anchored near to one, and upon which one has perhaps been basing idly from day to day an unacknowledged hope, remove themselves finally, with a joyous flapping of pennants, for unknown destinations, like a pair of ships. As for the prospective bridegrooms themselves, their attitude towards their own marriages was perfectly natural, since it was a question not of other people but of themselves—though hitherto they had never tired of mocking at such "grand marriages" founded upon some secret taint. And even the Cambremer family, so ancient in its lineage and so modest in its pretensions, would have been the first to forget Jupien and to remember only the unimaginable grandeur of the House of Oloron, had not an exception appeared in the person who ought to have been most gratified by this marriage, the Marquise de Cambremer-Legrandin. Being spiteful by nature, she reckoned the pleasure of humiliating her family above that of glorifying herself. And so, not being enamoured of her son, and having rapidly taken a dislike to her future daughter-in-law, she declared that it was a calamity for a Cambremer to marry a person who had sprung from heaven knew where, and had such bad teeth. As for young Cambremer, who had already shown a propensity towards the society of men of letters such as Bergotte and even Bloch, it may be imagined that so brilliant a marriage did not have the effect of making him more of a snob than before, but that, feeling himself to have become the successor of the Ducs d'Oloron—"sovereign princes" as the newspapers said—he was sufficiently persuaded of his own grandeur to be able to mix with anyone he chose. And he deserted the minor nobility for the intelligent bourgeoisie on the days when he did not confine himself to royalty. The notices in the papers, especially when they referred to Saint-Loup, invested my friend, whose royal ancestors were endlessly enumerated, with a renewed grandeur which, however, could only sadden me, as though he had become someone else, the descendant of Robert the Strong rather than the friend who, only a little while since, had taken the folding

seat in the carriage in order that I might be more comfortable in the back; the fact that I had had no previous suspicion of his marriage with Gilberte—the prospect of which had appeared to me suddenly, in my letter, so different from anything that I could have expected of either of them the day before, as unexpected as a chemical precipitate—pained me, whereas I ought to have reflected that he had had a great deal to do, and that moreover in the fashionable world marriages are often arranged thus all of a sudden, as a substitute for a different combination which has come to grief. And the gloom, as dismal as the depression of moving house, as bitter as jealousy, that these marriages caused me by the accident of their sudden impact was so profound that people used to remind me of it later, congratulating me absurdly on my perspicacity, as having been, quite contrary to what it was at the time, a twofold, indeed a threefold and fourfold presentiment.

The people in society who had taken no notice of Gilberte said to me with an air of solemn interest: “Ah! she’s the one who’s marrying the Marquis de Saint-Loup,” and studied her with the attentive gaze of people who not only relish all the social gossip of Paris but are anxious to learn and believe in the profundity of their observation. Those who on the other hand had known only Gilberte gazed at Saint-Loup with the closest attention, asked me (these were often people who scarcely knew me) to introduce them, and returned from the presentation to the bridegroom radiant with the joys of the festivity saying to me: “He’s a fine figure of a man.” Gilberte was convinced that the name “Marquis de Saint-Loup” was a thousand times grander than “Duc d’Orléans,” but since she was very much of her knowing generation, she did not want to appear less witty than others, and delighted in saying *mater semita*, to which she would add in order to show herself wittier still: “In my case, however, it’s my *pater*.”

“It appears that it was the Princesse de Parme who arranged young Cambremer’s marriage,” Mamma said to me. And this was true. The Princess had known for a long time, through her charitable activities, on the one hand Legrandin whom she regarded as a distinguished man, on the other hand Mme de Cambremer who changed the subject whenever the Princess asked her whether it was true that she was Legrandin’s sister. The Princess knew how deeply Mme de Cambremer regretted having remained on the threshold of aristocratic high society without ever being invited in. When the Princess, who had undertaken to find a husband for Mlle d’Oloron, asked M. de Charlus whether he knew anything about an amiable and cultivated man called Legrandin de Méséglise (it was thus that M. Legrandin now styled himself), the Baron first of all replied in the negative, then suddenly the memory recurred to him of a man whose acquaintance he had made in the train one night and who had given him his card. He smiled a vague smile. “It’s perhaps the same man,” he said to himself. When he learned that the prospective bridegroom was the son of Legrandin’s sister, he said: “Why, that would be really extraordinary! If he took after his uncle, it wouldn’t alarm me; after all, I’ve always said that they made the best husbands.” “Who are *they*?” inquired the Princess. “Ah, madame, I could explain it all to you if we met more often. With you one can talk freely. Your Highness is so intelligent,” said Charlus, seized by a desire to confide which, however, went no further. The name Cambremer pleased him, although he did not like the boy’s parents; he knew that it was one of the four Baronies of Brittany and everything he could possibly have hoped for his adopted daughter; it was an old and respected name, with solid connexions in its native province. A prince would have been out of the question and, moreover, not altogether desirable. This was the very thing. The Princess then asked Legrandin to call. Physically he had changed considerably of late, on the whole for the better. Like those women who deliberately sacrifice their faces to the slimness of their figures and never stir from Marienbad, he had acquired the breezy air of a cavalry officer. He had taken up tennis at the age of fifty-five. In proportion as M. de Charlus had thickened and slowed down, Legrandin had become slimmer and brisker, the contrary effect of an identical cause. This velocity of movement had its psychological reasons as well. He was in the habit of frequenting certain low haunts where he did not wish to be seen going in or coming out: he would hurl himself into them.

When the Princesse de Parme spoke to him of the Guermantes family and of Saint-Loup, he declared that he had known them all his life, making a sort of compound of the fact that he had always known *by name* the proprietors of Guermantes and the fact that he had met *in person*, at my aunt’s house, Swann, the father of the future Mme de Saint-Loup—although he had always refused to have anything to do with Swann’s wife and daughter at Combray. “Indeed, I travelled quite recently with the brother of the Duc de Guermantes, M. de Charlus. It was he who spontaneously engaged me in conversation, which is always a good sign, for it proves that a man is neither a strait-laced fool nor a pretentious snob. Oh, I know all the things that people say about him. But I never pay any attention to gossip of that sort. Besides, the private life of other people is not my business. He gave me the impression of having a sensitive nature and a cultivated mind.” Then the Princesse de Parme spoke of Mlle d’Oloron. In the Guermantes circle people waxed sentimental about the nobility of heart of M. de Charlus who, generous as always, was securing the future happiness of a penniless but charming girl. And the Duc de Guermantes, who suffered from his brother’s reputation, let it be understood that, fine as this conduct was, it was wholly natural. “I don’t know if I make myself clear, but everything in the affair is natural,” he said, with calculated maladroitness. His object was to indicate that the girl was a daughter of his brother whom the latter acknowledged. This accounted at the same time for Jupien. The Princesse de Parme hinted at this version of the story to show Legrandin that after all young Cambremer would be marrying something in the nature of Mlle de Nantes, one of those bastards of Louis XIV who were scorned neither by the Duc d’Orléans nor by the Prince de Conti.

These two marriages which my mother and I discussed in the train that was taking us back to Paris had quite remarkable effects upon several of the characters who have figured in the course of this narrative. First of all upon Legrandin; needless to say, he swept like a hurricane into M. de Charlus’s town house, for all the world as though he were entering a house of ill-fame where he must on no account be seen, and also, at the same

time, to display his mettle and to conceal his age—for our habits accompany us even into places where they serve no useful purpose—and scarcely anybody observed that M. de Charlus greeted him with a smile which was hard to detect and harder still to interpret; this smile was similar in appearance—though in fact it was precisely the opposite—to the smile which two men who are in the habit of meeting in the best society exchange if they happen to meet in what they regard as disreputable surroundings (such as the Elysée where General de Froberville, whenever he met Swann there in the old days, would assume, on catching sight of him, an expression of ironical and mysterious complicity appropriate between two habitués of the salon of the Princesse des Laumes who were compromising themselves by visiting M. Grévy). But what was rather remarkable was the genuine improvement in Legrandin's character. For a long time past—ever since the days when I used to go as a child to spend my holidays at Combray—he had been surreptitiously cultivating relations with the aristocracy, productive at the most of an isolated invitation to a sterile house party. All of a sudden, his nephew's marriage having supervened to join up these scattered fragments, Legrandin stepped into a social position to which, retroactively, his former relations with people who had known him only in private but had known him well, gave a sort of solidity. Ladies to whom people offered to introduce him revealed that for the last twenty years he had stayed with them in the country for a fortnight annually, and that it was he who had given them the beautiful old barometer in the small drawing-room. It also transpired that he had been photographed in "groups" which included dukes who were now related to him. But as soon as he had acquired this social position, he ceased to take advantage of it. This was not merely because, now that people knew that he was received everywhere, he no longer derived any pleasure from being invited, but because, of the two vices that had long struggled for mastery in him, the less natural, snobbishness, was now giving way to another that was less artificial, since it did at least show a sort of return, however circuitous, towards nature. No doubt the two are not incompatible, and a nocturnal prowling may be undertaken immediately after leaving a duchess's party. But the dampening effect of age discouraged Legrandin from combining too many pleasures, from venturing out except well advisedly, and also made his enjoyment of the pleasures of nature fairly platonic, consisting chiefly in friendships, in time-consuming conversations, which, making him spend almost all his time among the people, left him very little for the life of society.

Mme de Cambremer herself became almost indifferent to the friendly overtures of the Duchesse de Guermantes. The latter, obliged to see something of the Marquise, had noticed, as happens whenever we come to see more of our fellow creatures, that is to say as combinations of good qualities which we eventually discover and defects to which we eventually grow accustomed, that Mme de Cambremer was a woman endowed with an intelligence and culture which were little to my taste but which appeared remarkable to the Duchess. And so she often went to see Mme de Cambremer in the late afternoon and paid her long visits. But the fabulous charm which her hostess imagined to exist in the Duchesse de Guermantes vanished as soon as she found herself sought after by her, and she received her out of politeness rather than pleasure.

A more striking change manifested itself in Gilberte, a change at once symmetrical with and different from that which occurred in Swann after his marriage. It is true that during the first few months Gilberte had been happy to open her doors to the most select society. It was doubtless only because of the inheritance that she invited the intimate friends to whom her mother was attached, but on certain days only when there was no one but themselves, segregated from the fashionable people, as though the contact of Mme Bontemps or Mme Cottard with the Princesse de Guermantes or the Princesse de Parme might, like that of two unstable powders, have produced irreparable catastrophes. Nevertheless the Bontemps, the Cottards and such, although disappointed to find themselves dining among themselves, were proud to be able to say: "We dined with the Marquise de Saint-Loup," all the more so because she sometimes went so far as to invite with them Mme de Marsantes, who showed herself emphatically the "great lady" with her tortoiseshell and ostrich-feather fan—also in the interests of the legacy. She merely made a point of paying tribute from time to time to the discreet people whom one never sees except when they are invited, a word to the wise after which she could bestow upon the Cottards, the Bontemps and their ilk her most gracious and lofty salutation. Perhaps because of my "Balbec girlfriend," by whose aunt I liked to be seen in these surroundings, I should have preferred to be included in that group. But Gilberte, in whose eyes I was now principally a friend of her husband and of the Guermantes (and who—perhaps even from the Combray days, when my parents did not call upon her mother—at the age when we do not merely add this or that to the value of things but classify them according to their species, had endowed me with the sort of prestige which one never afterwards loses), regarded these evenings as unworthy of me, and would say to me as I left: "It's delightful to have seen you, but you must come the day after tomorrow; you'll find my aunt Guermantes, and Mme de Poix; today it was just a few of Mamma's friends, to please Mamma." But this state of things lasted for a few months only, and then everything was totally transformed. Was this because Gilberte's social life was fated to exhibit the same contrasts as Swann's? However that may be, Gilberte had been for only a short time the Marquise de Saint-Loup (in the process of becoming, as we shall see, Duchesse de Guermantes)<sup>34</sup> when, having attained to the most brilliant and most rarefied position, she decided that the name Guermantes was now embodied in her like a lustrous enamel and that, whatever the society she frequented, from now onwards she would remain for all the world the Duchesse de Guermantes—sharing, in short, the opinion of the character in the operetta who declares: "My name, I think, dispenses me from saying more."<sup>35</sup> Wherein she was mistaken, for the value of a title, like that of stocks and shares, rises with the demand and falls when it is offered in the market. Everything that seems to us imperishable tends towards decay; a position in society, like anything else, is not created once and for all, but, just as much as the power of an empire, is continually rebuilding itself by a sort of perpetual process of creation, which explains the apparent anomalies in social or political history in the course of half a century.

The creation of the world did not occur at the beginning of time, it occurs every day. The Marquise de Saint-Loup said to herself, "I am the Marquise de Saint-Loup," and she knew that, the day before, she had refused three invitations to dine with duchesses. But if to a certain extent her name aggrandised the very unaristocratic people whom she entertained, by an inverse process the people whom she entertained diminished the name that she bore. Nothing can hold out against such trends; the greatest names succumb to them in the end. Had not Swann known a princess of the House of France whose drawing-room, because anyone at all was welcomed there, had fallen to the lowest rank? One day when the Princesse des Laumes had gone to pay a brief duty call on this Highness, in whose drawing-room she had found only nonentities, arriving immediately afterwards at Mme Leroi's, she had said to Swann and the Marquis de Modène: "At last I find myself upon friendly soil. I have just come from Mme la Comtesse de X—, and there weren't three faces I knew in the room." At all events, Gilberte suddenly began to flaunt her contempt for what she had once so ardently desired, to declare that all the people in the Faubourg Saint-Germain were idiots, simply not worth meeting, and, suiting her actions to her words, ceased to meet them. People who did not make her acquaintance until after this period, and who, in the first stages of that acquaintance, heard her, by that time Duchesse de Guermantes, being very funny at the expense of the society in which she could so easily have moved, never inviting a single person from that society, and, if any of them, even the most brilliant, should venture into her drawing-room, yawning openly in their faces, blush now in retrospect at the thought that they themselves could ever have seen any glamour in the fashionable world, and would never dare to confess this humiliating secret of their past weaknesses to a woman whom they assume to have been, by an essential loftiness in her nature, incapable from the beginning of understanding such things. They hear her poking such delicious fun at dukes, and see her (which is more significant) matching her behaviour so entirely to her mockery! No doubt they do not think of inquiring into the causes of the accident which turned Mlle Swann into Mlle de Forcheville, Mlle de Forcheville into the Marquise de Saint-Loup, and finally into the Duchesse de Guermantes. Possibly it does not occur to them either that the effects of this accident would serve no less than its causes to explain Gilberte's subsequent attitude, association with commoners not being regarded in quite the same light in which Mlle Swann would have regarded it by a lady who is addressed by all and sundry as "Madame la Duchesse" and, by other duchesses who bore her so much, as "cousin." One is always ready to despise a goal which one has not succeeded in attaining, or has finally attained. And this contempt seems to us to form part of the character of people whom one did not know before. Perhaps, if we were able to go back over the years, we should find them devoured, more savagely than anyone, by those same weaknesses which they have succeeded so completely in disguising or conquering that we reckon them incapable not only of ever having been infected by them themselves but even of ever excusing them in others, because of their inability to imagine them. At all events, very soon the drawing-room of the new Marquise de Saint-Loup assumed its permanent aspect (from the social point of view at least, for we shall see what troubles were brewing in it in other respects). Now this aspect was surprising for the following reason. People still remembered that the most grandiose and glittering receptions in Paris, as brilliant as those given by the Princesse de Guermantes, had been those of Mme de Marsantes, Saint-Loup's mother. At the same time, in recent years Odette's salon, infinitely lower in the social scale, had been no less dazzling in its elegance and splendour. Saint-Loup, however, happy to have, thanks to his wife's vast fortune, everything that he could desire in the way of comfort, wished only to rest quietly in his armchair after a good dinner with a musical entertainment by good performers. And this young man who had seemed at one time so proud and so ambitious invited to share his luxury old friends whom his mother would not have admitted to her house. Gilberte, for her part, put into practice Swann's maxim: "Quality doesn't matter, what I dread is quantity." And Saint-Loup, very much on his knees before his wife, both because he loved her and because it was to her that he owed this extreme luxury, took care not to interfere with tastes that were so similar to his own. With the result that the great receptions that had been given year after year by Mme de Marsantes and Mme de Forcheville, principally with an eye to the establishing of their children in ostentatious splendour, gave rise to no receptions by M. and Mme de Saint-Loup. They had the best of saddle-horses on which to go out riding together, the finest of yachts in which to cruise—but they never took more than a couple of guests with them. In Paris, every evening, they would invite three or four friends to dine, never more; with the result that, by an unforeseen but at the same time quite natural retrogression, the two vast maternal aviaries had been replaced by a silent nest.

The person who profited least by these two marriages was the young Mlle d'Oloron who, already stricken with typhoid on the day of the religious ceremony, was barely able to crawl to the church and died a few weeks later. In the letter of intimation that was sent out some time after her death, names such as Jupien's were juxtaposed with some of the greatest in Europe, such as those of the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Montmorency, H.R.H. the Comtesse de Bourbon-Soissons, the Prince of Modena-Este, the Vicomtesse d'Edumea, Lady Essex, and so forth. No doubt, even to a person who knew that the deceased was Jupien's niece, this plethora of grand marriage connexions could cause no surprise. The great thing, after all, is to have a grand marriage. Then, the *casus foederis* coming into play, the death of a simple little seamstress plunges all the princely families of Europe into mourning. But many young people of the rising generation, who were not familiar with the real situation, might, apart from the possibility of their mistaking Marie-Antoinette d'Oloron, Marquise de Cambremer, for a lady of the noblest birth, have been guilty of many other errors had they read this communication. Thus, supposing their excursions through France to have given them some slight familiarity with the country round Combray, when they saw that Mme L. de Méséglise and the Comte de Méséglise figured among the first of the signatories, close to the Duc de Guermantes, they might not have been

at all surprised: the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way are cheek by jowl. "Old nobility of the same region, perhaps interrelated for generations," they might have said to themselves. "Who knows? It's perhaps a branch of the Guermantes family which bears the title of Comte de Méséglise." As it happened, the Comte de Méséglise had no connexion with the Guermantes and was not even enrolled on the Guermantes side, but on the Cambremer side, since the Comte de Méséglise, who by a rapid advancement had remained Legrandin de Méséglise for only two years, was our old friend Legrandin. No doubt, if they had to choose between bogus titles, few could have been so disagreeable to the Guermantes as this one. They had been connected in the past with the authentic Comtes de Méséglise, of whom there survived only one female descendant, the daughter of obscure parents who had come down in the world, herself married to one of my aunt's tenant farmers named Ménager, who had become rich and bought Mirougrain from her and now styled himself "Ménager de Mirougrain," with the result that when it was said that his wife was born "de Méséglise" people thought that she must simply have been born at Méséglise and that she was "from Méséglise" as her husband was "from Mirougrain."

Any other sham title would have caused less annoyance to the Guermantes family. But the aristocracy knows how to tolerate such irritations, and many others as well, the moment a marriage is at stake which is deemed advantageous, from whatever point of view. Shielded by the Duc de Guermantes, Legrandin was, to part of that generation, and would be to the whole of the generation that followed it, the real Comte de Méséglise.

Yet another mistake which any young reader not acquainted with the facts might have been led to make was that of supposing that the Baron and Baronne de Forcheville figured on the list in the capacity of parents-in-law of the Marquis de Saint-Loup, that is to say on the Guermantes side. But on this side they had no right to appear since it was Robert who was related to the Guermantes and not Gilberte. No, the Baron and Baronne de Forcheville, despite these deceptive appearances, did figure on the wife's side, it is true, and not on the Cambremer side, not because of the Guermantes, but because of Jupien, who, the better informed reader knows, was Odette's first cousin.

All M. de Charlus's favour had been transferred after the marriage of his adopted daughter on to the young Marquis de Cambremer; the young man's tastes, which were similar to those of the Baron, since they had not prevented the Baron from choosing him as a husband for Mlle d'Oloron, naturally made him appreciate him all the more when he was left a widower. This is not to say that the Marquis did not have other qualities which made him a charming companion for M. de Charlus. But even in the case of a man of real merit, it is a quality not to be despised by the person who admits him into his private life, and one that makes him particularly useful if he can also play whist. The intelligence of the young Marquis was remarkable, and, as they had already begun to say at Féterne when he was barely out of his cradle, he "took" entirely after his grandmother, had the same enthusiasms, the same love of music. He reproduced also some of her idiosyncrasies, but these more by imitation, like all the rest of the family, than from atavism. Thus it was that, some time after the death of his wife, having received a letter signed "Léonor," a name which I did not remember as being his, I realised who it was that had written to me only when I had read the closing formula: "*Croyez à ma sympathie vraie.*" The placing of that *vraie* infallibly added to the Christian name Léonor the surname Cambremer.

The train reached Paris before my mother and I had finished discussing these two pieces of news, which, so that the journey might not seem to me too long, she had deliberately reserved for the latter part of it, not allowing me to learn about them until after Milan. My mother had soon reverted to the point of view which for her was the only possible one, that of my grandmother. Mamma had first of all said that my grandmother would have been surprised, then that she would have been saddened, which was simply a way of saying that such a surprising event would have given her pleasure, and my mother, unable to accept that my grandmother should have been deprived of a pleasure, preferred to think that all was for the best, this news being of the kind that could only have caused her sorrow. But no sooner had we reached home than my mother felt that it was still too selfish of her to regret being unable to share with my grandmother all the surprises that life brings. She preferred to believe that this news would not have surprised my grandmother, since it merely confirmed her predictions. She wanted to see it as a confirmation of my grandmother's foresight, proof that she had been even more profound, more perceptive, more sagacious than we had thought. And so, in order to arrive at this attitude of pure admiration, it was not long before my mother was adding: "And yet, who knows whether your grandmother wouldn't have approved? She was so kind and tolerant. And then you know, for her, social status meant nothing; natural distinction was what mattered. And curiously enough, don't you remember, she liked both of them. Remember that first visit of hers to Mme de Villeparisis, when she came back and told us how common she thought M. de Guermantes was, and by comparison how full of praise she was for those Jupiens. Poor Mamma, do you remember her saying about the father: 'If I had another daughter, I'd give her to him as a wife, and his daughter is even nicer.' And the little Swann girl! She used to say of her: 'I think she's charming; you'll see that she'll marry well.' Poor Mamma, if only she'd lived to see how right she was! Right up to the end she'll go on giving us lessons in goodness and foresight and judgment." And since the joys which we suffered to see my grandmother deprived of were all the humble little joys of life—an actor's intonation which would have amused her, a dish she would have enjoyed, a new novel by a favourite author—Mamma said: "How surprised she would have been! How it would have interested her! What a lovely letter she would have written in reply!" And my mother went on: "Just imagine, poor Swann who so longed for Gilberte to be received by the Guermantes, how happy he would be if he could see his daughter become a Guermantes!"



"Under another name than his, led to the altar as Mlle de Forcheville—do you think he would be so happy after all?"

"Ah, that's true, I hadn't thought of it."

"That's what makes it impossible for me to be happy for her sake, the thought that the little beast could have had the heart to give up her father's name, when he was so good to her."

"Yes, you're right; all things considered, it's perhaps just as well that he never knew." So difficult is it for us to know, with the dead as with the living, whether a thing would cause them joy or sorrow! "It appears that the Saint-Loups are going to live at Tansonville," my mother went on. "Old Swann, who was so anxious to show your poor grandfather his pond, could never have dreamed that the Duc de Guermantes would see it constantly, especially if he had known of his son's shameful marriage. And then, you've talked so often to Saint-Loup about the hawthorns and lilacs and irises at Tansonville, he'll see what you meant now. They'll be his property."

Thus there proceeded in our dining-room, in the lamplight that is so congenial to them, one of those long chats in which the wisdom not of nations but of families, taking hold of some event, a death, a betrothal, an inheritance, a bankruptcy, and slipping it under the magnifying glass of memory, brings it into high relief, detaches, thrusts back, and places in perspective at different points in space and time things which to those who have not lived through it seem to be juxtaposed on a single plane, the names of the deceased, successive addresses, the origins of a fortune and its vicissitudes, transfers of property. It is the wisdom inspired by the Muse whom it is best to ignore for as long as possible if we wish to retain some freshness of impressions, some creative power, but whom even those who have ignored her meet in the evening of their lives in the nave of an old country church, at a point when suddenly they feel less susceptible to the eternal beauty expressed in the carvings on the altar than to the thought of the vicissitudes of fortune which those carvings have undergone, passing into a famous private collection or a chapel, from there to a museum, then returning at length to the church, or to the feeling that as they walk around it they may be treading upon a flagstone almost endowed with thought, which is made of the ashes of Arnauld or Pascal, or simply to deciphering (forming perhaps a mental picture of a fresh-faced country girl) on the brass plate of the wooden prie-dieu the names of the daughters of the squire or the notable—the Muse who has gathered up everything that the more exalted Muses of philosophy and art have rejected, everything that is not founded upon truth, everything that is merely contingent, but that reveals other laws as well: the Muse of History.

Some old friends of my mother, who belonged more or less to Combray, came to see her to discuss Gilberte's marriage, which did not dazzle them in the least. "You know who Mlle de Forcheville is, she's simply Mlle Swann. And her witness at the marriage, the 'Baron' de Charlus, as he calls himself, is the old man who used to keep her mother at one time, under Swann's very nose, and no doubt to his advantage." "But what do you mean?" my mother protested; "in the first place, Swann was extremely rich." "One must assume that he wasn't as rich as all that if he needed other people's money. But what is there about that woman, that she hangs on to her old lovers like that? She managed to persuade the first to marry her, then the third, and she drags out the second when he has one foot in the grave to get him to be a witness at the marriage of the daughter she had by the first or by someone else—for how is one to tell who the father was? She can't be certain herself! I said the third, but I should have said the three hundredth. Mind you, even if the girl's no more a Forcheville than you or I, that puts her on the same level as the bridegroom who of course isn't noble at all. You can imagine that only an adventurer would marry a girl like that. It appears he's just a plain Monsieur Dupont or Durand or something. If it weren't that we have a Radical mayor now at Combray, who doesn't even lift his hat to the priest, I should know all about it. Because, you understand, when they published the banns, they were obliged to give the real name. It's all very nice, for the newspapers or for the stationer who sends out the invitations, to describe yourself as the Marquis de Saint-Loup. That does no harm to anyone, and if it can give any pleasure to those worthy people, I should be the last person in the world to object! What harm can it do me? As I shall never dream of going to call on the daughter of a woman who has let herself be talked about, she can have a string of titles as long as my arm for the benefit of her servants. But in an official document it's not the same thing. Ah, if my cousin Sazerat was still deputy-mayor, I'd have written to him, and he would certainly have let me know what name the man was registered under."

I saw a good deal of Gilberte at this time, as it happened, having renewed my friendship with her: for our life, in the long run, is not calculated according to the duration of our friendships. Let a certain period of time elapse, and you will see (just as, in politics, former ministries reappear, or, in the theatre, forgotten plays are revived) friendships renewed between the same persons as before, after long years of interruption, and renewed with pleasure. After ten years, the reasons which made one party love too passionately, the other unable to endure a too exacting despotism, no longer exist. The affinity alone survives, and everything that Gilberte would have refused me in the past, that had seemed to her intolerable, impossible, she granted me quite readily—doubtless because I no longer desired it. Although neither of us had ever mentioned the reason for this change, if she was always ready to come to me, never in a hurry to leave me, it was because the obstacle had vanished: my love.

Some time later, I went to spend a few days at Tansonville. This excursion was something of an inconvenience, for I was keeping a girl in Paris who slept in a bachelor flat which I had rented. As other people need the aroma of forests or the ripple of a lake, so I needed her sleep by my side during the night and, by day, to have her always by my side in the carriage. For even if one love has passed into oblivion, it may determine the form of the love that is to follow it. Already, even in the midst of the previous love, daily

habits existed, the origin of which we did not ourselves remember; perhaps it was a moment of anguish early on that had made us passionately desire, then permanently adopt, like customs the meaning of which has been forgotten, the habit of those homeward drives to the beloved's door, or her residence in our home, our presence or the presence of someone we trust during all her outings. All these habits, which are like great uniform high-roads along which our love passes daily and which were forged long ago in the volcanic fire of an ardent emotion, nevertheless survive the woman, survive even the memory of the woman. They become the pattern, if not of all our loves, at least of certain of our loves which alternate among themselves. And thus my home had demanded, in memory of a forgotten Albertine, the presence of my mistress of the moment whom I concealed from visitors and who filled my life as Albertine had filled it in the past. And in order to go to Tansonville I had to obtain her consent to being looked after for a few days by one of my friends who did not care for women. I was going because I had heard that Gilberte was unhappy, in that Robert was unfaithful to her, though not in the fashion which everyone believed, which perhaps she herself still believed, which in any case she alleged. A belief that could be explained by pride, by the desire to hoodwink other people and to hoodwink oneself, not to mention the imperfect knowledge of infidelities which is all that betrayed spouses ever acquire, all the more so as Robert, a true nephew of M. de Charlus, went about openly with women whom he compromised, whom the world believed and whom Gilberte on the whole believed to be his mistresses. It was even thought in society that he was somewhat barefaced, never stirring, at a party, from the side of some woman whom he afterwards accompanied home, leaving Mme de Saint-Loup to return as best she could. Anyone who had said that the other woman whom he compromised thus was not really his mistress would have been regarded as a fool, incapable of seeing what was staring him in the face; but I had been pointed, alas, in the direction of the truth, a truth which caused me infinite distress, by a few words let fall by Jupien. A few months before my visit to Tansonville I had gone to inquire after M. de Charlus, in whom certain cardiac symptoms had been causing great anxiety, and having mentioned to Jupien, whom I found alone, some love-letters addressed to Robert and signed Bobette which Mme de Saint-Loup had discovered, I was stupefied to learn from the Baron's former factotum that the person who used the signature Bobette was none other than the violinist-journalist who had played so important a part in M. de Charlus's life!<sup>36</sup> Jupien could not speak of him without indignation: "The boy was free to do whatever he liked. But if there was one direction in which he ought never to have looked, that was in the direction of the Baron's nephew. All the more so as the Baron loved his nephew like his own son. He has tried to break up the marriage—it's really shameful. And he must have gone about it with the most devilish cunning, for no one was ever more opposed to that sort of thing by nature than the Marquis de Saint-Loup. You've only to think of the follies he committed for the sake of his mistresses! No, however despicably—there's no other word for it—he deserted the Baron, that was his business. But to take up with the nephew! There are some things that just aren't done."

Jupien was sincere in his indignation; among so-called immoral people, moral indignation is quite as violent as among other people, only its object is slightly different. What is more, people whose own hearts are not directly involved always regard unfortunate entanglements, disastrous marriages, as though one were free to choose whom one loves, and do not take into account the exquisite mirage which love projects and which envelops so entirely and so uniquely the person with whom one is in love that the "folly" a man commits by marrying his cook or the mistress of his best friend is as a rule the only poetical action that he performs in the course of his existence.

I gathered that Robert and his wife had been on the brink of a separation (though Gilberte had not yet discovered the precise nature of the trouble) and that it was Mme de Marsantes, a loving, ambitious and philosophical mother, who had arranged and enforced their reconciliation. She belonged to a world in which perennial inbreeding and the impoverishment of patrimonies constantly bring out, in the realm of the passions as in that of pecuniary interest, inherited vices and compromises. It was with the same energy that in the past she had patronised Mme Swann, encouraged the marriage of Jupien's niece and arranged that of her own son to Gilberte, exercising thus on her own behalf, with a pained resignation, the same atavistic wisdom which she deployed for the benefit of the entire Faubourg. And perhaps what had made her at a certain moment expedite Robert's marriage to Gilberte—which had certainly caused her less trouble and fewer tears than making him break with Rachel—had been the fear of his forming with another harlot—or perhaps with the same one, for Robert took a long time to forget Rachel—a fresh attachment which might have been his salvation. Now I understood what Robert had meant when he said to me at the Princesse de Guermantes's: "It's a pity your Balbec girlfriend hasn't the fortune that my mother insists upon. I believe she and I would have got on very well together." He had meant that she belonged to Gomorrah as he belonged to Sodom, or perhaps, if he did not yet belong, that he had ceased to enjoy women whom he could not love in a certain fashion and together with other women. Gilberte, too, might have been able to enlighten me as to Albertine. If therefore, apart from rare moments of recollection, I had not lost all my curiosity as to the life of my dead mistress, I could have questioned not only Gilberte but her husband about her. And on the whole it was the same thing that had given both Robert and myself a desire to marry Albertine—to wit, the knowledge that she was a lover of women. But the causes of our desire, as for that matter its objects, were the reverse of each other. In my case, it was the despair in which I had been plunged by the discovery, in Robert's the satisfaction; in my case to prevent her, by perpetual vigilance, from indulging her predilection; in Robert's to cultivate it, and by granting her her freedom to make her bring her girlfriends to him.

If Jupien traced back to a quite recent origin the new orientation, so divergent from their original course, that Robert's carnal pleasures had assumed, a conversation which I had with Aimé and which made me extremely unhappy showed me that the head waiter at Balbec traced this divergence, this inversion, back to a

far earlier date. The occasion of this conversation had been a brief visit I paid to Balbec, where Saint-Loup himself, on long leave, had also come with his wife, whom during this first phase he never allowed out of his sight. I had been struck by the extent to which Rachel's influence over Robert still made itself felt. Only a young husband who has long been keeping a mistress knows how to take off his wife's cloak as they enter a restaurant, how to treat her with due attentiveness. He has received, during the course of his liaison, the education which a good husband requires. Not far from him, at a table adjoining mine, Bloch, among a party of pretentious young academics, was assuming a spuriously relaxed air, and shouted at the top of his voice to one of his friends, as he ostentatiously passed him the menu with a gesture which upset two carafes of water: "No, no, my dear fellow, you order! Never in my life have I been able to make head or tail of these documents. I've never known how to order dinner!" he repeated with a pride that was obviously insincere and, blending literature with greed, decided at once upon a bottle of champagne which he liked to see "in a purely symbolic fashion" adorning a conversation. Saint-Loup, on the other hand, did know how to order. He was seated by the side of Gilberte—already pregnant (subsequently he did not fail to keep her continually supplied with offspring)<sup>37</sup>—as he slept by her side in their double bed in the hotel. He spoke to no one but his wife; the rest of the hotel appeared not to exist for him; but whenever a waiter came to take an order, and stood close beside him, he swiftly raised his blue eyes and darted a glance at him which did not last for more than two seconds, but in its limpid penetration seemed to indicate a kind of investigative curiosity entirely different from that which might have inspired any ordinary diner scrutinising, even at greater length, a page or waiter with a view to making humorous or other observations about him which he would communicate to his friends. This little glance, brief, disinterested, showing that the waiter interested him in himself, would have revealed to anyone who intercepted it that this excellent husband, this once so passionate lover of Rachel, had another plane in his life, and one that seemed to him infinitely more interesting than the one on which he moved from a sense of duty. But it was not otherwise visible. Already his eyes had returned to Gilberte who had noticed nothing; he introduced her to a passing friend and left the room to stroll with her outside. It was then that Aimé spoke to me of a far earlier time, the time when I had made Saint-Loup's acquaintance through Mme de Villeparisis, in this same Balbec.

"Why, of course, Monsieur," he said to me, "it's common knowledge, I've known it for ever so long. The first year Monsieur came to Balbec, M. le Marquis shut himself up with my lift-boy, on the pretext of developing some photographs of Monsieur's grandmother. The boy made a complaint, and we had the greatest difficulty in hushing the matter up. And besides, Monsieur, Monsieur remembers the day, no doubt, when he came to lunch at the restaurant with M. le Marquis de Saint-Loup and his mistress, whom M. le Marquis was using as a screen. Monsieur doubtless remembers that M. le Marquis left the room, pretending that he had lost his temper. Of course I don't suggest for a moment that Madame was in the right. She was leading him a regular dance. But as to that day, no one will ever make me believe that M. le Marquis's anger wasn't put on, and that he hadn't a good reason to get away from Monsieur and Madame."

So far as that day was concerned, I am convinced that, if Aimé was not deliberately lying, he was entirely mistaken. I remembered too well the state Robert was in, the blow he had struck the journalist. And, for that matter, it was the same with the Balbec incident; either the lift-boy had lied, or it was Aimé who was lying. At least so I believed; I could not be absolutely certain, for we never see more than one aspect of things, and had it not been that the thought distressed me, I should have found a certain beauty in the fact that, whereas for me sending the lift-boy to Saint-Loup had been the most convenient way of conveying a letter to him and receiving his answer, for him it had meant making the acquaintance of a person who had taken his fancy. For everything is at least dual. On to the most insignificant action that we perform, another man will graft a series of entirely different actions. Certain it is that Saint-Loup's adventure with the lift-boy, if it occurred, no more seemed to me to be inherent in the commonplace dispatch of my letter than that a man who knew nothing of Wagner save the duet in *Lohengrin* would be able to foresee the prelude to *Tristan*. True, things offer men only a limited number of their innumerable attributes, because of the paucity of our senses. They are coloured because we have eyes; how many other epithets would they not merit if we had hundreds of senses? But this different aspect which they might present is made more comprehensible to us by the occurrence in life of even the most trivial event of which we know a part which we suppose to be the whole, and at which another person looks as through a window opened up on the other side of the house and offering a different view. Supposing that Aimé had not been mistaken, Saint-Loup's blush when Bloch spoke to him of the lift-boy had not perhaps been due after all to my friend's pronouncing the word as "lighft." But I was convinced that Saint-Loup's physiological evolution had not begun at that period and that he had then been still exclusively a lover of women. More than by any other sign, I could tell this retrospectively by the friendship that Saint-Loup had shown me at Balbec. It was only while he still loved women that he was really capable of friendship. Afterwards, for some time at least, to the men who did not attract him physically he displayed an indifference which was to some extent, I believe, sincere—for he had become very curt—but which he exaggerated as well in order to make people think that he was interested only in women. But I remember all the same that one day at Doncières, when I was on my way to dine with the Verdurins and he had just been staring rather hard at Morel, he had said to me: "Curious, that fellow reminds me in some ways of Rachel. Doesn't it strike you? They seem to me identical in some ways. Not that it can be of the slightest interest to me." And yet his eyes had afterwards remained for a long time gazing abstractedly at the horizon, as when we think, before returning to the card-table or going out to dinner, of one of those long journeys which we think we shall never make, but for which we have felt a momentary longing. But if Robert found something of Rachel in Charlie, Gilberte, for her part, sought to give herself some resemblance to Rachel in order to appear more

attractive to her husband, wearing, like her, bows of scarlet or pink or yellow ribbon in her hair, which she dressed in a similar style, for she believed that her husband was still in love with Rachel, and so was jealous of her. That Robert's love may have hovered at times on the boundary which divides the love of a man for a woman from the love of a man for a man was quite possible. In any case, the memory of Rachel now played only an aesthetic role in this context. It is indeed improbable that it could have played any other. One day Robert had gone to her to ask her to dress up as a man, to leave a lock of hair hanging down, and nevertheless had contented himself with gazing at her, unsatisfied. He remained none the less attached to her and paid her scrupulously, though without pleasure, the enormous income which he had promised her and which did not prevent her from treating him in the most abominable fashion later on. This generosity towards Rachel would not have distressed Gilberte if she had known that it was merely the resigned fulfilment of a promise which no longer bore any trace of love. But love was, on the contrary, precisely what he pretended to feel for Rachel. Homosexuals would be the best husbands in the world if they did not put on an act of loving other women. Not that Gilberte made any complaint. It was the belief that Robert had been loved, and loved for so long, by Rachel that had made her desire him, had made her reject more glittering matches; it seemed that he was making a sort of concession to her in marrying her. And indeed, at first, any comparison between the two women (incommensurable though they were in charm and beauty) did not favour the delightful Gilberte. But the latter subsequently grew in her husband's esteem while Rachel visibly diminished.

There was another person, who changed her tune, namely Mme Swann. If, in Gilberte's eyes, Robert before their marriage was already crowned with the double halo conferred on him on the one hand by his life with Rachel, perpetually advertised by Mme de Marsantes's lamentations, and on the other hand by the prestige which the Guermantes family had always had in her father's eyes and which she had inherited from him, Mme de Forcheville for her part would have preferred a more brilliant, perhaps a princely marriage (there were impoverished royal families who would not have refused the money—which incidentally proved to be considerably less than the promised eighty million—laundered as it was by the name Forcheville) and a son-in-law less depreciated in value by a life spent outside the world of society. She had been unable to overcome Gilberte's determination, and had complained bitterly to all and sundry, denouncing her son-in-law. One fine day her attitude changed completely; her son-in-law had become an angel, and she no longer said anything against him except surreptitiously. The fact was that age had left Mme Swann (now Mme de Forcheville) with the taste she had always had for being kept, but, by the desertion of her admirers, had deprived her of the means. She longed every day for another necklace, a new dress studded with brilliants, a more sumptuous motor-car, but she had only a small income, Forcheville having squandered most of it, and—what Jewish strain influenced Gilberte in this?—she had an adorable but fearfully avaricious daughter, who counted every sou that she gave her husband, and naturally even more so her mother. Then suddenly she had sniffed out and found her natural protector in Robert. That she was no longer in her first youth mattered little to a son-in-law who was not a lover of women. All that he asked of his mother-in-law was to smooth down any little difficulty that might arise between Gilberte and himself, to obtain his wife's consent to his going on a trip with Morel. Odette, having applied herself thereto, was at once rewarded with a magnificent ruby. To pay for this, it was necessary for Gilberte to be more generous to her husband. Odette urged her in this direction with all the more fervour in that it was she herself who would benefit by her daughter's generosity. Thus, thanks to Robert, she was enabled, on the threshold of her fifties (some said her sixties), to dazzle every table at which she dined, every party at which she appeared, with an unparalleled splendour without needing to have, as in the past, a "friend" who now would no longer have coughed up, or even fallen for her. And so she had entered, permanently it seemed, into the period of final chastity, and yet she had never been so elegant.

It was not merely the malice, the rancour of the once poor boy against the master who has enriched him and has moreover (this was in keeping with the character and still more with the vocabulary of M. de Charlus) made him feel the difference of their positions, that had made Charlie turn to Saint-Loup in order to aggravate the Baron's sufferings. He may also have had an eye to his own profit. I had the impression that Robert must be giving him a great deal of money. After an evening party at which I had met Robert before I went down to Combray—and where the manner in which he flaunted himself by the side of a lady of fashion who was reputed to be his mistress, glued to her, never leaving her for a moment, enveloped publicly in the folds of her skirt, reminded me, but with something more hectic and jumpy about it, of a sort of involuntary repetition of an ancestral gesture which I had had an opportunity of observing in M. de Charlus, when he appeared to be wrapped in the finery of Mme Mole or some other lady, the banner of a gynophile cause which was not his own but which, without having any right to do so, he loved to sport thus, whether because he found it useful as a protection or aesthetically charming—I had been struck, as we came away, by the discovery that this young man, so generous when he was far less rich, had become so careful. That a man clings only to what he possesses, and that he who used to scatter money when he so rarely had any now hoards that with which he is amply supplied, is no doubt a common enough phenomenon, and yet in this instance it seemed to me to have assumed a more particular form. Saint-Loup refused to take a cab, and I saw that he had kept a tramway transfer-ticket. No doubt in so doing Saint-Loup was exercising, for different ends, talents which he had acquired in the course of his liaison with Rachel. A young man who has lived for years with a woman is not as inexperienced as the novice for whom the woman he marries is the first. One had only to see, on the rare occasions when Robert took his wife out to a restaurant, the adroit and considerate way he looked after her, his skill and poise in ordering dinner and giving instructions to waiters, the care with which he smoothed Gilberte's sleeves before she put on her jacket, to realise that he had been a woman's lover for a long time before being this one's husband. Similarly, having had to enter into the minutest details of Rachel's

domestic economy, partly because she herself was useless as a housekeeper, and later because his jealousy made him determined to keep a firm control over her domestic staff, he was able, in the administration of his wife's property and the management of their household, to go on playing this skilful and competent role which Gilberte, perhaps, might have been unable to fulfil and which she gladly relinquished to him. But no doubt he did so principally in order to be able to give Charlie the benefit of his candle-end economies, maintaining him in affluence without Gilberte's either noticing it or suffering from it—and perhaps even assuming the violinist to be a spendthrift “like all artists” (Charlie styled himself thus without conviction and without conceit, in order to excuse himself for not answering letters and for a mass of other defects which he believed to form part of the undisputed psychology of the artist). Personally, I found it absolutely immaterial from a moral point of view whether one took one's pleasure with a man or with a woman, and only too natural and human that one should take it where one could find it. If, therefore, Robert had not been married, his liaison with Charlie ought not to have caused me pain. And yet I realised that the pain I felt would have been as acute if Robert had been a bachelor. In anyone else, his conduct would have left me indifferent. But I wept when I reflected that I had once had so great an affection for a different Saint-Loup, an affection which, I sensed all too clearly from the cold and evasive manner which he now adopted, he no longer felt for me, since men, now that they were capable of arousing his desires, could no longer inspire his friendship. How could these tastes have come to birth in a young man who had loved women so passionately that I had seen him brought to a state of almost suicidal despair because “Rachel when from the Lord” had threatened to leave him? Had the resemblance between Charlie and Rachel—invisible to me—been the plank which had enabled Robert to pass from his father's tastes to those of his uncle, in order to complete the physiological evolution which even in the latter had occurred fairly late? At times, however, Aimé's words came back to my mind to make me uneasy; I remembered Robert that year at Balbec; he had had a trick, when he spoke to the lift-boy, of not paying any attention to him which strongly resembled M. de Charlus's manner when he addressed certain men. But Robert might easily have derived this from M. de Charlus, from a certain hauteur and a certain physical posture peculiar to the Guermantes family, without for a moment sharing the Baron's heterodox tastes. For instance, the Duc de Guermantes, who was wholly innocent of such tastes, had the same nervous trick as M. de Charlus of turning his wrist, as though he were straightening a lace cuff round it, and also in his voice certain shrill and affected intonations, mannerisms to all of which, in the case of M. de Charlus, one might have been tempted to ascribe another meaning, to which he had given another meaning himself, the individual expressing his distinctive characteristics by means of impersonal and atavistic traits which are perhaps simply age-old characteristics ingrained in his gestures and voice. On this latter assumption, which borders upon natural history, it would not be M. de Charlus whom one described as a Guermantes affected with a blemish and expressing it to a certain extent by means of traits peculiar to the Guermantes stock, but the Duc de Guermantes who, in a perverted family, would be the exception whom the hereditary disease has so effectively spared that the external stigmata it has left upon him have lost all meaning. I remembered that on the day when I had seen Saint-Loup for the first time at Balbec, so fair-complexioned, fashioned of so rare and precious a substance, his monocle fluttering in front of him, I had found in him an effeminate air which was certainly not the effect of what I had now learned about him, but sprang rather from the grace peculiar to the Guermantes, from the fineness of that Dresden china in which the Duchess too was moulded. I recalled his affection for myself, his tender, sentimental way of expressing it, and told myself that this too, which might have deceived anyone else, meant at the time something quite different, indeed the direct opposite of what I had just learned about him. But when did the change date from? If from the year of my return to Balbec, how was it that he had never once come to see the lift-boy, had never once mentioned him to me? And as for the first year, how could he have paid any attention to the boy, passionately enamoured as he then was of Rachel? That first year, I had found Saint-Loup unusual, as was every true Guermantes. Now he was even odder than I had supposed. But things of which we have not had a direct intuition, which we have learned only through other people, are such that we no longer have the means, we have missed the chance, of conveying them to our inmost soul; its communications with the real are blocked and so we cannot profit by the discovery, it is too late. Besides, upon any consideration, this discovery distressed me too deeply for me to be able to appreciate it intellectually. Of course, after what M. de Charlus had told me in Mme Verdurin's house in Paris, I no longer doubted that Robert's case was that of any number of respectable people, to be found even among the best and most intelligent of men. To learn this of anyone else would not have affected me, of anyone in the world except Robert. The doubt that Aimé's words had left in my mind tarnished all our friendship at Balbec and Doncières, and although I did not believe in friendship, or that I had ever felt any real friendship for Robert, when I thought about those stories of the lift-boy and of the restaurant in which I had had lunch with Saint-Loup and Rachel, I was obliged to make an effort to restrain my tears.

## *Addenda*

*\*There is a brief passage inserted here in Proust's manuscript which interrupts the thread of the narrative:*

Lying is a very small matter; we live in the midst of it without giving it more than a smile, we practise it without meaning to harm anyone, but jealousy suffers because of it and sees more in it than it conceals (often one's mistress refuses to spend the evening with one and goes to the theatre simply to prevent us from seeing that she is not looking her best), just as it often remains blind to what the truth conceals. But it can elicit nothing, for women who swear that they are not lying would refuse even with a knife at their throats to confess their true character.

*\*The following isolated passage which the original editors inserted, somewhat arbitrarily, after "for so long."*

The curious thing is that, a few days before this quarrel with Albertine, I had already had one with her in Andrée's presence. Now Andrée, in giving Albertine good advice, always appeared to be insinuating bad. "Come, don't talk like that, hold your tongue," she said, as though she were at the peak of happiness. Her face assumed the dry raspberry hue of those pious housekeepers who get all the servants sacked one by one. While I was heaping unjustified reproaches upon Albertine, Andrée looked as though she were sucking a lump of barley sugar with keen enjoyment. At length she was unable to restrain an affectionate laugh. "Come with me, Titine. You know I'm your dear little sister."

I was not merely exasperated by this rather sickly exhibition; I wondered whether Andrée really felt the affection for Albertine that she pretended to feel. Seeing that Albertine, who knew Andrée far better than I did, always shrugged her shoulders when I asked her whether she was quite certain of Andrée's affection, and always answered that nobody in the world cared for her more, I am convinced even now that Andrée's affection was sincere. Possibly, in her wealthy but provincial family, one might find the equivalent in some of the shops in the Cathedral square, where certain sweetmeats are declared to be "the best going." But I know that, for my part, even if I had invariably come to the opposite conclusion, I had so strong an impression that Andrée was trying to rap Albertine over the knuckles that my mistress at once regained my affection and my anger subsided.

*\*In the place of this passage, the manuscript contains the following:*

"What? You wouldn't kill yourself after all?" she said with a laugh.

"No, but it would be the greatest sorrow that I could possibly imagine." And since, although living exclusively with me, and having become extremely intelligent, she none the less remained mysteriously in tune with the atmosphere of the world outside—as the roses in her bedroom flowered again in the spring—and followed as though by a pre-established accord (for she spoke to almost no one) the charmingly idiotic fashions of feminine speech, she said to me: "Is it really true, that great big fib?" And indeed she must, if not love me more than I loved her, at least infer from my niceness to her that my tenderness was deeper than it was in reality, for she added: "You're very sweet. I don't doubt it at all, I know you're fond of me." And she went on: "Ah, well, perhaps it's my destiny to die in a riding accident. I've often had a presentiment of it, but I don't care a fig. I accept whatever fate has in store for me."

I believe that, on the contrary, she had neither a presentiment of nor a contempt for death, and that her words were lacking in sincerity. I am sure in any case that there was no sincerity in mine, as to the greatest sorrow I could imagine. For, feeling that Albertine could henceforth only deprive me of pleasures or cause me sorrows, that I would be ruining my life for her sake, I remembered the wish that Swann had once formed apropos of Odette, and without daring to wish for Albertine's death, I told myself that it would have restored to me, in the words of the Sultan, my peace of mind and freedom of action.

*\*There is an additional passage here, isolated at the foot of the page. Saniette reappears further on.*

"Pretty well played, what!" said M. Verdurin to Saniette. "My only fear," the latter replied, stuttering, "is that Morel's very virtuosity may somewhat offend against the general spirit of the work." "Offend? What do you mean?" roared M. Verdurin while a number of the guests gathered round like lions ready to devour a man who has been laid low. "Oh, I'm not aiming at him alone ..." "But the man doesn't know what he's talking about. Aiming at what?" "I ... shall have ... to listen to it ... once again to form a judgment à la rigueur." "À la rigueur! the man's mad!" said M. Verdurin, clutching his head between his hands, "he ought to be put away." "The term means with exactitude. You ca ... ca ... can say 'with rigorous exactitude,' after all. I'm saying that I can't judge à la rigueur." "And I'm telling you to go away," M. Verdurin shouted, intoxicated by his own rage, and pointing to the door with blazing eyes. "I will not allow people to talk like that in my house!"

Saniette went off zigzagging like a drunken man. Some of the guests, seeing him thus ejected, assumed that he had not been invited. And a lady who had been extremely friendly with him hitherto, and to whom he had



lent a precious book the day before, sent it back to him next day without a word, scarcely even wrapped in some paper on which she had her butler simply put Saniette's address. She did not wish to be in any way "indebted" to someone who was obviously far from being in the good graces of the little clan. Saniette, as it happened, was never to know of this piece of rudeness. For scarcely five minutes had passed after M. Verdurin's outburst when a footman came to inform the latter that M. Saniette had had a stroke in the courtyard. But the evening was not yet over. "Have him taken home; I'm sure it won't be serious," said M. Verdurin, whose *hotel particulier*, as the manager of the hotel at Balbec would have said, thus became assimilated to those grand hotels where the management hasten to conceal sudden deaths in order not to frighten off their customers, and where the deceased is temporarily hidden in a meat-safe until the moment when, even if he has been in his lifetime the most distinguished and the most generous of men, he is clandestinely evacuated by the door reserved for the dishwashers and sauce chefs. In fact Saniette was not quite dead. He lived for another few weeks, but only intermittently regaining consciousness.

*\*An additional passage which Proust placed a few pages later (clearly in error):*

I was going to buy, in addition to the motor-cars, the finest yacht which then existed. It was for sale, but at so high a price that no buyer could be found. Moreover, once bought, even if we confined ourselves to four-month cruises, it would cost two hundred thousand francs a year in upkeep. We should be living at the rate of half a million francs a year. Would I be able to sustain it for more than seven or eight years? But never mind; when I had only an income of fifty thousand francs left, I could leave it to Albertine and kill myself. This was the decision I made. It made me think of *myself*. Now, since one's ego lives by thinking incessantly of all sorts of things, since it is no more than the thought of those things, if by chance, instead of being preoccupied with those things, it suddenly thinks of itself, it finds only an empty apparatus, something which it does not recognise and to which, in order to give it some reality, it adds the memory of a face seen in a mirror. That peculiar smile, that untidy moustache—they are what would disappear from the face of the earth. When I killed myself five years hence, I would no longer be able to think all those things which passed through my mind unceasingly, I would no longer exist on the face of the earth and would never come back to it; my thought would stop for ever. And my ego seemed to me even more null when I saw it as something that no longer exists. How could it be difficult to sacrifice, for the sake of the person to whom one's thought is constantly straining (the person we love), that other person of whom we never think: ourselves? Accordingly, this thought of my death, like the notion of my ego, seemed to me most strange, but I did not find it at all disagreeable. Then suddenly it struck me as being terribly sad; this was because, reflecting that if I did not have more money at my disposal it was because my parents were still alive, I suddenly thought of my mother. And I could not bear the idea of what she would suffer after my death.

*\*Proust's manuscript has a different version of the Norpois-Villeparisis episode. Passages that have become illegible are indicated by square brackets:*

Several of the palaces on the Grand Canal were transformed into hotels, and by way of a change from the one at which we were staying, we decided one evening to dine in another where the food was said to be better. While my mother was paying the gondolier, I entered a vast marble-pillared hall that had once been entirely covered with frescoes, [...]

One of the waiters asked if the "old couple" [...] were coming down [...], that they never gave any warning, and that it was most tiresome. Then he saw the lady appear. It was in fact Mme de Villeparisis [...] but bent towards the ground, with that air of dejection and bemusement produced by extreme fatigue and the weight of years. We happened by chance to be given a table immediately behind hers, up against the splendid marble walls of the palace, and fortunately, since my mother was tired and wanted to avoid introductions, we had our backs to the Marquise and could not be seen by her, and were moreover protected by the relief of a massive column with a [...] capital. Meanwhile I was wondering which of her relations was being referred to as M. de Villeparisis, when a few minutes later I saw her old lover, M. de Norpois, even more bent than she, sit down at her table, having just come down from their room. They still loved each other, and, now that he had given up his functions at the Ministry, as soon as the relative incognito which one enjoys abroad permitted, they lived together completely. In order to allow his old mistress a degree of respectability, he was careful not to give his name in hotels, and the waiters, ignorant at this distance of celebrated Parisian liaisons, and moreover seeing this old gentleman, even when he had gone out without her, invariably coming back to dine alone with the old lady, assumed that they were M. and Mme de Villeparisis. The matrimonial character of their relationship, which had been greatly accentuated by the carelessness of old age and travel, manifested itself at once in the fact that on sitting down to table M. de Norpois evinced none of those courtesies one shows towards a woman who is not one's wife, any more than she herself made any effort for him. More lively than Mme de Villeparisis, he related to her with a familiarity that surprised me what he had learned that day from a foreign ambassador he had been to see. She let a fair proportion of his words go by without answering, either from fatigue, or lack of interest, or deafness and a desire to conceal it. From time to time she addressed a few words to him in a faint voice, as though overcome with exhaustion. It was obvious that she now lived almost exclusively for him, and had long since lost touch with the social world—from which, with considerable volubility and in a rather loud voice (perhaps to enable her to hear him), he brought her the

latest news—for she put to him, in a low-pitched, weary voice, questions that seemed strange on the lips of a person who, even though excluded from it for a long time, nevertheless belonged to the highest society. After a long silence [...] asked: “So this Bisaccia you [...] this afternoon, is he one of Sosthène’s sons?” “Yes, of course, he’s the one who became Duc de Bisaccia when Arnaud took the name Doudeauville. He’s charming; he’s a bit like Carnot’s youngest son, only better-looking.” And once more there was silence. What seemed most of all to be preoccupying the old woman, whose charming eyes in that ruined face no one could have identified through the mists which the distance from Paris and the remoteness of age accumulated round her, was a war over Morocco. In spite of what the foreign ambassador had said to M. de Norpois, she did not seem reassured. “Ah, but you always see the black side,” said M. de Norpois with some asperity. “I admit that Emperor William is often unfortunate in his choice of words and gestures. But the fact that certain things must be taken seriously doesn’t mean that they should be taken tragically. It would be a case of Jupiter making mad those he wishes to destroy; for war is in nobody’s interest, least of all Germany’s. They’re perfectly aware in the Wilhelmstrasse that Morocco isn’t worth the blood of a single Pomeranian grenadier. You’re alarming yourself about trifles.” And again there was silence, prolonged indefinitely by Mme de Villeparisis, whose beauty, which was said to have been so striking, had been as thoroughly effaced as the frescoes that had decorated the ceiling of this magnificent hall with its broad red pillars, and whose personality was as well concealed, if not from the eyes of Parisians who might perhaps have identified her, at least from the hotel’s Venetian staff, as if she had been wearing a carnival mask as in the old days in Venice. M. de Norpois addressed an occasional reproof to a waiter who had failed to bring something he had ordered. I noticed that he enjoyed good food as much as at the time when he used to dine with my family, and Mme de Villeparisis was as finicky as she had been at Balbec. “No no, don’t ask them for a soufflé,” M. de Norpois said, “they’ve no idea what it is. They’ll bring you something that bears not the slightest resemblance to a soufflé. In any case it’s your own fault, since you won’t hear of Italian cooking.” Mme de Villeparisis did not answer; then after a while, in a plaintive voice, as sad and faint as the murmur of the wind, she wailed: “No one knows how to make anything any more. I don’t know whether you remember, in the old days at my mother’s house, they used to bring off to perfection a dish called a *crime renversée*. Perhaps we could ask for one of those.” “In fact it hadn’t yet come to be called a *crème renversée*; it was called,” said M. de Norpois, putting the phrase in inverted commas, “‘creamed eggs.’ What they give you here won’t be up to much. Creamed eggs were so smooth and succulent, do you remember?” But, whether because she did not in fact remember, or because she had talked enough, Mme de Villeparisis said nothing. She relapsed into a long silence which did not offend M. de Norpois, presumably because it did not surprise him and because it must have been one of the characteristics, perhaps one of the charms, of his life with her. And while she laboriously cut up her beans, he went back to telling her how interesting, and on the whole optimistic, the foreign ambassador had been, meanwhile keeping an eye out for a waiter from whom he could order their dessert. Before this had been served, my mother and I rose from the table, and, while keeping my head turned away so as not to attract their attention, I could nevertheless still see the two aged lovers, seemingly indifferent to one another, but in reality bent by time like two branches which have developed the same tilt, which have drawn so close to each other that they almost touch, and which nothing will ever either straighten up or separate again.

This was perhaps what might have happened to me in the long run if Albertine had lived. And yet, comforting though it must after all be, since worldly men and women sacrifice social life and ambition for it, I felt no regret that what might have been had failed to come about, so impervious had I become to the memory of Albertine. I cannot however say that sometimes in the evening, when we returned to our hotel (for, since our encounter with the old Villeparisis-Norpois couple, my mother had decided against our dining elsewhere), I did not feel, in the nervous restlessness of nightfall, that the Albertine of long ago, invisible to myself ...



That complexity of the Bois de Boulogne which makes it an artificial place and, in the zoological or mythological sense of the word, a Garden, I discovered again this year as I was crossing it to go to Trianon,<sup>36</sup> on one of the first mornings of this month of November when, in Paris, inside the houses, we are so close to the autumn spectacle, and yet denied it, as it rapidly comes to an end without our witnessing it, that we are filled with a yearning, a veritable fever for the dead leaves that may go so far as to stop us from sleeping. In my closed room, they had been coming for a month now, summoned by my desire to see them, between my thoughts and any object to which I applied myself, and they eddied like those yellow spots that sometimes, whatever we may be looking at, dance in front of our eyes. And that morning, no longer hearing the rain fall as on the days before, seeing the fine weather smile at the corners of the drawn curtains as at the corners of a closed mouth that betrays the secret of its happiness, I had felt that I might be able to look at those yellow leaves as the light passed through them, in their supreme beauty; and being no more able to keep myself from going to see the trees than in earlier days, when the wind blew too hard in my chimney, from departing for the seaside, I had left to go to Trianon, by way of the Bois de Boulogne. It was the hour and it was the season when the Bois seems perhaps most multiform, not only because it is more subdivided, but also because it is subdivided in a different way. Even in the open parts where one embraces a great space, here and there, in front of the dark distant masses of the trees that had no leaves or still had their summer leaves, a double row of orange chestnut trees seemed, as in a picture just begun, to be the only thing painted so far by the scene painter, who had not put any color on the rest, and it offered its avenue in full light for the episodic walk of figures that would be added later on. Farther off, at a place where the trees were still covered in all their green leaves, one alone, small, squat, lopped, obstinate, shook in the wind a homely head of red hair. Elsewhere, again, there was a first awakening of this May of the leaves, and those of an ampelopsis as marvelous and smiling as a pink winter hawthorn had since that same morning been all in flower. And the Bois had the temporary and artificial look of a tree nursery or a park, where for botanical purposes or in preparation for a festival, they have just placed, among the trees of a common sort that have not yet been transplanted, two or three precious species with fantastic foliage which seem to be reserving an empty space around themselves, giving air, creating light. Thus it was the season when the Bois de Boulogne reveals the most numerous different varieties and juxtaposes the most numerous distinct parts in a composite aggregation. And it was the hour, as well. In the places where the trees still kept their leaves, they seemed to be undergoing a change in substance starting from the point where they were touched by the light of the sun, almost horizontal in the morning as it would be again a few hours later at the moment when in the early twilight it flames up like a lamp, projects over a distance onto the foliage a warm and artificial glow, and sets ablaze the topmost leaves of a tree that remains the dull and incombustible candelabrum of its burning tip. Here, it thickened the leaves of the chestnut trees like bricks and, like a piece of yellow Persian masonry patterned in blue, crudely cemented them against the sky, there on the contrary detached them from it as they clutched at it with their fingers of gold. Halfway up a tree clothed in Japanese ivy, it had grafted and brought into bloom, too dazzling to discern clearly, an immense bouquet as though of red flowers, perhaps a variety of carnation. The different parts of the Bois, merging more completely in summer in the thickness and monotony of their green, were now separated. Open spaces made visible the entrance to almost every one of them, or a sumptuous bit of foliage marked it like a banner. One could distinguish, as on a colored map, Armenonville, the Pré Catelan, Madrid, the Race Course, the shores of the lake. From time to time there would appear some useless construction, a fake grotto, a mill for which the trees parted to make room or which a lawn carried forward on its soft platform. One sensed that the Bois was not merely a wood, that it fulfilled a purpose foreign to the life of its trees, the exhilaration I was experiencing was not caused merely by an admiration for autumn, but by some desire. The great source of a joy which the soul feels at first without recognizing its cause, without understanding that it is motivated by nothing outside. And so I looked at the trees with an unsatisfied tenderness that passed beyond them and went on without my knowing it toward that masterpiece of lovely strolling women which they enclose each day for several hours. I went toward the allée des Acacias. I passed through old groves where the morning light imposed new divisions, pruning the trees, joining together the different stems, and composing bouquets. Deftly it drew toward itself a pair of trees; using the powerful scissors of a ray of light and a shadow, it cut off from each of them half its trunk and branches and, weaving together the two halves that remained, made of them either a single pillar of shadow, delimited by the sunshine around it, or a single phantom of brightness whose tremulous artificial contour was ringed by a net of black shadow. When a ray of sun gilded the highest branches, they seemed, steeped in a sparkling dampness, to emerge alone from the liquid emerald-colored atmosphere in which the entire forest was plunged as though under the sea. For the trees continued to live their own life and, when they had no more leaves, that life shone more brightly on the sheath of green velvet that wrapped their trunks or in the white enamel of the spheres of mistletoe that spangled the tops of the poplars, as round as the sun and the moon in Michelangelo's *Creation*. But forced as they have been for so many years by a sort of grafting to live a life shared with women, they conjured up for me the wood nymph, the lovely quick and colorful worldly beauty whom they cover with their branches as she passes beneath them, obliging her to feel as they do the power of the season; they recalled to me the happy time of my believing youth, when I would avidly come to the places where masterpieces of feminine elegance were created for a few moments among the unconscious and complicitous leaves. But the beauty which the pines and acacias of the Bois de Boulogne made me desire, trees more disturbing because of this than the chestnuts and lilacs of Trianon that I was going to see, was not fixed outside me in the mementos of some historic period, in works of art, in a little temple to the god of Love whose base is piled with golden palmate leaves. I reached the shores of the lake, I went on as far as the Tir aux Pigeons. The idea of perfection which I carried inside me I had conferred at that time upon the height of a victoria, upon the slenderness of those horses, as furious and light as wasps, their eyes bloodshot like the cruel steeds of Diomedes,<sup>37</sup> which now, filled as I was with a desire to see again what I had once loved, as ardent as the desire that had driven me down these same paths many years before, I wanted to see before my eyes again at the moment when Mme. Swann's enormous coachman, watched over by a little groom as fat as a fist and as childlike as Saint George, tried to control those wings of steel as they thrashed about quivering with fear. Alas, now there were only automobiles driven by mustached mechanics with tall footmen by their sides. I wanted to hold in front of my bodily eyes, so as to know if they were as charming as they appeared in the eyes of my memory, women's little hats so low they seemed to be simple crowns. All the hats were now immense, covered with fruits and flowers and varieties of birds. In place of the lovely dresses in which Mme. Swann looked like a queen, I now saw Greco-Saxon tunics with Tanagra<sup>38</sup> folds, and sometimes in the style of the Directoire, made of liberty-silk chiffons sprinkled with flowers like wallpaper. On the heads of the gentlemen who could have walked with Mme. Swann in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite, I did not find the gray hats of earlier times, nor any others. They went out bare-headed. And I no longer had any belief to infuse into all these new elements of the spectacle, to give them substance, unity, life; they went past scattered before me, randomly, without reality, containing in themselves no beauty that my eyes might have tried as they had in earlier times to form into a composition. These were ordinary women, in whose elegance I had no faith and whose dress seemed to me unimportant. But when a belief disappears, there survives it—more and more vigorous so as to mask the absence of the power we have lost to give reality to new things—a fetishistic attachment to the old things which our belief once animated, as if it were in them and not in us that the divine resided and as if our present lack of belief had a contingent cause, the death of the Gods.

How awful! I said to myself: can anyone think these automobiles are as elegant as the old carriages and pairs? I'm probably too old now—but I'm not meant for a world in which women hobble themselves in dresses that aren't even made of cloth. What's the use of walking among these trees, if nothing is left of what used to gather under the delicate reddening leaves, if vulgarity and idiocy have taken the place of the exquisite thing they once framed? How awful! My consolation is to think about the women I once knew, now that there is no more elegance. But how could anyone contemplating these horrible creatures under their hats topped with a birdcage or a vegetable patch even perceive what was so charming about the sight of Mme. Swann in a simple mauve hood or a little hat with a single stiff, straight iris poking up from it? Could I even have made them understand the emotion I felt on winter mornings when I met Mme. Swann on foot, in a sealskin coat, wearing a simple beret with two blades of partridge feathers sticking up from it, but enveloped also by the artificial warmth of her apartment, which was conjured by nothing more than the bouquet of violets crushed at her breast whose live blue flowering against the gray sky, the icy air, the bare-branched trees, had the same charming manner of accepting the season and the weather merely as a setting, and of living in a human atmosphere, in the atmosphere of this woman, as had, in the vases and flower stands of her drawing room, close to the lit fire, before the silk sofa, the flowers that looked out through the closed window at the falling snow? But it would not have been enough for me anyway for the clothes to be the same as in those earlier times. Because of the dependence which the different parts of a recollection have on one another, parts which our memory keeps balanced in an aggregate from which we are not permitted to abstract anything, or reject anything, I would have wanted to be able to go spend the last part of the day in the home of one of these women, over a cup of tea, in an apartment with walls painted in dark colors, as Mme. Swann's still was (in the year after the one in which the first part of this story ends) and in which the orange flares, the red combustion, the pink and white flame of the chrysanthemums would gleam in the November twilight, during moments like those in which (as we will see later) I was not able to discover the pleasures I desired. But now, even though they had led to nothing, those moments seemed to me to have had enough charm in themselves. I wanted to find them again as I remembered them. Alas, there was no longer anything but Louis XVI apartments all white and dotted with blue hydrangeas. Moreover, people no longer returned to Paris until very late. Mme. Swann would have answered me from a country house that she would not be back until February, well after the time of the chrysanthemums, had I asked her to reconstruct for me the elements of that memory which I felt belonged to a distant year, to a vintage to which I was not allowed to go back, the elements of that desire which had itself become as inaccessible as the pleasure it had once vainly pursued. And I would also have needed them to be the same women, those whose dress interested me because, at the time when I still believed, my imagination had individualized them and given them each a legend. Alas, in the avenue des Acacias—the Alley of the Myrtles—I did see a few of them again, old, now no more than terrible shadows of what they had been, wandering, desperately searching for who knows what in the Virgilian groves. They had fled long since as I still vainly questioned the deserted paths. The sun had hidden itself. Nature was resuming its rule over the Bois, from which the idea that it was the Elysian Garden of Woman had vanished; above the artificial mill the real sky was gray; the wind wrinkled the Grand Lac with little wavelets, like a real lake; large birds swiftly crossed the Bois, like a real wood, and uttering sharp cries alighted one after another in the tall oaks which under their druidical crowns and with a Dodonean<sup>39</sup> majesty seemed to proclaim the inhuman emptiness of the disused forest, and helped me better understand what a contradiction it is to search in reality for memory's pictures, which would never have the charm that comes to them from memory itself and from not being perceived by the senses. The reality I had known no longer existed. That Mme. Swann did not arrive exactly the same at the same moment was enough to make the Avenue different. The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions which formed our life at that time; the memory of a certain image is but regret for a certain moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years.

BOOK VII  
TIME REGAINED  
Chapter Twenty  
Tansonville

I should have no occasion to dwell upon this visit which I paid to the neighbourhood of Combray at perhaps the moment in my life when I thought least about Combray, had it not, precisely for that reason, brought me what was at least a provisional confirmation of certain ideas which I had first conceived along the Guermites way, and also of certain other ideas which I had conceived on the Méséglise way. I repeated every evening, in the opposite direction, the walks which we used to take at Combray, in the afternoon, when we went the Méséglise way. One dined now at Tansonville at an hour at which in the past one had long been asleep at Combray. And because of the seasonal heat, and also because Gilberte spent the afternoon painting in the chapel attached to the house, we did not go out for our walk until about two hours before dinner. The pleasure of those earlier walks, which was that of seeing, on the way home, the crimson sky framing the calvary or mirroring itself in the Vivonne, was now replaced by the pleasure of setting forth at nightfall, when one encountered nothing in the village but the blue-grey, irregular and shifting triangle of a flock of sheep being driven home. Over one half of the fields the sun had already set; above the other half the moon was already alight and would soon bathe them in their entirety. It sometimes happened that Gilberte let me go without her, and I set off, trailing my shadow behind me, like a boat gliding across enchanted waters. But as a rule Gilberte came with me. The walks that we took thus together were very often those that I used to take as a child: how then could I help but feel much more acutely even than in the past on the Guermites way the conviction that I would never be able to write, reinforced by the conviction that my imagination and my sensibility had weakened, when I found how incurious I was about Combray? I was distressed to see how little I relived my early years. I found the Vivonne narrow and ugly alongside the towpath. Not that I noticed any great physical discrepancies from what I remembered. But, separated as I was by a whole lifetime from places I now happened to be passing through again, there was lacking between them and me that contiguity from which is born, even before we have perceived it, the immediate, delicious and total deflagration of memory. Having doubtless no very clear conception of its nature, I was saddened by the thought that my faculty of feeling and imagining things must have diminished since I no longer took any pleasure in these walks. Gilberte herself, who understood me even less than I understood myself, increased my melancholy by sharing my astonishment. "What," she would say, "you feel no excitement when you turn into this little footpath which you used to climb?" And she herself had changed so much that I no longer thought her beautiful, that she was no longer beautiful at all. As we walked, I saw the landscape change; we had to climb hills, followed by downward slopes. We chatted—very agreeably for me. Not without difficulty, however. In so many people there are different strata which are not alike: the character of the father, then of the mother; one traverses first one, then the other. But, next day, the order of their superimposition is reversed. And finally one does not know who will decide between the contestants, to whom one is to appeal for the verdict. Gilberte was like one of those countries with which one dare not form an alliance because of their too frequent changes of government. But in reality this is a mistake. The memory of the most multiple person establishes a sort of identity in him and makes him reluctant to go back on promises which he remembers, even if he has not countersigned them. As for intelligence, Gilberte's, in spite of certain absurdities inherited from her mother, was very acute. But, quite unrelated to this, I remember that, in the course of our conversations during these walks, on several occasions she surprised me a great deal. The first time was when she said to me: "If you were not too hungry and if it was not so late, by taking that road to the left and then turning to the right, in less than a quarter of an hour we should be at Guermites." It was as though she had said to me: "Turn to the left, then bear right, and you will touch the intangible, you will reach the inaccessible remote tracts of which one never knows anything on this earth except the direction, except" (what I thought long ago to be all that I could ever know of Guermites, and perhaps in a sense I had not been mistaken) "the 'way.'" One of my other surprises was that of seeing the "source of the Vivonne," which I imagined as something as extra-terrestrial as the Gates of Hell, and which was merely a sort of rectangular basin in which bubbles rose to the surface. And the third occasion was when Gilberte said to me: "If you like, we might after all go out one afternoon and then we can go to Guermites, taking the road by Méséglise, which is the nicest way," a sentence which upset all the ideas of my childhood by informing me that the two "ways" were not as irreconcilable as I had supposed. But what struck me most forcibly was how little, during this stay, I relived my childhood years, how little I desired to see Combray, how narrow and ugly I thought the Vivonne. But where Gilberte corroborated some of my childhood imaginings along the Méséglise way was during one of those walks which were more or less nocturnal even though they occurred before dinner—for she dined so late. Before descending into the mystery of a deep and flawless valley carpeted with moonlight, we stopped for a moment like two insects about to plunge into the blue calyx of a flower. Gilberte then uttered, perhaps simply out of the politeness of a hostess who is sorry you are going away so soon and would have liked to show you more of a countryside which you seem to appreciate, an avowal of the sort in which her practice as a woman of the world skilled in putting to the best advantage silence, simplicity, sobriety in the expression of her feelings, makes you believe that you occupy a place in her life which no one else could fill. Opening my heart to her suddenly with a tenderness born of the exquisite air, the fragrant evening breeze, I said to her: "You were speaking the other day of the little footpath. How I loved you then!" She replied: "Why didn't you tell me? I had no idea. I loved you too. In

fact I flung myself twice at your head." "When?" "The first time at Tansonville. You were going for a walk with your family, and I was on my way home, I'd never seen such a pretty little boy. I was in the habit," she went on with a vaguely bashful air, "of going to play with little boys I knew in the ruins of the keep of Roussainville. And you will tell me that I was a very naughty girl, for there were girls and boys there of all sorts who took advantage of the darkness. The altar-boy from Combray church, Théodore, who, I must admit, was very nice indeed (goodness, how handsome he was!) and who has become quite ugly (he's the chemist now at Méséglise), used to amuse himself with all the peasant girls of the district. As I was allowed to go out by myself, whenever I was able to get away, I used to rush over there. I can't tell you how I longed for you to come there too; I remember quite well that, as I had only a moment in which to make you understand what I wanted, at the risk of being seen by your people and mine, I signalled to you so vulgarly that I'm ashamed of it to this day. But you stared at me so crossly that I saw that you didn't want to."

And suddenly I thought to myself that the true Gilberte, the true Albertine, were perhaps those who had at the first moment yielded themselves with their eyes, one through the hedge of pink hawthorn, the other on the beach. And it was I who, having been incapable of understanding this, having failed to recapture the impression until much later in my memory after an interval in which, as a result of my conversation, a dividing hedge of sentiment had made them afraid to be as frank as in the first moments, had ruined everything by my clumsiness. I had "botched it" more completely than had Saint-Loup with Rachel—although in fact the relative failure with them was less absurd—and for the same reasons.

"And the second time," Gilberte went on, "was years later when I passed you in the doorway of your house, the day before I met you again at my aunt Oriane's. I didn't recognise you at first, or rather I did unconsciously recognise you because I felt the same attraction as I had felt at Tansonville."

"But in the meantime there'd been, after all, the Champs-Élysées."

"Yes, but there you were too fond of me. I felt you were prying into everything I did."

I did not think to ask her who the young man was with whom she had been walking along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées on the day when I had set out to call on her again, when I might have been reconciled with her while there was still time, that day which would perhaps have changed the whole course of my life, if I had not caught sight of those two shadowy figures strolling side by side in the dusk. If I had asked her, she would perhaps have confessed the truth, as would Albertine had she been restored to life. And indeed when we meet again after many years women whom we no longer love, is there not the abyss of death between them and us, quite as much as if they were no longer of this world, since the fact that our love exists no longer makes the people that they were or the person that we were then as good as dead? Perhaps, too, she might not have remembered, or she might have lied. In any case I was no longer interested to know, since my heart had changed even more than Gilberte's face. This face gave me little pleasure, but above all I was no longer unhappy, and I should have been incapable of conceiving, had I thought about it again, that I could have been so unhappy at the sight of Gilberte tripping along by the side of a young man that I had said to myself: "It's all over, I shall never attempt to see her again." Of the state of mind which, in that far-off year, had been tantamount to a long-drawn-out torture for me, nothing survived. For in this world of ours where everything withers, everything perishes, there is a thing that decays, that crumbles into dust even more completely, leaving behind still fewer traces of itself, than beauty: namely grief.

And so I am not surprised that I did not ask her then with whom she had been walking in the Champs-Élysées, for I had already seen too many examples of the incuriosity that is brought about by Time, but I am a little surprised that I did not tell her that before I saw her that evening I had sold a Chinese porcelain bowl in order to buy her flowers. It had indeed, during the gloomy period that followed, been my sole consolation to think that one day I should be able with impunity to tell her of so tender an intention. More than a year later, if I saw another carriage about to crash into mine, my sole reason for wishing not to die was that I might be able to tell this to Gilberte. I consoled myself with the thought: "There's no hurry, I have a whole lifetime in which to tell her." And for this reason I was anxious not to lose my life. Now it would have seemed to me an unseemly, almost ridiculous thing to say, and a thing that would "involve consequences."

I did not ask then with whom she had been walking that evening. (I asked her later. It was Léa dressed as a man. Gilberte was aware that she knew Albertine, but could tell me nothing more. Thus it is that certain persons always reappear in one's life to herald one's pleasures or one's griefs.) What reality there had been beneath the appearance on that occasion had become quite immaterial to me. And yet for how many days and nights had I not tormented myself with wondering who it had been, had I not been obliged, even more perhaps than in the effort not to go downstairs to say good-night to Mamma in this very Combray, to control the beating of my heart! It is said, and this is what accounts for the gradual disappearance of certain nervous affections, that our nervous system grows old. This is true not merely of our permanent self, which continues throughout the whole duration of our life, but of all our successive selves which, after all, to a certain extent compose it.

"Moreover," Gilberte went on, "even on the day when I passed you in the doorway, you were still just the same as at Combray; if you only knew how little you'd changed!"

I pictured Gilberte again in my memory. I could have drawn the rectangle of light which the sun cast through the hawthorns, the spade which the little girl was holding in her hand, the slow gaze that she fastened on me. Only I had supposed, because of the coarse gesture that accompanied it, that it was a contemptuous gaze because what I longed for it to mean seemed to me to be a thing that little girls did not know about and did only in my imagination, during my hours of solitary desire. Still less could I have supposed that so

casually, so rapidly, almost under the eyes of my grandfather, one of them would have had the audacity to suggest it.

And so I was obliged, after an interval of so many years, to touch up a picture which I recalled so well—an operation which made me quite happy by showing me that the impassable gulf which I had then supposed to exist between myself and a certain type of little girl with golden hair was as imaginary as Pascal's gulf, and which I thought poetic because of the long sequence of years at the end of which I was called upon to perform it. I felt a stab of desire and regret when I thought of the dungeons of Roussainville. And yet I was glad to be able to tell myself that the pleasure towards which I used to strain every nerve in those days, and which nothing could restore to me now, had indeed existed elsewhere than in my mind, in fact so close at hand, in that Roussainville of which I used to speak so often, and which I could see from the window of the orris-scented closet. And I had known nothing! In short, the image of Gilberte summed up everything that I had desired during my walks to the point of being unable to make up my mind to return home, seeming to see the tree-trunks part asunder and take human form. What I had so feverishly longed for then she had been ready, if only I had been able to understand and to meet her again, to let me taste in my boyhood. More completely even than I had supposed, Gilberte had been in those days truly part of the Méséglise way.

And even on the day when I had passed her in a doorway, although she was not Mlle de l'Orgeville, the girl whom Robert had met in houses of assignation (and what an absurd coincidence that it should have been to her future husband that I had applied for information about her), I had not been altogether mistaken as to the meaning of her glance, nor as to the sort of woman that she was and confessed to me now that she had been. "All that is a long time ago," she said to me, "I've never given a thought to anyone but Robert since the day of our engagement. And even so, you see, it's not those childish whims that I feel most guilty about."<sup>1</sup>

All day long, in that slightly too countrified house which seemed no more than a place for a rest between walks or during a sudden downpour, one of those houses in which all the sitting-rooms look like arbours and, on the wall-paper in the bedrooms, here the roses from the garden, there the birds from the trees outside join you and keep you company, isolated from the world—for it was old wall-paper on which every rose was so distinct that, had it been alive, you could have picked it, every bird you could have put in a cage and tamed, quite different from those grandiose bedroom decorations of today where, on a silver background, all the apple-trees of Normandy display their outlines in the Japanese style to hallucinate the hours you spend in bed—all day long I remained in my room which looked over the fine greenery of the park and the lilacs at the entrance, over the green leaves of the tall trees by the edge of the lake, sparkling in the sun, and the forest of Méséglise. Yet I looked at all this with pleasure only because I said to myself: "How nice to be able to see so much greenery from my bedroom window," until the moment when, in the vast verdant picture, I recognised, painted in a contrasting dark blue simply because it was further away, the steeple of Combray church. Not a representation of the steeple, but the steeple itself, which, putting in visible form a distance of miles and of years, had come, intruding its discordant tone into the midst of the luminous verdure—a tone so colourless that it seemed little more than a preliminary sketch—and engraved itself upon my window-pane. And if I left my room for a moment, I saw at the end of the corridor, in a little sitting-room which faced in another direction, what seemed to be a band of scarlet—for this room was hung with a plain silk, but a red one, ready to burst into flames if a ray of sun fell upon it.

The love of Albertine had disappeared from my memory. But it seems that there exists too an involuntary memory of the limbs, a pale and sterile imitation of the other but longer-lived, just as there are animals or vegetables without intelligence which are longer-lived than man. Our legs and our arms are full of torpid memories. And once, when I had said good-night to Gilberte rather early, I woke up in the middle of the night in my room at Tansonville and, still half-asleep, called out: "Albertine!" It was not that I had thought of her or dreamt of her, nor that I was confusing her with Gilberte, but a memory in my arm, opening like a flower, had made me fumble behind my back for the bell, as though I had been in my bedroom in Paris. And not finding it, I had called out: "Albertine!", thinking that my dead mistress was lying by my side, as she had often done in the evening, and that we were both dropping off to sleep, and reckoning, as I woke up, that, because of the time it would take Françoise to reach my room, Albertine might without imprudence pull the bell which I could not find.

During our walks Gilberte intimated to me that Robert was turning away from her, but only in order to run after other women. And it is true that many women encumbered his life, yet always these associations, like certain masculine friendships in the lives of men who love women, had that quality of ineffectual resistance, of purposelessly filling an empty space that often in a house may be seen in objects which are not there to be used.

He came several times to Tansonville while I was there and I found him very different from the man I had known. His life had not coarsened him or slowed him down, as had happened with M. de Charlus; on the contrary, working in him an inverse change, it had given him, in a degree in which he had never had it before—and this although he had resigned his commission on his marriage—the grace and ease of a cavalry officer. Gradually, just as M. de Charlus had grown heavier, Robert (it is true that he was very much younger, but one felt that with age he would only get nearer and nearer to this ideal), had, like those women who resolutely sacrifice their faces to their figures and after a certain moment never stir from Marienbad (they realise that they cannot preserve more than one kind of youth and think that a youthful figure will serve best to represent youth in general), become slimmer and taken to moving more rapidly, a contrary effect of an identical vice.

This swiftness of movement had, moreover, various psychological causes, the fear of being seen, the wish to conceal that fear, the feverishness which is generated by self-dissatisfaction and boredom. He was in the habit of visiting certain low haunts into which, as he did not wish to be seen going in or coming out, he would hurl himself in such a way as to present the smallest possible target to the unfriendly glances of possible passers-by, like a soldier going into an attack.<sup>2</sup> And this manner of moving like a gust of wind had become a habit. Perhaps also it symbolised the superficial intrepidity of a man who wants to show that he is not afraid and does not want to give himself time to think. We must mention too, if our account is to be complete, a desire, the older he grew, to appear young, and also the impatience characteristic of those perpetually bored and perpetually cynical men that people inevitably turn into when they are too intelligent for the relatively idle lives they lead, in which their faculties do not have full play. No doubt idleness, in these men as in others, may express itself in inertia. But in these days especially, when physical exercise is so much in favour, there exists also, even outside the actual hours of sport, an athletic form of idleness which finds expression not in inertia but in a feverish vivacity that hopes to leave boredom neither time nor space to develop in.

Becoming—at any rate during this tiresome phase—much harder in his manner, towards his friends, towards for example myself, he now exhibited scarcely any trace of sensibility. Towards Gilberte on the other hand he behaved with an affectation of sentiment carried to the point of theatricality, which was most disagreeable. Not that he was in fact indifferent to her. No, he loved her. But he lied to her all the time and his untruthfulness, if not the actual purpose of his lies, was invariably detected; and then he thought that the only way to extricate himself was to exaggerate to a ridiculous degree the genuine distress which he felt at having hurt her. He would arrive at Tansonville, obliged, he said, to leave again the next morning because of some business with a certain neighbouring landowner who was supposed to be waiting for him in Paris; but the neighbour, when they happened to meet him near Combray the same evening, would unintentionally expose the lie, of which Robert had neglected to inform him, by saying that he had come to the country for a month's rest and would not be going back to Paris during his stay. Robert would blush, would observe Gilberte's melancholy and knowing smile, get rid of the blundering friend with a few sharp words, go home before his wife, send her a desperate note saying that he had told this lie in order not to hurt her, so that she should not think, when she saw him go off for a reason which he could not avow to her, that he did not love her (and all this, though Robert thought that he was lying when he wrote it, was in substance true), and then would ask permission to come to her room and there—part genuine distress, part the nervous strain of the life he led, part a pretence which became every day more brazen—would sob, plunge his head into cold water, talk about his imminent death, sometimes throw himself on the floor as though he had been taken ill. Gilberte did not know how far she should believe him, supposed that in each particular case he was lying but that in a general way he loved her, and was worried by this presentiment of an imminent death, thinking that he perhaps had some illness she did not know of, so that for that reason she did not dare to thwart him or ask him to give up his travels. All this, however, did not help me to understand why Robert insisted on Morel's being accepted as the son of the house—as much a part of it as Bergotte,<sup>3</sup> wherever the Saint-Loups were, in Paris or at Tansonville. Morel imitated Bergotte marvellously. It was even unnecessary, after a while, to ask him for an impersonation. Like those hysterics whom one doesn't have to hypnotise to make them become such or such a person, he entered spontaneously and immediately into the character.

Françoise, who had seen all that M. de Charlus had done for Jupien and saw now all that Robert de Saint-Loup was doing for Morel, did not conclude that this was a characteristic which reappeared from generation to generation in the Guermantes family. She, who was so moral and so full of prejudices, had come rather to believe—as Legrandin too was so kind to Théodore—that this was a custom rendered respectable by its universality. She would say of a young man, whether Morel or Théodore: "He has found a gentleman who takes an interest in him and has done a great deal to help him." And as in such cases it is the protectors who love and suffer and forgive, Françoise, faced with a choice between the "gentlemen" and the youths whom they seduced, did not hesitate to award her sympathy to the seducers, to decide that it was they who "really had hearts." She blamed Théodore for all the tricks he played on Legrandin—and yet it seemed scarcely possible that she could have any doubt about the nature of their relations, for she would add: "Then the boy realised that it was his turn to make a move and said: 'Take me with you, I will love you, I will do my best to please you,' and upon my word the gentleman has such a heart that I'm sure Théodore is sure to do well with him. Perhaps much better than he deserves, for he's a proper madcap, but the gentleman is so good that I've often said to Jeannette (Théodore's fiancée): 'My girl, if ever you're in trouble, go to the gentleman. He'd give you his bed rather than let you sleep on the floor. He's been too fond of that lad (Théodore) to turn him out. You can be sure he'll never desert him.' " Out of politeness I inquired what was the surname of Théodore, who was now living somewhere in the south of France, and she told me that it was Sanilon. "Then that's who it was," I exclaimed, "who wrote to me about my article in *Le Figaro*."

In the same way Françoise had a higher esteem for Saint-Loup than for Morel and gave it as her opinion that, in spite of all the tricks the lad (Morel) had played, the Marquis would always come to his rescue if he were in trouble, for he was a man with a real heart—or if he didn't, it would only be because he himself had suffered some great disaster.

Saint-Loup insisted that I should stay on at Tansonville and once, although he never now visibly sought to give me pleasure, let slip the remark that my coming had been so great a joy to his wife that it had caused her, as she had told him, a transport of happiness which lasted a whole evening, an evening when she had been feeling so miserable that my unexpected arrival had miraculously saved her from despair, "Perhaps from something worse," he added. He asked me to try to persuade her that he loved her and told me that, though he



loved another woman, he loved her less than his wife and would soon break with her. "And yet," he continued, with such self-satisfaction and such an evident need to confide that there were moments when I thought the name of Charlie would, for all Robert's efforts, "come up" like a number in a lottery, "I had something to be proud of. This woman who has given me so many proofs of her affection and whom I am about to sacrifice to Gilberte, had never looked at a man before, she even thought herself incapable of falling in love. I am the first man in her life. I knew that she had refused offers right and left, so that when I received the marvellous letter in which she told me that there would be no happiness for her except with me, I just could not get over it. Obviously, there would be something here for me to lose my head about, were it not that the thought of seeing poor Gilberte in tears is intolerable to me. Don't you see something of Rachel in her?" he went on. And indeed I had been struck by a vague resemblance which one could, if one tried, now find between them. Perhaps it was due to a real similarity of certain features (owing possibly to the Jewish origin of both, though of this there was little evidence in Gilberte) which had caused Robert, when his family had insisted that he should marry, to feel himself more attracted to Gilberte than to any other girl who was equally rich. But it was due also to the fact that Gilberte, having come across some hidden photographs of Rachel, whose name even had been unknown to her, tried to please Robert by imitating certain habits dear to the actress, such as always wearing a red ribbon in her hair and a black velvet ribbon on her arm, and by dyeing her hair in order to look dark. Then, feeling that her unhappiness was spoiling her looks, she tried to do something about it. Sometimes she went a great deal too far. One day, when Robert was coming to Tansonville for a single night, I was astounded to see her take her place at table looking so strangely different, not merely from what she had been in the past, but from her present self of every day, that I sat dumbfounded as if I had before my eyes an actress, a sort of Empress Theodora. I felt that in spite of myself I was staring at her, so curious was I to know what it was that was changed. My curiosity was soon satisfied when she blew her nose—in spite of all the precautions with which she did this. For from the many colours which were left on her handkerchief, turning it into a sumptuous palette, I saw that she was heavily made up. This it was that gave her that blood-red mouth which she tried hard to control into laughter in the belief that it was becoming to her, while the thought that the time of her husband's train was approaching and still she did not know whether he would really come or whether he would send one of those telegrams of which M. de Guermantes had wittily fixed the formula: "Cannot come, lie follows," turned her cheeks pale beneath the violet sweat of her grease-paint and drew dark rings round her eyes.

"Ah! don't you see?" he would say to me—in an artificially affectionate manner which contrasted painfully with his spontaneous affection of the old days, with the voice of an alcoholic and an actor's intonations—"Gilberte happy, there is nothing I would not give to see that. She has done so much for me. You can't possibly know." And the most disagreeable part of all this was once again his vanity, for he was flattered at being loved by Gilberte and, without daring to say that it was Charlie whom he loved, gave, nevertheless, of the love which the violinist was supposed to feel for him, details which he, the Saint-Loup from whom Charlie every day demanded more and more money, knew to be wildly exaggerated if not invented from start to finish. And so, entrusting Gilberte to my care, he would go off to Paris again. In Paris (to anticipate a little, for I am still at Tansonville) I once had an opportunity of observing him at a party and from a distance and on this occasion, though the way in which he spoke was still alive and charming and enabled me to rediscover the past, I was struck by the great changes taking place in him. More and more he resembled his mother: the haughtily elegant manner which he had inherited from her and which she, by means of the most elaborate training, had perfected in him was now freezing into exaggeration; the penetrating glance proper to him as a Guermantes gave him the air of inspecting every place in which he happened to be, but of doing this in an almost unconscious fashion, as though from habit, in obedience to a sort of animal characteristic. Even when he was at rest, the colouring which he possessed in a greater degree than any other Guermantes—that air of being merely the solidified sunniness of a golden day—gave him as it seemed a plumage so strange, made of him a species so rare and so precious, that one would have liked to acquire him for an ornithological collection; but when, in addition, this ray of light, metamorphosed into a bird, set itself in motion, when for instance I saw Robert de Saint-Loup enter this evening party at which I was present, the way in which he tossed back his head, so silkily and proudly crested with the golden tuft of his slightly moulting hair, and moved his neck from side to side, was so much more supple, so much more aloof and yet more delicate than anything to be expected of a human being that, fired by the sight with curiosity and wonder, half social and half zoological, one asked oneself whether one was really in the Faubourg Saint-Germain and not rather in the Zoological Gardens, whether one was watching the passage of a great nobleman through a drawing-room or a bird pacing its cage. And if one was prepared to exercise a little imagination, the twittering lent itself just as well to this second interpretation as the plumage. For he was beginning to use phrases which he thought redolent of the age of Louis XIV, and though in this he was simply imitating the manners of the Guermantes, in him some indefinable nuance was turning them into the manners of M. de Charlus. "I must leave you for a moment," he said to me for instance, at this party, at which Mme de Marsantes was standing a little way away from us. "I have to pay my respects to my mother."

To return to this "love," of which he could not stop talking to me, it was not only love for Charlie, although this was the only one that counted for him. Whatever the nature of a man's loves, one always makes mistakes as to the number of people with whom he has affairs, partly from wrongly interpreting friendships as love affairs, an error which exaggerates the total, but also through believing that one proved love affair excludes another, which is an error of a contrary kind. Two people may say: "X's mistress, yes, I know her," they may pronounce two different names and neither of them may be mistaken. A woman whom we love seldom

satisfies all our needs and we deceive her with a woman whom we do not love. As to the species of loves that Saint-Loup had inherited from M. de Charlus, a husband who is that way inclined usually makes his wife happy. This is a general rule to which the Guermantes contrived to be an exception, because those of them who had this taste wanted it to be believed that on the contrary they were fond of women. So they made themselves conspicuous with one woman or another and drove their own wives to despair. The Courvoisiers were more sensible. The young Vicomte de Courvoisier thought he was the only man alive, perhaps the only man since the beginning of the world, to be tempted by someone of his own sex. Supposing this inclination to come to him from the devil, he struggled against it, married an extremely pretty wife and had children by her. Then one of his cousins taught him that the tendency is fairly widespread and was even so kind as to take him to places where he could indulge it. M. de Courvoisier became fonder than ever of his wife and redoubled his philoprogenitive zeal, and he and she were quoted as the happiest couple in Paris. That could not possibly be said of the Saint-Loups, because Robert, instead of being content with inversion, made his wife ill with jealousy by keeping mistresses without pleasure to himself.

It is possible that Morel, being excessively dark, was necessary to Saint-Loup in the way that shadow is necessary to the sunbeam. Can one not imagine some golden-haired aristocrat sprung from an ancient family such as his, intelligent and endowed with every kind of prestige, concealing within him, unbeknown to all his friends, a secret taste for negroes?

Robert never allowed the conversation to touch upon his own species of loves. If I said a word about it, "Oh! I don't know," he would reply, with a detachment so profound that it caused him to drop his monocle, "I am utterly ignorant about those things. If you want information about them, my dear boy, I advise you to go elsewhere. I am a soldier, that's all I can say for myself. The things you speak of leave me cold. What I *am* interested in, passionately, is the course of the Balkan war. That sort of thing interested you too once, the 'etymology' of battles. I told you in those days that we should see again, even in greatly changed circumstances, battles conforming to certain types, for example the great exercise in lateral envelopment, the battle of Ulm. Well! However special these Balkan wars may be, Lüleburgaz is Ulm all over again: lateral envelopment. These are the subjects you can talk to me about. As for the sort of thing you allude to, it means about as much to me as Sanskrit."

While Robert thus expressed his disdain for the subject, Gilberte on the contrary, after he had left, was very willing to raise it in the conversation which I had with her. Not with reference to her husband certainly, for she knew, or pretended to know, nothing. But she liked to discuss it at length in so far as other men were concerned, whether because she saw in this a sort of indirect excuse for Robert or because he, divided like his uncle between an austere silence with regard to the subject and a need to let himself go and talk slander, had opened her eyes in many directions. M. de Charlus was one of those who were not spared, doubtless because Robert, without mentioning Charlie to Gilberte, could not help, when he was with her, repeating in one form or another what the violinist had told him; and the latter pursued his former benefactor with unrelenting hate. These conversations, and Gilberte's evident liking for them, gave me a chance to ask her whether, in a parallel category, Albertine, whose name I had first heard from Gilberte herself when they were attending the same classes, had comparable tastes. Gilberte could not give me any information on this point. And in any case it had long ceased to be of interest to me. But I continued to make inquiries mechanically, as an old man with a failing memory from time to time asks for news of the son he has lost.

What is odd, though I cannot here enlarge upon the topic, is the degree to which, at that time, all the people whom Albertine loved, all those who might have been able to persuade her to do what they wanted, asked, entreated, I will even say begged to be allowed to have, if not my friendship, at least some sort of acquaintance with me. No longer should I have had to offer money to Mme Bontemps as an inducement to send Albertine back to me. But this turn of fortune's wheel, taking place when it was no longer of the slightest use, merely saddened me profoundly, not because of Albertine, whom I would have received without pleasure had she been brought back not from Touraine but from the other world, but because of a young woman with whom I was in love and whom I could not contrive to meet. I told myself that, if she died, or if I no longer loved her, all those who might have brought us together would suddenly be at my feet. Meanwhile, I tried in vain to work upon them, not having been cured by experience, which ought to have taught me—if ever it taught anybody anything—that loving is like an evil spell in a fairy-story against which one is powerless until the enchantment has passed.

"As a matter of fact the book I'm reading at the moment talks about that sort of thing," Gilberte said to me. "It is an old Balzac which I am swotting up so as to be as well-informed as my uncles, *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*. But it is absurd, improbable, nightmarish. For one thing, I suppose a woman might be kept under surveillance in that way by another woman, but surely not by a man." "You are wrong, I once knew a woman who was loved by a man who in the end literally imprisoned her; she was never allowed to see anybody, she could only go out with trusted servants." "Well, you who are so kind must be horrified at the idea. By the way, we were saying, Robert and I, that you ought to get married. Your wife would improve your health and you would make her happy." "No, I have too bad a character." "How absurd!" "I mean it. Besides, I was engaged once. But I couldn't quite make up my mind to marry the girl—and anyhow she thought better of it herself, because of my undecided and cantankerous character." This was, in fact, the excessively simple light in which I regarded my adventure with Albertine, now that I saw it only from outside.

Back in my bedroom again, I thought sadly that I had not once been back to revisit Combray church, which seemed to be waiting for me amidst green foliage in a violet-tinted window. "Never mind," I said to myself, "that can wait for another year, if I don't die in the meanwhile," seeing no other possible obstacle but my own



death and not envisaging that of the church which must, as I supposed, endure for centuries after my death as it had for centuries before my birth.

One day I spoke to Gilberte about Albertine, and asked her whether Albertine loved women. "Not in the least!" "But you used to say that you didn't approve of her." "I said that? No, I'm sure you're mistaken. In any case, if I said it—but you're wrong about that—what I was referring to was flirtations with young men. And anyhow, at her age, it probably didn't go very far." Did Gilberte say this in order to conceal from me that she herself—or so Albertine had told me—loved women and had made advances to Albertine? Or did she (for other people are often better informed about our life than we think) know that I had loved and been jealous of Albertine, and did she (since, though others may know more of the truth about us than we think, they may also stretch it too far and fall into the error of supposing too much, whereas we had hoped that they made the mistake of supposing nothing at all) imagine that this was still the case, was she, out of kindness, placing over my eyes that bandage with which we are always ready to blindfold the jealous? In any case, Gilberte's remarks, from the "disapproval" of the old days to the present certificate of respectability, were pursuing an opposite course to the statements of Albertine, who in the end had almost admitted some sort of relations with Gilbert. In this Albertine had astonished me, just as I had been astonished by what Andrée had told me, for with all the girls in the little band, if I had at first believed, before knowing them, in their perversity, I had come round to the view that my suspicions were false, as must often happen when one finds a virtuous girl, almost ignorant of the facts of love, in surroundings which one had wrongly supposed to be extremely depraved. Then later I had travelled the same road in the opposite direction, back to a belief in the truth of my original suspicions. But perhaps Albertine had told me this because she wanted to appear more experienced than she was and to dazzle me in Paris with the prestige of her depravity, as on the earlier occasion at Balbec with that of her virtue; or quite simply, when I had talked about women who loved women, had not wanted to appear not to know what I meant, just as, if Fourier or Tobolsk is mentioned in a conversation, one tries to look as if one understood even if one has no idea what they are. She had perhaps lived, though in proximity to Mlle Vinteuil's friend and to Andrée, yet separated from them by a watertight partition, so that they thought that she was "not one," and had perhaps only got to know about the subject later—in the spirit of a woman who marries a man of letters and tries to improve her mind—in order to please me by making herself capable of answering my questions, until the day when she realised that the questions were inspired by jealousy, when she had hastily gone into reverse. Unless it was Gilberte who was lying to me. It even occurred to me that it was because he had learnt from Gilberte, while flirting with her with an eye all the while on his real interests, that she did not altogether dislike women, that Robert had married her, hoping for pleasures which, since he now went elsewhere for them, he must have failed to obtain from her. None of these hypotheses was absurd, for with women like Odette's daughter or the girls of the little band there is such a diversity, such an accumulation of alternating if not actually simultaneous tastes, that they pass easily from an affair with a woman to a great love for a man, so that to define the real and dominating taste must always be difficult.

I did not want to borrow Gilberte's copy of *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or* as she was reading it herself. But she lent me to read in bed, on that last evening of my stay with her, a book which produced on me a strong but mixed impression, which did not, however, prove to be lasting. It was a newly published volume of the *Journal of the Goncourts*. And when, before putting out my candle, I read the passage which I am about to transcribe, my lack of talent for literature, of which I had had a presentiment long ago on the Guermantes way and which had been confirmed during the stay of which this was the last evening—one of those evenings before a departure when we emerge from the torpor of habits about to be broken and attempt to judge ourselves—struck me as something less to be regretted, since literature, if I was to trust the evidence of this book, had no very profound truths to reveal: and at the same time it seemed to me sad that literature was not what I had thought it to be. At the same time, the state of ill-health which was soon to shut me up in a sanatorium seemed to me also less to be regretted, if the beautiful things of which books speak were not more beautiful than what I had seen myself. And yet, by an odd contradiction, now that they were being spoken of in this book I had a desire to see them. Here are the pages that I read before fatigue closed my eyes ...

"The day before yesterday Verdurin drops in here to carry me off to dine with him—Verdurin, former critic of the *Revue*, author of that book on Whistler in which the workmanship, the painterly colouration, of the American eccentric is interpreted sometimes with great delicacy by the lover of all the refinements, all the *prettinesses* of the painted canvas, that Verdurin is. And while I am getting dressed to accompany him, he treats me to a long narrative, almost at moments a timidly stammered confession, about his renunciation of writing immediately after his marriage to Fromentin's 'Madeleine,' a renunciation brought about, he says, by his addiction to morphine and which had the result, according to Verdurin, that most of the frequenters of his wife's drawing-room did not even know that her husband had ever been a writer and spoke to him of Charles Blanc, of Saint-Victor, of Sainte-Beuve, of Burty, as individuals to whom they considered him, Verdurin, altogether inferior. 'Now, you Goncourts, you know—and Gautier knew too—that my *Salons* were on a different plane from those pitiful *Maîtres d'Autrefois* which are deemed a masterpiece in my wife's family.' Then, through a dusk in which, as we pass the towers of the Trocadéro, the last glimmer of a gleam of daylight makes them positively resemble those towers of red-currant jelly that pastry-cooks used to make, the conversation continues in the carriage on its way to the Quai Conti, where their mansion is, which its owner claims was once the mansion of the Venetian ambassadors and in which there is a room used as a smoking-room which Verdurin tells me was transported lock, stock and barrel, as in a tale of the *Arabian Nights*, from a celebrated

*palazzo* whose name I forget, a *palazzo* boasting a well-head decorated with a Coronation of the Virgin which Verdurin maintains is positively one of Sansovino's finest things and which now, he says, their guests find useful as a receptacle for cigar-ash. And upon my word, when we arrive, in the watery shimmer of a moonlight really just like that in which the paintings of the great age enwraps Venice, against which the silhouetted dome of the Institute makes one think of the Salute in Guardi's pictures, I have almost the illusion of looking out over the Grand Canal. And the illusion is preserved by the way in which the house is built so that from the first floor one cannot see the quay, and by the evocative remark of its owner, who affirms that the name of the Rue du Bac—the devil if ever I'd thought of it—comes from the ferry which once upon a time used to take an order of nuns, the Miramiones, across to attend services in Notre-Dame. A whole quarter which my childhood used idly to explore when my aunt de Courmont lived there, and which I am inspired to *re-love* by rediscovering, almost next door to the Verdurin mansion, the sign of 'Little Dunkirk,' one of the rare shops surviving elsewhere than in the crayon and wash vignettes of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, to which the eighteenth-century connoisseur would come to pass a few leisure moments in cheapening trinkets French and foreign and 'all the newest products of the arts,' as an invoice of this Little Dunkirk puts it, an invoice of which we two, Verdurin and myself, are, I believe, alone in possessing copies, one of those flimsy masterpieces of engraved paper upon which the reign of Louis XV made out its accounts, with a headpiece representing a billowy sea laden with vessels, a sea of billows which might be an illustration, in the Fermiers Généraux La Fontaine, to 'The Oyster and the Litigants.' The mistress of the house, who has placed me next to her at dinner, graciously tells me before we go in that she has decked out her table with nothing but Japanese chrysanthemums—but chrysanthemums displayed in vases which are the rarest masterpieces, one in particular of bronze on which petals of red-gold copper seem to have been shed by the living flower. Cottard, the doctor, is there, his wife, the Polish sculptor Viradobetski, Swann the collector, and an aristocratic Russian lady, a princess with a name ending in -off which I fail to catch (Cottard whispers in my ear that she is the woman who is supposed to have fired point-blank at the Archduke Rudolf), according to whom in Galicia and the whole of the north of Poland my reputation stands extraordinarily high, no young girl ever giving her consent to an offer of marriage without first ascertaining whether her fiancé is an admirer of *La Faustin*. 'You cannot understand that, you western Europeans'—this is thrown in as a sort of coda by the Princess, who, upon my word, strikes me as a person of a really superior intelligence—that penetration by a writer of a woman's most intimate feelings.' A man with a close-shaven chin and lip and the side-whiskers of a butler, rolling out in a condescending tone the witticisms of a fifth-form schoolmaster unbending among his prize pupils on the feast of St Charlemagne—this is Brichot, of the university. I am introduced to him by Verdurin but he utters not a word of reference to our books, and I am filled with a mixture of discouragement and anger at this conspiracy organised against us by the Sorbonne, which brings even into this pleasant dwelling where I am received as an honoured guest the contradiction, the hostility, of deliberate silence. We go in to dinner, and there follows an extraordinary cavalcade of plates which are nothing less than masterpieces of the porcelainist's art, that artist whose chatter, during an exquisite meal, is heard with more pleasure than any fellow-guest's by the titillated attention of the connoisseur—Yung-cheng plates with nasturtium-coloured borders and purple-blue irises, leafless and tumid, and those supremely decorative flights of kingfishers and cranes trailing across a dawn sky, a dawn that has just the early-morning tones glimpsed daily from Boulevard Montmorency by my awakening eyes—Dresden plates daintier and of more graceful workmanship, with drowsy, bloodless roses fading into violet, with ragged-edged tulips the colour of wine-lees, with the rococo elegance of a pink or a forget-me-not—Sèvres plates meshed with the close guilloché of their white fluting, whorled in gold, or knotted with a golden ribbon that stands in gallant relief upon the creamy smoothness of the paste—finally a whole service of silver plate arabesqued with those myrtles of Luciennes that were not unknown to the du Barry. And what is perhaps equally rare is the truly quite remarkable quality of the things served upon these plates, a meal most subtly concocted, a real spread such as Parisians, one cannot say it too emphatically, never have at their really grand dinner-parties and which reminds me of certain prize dishes of Jean d'Heurs. Even the foie gras bears no resemblance to the insipid mousse customarily served under that name; and I do not know many places in which a simple potato salad is made as it is here with potatoes firm as Japanese ivory buttons and patina'd like those little ivory spoons with which Chinese women sprinkle water over their new-caught fish. Into the Venetian glass which I have before me is poured, like a rich cascade of red jewels, an extraordinary Léoville bought at M. Montalivet's sale, and it is a delight to the imagination of the eye and also, I am not afraid to say it, of what used to be called the gullet, to see a brill placed before us which has nothing in common with those anything but fresh brills that are served at the most luxurious tables, which in the slow course of their journey from the sea have had the pattern of their bones imprinted upon their backs; a brill that is served not with the sticky paste prepared under the name of white sauce by so many chefs in great houses, but with a genuine white sauce, made with butter that costs five francs a pound; to see this brill brought in on a wonderful Chinese dish streaked with the purple rays of a sun setting above a sea upon which ludicrously sails a flotilla of large lobsters, their spiky stippling rendered with such extraordinary skill that they seem to have been moulded from living shells, with a border too depicting a little Chinese who plays with rod and line a fish whose silver and azure belly makes it a marvel of iridescent colour. When I remark to Verdurin what an exquisite pleasure it must be for him to eat this choice grub off a collection such as no prince today possesses in his show cases: 'It is easy to see that you don't know him,' gloomily interjects the mistress of the house. And she speaks to me of her husband as of an original and a crank, indifferent to all these dainties, 'a crank,' she repeats, 'yes, that is the only word for it,' a crank who would get more enjoyment from a bottle of cider drunk in the somewhat plebeian coolness of a Normandy farm. And this charming woman, whose speech

betrays her positive adoration of local colouring, talks with overflowing enthusiasm of the Normandy in which they once lived, a Normandy, so she says, like an immense English park, with the fragrance of tall woodlands that Lawrence might have painted, with the cryptomeria-coloured velvet of natural lawns bordered with the porcelain of pink hydrangeas, with crumpled sulphur-roses which, as they cascade over a cottage-door, above which the incrustation of two entwined pear-trees has the effect of a purely decorative sign over a shop, make one think of the free arabesque of a flowery branch of bronze in a candle-bracket by Gouthière, a Normandy absolutely unsuspected by the Parisian holiday-makers, protected by the iron gates of each of its little properties, gates which the Verdurins confessed to me that they did not scruple to open one and all. At the end of the day, in the drowsy extinguishment of all colours, when the only light was from an almost curdled sea, blue-white like whey ('No, not in the least like the sea you know,' frantically protests my neighbour, when I start to tell her that Flaubert once took us, my brother and me, to Trouville, 'not the slightest bit, you must come with me, otherwise you will never find out'), they would go home, through the forests—absolute forests abloom with pink tulles—of the great rhododendrons, quite drunk with the smell of the sardine fisheries which gave her husband terrible attacks of asthma—'Yes,' she insists, 'I mean it, real attacks of asthma.' Thereupon, the following summer, they returned, lodging a whole colony of artists in an old cloister which they rented for next to nothing, and which made an admirable mediaeval abode. And upon my word, as I listen to this woman who, in passing through so many social circles of real distinction, has nevertheless preserved in her speech a little of the freshness and freedom of language of a woman of the people, a language which shows you things with the colour which your imagination sees in them, my mouth waters at the life which she avows to me they lived down there, each one working in his cell and the whole party assembling before luncheon, in a drawing-room so vast that it had two fireplaces, for really intelligent conversation interspersed with parlour games, a life which makes me think of the one we read of in that masterpiece of Diderot, the *Lettres à Mademoiselle Volland*. Then, after luncheon, they would all go out, even on the days when the weather was unsettled, in a brief burst of sunshine or the diffused radiance of a shower, a shower whose filtered light sharpened the knotted outlines of a magnificent avenue of century-old beeches which began just behind the house and brought almost up to the iron grill that vegetable embodiment of "the beautiful" so dear to eighteenth-century taste, and of the ornamental trees which held suspended in their branches not buds about to flower but drops of rain. They would stop to listen to the delicate splish-splash of a bullfinch, enamoured of coolness, bathing itself in the tiny dainty Nymphenburg bath made for it by the corolla of a white rose. And when I mention to Mme Verdurin Elstir's delicate pastel sketches of the landscapes and the flowers of that coast: 'But it is through me that he discovered all those things,' she bursts out, with an angry toss of the head, 'all of them, yes, all, make no mistake about it, the interesting spots, every one of his subjects—I threw it in his teeth when he left us, didn't I, Gustave?—every one of the subjects he has painted. *Things* he has always known about, there one must be fair, one must admit that. But as for flowers, he had never seen any, he couldn't tell a mallow from a hollyhock. It was I who taught him—you won't believe this—to recognise jasmine.' And one must admit that it is a curious thought that the artist who is cited by connoisseurs today as our leading flower-painter, superior even to Fantin-Latour, would perhaps never, without the help of the woman sitting beside me, have known how to paint jasmine. 'Yes, honestly, jasmine. And all the roses he has done have been painted in my house, or else it was I who took them to him. Among us he was always known simply as Monsieur Tiche; ask Cottard, ask Brichot, ask anybody here, whether we treated him as a great man. He would have laughed at the idea himself. I taught him to arrange his flowers; at first he couldn't manage it at all. He never learnt how to make a bouquet. He had no natural taste in selecting, I had to say to him: "No, don't paint that, that's no good, paint this." Ah! if he had listened to us about the arrangement of his life as he did about the arrangement of his flowers, and hadn't made that vile marriage!' And of a sudden, her eyes feverish from her absorption in thoughts of the past, plucking nervously at the silk sleeves of her bodice as she frenziedly tenses her fingers, she presents, in the distortion of her grief-stricken pose, an admirable picture which has, I think, never been painted, a picture in which one would see portrayed all the restrained revolt, all the passionate susceptibilities of a female friend outraged in the delicate feelings, the modesty of a woman. Thereupon she talks about the admirable portrait which Elstir did for her, the portrait of the Cottard family, which she gave to the Luxembourg at the time of her quarrel with the painter, confessing that it was she who gave him the idea of painting the man in dress clothes in order to get all that splendid ebullition of fine linen, and she who chose the woman's velvet gown which forms a solid mass amid all the glitter of the bright tones of the carpets, the flowers, the fruit, the little girls' muslin dresses that look like dancers' tutus. It was she too, she tells me, who gave him the idea of the woman brushing her hair, an idea for which the artist was subsequently much praised and which consisted simply in painting her not as if she were on show but surprised in the intimacy of her everyday life. 'In a woman doing her hair,' I used to say to him, "or wiping her face, or warming her feet, when she thinks she is not observed, there is a multitude of interesting movements, movements of a grace and charm that are positively Leonardesque!" ' But at a sign from Verdurin indicating that the revival of these old indignations is dangerous for the health of his wife, who is really a mass of nerves, Swann points out to me the wonderful necklace of black pearls which the mistress of the house is wearing, which she bought, as a necklace of white pearls, at the sale of a descendant of Mme de La Fayette, to whom they were given by Henrietta of England, and which became black as the result of a fire which destroyed part of a house which the Verdurins had in a street whose name I do not remember, after which fire the casket containing these pearls was found, with the pearls completely black inside it. 'And I know the portrait of these pearls, on the shoulders of Mme de La Fayette herself, yes, positively their portrait,' insists Swann, checking the exclamations of the somewhat dumb-founded guests, 'their authentic portrait, in

the collection of the Duc de Guermantes.' A collection which has not its equal in the world, proclaims Swann, and which I ought to go and see, a collection inherited by the celebrated Duke, who was her favourite nephew, from his aunt Mme de Beausergent, who afterwards became Mme d'Hatzfeldt and was the sister of the Marquise de Villeparisis and of the Princess of Hanover, in whose house years ago my brother and I became so fond of him under the guise of the charming infant known as Basin, which is indeed the Duke's first name. Thereupon Doctor Cottard, with that keen intelligence which shows him to be a man of real distinction, harks back to the story of the pearls and informs us that catastrophes of this kind can produce changes in people's brains which are just like those that may be observed in inanimate matter, and, discoursing in a philosophical vein well beyond the powers of most doctors, quotes as an example Mme Verdurin's own valet, who from the terrible shock of this fire in which he very nearly lost his life became a changed man, with a handwriting so altered that when his master and mistress, then in Normandy, first received a letter from him with the news of the fire, they thought that someone was playing a practical joke upon them. And not only an altered handwriting, according to Cottard, who maintains that this man, hitherto always sober, became such an abominable sot that Mme Verdurin was obliged to get rid of him. And the Doctor's stimulating dissertation passes, upon a gracious sign from the mistress of the house, from the dining-room to the Venetian smoking-room, where he tells us that he has witnessed cases of what can only be called dual personality, citing as an instance one of his patients, whom he is so kind as to offer to bring to my house, whose temples he only has to touch, so he says, to awaken him to a second life, a life during which he remembers nothing of his first life and so different that, while he behaves most respectably in the first, he has more than once been arrested for thefts committed in the second, in which he is nothing more nor less than an abominable scoundrel. Whereupon Mme Verdurin acutely observes that medical science could provide the theatre with truer themes than those now in favour, themes in which the comicality of the plot would be based upon misunderstandings of a pathological kind, and this, by a natural transition, leads Mme Cottard to say that a very similar subject has been employed by a story-teller who is her children's favourite at bedtime, the Scotsman Stevenson, a name which brings from Swann the peremptory statement: 'But he is a really great writer, Stevenson, I assure you, M. de Goncourt, a very great writer, equal to the greatest.' Next, after I have admired the ceiling of the room where we are smoking, with its escutcheoned coffered from the old Barberini palace, when I intimate my regret at the progressive blackening of a certain stone basin by the ash of our 'Havanas' and Swann remarks that similar stains on books from the library of Napoleon which are now, despite his anti-Bonapartist opinions, in the possession of the Duc de Guermantes, bear witness to the fact that the Emperor chewed tobacco, Cottard, who evinces a truly penetrating curiosity in all things, declares that the stains do not come from that at all—'No, no, no, not at all,' he insists with authority—but from the habit the Emperor had of always, even on the field of battle, clutching in his hand the liquorice tablets which he took to relieve the pain in his liver. 'For he had a disease of the liver and that is what he died of,' concludes the Doctor."

There I stopped, for I was leaving the next morning; and besides it was the hour at which I was habitually summoned by that other master in whose service we spend, every day, a part of our time. The task which he assigns to us we accomplish with our eyes closed. Every morning he hands us back to the master who shares us with him, knowing that, unless he did so, we should be remiss in his own service. Curious, when our intelligence reopens its eyes, to know what we can have done under this master who first makes his slaves lie down and then puts them to work at full speed, the most artful among us try, the moment their task is finished, to take a covert glance. But sleep is racing against them to obliterate the traces of what they would like to see. And after all these centuries we still know very little about the matter.

I closed the Journal of the Goncourts. Prestige of literature! I wished I could have seen the Cottards again, asked them all sorts of details about Elstir, gone to look at the shop called Little Dunkirk, if it still existed, asked permission to visit the Verdurin mansion where I had once dined. But I felt vaguely depressed. Certainly, I had never concealed from myself that I knew neither how to listen nor, once I was not alone, how to look. My eyes were blind to the sort of necklace an old woman might be wearing, and the things I might be told about her pearls never entered my ears. All the same, I had known these people in daily life, I had dined with them often, they were simply the Verdurins and the Duc de Guermantes and the Cottards, and each one of them I had found just as commonplace as my grandmother had found that Basin of whom she had no suspicion that he was the darling nephew, the enchanting young hero, of Mme de Beausergent, each one of them had seemed to me insipid; I could remember the vulgarities without number of which each of them was composed ...

And that all this should make a star in the night!<sup>4</sup>

But provisionally I decided to ignore the objections against literature raised in my mind by the pages of Goncourt which I had read on the evening before I left Tansonville. Even without taking into account the manifest naïvety of this particular diarist, I could in any case reassure myself on various counts. First, in so far as my own character was concerned, my incapacity for looking and listening, which the passage from the Journal had so painfully illustrated to me, was nevertheless not total. There was in me a personage who knew more or less how to look, but it was an intermittent personage, coming to life only in the presence of some general essence common to a number of things, these essences being its nourishment and its joy. Then the

personage looked and listened, but at a certain depth only, without my powers of superficial observation being enhanced. Just as a geometer, stripping things of their sensible qualities, sees only the linear substratum beneath them, so the stories that people told escaped me, for what interested me was not what they were trying to say but the manner in which they said it and the way in which this manner revealed their character or their foibles; or rather I was interested in what had always, because it gave me specific pleasure, been more particularly the goal of my investigations: the point that was common to one being and another. As soon as I perceived this my intelligence—until that moment slumbering, even if sometimes the apparent animation of my talk might disguise from others a profound intellectual torpor—at once set off joyously in pursuit, but its quarry then, for instance the identity of the Verdurin drawing-room in various places and at various times, was situated in the middle distance, behind actual appearances, in a zone that was rather more withdrawn. So the apparent, copiable charm of things and people escaped me, because I had not the ability to stop short there—I was like a surgeon who beneath the smooth surface of a woman's belly sees the internal disease which is devouring it. If I went to a dinner-party I did not see the guests: when I thought I was looking at them, I was in fact examining them with X-rays.

The result was that, when all the observations I had succeeded in making about the guests during the party were linked together, the pattern of the lines I had traced took the form of a collection of psychological laws in which the actual purport of the remarks of each guest occupied but a very small space. But did this take away all merit from my portraits, which in fact I did not intend as such? If, in the realm of painting, one portrait makes manifest certain truths concerning volume, light, movement, does that mean that it is necessarily inferior to another completely different portrait of the same person, in which a thousand details omitted in the first are minutely transcribed, from which second portrait one would conclude that the model was ravishingly beautiful while from the first one would have thought him or her ugly, a fact which may be of documentary, even of historical importance, but is not necessarily an artistic truth?

Furthermore my frivolity, the moment I was not alone, made me eager to please, more eager to amuse by chattering than to acquire knowledge by listening, unless it happened that I had gone out into society in search of information about some particular artistic question or some jealous suspicion which my mind had previously been revolving. Always I was incapable of seeing anything for which a desire had not already been roused in me by something I had read, anything of which I had not myself traced in advance a sketch which I wanted now to confront with reality. How often—and I was well aware of this even without being apprised of it by these pages of Goncourt—have I remained incapable of bestowing my attention upon things or people that later, once their image has been presented to me in solitude by an artist, I would have travelled many miles, risked death to find again! Then and then only has my imagination been set in motion, has it begun to paint. And of something which a year before had made me yawn I have said to myself with anguish, longingly contemplating it in advance: "Shall I really be unable to see this thing? I would give anything for a sight of it!"

When one reads articles about people, perhaps mere fashionable people, who are described as "the last representatives of a society of which no eye-witness now exists," one may of course exclaim: "Fancy using such extravagant language about so insignificant a creature! This is what I should have lamented never having known if I had only read the newspapers and the monthly reviews and had not met the man!" But I was tempted rather, when I read such pages in the newspapers, to think: "How unfortunate that in those days when I was solely preoccupied with meeting Gilberte or Albertine again I did not pay more attention to this gentleman! I took him for a society bore, a mere dummy. On the contrary he was a Distinguished Figure!" The pages of Goncourt which I had read made me regret this tendency of mine. For though I might have inferred from them that life teaches us to cheapen the value of a book, and shows us that what a writer extols was in fact worth very little, it was equally possible for me to come to the contrary conclusion, that reading teaches us to take a more exalted view of the value of life, a value at the time we did not know how to appreciate and of whose magnitude we have only become aware through the book. We may, without too much difficulty, console ourselves for having taken little pleasure in the society of a Vinteuil, a Bergotte. But the prudish respectability of the one, the intolerable defects of the other, even the pretentious vulgarity of an Elstir in his early days—for I had discovered from the Goncourt Journal that he was none other than the "Monsieur Tiche" whose twaddle had once exasperated Swann in the Verdurins' drawing-room—prove nothing against them: their genius is manifested in their works. What man of genius has not in his conversation adopted the irritating mannerisms of the artists of his set, before attaining (as Elstir had eventually done, though this does not always happen) to a good taste that rises above them? Are not Balzac's letters, for instance, strewn with vulgar expressions which Swann would have suffered a thousand deaths rather than employ? Yet can one doubt that Swann, finely intelligent as he was, purged of all odious absurdities, would have been incapable of writing *La Cousine Bette* or *Le Curé de Tours*? As for the Vinteuils, the Bergottes, the Elstirs, the question whether it is we or the writers of memoirs who are at fault when they represent the society of these men as charming whereas we found it disagreeable, it is a question of slight importance, since even if our estimate were the correct one, this would be no argument against the value of a life that can produce such geniuses.

Right at the other pole of experience, when I saw that the most piquant anecdotes, which form the inexhaustible material of the Goncourt Journal and provide the reader with entertainment for many solitary evenings, had been related to the writer by these people whom he had met at dinner and who, though on the evidence of his pages we should certainly have wanted to meet them, had in my mind left no trace of any interesting recollection, that too was not altogether difficult to explain. In spite of the naïvety of Goncourt, who inferred from the interest of these anecdotes the probable distinction of the man who related them, it might well be that commonplace men had seen during their lives, or heard related, remarkable things which

they in their turn had described. Goncourt knew how to listen, just as he knew how to see; I did not. Besides, all these facts needed to be considered and judged separately. Certainly M. de Guermantes had not given me the impression of that adorable model of the youthful graces which my grandmother so wished she had known and which she set before me, in the *Memoirs of Mme de Beausergent*, as an inimitable example. But one must remember that Basin was then seven years old, that the writer was his aunt, and that even a husband who within a few months will be suing for divorce will praise his wife to the skies. In one of his most delightful poems Sainte-Beuve describes an apparition beside a fountain—a little girl crowned with every gift and every grace, young Mlle de Champlâtreux, whose age at the time cannot have been ten. And in spite of all the affectionate respect which the poet of genius who is the Comtesse de Noailles bore for her husband's mother, the Duchesse de Noailles *née* Champlâtreux, one wonders whether, had she had occasion to portray her, the result might not have contrasted rather sharply with the portrait drawn by Sainte-Beuve fifty years earlier.

More puzzling perhaps were the people in between the two extremes, those in whom what the writer says of them implies more than a memory which has succeeded in retaining a piquant anecdote, with whom, nevertheless, one has not, as with the Vinteuils, the Bergottes, the resource of judging them on their work, for they have created none: they have only—to the great astonishment of us who found them so commonplace—inspired the work of others. I could, it is true, understand how the drawing-room which, seen on the walls of a museum, will give a greater impression of elegance than anything since the great paintings of the Renaissance, might be that of the ridiculous middle-class woman whom, had I not known her, I would have longed, as I stood before the picture, to be able to approach in reality, hoping to learn from her the most precious secrets of the painter's art which his canvas did not reveal to me, and how her lace and her stately train of velvet might have become a piece of painting as lovely as anything in Titian. For I had already realised long ago that it is not the man with the liveliest mind, the most well-informed, the best supplied with friends and acquaintances, but the one who knows how to become a mirror and in this way can reflect his life, commonplace though it may be, who becomes a Bergotte (even if his contemporaries once thought him less witty than Swann, less erudite than Bréauté), and could one not say as much, and with better reason, of a painter's models? The artist may paint anything in the world that he chooses, but when beauty is awakened within him, the model for that elegance in which he will find themes of beauty will be provided for him by people a little richer than he is himself, in whose house he will find what is not normally to be seen in the studio of an unrecognised man of genius selling his canvases for fifty francs: a drawing-room with chairs and sofas covered in old brocades, an abundance of lamps, beautiful flowers, beautiful fruit, beautiful dresses—people in a relatively modest position, or who would seem to be so to people of real social brilliance (who are not even aware of their existence), but who, for that reason, are more within reach of the obscure artist's acquaintance, more likely to appreciate him, to invite him, to buy his pictures, than men and women of the aristocracy who, like the Pope and Heads of State, get themselves painted by academicians. Will not posterity, when it looks at our time, find the poetry of an elegant home and beautifully dressed women in the drawing-room of the publisher Charpentier as painted by Renoir, rather than in the portraits of the Princesse de Sagan or the Comtesse de La Rochefoucauld by Cot or Chaplin? The artists who have given us the most splendid visions of elegance have gathered the materials for them from among people who were rarely the leaders of fashion in their age, for the leaders of fashion rarely commission pictures from the unknown bearer of a new type of beauty which they are unable to distinguish in his canvases, concealed as it is by the interposition of that formula of hackneyed charm which floats in the eye of the public like the subjective visions which a sick man supposes really to exist before his eyes. This, I say, I could understand; but that these commonplace models whom I had known should in addition have inspired and advised certain arrangements which had enchanted me, that the presence of one or another of them in a painting should be not merely that of a model but of a friend whom an artist wants to put into his pictures, this made me ask myself whether all the people whom we regret not having known because Balzac depicted them in his novels or dedicated books to them in homage and admiration, the people about whom Sainte-Beuve or Baudelaire wrote their loveliest poems, still more whether all the Récamiers, all the Pompadours, would not have seemed to me insignificant creatures, either owing to an infirmity of my nature, which, if it were so, made me furious at being ill and therefore unable to go back and see again all the people whom I had misjudged, or because they owed their prestige only to an illusory magic of literature, in which case I had been barking up the wrong tree and need not repine at being obliged almost any day now by the steady deterioration of my health to break with society, renounce travel and museums, and go to a sanatorium for treatment.

For many years, already, everything about Combray that was not the theater and drama of my bedtime had ceased to exist for me, when one day in winter, as I returned home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, suggested that, contrary to my habit, I have a little tea. I refused at first and then, I do not know why, changed my mind. She sent for one of those squat, plump cakes called *petites madeleines* that look as though they have been molded in the grooved valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, oppressed by the gloomy day and the prospect of another sad day to follow, I carried to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had let soften a bit of madeleine. But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me. A delicious pleasure had invaded me, isolated me, without my having any notion as to its cause. It had immediately rendered the vicissitudes of life unimportant to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, acting in the same way that love acts, by filling me with a precious essence: or rather this essence was not merely inside me, it was me. I had ceased to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Where could it have come to me from—this powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected to the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it went infinitely far beyond it, could not be of the same nature. Where did it come from? What did it mean? How could I grasp it? I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third that gives me a little less than the second. It is time for me to stop, the virtue of the drink seems to be diminishing. Clearly, the truth I am seeking is not in the drink, but in me. The drink has awoken it in me, but does not know this truth, and can do no more than repeat indefinitely, with less and less force, this same testimony which I do not know how to interpret and which I want at least to be able to ask of it again and find again, intact, available to me, soon, for a decisive clarification. I put down the cup and turn to my mind. It is up to my mind to find the truth. But how? Such grave uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is also the obscure country where it must seek and where all its baggage will be nothing to it. Seek? Not only that: create. It is face-to-face with something that does not yet exist and that only it can accomplish, then bring into its light.

And I begin asking myself again what it could be, this unknown state which brought with it no logical proof, but only the evidence of its felicity; its reality, and in whose presence the other states of consciousness faded away. I want to try to make it reappear. I return in my thoughts to the moment when I took the first spoonful of tea. I find the same state again, without any new clarity. I ask my mind to make another effort, to bring back once more the sensation that is slipping away. And, so that nothing may interrupt the thrust with which it will try to grasp it again, I clear away every obstacle, every foreign idea, I protect my ears and my attention from the noises in the next room. But feeling my mind grow tired without succeeding, I now compel it to accept the very distraction I was denying it, to think of something else, to recover its strength before a supreme attempt. Then for a second time I create an empty space before it, I confront it again with the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something quiver in me, shift, try to rise, something that seems to have been unanchored at a great depth; I do not know what it is, but it comes up slowly; I feel the resistance and I hear the murmur of the distances traversed.

Undoubtedly what is palpitating thus, deep inside me, must be the image, the visual memory which is attached to this taste and is trying to follow it to me. But it is struggling too far away, too confusedly; I can just barely perceive the neutral glimmer in which the elusive eddying of stirred-up colors is blended; but I cannot distinguish the form, cannot ask it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate for me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable companion, the taste, ask it to tell me what particular circumstance is involved, what period of the past.

Will it reach the clear surface of my consciousness—this memory, this old moment which the attraction of an identical moment has come from so far to invite, to move, to raise up from the deepest part of me? I don't know. Now I no longer feel anything, it has stopped, gone back down perhaps; who knows if it will ever rise up from its darkness again? Ten times I must begin again, lean down toward it. And each time, the laziness that deters us from every difficult task, every work of importance, has counseled me to leave it, to drink my tea and think only about my worries of today, my desires for tomorrow, upon which I may ruminate effortlessly.

And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because that day I did not go out before it was time for Mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime blossom. The sight of the little madeleine had not reminded me of anything before I tasted it; perhaps because I had often seen them since, without eating them, on the shelves of the pastry shops, and their image had therefore left those days of Combray and attached itself to others more recent; perhaps because of these recollections abandoned so long outside my memory, nothing survived, everything had come apart; the forms and the form, too, of the little shell made of cake, so fatly sensual within its severe and pious pleating—had been destroyed, or, still half asleep, had lost the force of expansion that would have allowed them to rejoin my consciousness. But, when nothing subsists of an old past, after the death of people, after the destruction of things, alone, frailer but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, smell and taste still remain for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, upon the ruins of all the rest, bearing without giving way, on their almost impalpable droplet, the immense edifice of memory. And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea that my aunt used to give me (though I did not yet know and had to put off to much later discovering why this memory made me so happy), immediately the old gray house on the street, where her bedroom was, came like a stage set to attach itself to the little wing opening onto the garden that had been built for my parents behind it (that truncated section which was all I had seen before then); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went on errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine. And as in that game enjoyed by the Japanese in which they fill a porcelain bowl with water and steep in it little pieces of paper until then indistinct which, the moment they are immersed, stretch and twist, assume colors and distinctive shapes, become flowers, houses, human figures, firm and recognizable, so now all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water lilies of the Vivonne, and the good people of the village and their little dwellings and the church and all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this which is acquiring form and solidity, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.

## Chapter Twenty-One

Mr. Charlus during the War - his Opinions and Pleasures

These ideas, tending on the one hand to diminish, and on the other to increase, my regret that I had no gift for literature, were entirely absent from my mind during the long years—in which I had in any case completely renounced the project of writing—which I spent far from Paris receiving treatment in a sanatorium, until there came a time, at the beginning of 1916, when it could no longer get medical staff. I then returned to a Paris very different from the city to which, as we shall see presently, I had come back once before in August 1914 for a medical consultation, after which I had withdrawn again to my sanatorium. On one of the first evenings of my second return, in 1916, wanting to hear people talk about the only thing that interested me at the time, the war, I went out after dinner to call on Mme Verdurin, who was, with Mme Bontemps, one of the queens of this wartime Paris which made one think of the Directory. As if by the germination of a tiny quantity of yeast, apparently of spontaneous generation, young women now went about all day with tall cylindrical turbans on their heads, as a contemporary of Mme Tallien's might have done,

and from a sense of patriotic duty wore Egyptian tunics, straight and dark and very “war,” over very short skirts; they wore thonged footwear recalling the buskin as worn by Talma, or else long gaiters recalling those of our dear boys at the front; it was, so they said, because they did not forget that it was their duty to rejoice the eyes of these “boys at the front,” that they still decked themselves of an evening not only in flowing dresses, but in jewellery which suggested the army by its choice of decorative themes, when indeed the actual material from which it was made did not come from, had not been wrought in the army; for instead of Egyptian ornaments recalling the campaign in Egypt, the fashion now was for rings or bracelets made out of fragments of exploded shells or copper bands from 75 millimetre ammunition, and for cigarette-lighters constructed out of two English pennies to which a soldier, in his dugout, had succeeded in giving a patina so beautiful that the profile of Queen Victoria looked as if it had been drawn by the hand of Pisanello; and it was also because they never stopped thinking of the dear boys, so they said, that when one of their own kin fell they scarcely wore mourning for him, on the pretext that “their grief was mingled with pride,” which permitted them to wear a bonnet of white English crêpe (a bonnet with the most charming effect, “authorising every hope” and “inspired by an invincible confidence in final victory”) and to replace the cashmere of former days by satin and chiffon, and even to keep their pearls, “while observing the tact and propriety of which there is no need to remind Frenchwomen.”

The Louvre and all the other museums were closed, and when one saw at the head of an article in a newspaper the words: “A sensational exhibition,” one could be sure that the exhibition in question was not one of paintings but of dresses, of dresses moreover which aimed at reviving “those refined joys of art of which the women of Paris have for too long been deprived.” So it was that fashion and pleasure had returned, fashion, in the absence of the arts, apologising for its survival as the arts had done in 1793, in which year the artists exhibiting in the revolutionary Salon proclaimed that, though “stern Republicans might find it strange that we should occupy ourselves with the arts when Europe united in coalition is besieging the soil of liberty,” they would be wrong. The same sort of thing was said in 1916 by the dressmakers, who, with the self-conscious pride of artists, affirmed that “to create something new, to get away from banality, to assert an individual character, to prepare for victory, to evolve for the post-war generations a new formula of beauty, such was the ambition that tormented them, the chimera that they pursued, as would be apparent to anyone who cared to visit their salons, delightfully installed in the Rue de la ..., where to efface by a note of luminous gaiety the heavy sadness of the hour seems to be the watchword, with the discretion, naturally, that circumstances impose.”

“The sadness of the hour”—it was true—“might prove too strong for feminine energies, were it not that we have so many lofty examples of courage and endurance to contemplate. So, as we think of our warriors dreaming in their trenches of more comfort and more pretty things for the girl they have left behind them, we shall not pause in our ever more strenuous efforts to create dresses that answer to the needs of the moment. The vogue”—and what could be more natural? —“is for the fashion-houses of our English allies, and the rage this year is the barrel-dress, which, with its charming informality, gives us all an amusing little cachet of rare distinction. We may even say that one of the happiest consequences of this sad war will be,” added the delightful chronicler (and one expected: “the return of our lost provinces” or “the reawakening of national sentiment”)—“one of the happiest consequences of this sad war will be that we have achieved some charming results in the realm of fashion, without ill-considered and unseemly luxury, with the simplest materials, that we have created prettiness out of mere nothings. To the dresses of the great designers, reproduced in a number of copies, women prefer just now dresses made at home, which affirm the intelligence, the taste and the personal preferences of the individual.”

As for charity, the thought of all the miseries that had sprung from the invasion, of all the wounded and disabled, meant naturally that it was obliged to develop forms “more ingenious than ever before,” and this meant that the ladies in tall turbans were obliged to spend the latter part of the afternoon at “teas” round a bridge table, discussing the news from the “front,” while their cars waited at the door with a handsome soldier in the driver’s seat who chatted to the footman. It was, moreover, not only the headdresses with their strange cylinders towering above the ladies’ faces that were new. The faces were new themselves. These ladies in new-fangled hats were young women who had come one did not quite know from where and had been the flower of fashion, some for six months, others for two years, others for four. And these differences were of as much importance for them as had been, at the time when I took my first steps in society, for two families like the Guermantes and the La Rochefoucaulds a difference of three or four centuries of proven antiquity. The lady who had known the Guermantes since 1914 looked upon the lady who had been introduced to them in 1916 as an upstart, greeted her with the air of a dowager, quizzed her with her lorgnette, and admitted with a little grimace that no one even knew for certain whether or no she was married. “It is all rather nauseating,” concluded the lady of 1914, who would have liked the cycle of new admissions to have come to a halt after herself. These new ladies, whom the young men found pretty ancient and whom, also, certain elderly men, who had not moved exclusively in the best circles, thought that they recognised as being not so new as all that, did not merely recommend themselves to society by offering it its favourite amusements of political conversation and music in intimate surroundings; part of their appeal was that it was *they* who offered these amenities, for in order that things should appear new even if they are old—and indeed even if they are new—there must in art, as in medicine and in fashion, be new names. (New names indeed there were in certain spheres. For instance, Mme Verdurin had visited Venice during the war, but—like those people who cannot bear sad talk or display of personal feelings—when she said that “it” was “marvellous” she was referring not to Venice, or St Mark’s, or the palaces, all that I had so loved and she thought so unimportant, but to the effect



of the searchlights in the sky, of which searchlights she could give you a detailed account supported by statistics. So from age to age is reborn a certain realism which reacts against what the previous age has admired.)

The Saint-Euverte salon was a faded banner now, and the presence beneath it of the greatest artists, the most influential ministers, would have attracted nobody. But people would run to listen to the secretary of one of these same artists or a subordinate official of one of the ministers holding forth in the houses of the new turbaned ladies whose winged and chattering invasion filled Paris. The ladies of the first Directory had a queen who was young and beautiful and was called Mme Tallien. Those of the second had two, who were old and ugly and were called Mme Verdurin and Mme Bontemps. Who could now hold it against Mme Bontemps that in the Dreyfus Affair her husband had played a role which the *Echo de Paris* had sharply criticised? The whole Chamber having at a certain moment become revisionist, it was inevitably from among former revisionists—and also from among former socialists—that the party of social order, of religious tolerance, of military preparedness, had been obliged to enlist its recruits. Time was when M. Bontemps would have been abominated, because then the antipatriots bore the name of Dreyfusards. But presently this name had been forgotten and replaced by that of “opponent of the law of three years’ military service.” M. Bontemps, far from being its opponent, was one of the sponsors of this law; consequently he was a patriot.

In society (and this social phenomenon is merely a particular case of a much more general psychological law) novelties, whether blameworthy or not, excite horror only so long as they have not been assimilated and enveloped by reassuring elements. It was the same with Dreyfusism as with that marriage between Saint-Loup and the daughter of Odette which had at first produced such an outcry. Now that “everybody one knew” was seen at the parties given by the Saint-Loups, Gilberte might have had the morals of Odette herself but people would have “gone there” just the same and would have thought it quite right that she should disapprove like a dowager of any moral novelties that had not been assimilated. Dreyfusism was now integrated in a scheme of respectable and familiar things. As for asking oneself whether intrinsically it was good or bad, the idea no more entered anybody’s head, now when it was accepted, than in the past when it was condemned. It was no longer *shocking* and that was all that mattered. People hardly remembered that it had once been thought so, just as, when a certain time has elapsed, they no longer know whether a girl’s father was a thief or not. One can always say, if the subject crops up: “No, it’s the brother-in-law, or someone else with the same name, that you’re thinking of. There has never been a breath of scandal about her father.” In the same way, there had undeniably been Dreyfusism and Dreyfusism, and a man who was received by the Duchesse de Montmorency and was helping to pass the three years law could not be bad. And then, as the saying goes, no sin but should find mercy. If Dreyfusism was accorded an amnesty, so, *a fortiori*, were Dreyfusards. In fact, there no longer were Dreyfusards in politics, since at one moment every politician had been one if he wanted to belong to the government, even those who represented the contrary of what at the time of its shocking novelty—the time when Saint-Loup had been getting into bad ways—Dreyfusism had incarnated: anti-patriotism, irreligion, anarchy, etc. So the Dreyfusism of M. Bontemps, invisible and constitutional like that of every other politician, was no more apparent than the bones beneath the skin. No one troubled to remember that he had been a Dreyfusard, for people in society are scatterbrained and forgetful and, besides, all *that* had been a very long time ago, a “time” which these people affected to think longer than it was, for one of the ideas most in vogue was that the pre-war days were separated from the war by something as profound, something of apparently as long a duration; as a geological period, and Brichot himself, that great nationalist, when he alluded to the Dreyfus case now talked of “those prehistoric days.”

(The truth is that this profound change wrought by the war was in inverse ratio to the quality of the minds which it affected, at least above a certain level. At the very bottom of the scale the really stupid people, who lived only for pleasure, did not bother about the fact that there was a war. But, at the other end of the scale too, people who have made for themselves a circumambient interior life usually pay small regard to the importance of events. What profoundly modifies their system of thought is much more likely to be something that in itself seems to have no importance, something that reverses the order of time for them by making them contemporaneous with another epoch in their lives. And that this is so we may see in practice from the beauty of the writing which is inspired in this particular way: the song of a bird in the park at Montboissier, or a breeze laden with the scent of mignonette, are obviously phenomena of less consequence than the great events of the Revolution and the Empire; but they inspired Chateaubriand to write pages of infinitely greater value in his *Mémoires d’Outre-tombe*.) The words Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard no longer had any meaning then. But the very people who said this would have been dumbfounded and horrified if one had told them that probably in a few centuries, or perhaps even sooner, the word Boche would have only the curiosity value of such words as *sans-culotte*, *chouan* and *bleu*.

Things had altered so little that people still found it quite natural to use the old catchwords “right-minded” and “not right-minded.” And yet change of a kind there was, for, just as former partisans of the Commune had at a later date been against a retrial, so now the most extreme Dreyfusards of the old days wanted to shoot people right and left, and the generals supported them in this policy just as they had supported Galliffet’s opponents at the time of the Affair.

M. Bontemps did not want there to be any question of peace until Germany had been broken up into tiny states as it had been in the Middle Ages, the fall of the House of Hohenzollern pronounced, and the Kaiser stood up against a wall and shot. In a word he was what Brichot called a *jusqu’au-boutiste*, and this was the highest certificate of patriotism that could be conferred upon him. Doubtless for the first three days Mme Bontemps had been a little bewildered in the midst of the people who had asked Mme Verdurin to introduce

them to her, and it was in a tone of some slight asperity that Mme Verdurin had replied: "No, my dear, the Comte," when Mme Bontemps said to her, "That was the Duc d'Haussonville you introduced to me just now, wasn't it?", either out of total ignorance and failure to associate the name Haussonville with any title whatsoever or, on the contrary, from excess of information and an association of ideas with the "Party of the Dukes," to which she had been told that in the Academy M. d'Haussonville belonged. But by the fourth day she had begun to be firmly installed in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Sometimes there could still be seen around her the nameless fragments of a world that one did not know, which, in those who knew the egg from which Mme Bontemps had emerged, evoked no more surprise than the debris of shell around a chick. But after a fortnight she had shaken them off, and before the end of the first month, when she said: "I am going to the Lévis," everybody understood, without her having to explain herself, that it was the Lévis-Mirepoix she meant, and not a duchess would have gone to bed without having inquired of Mme Bontemps or Mme Verdurin, at least by telephone, what there had been in the evening communiqué, what had been deliberately left out, how the Greek situation was developing, what offensive was being prepared, in a word all the news that the public would know only on the following day or later but of which the two ladies staged the equivalent of a dressmaker's private view. In conversation, when she was announcing news, Mme Verdurin would say "we" when she meant France. "Now listen: we demand of the King of Greece that he should withdraw from the Peloponnese, etc.; we send him, etc." And in all her stories there was constant mention of GHQ ("I telephoned to GHQ"), an abbreviation which gave her, as it fell from her lips, the pleasure that in former days women who did not know the Prince d'Agrigente had got from asking with a smile, when his name was mentioned, so as to show that they were in the swim: "Grigri?", a pleasure which in untroubled times is confined to the fashionable world but in great crises comes within the reach of the lower classes. Our butler, for instance, if the King of Greece was mentioned, was able, thanks to the newspapers, to say like the Kaiser Wilhelm: "Tino?", whereas hitherto his familiarity with kings had been of his own invention and of a more plebeian kind, as when at one time he had been in the habit of referring to the King of Spain as "Fonfonse." Another noticeable change was that, as more and more smart people made advances to Mme Verdurin, inversely the number of those whom she dubbed "bores" diminished. By a sort of magical transformation, every bore who had come to call on her and asked to be invited to her parties immediately became a charming and intelligent person. In short, at the end of a year, the number of bores had dwindled to such an extent that "the fear and awfulness of being bored," which had filled so large a place in the conversation and played so great a role in the life of Mme Verdurin, had almost entirely disappeared. In her latter days, it seemed, this awfulness of being bored (which anyhow, as she had formerly assured people, she had not known in her early youth) afflicted her less, just as certain kinds of migraine, certain nervous asthmatic conditions lose their force as one grows older. And the terror of being bored would doubtless, for want of bores, have entirely abandoned Mme Verdurin had she not, in some slight degree, replaced the vanishing bores by others recruited from the ranks of the former faithful.

Be that as it may, to conclude the subject of the duchesses who now frequented Mme Verdurin's house, they came, though they did not realise this, in search of exactly the same thing as the Dreyfusards had sought there in the old days, that is to say a social pleasure so compounded that their enjoyment of it at the same time assuaged their political curiosities and satisfied their need to discuss with others like themselves the incidents about which they had read in the newspapers. Mme Verdurin said: "Come at 5 o'clock to talk about the war" as she would have said in the past: "Come and talk about the Affair," or at an intermediate period: "Come to hear Morel."

Morel, incidentally, ought not to have been there, for the reason that he had not, as was supposed, been invalided out of the army. He had simply failed to rejoin his regiment and was a deserter, but nobody knew this.

One of the stars of the salon was "I'm a wash-out," who in spite of his sportive tastes had got himself exempted and whom I now thought of mainly as the author of remarkable works of art which were constantly in my thoughts. To such an extent had he assumed for me this new character that it was only by chance, when from time to time I established a transverse current linking two series of memories, that it crossed my mind that he was also the person who had brought about the departure of Albertine from my house. And even this transverse current ended, as far as these vestigial memories of Albertine were concerned, in a channel which petered out completely at a distance of several years from the present. For I never thought of her now. That was a channel of memories, a route, which I had quite ceased to take. Whereas the works of "I'm a wash-out" were recent and this route of memory was one perpetually visited and used by my mind.

I ought to say that the acquaintance of Andrée's husband was neither very easy nor very agreeable to make, and that any attempt to make friends with him was destined to numerous disappointments. He was, in fact, at this time already seriously ill and spared himself all fatigues except those which he thought likely to give him pleasure. Now in this category he included only meetings with people whom he did not yet know, whom his ardent imagination represented to him doubtless as being possibly different from others. When it came to people he was already acquainted with, he knew too well what they were like and what they would be like again and they no longer seemed to him worth the trouble of a fatigue that would be dangerous and might even be fatal to him. In short, he was a very poor friend. And perhaps in his taste for new people there was still something to be found of the frenzied daring which he had shown in the old days at Balbec, in sport, in gambling, in excesses of eating and drinking.

Whenever Andrée and I were there together Mme Verdurin tried to introduce me to her, being unable to accept the fact that we were already acquainted. Andrée did not often come with her husband, but she at least

was an admirable and sincere friend to me. Faithful to the aesthetic ideas of her husband, who had reacted against the Russian Ballet, she was always saying of the Marquis de Polignac: "He's had his house decorated by Bakst. How can one sleep with all that round one? I would rather have Dubuffe." The Verdurins, too, swept along by the fatal progress of aestheticism which ends by eating its own tail, said now that they could not endure *art nouveau* (besides, it came from Munich) or white rooms; they cared only for old French furniture in a sombre colour-scheme.

I saw a lot of Andrée at this time. We did not know what to say to each other, and once there came into my mind that name, Juliette, which had risen from the depths of Albertine's memory like a mysterious flower. Mysterious then, but now it no longer stirred any feeling in me: many subjects that were indifferent to me I discussed but on this subject I was silent; not that it meant less to me than others, but a sort of supersaturation takes place when one has thought about a thing too much. Perhaps the epoch in my life when I saw so many mysteries in that name was the true one. But as these epochs will not last for ever, it is a mistake for a man to sacrifice his health and his fortune to the elucidation of mysteries which one day will no longer interest him.

Now that Mme Verdurin could get anyone she wanted to come to her house, people were very surprised to see her make indirect advances to someone she had completely lost sight of, Odette, the general opinion being that Odette could add nothing to the brilliant set that the little group had become. But a prolonged separation, which has the effect of appeasing resentments, in some cases also reawakens feelings of friendship. And then too the phenomenon of the dying man who pronounces none but familiar names from the past, or the old man who finds pleasure in his childhood memories, has its social equivalent. To succeed in the project of making Odette return to her, Mme Verdurin employed, naturally, not the "ultras" but the less faithful members of the group who had kept a foot in each of the two drawing-rooms. "I can't think why we no longer see her here," she said to them. "She may have fallen out with me, I haven't with her. After all, what harm have I done her? It was in my house that she met both her husbands. If she wants to come back, let her know that the door is open." These words, which would have involved a sacrifice of pride for the Mistress if they had not been dictated to her by her imagination, were passed on, but without success. Mme Verdurin waited in vain for Odette, until events which will come to our notice later brought about, for entirely different reasons, what the intercession of the "deserters," for all their zeal, had been unable to achieve. So rarely do we meet either with easy success or with irreversible defeat.

To these parties Mme Verdurin used to invite a few ladies of rather recent origin, known for their good works, who at first came magnificently dressed, with great pearl necklaces that Odette, who had a necklace just as beautiful the display of which she had herself formerly overdone, regarded, now that she was "dressed for war" in imitation of the ladies of the Faubourg, with some severity. But women know how to adapt themselves. After three or four appearances they realised that the clothes which they had thought smart were precisely the ones proscribed by people who were smart; they laid aside their gold dresses and resigned themselves to simplicity.

"It is too bad," Mme Verdurin would say. "I must telephone to Bontemps to get things put right for tomorrow, they have *blue-pencilled* the whole of the end of Norpois's article and just because he hinted that Percin had been *bowler-hatted*." For the idiocy of the times caused people to pride themselves on using the expressions of the times; in this way they hoped to show that they were in the fashion, like the middle-class woman who says, when MM. de Bréauté or d'Agrigente or de Charlus is mentioned: "You mean Babal de Bréauté? Grigri? Mémé de Charlus?" As a matter of fact duchesses do this too, and duchesses felt the same pleasure in saying "bowler-hatted," for it is in their names that these ladies—for the commoner with a poetical imagination—are exceptional; in their language and their ideas they conform to the intellectual category to which they belong and to which also belong a vast number of middle-class people. The classes of the intellect take no account of birth.

All this telephoning that Mme Verdurin did was not, however, without its disadvantages. Although we have forgotten to mention the fact, the Verdurin "salon," if it continued to exist in spirit and in all essentials, had been temporarily transferred to one of the largest hotels in Paris, the lack of coal and light making it too difficult for the Verdurins to entertain in the former mansion of the Venetian ambassadors, which was extremely damp. But the new drawing-room was not altogether disagreeable. Just as, in Venice, the restrictions that water imposes upon a site dictate the shape of a palace, and in Paris a scrap of garden is more ravishing than a whole park in the country, so the narrow dining-room that Mme Verdurin had in the hotel, with the dazzling white walls of its irregular quadrilateral, made a sort of screen upon which figured every Wednesday, indeed almost every day of the week, all the most interesting men of every kind, all the smartest women in Paris, only too delighted to avail themselves of the luxury of the Verdurins, which went on increasing, with their wealth, at a time when other very rich people were economising, because part of their income was frozen. In their altered form the receptions had not ceased to enchant Brichot, who, as the circle of the Verdurins' acquaintance grew wider and wider, found in their parties ever new pleasures, packed tight together in a tiny space like surprises in a Christmas stocking. On some days the guests were so numerous that the dining-room of the private suite was too small and the dinner was given in the huge dining-room downstairs, where the faithful, if they feigned a hypocritical regret for the intimacy of upstairs, were at heart delighted—while keeping themselves to themselves, as in the old days on the little train—to be a spectacle and an object of envy for neighbouring tables. Doubtless, under normal peacetime conditions, a "society" note surreptitiously sent to *Le Figaro* or *Le Gaulois* would have informed a larger public than could be contained in the dining-room of the Majestic that Brichot had dined with the Duchesse de Duras. But since the war, the

social reporters having suppressed this type of news (they made up for it, however, in funerals, "mentions in despatches" and Franco-American banquets), publicity could only be attained through a more embryonic, a more restricted medium, worthy of primitive ages and anterior to the discovery of Gutenberg: one had actually to be seen at Mme Verdurin's table. After dinner the guests went upstairs to the Mistress's reception rooms, and then the telephoning began. But many large hotels were at this period peopled with spies, who duly noted the news announced over the telephone by Bontemps with an indiscretion which might have had serious consequences but for a fortunate lack of accuracy in his reports, which invariably were contradicted by events.

Before the hour at which the afternoon tea-parties came to an end, at the close of the day, in the still light sky one saw, far off, little brown dots which one might have taken, in the blue evening, for midges or birds. In the same way, when one sees a mountain at a great distance one can imagine it to be a cloud. But because one knows that this "cloud" is huge, solid and resistant one's emotions are stirred. And I too was moved by the thought that the brown dot in the summer sky was neither midge nor bird but an aeroplane with a crew of men keeping guard over Paris. (The memory of the aeroplanes which I had seen with Albertine on our last drive, near Versailles, played no part in this emotion, for the memory of that drive had become indifferent to me.)

When the time came for dinner, the restaurants were full; and if, passing in the street, I saw a wretched soldier on leave, escaped for six days from the constant danger of death and about to return to the trenches, halt his gaze for a moment upon the illuminated windows, I suffered as I had in the hotel at Balbec when fishermen used to watch us at dinner, but I suffered more now because I knew that the misery of the soldier is greater than that of the poor, since it combines in itself all miseries, and more touching still because more resigned, more noble, and because it was with a philosophical shake of the head, without hatred, that on the eve of setting out again for the war the soldier would say to himself, as he saw the shirkers jostling one another in their efforts to secure a table: "You'd never know there was a war on here." Then at half past nine, before anyone had had time to finish dinner, the lights were all suddenly turned out because of the police regulations, so that at nine thirty-five the second jostling of shirkers snatching their overcoats from the page-boys of the restaurant where I had dined with Saint-Loup one evening when he was on leave took place in a mysterious half-darkness which might have been that of a room in which slides are being shown on a magic lantern, or of the auditorium, during the exhibition of a film, of one of those cinemas towards which the men and women who had been dining would presently rush.

But at any later hour for those who, like myself on the evening which I am going to describe, had had dinner at home and were going out to see friends, Paris, at least in certain quarters, was even blacker than had been the Combray of my childhood; the visits that people paid one another were like the visits of country neighbours. Ah! if Albertine had been alive, how delightful it would have been, on the evenings when I had dined out, to arrange to meet her out of doors, under the arcades! At first I should have seen nothing, I should have had the pang of thinking that she had failed to turn up, when suddenly I should have seen one of her beloved grey dresses emerge from the black wall, then her smiling eyes which had already seen me, and we could have walked along with our arms round each other without any fear of being recognised or disturbed, and then at length gone home. But alas, I was alone and I felt as if I was setting out to pay a neighbourly visit in the country, like those that Swann used to pay us after dinner, without meeting more people on his way through the darkness of Tansonville, along the little tow-path and as far as the Rue du Saint-Esprit, than I now met in the streets, transformed into winding rustic lanes, between Sainte-Clotilde and the Rue Bonaparte. Or again—since the effect of those fragments of landscape which travel in obedience to the moods of the weather was no longer nullified by surroundings which had become invisible—on evenings when the wind was chasing an icy shower of rain I had, now, much more strongly the impression of being on the shore of that raging sea of which I had once so longingly dreamed than I had had when I was actually at Balbec; and other natural features also, which had not existed in Paris hitherto, helped to create the illusion that one had just got out of the train and arrived to spend a holiday in the depth of the country: for example the contrast of light and shadow on the ground that one had all round one on evenings when the moon was shining. There were effects of moonlight normally unknown in towns, sometimes in the middle of winter even, when the rays of the moon lay outpoured upon the snow on the Boulevard Haussmann, untouched now by the broom of any sweeper, as they would have lain upon a glacier in the Alps. Against this snow of bluish gold the silhouettes of the trees were outlined clear and pure, with the delicacy that they have in certain Japanese paintings or in certain backgrounds of Raphael; and on the ground at the foot of the tree itself there was stretched out its shadow as often one sees trees' shadows in the country as sunset, when the light inundates and polishes to the smoothness of a mirror some meadow in which they are planted at regular intervals. But by a refinement of exquisite delicacy the meadow upon which were displayed these shadows of trees, light as souls, was a meadow of paradise, not green but of a whiteness so dazzling because of the moonlight shining upon the jade-like snow that it might have been a meadow woven entirely from petals of flowering pear-trees. And in the squares the divinities of the public fountains, holding a jet of ice in their hand, looked like statues wrought in two different materials by a sculptor who had decided to marry pure bronze to pure crystal. On these exceptional days all the houses were black. But in the spring, on the contrary, here and there, defying the regulations of the police, a private house, or simply one floor of a house, or even simply one room of one floor, had failed to close its shutters and appeared, mysteriously supported by dark impalpable shadows, to be

no more than a projection of light, an apparition without substance. And the woman whom, if one raised one's eyes high above the street, one could distinguish in this golden penumbra, assumed, in this night in which one was oneself lost and in which she too seemed to be hidden away, the mysterious and veiled charm of an oriental vision. Then one passed on and nothing more interrupted the rustic tramp, wholesome and monotonous, of one's feet through the darkness.

I reflected that it was a long time since I had seen any of the personages who have been mentioned in this work. In 1914, it was true, during the two months that I had spent in Paris, I had caught a glimpse of M. de Charlus and seen something of Bloch and Saint-Loup, the latter only twice. The second occasion was certainly that on which he had been most himself; he had quite effaced that disagreeable impression of insincerity which he had made on me during the stay at Tansonville that I have described, and I had once more recognised in him all the fine qualities of his earlier days. On the earlier occasion, which was less than a week after the declaration of war, while Bloch made a display of the most chauvinistic sentiments, Saint-Loup, once Bloch had left us, was unashamedly cynical about the fact that he himself had not joined his regiment, and I had been almost shocked at the violence of his tone.

Saint-Loup had just come back from Balbec. I learnt later, indirectly, that he had made unsuccessful advances to the manager of the restaurant. The latter owed his position to the money he had inherited from M. Nissim Bernard. He was, in fact, none other than the young waiter whom in the past Bloch's uncle had "protected." But wealth in his case had brought with it virtue and it was in vain that Saint-Loup had attempted to seduce him. Thus, by a process of compensation, while virtuous young men abandon themselves in their later years to the passions of which they have at length become conscious, promiscuous youths turn into men of principle from whom any Charlus who turns up too late on the strength of old stories will get an unpleasant rebuff. It is all a question of chronology.

"No," he exclaimed, gaily and with force, "if a man doesn't fight, whatever reason he may give, it is because he doesn't want to be killed, because he is *afraid*." And with the same affirming gesture, even more energetic than that which he had used to underline the fear of others, he added: "And that goes for me too. If I haven't rejoined my regiment, it is quite simply from *fear*—so there!" I had already observed in more than one person that the affectation of praiseworthy sentiments is not the only method of covering bad ones; another less obvious method is to make a display of these bad sentiments, so that at least one does not appear to be unaware of them. Moreover, in Saint-Loup this tendency was strengthened by his habit, when he had committed an indiscretion or made a blunder for which he expected to be blamed, of proclaiming it aloud and saying that it had been done on purpose. A habit which, I believe, must have come to him from some instructor at the Ecole de Guerre whom he had known well and greatly admired. I had, therefore, no hesitation in interpreting this outburst as the verbal confirmation of a sentiment which, since it had dictated the conduct of Saint-Loup and his non-participation in the war now beginning, he preferred to proclaim aloud.

"Have you heard the rumour," he asked, as he left me, "that my aunt Oriane is going to get a divorce? Personally I know nothing about it whatsoever. There have been rumours of the kind from time to time, and I have so often heard that it's imminent that I shall wait until it happens before I believe it. I must admit, it would be very understandable. My uncle is a charming man, not only socially but as a friend and in the family. He even, in a way, has much more heart than my aunt, who is a saint but makes him terribly aware of it. Only he is a dreadful husband, who has never ceased to be unfaithful to his wife, to insult her, to bully her, to keep her short of money. It would be so natural for her to leave him that that is a reason for the story to be true, but also a reason why it may not be true—the idea occurs to people and inevitably they talk about it. And then she has put up with him for so long! Of course I know quite well that there are lots of things which are reported falsely, and then denied, but later do become true." This put it into my head to ask him whether there had ever been any question of his marrying Mlle de Guermantes. He seemed amazed and assured me that there had not, that it was merely one of those rumours of the fashionable world which arise from time to time one does not know why and vanish in the same way, without their falsity causing those who believed them to be any more cautious when a new rumour arises, of an engagement or a divorce, or a political rumour, in giving credence to it and spreading it.

Forty-eight hours had not elapsed before certain facts which I learnt proved to me that I had been absolutely wrong in my interpretation of Robert's words: "If a man is not at the front, it is because he is afraid." Saint-Loup had said this in order to shine in conversation, to appear in the role of an original psychologist, so long as he was not sure that his own enlistment would be accepted. But meanwhile he was moving heaven and earth to bring this about and showing himself in this less "original," in the meaning that he thought it necessary to give to the word, but more profoundly a Frenchman of Saint-André-des-Champs, more in conformity with all that at this moment was best in the Frenchmen of Saint-André-des-Champs, lords, citizens and serfs—feudally respectful serfs and serfs in revolt, those two divisions, both equally French, of the same family, the Françoise branch and the Morel branch, from which two arrows were now converging upon a common target, the frontier. Bloch had been enchanted to hear a confession of cowardice from a nationalist (who was, as a matter of fact, so little of a nationalist) and when Saint-Loup had asked him whether he himself would soon be off, had assumed a high-priestly air and replied: "Short-sighted."

But Bloch had completely changed his mind about the war a few days later, when he came to see me in a state of frenzy. Although short-sighted, he had been passed fit for service. I was accompanying him home

when we met Saint-Loup, who was on his way to an interview at the Ministry of War with a colonel to whom he was to be introduced by a retired officer—"M. de Cambremer," he said to me, and added: "Oh! but of course, he is an old acquaintance of yours. You know Cancan as well as I do." I replied that I did indeed know him and his wife too, and that I didn't have a particularly high opinion of them. But I was so much in the habit, ever since I had first met them, of considering the wife as in her way a remarkable woman, who knew her Schopenhauer and at least had access to an intellectual sphere which was closed to her boorish husband, that I was at first astonished to hear Saint-Loup reply: "His wife is idiotic, I won't try to defend her. But *he* is an excellent man—he was talented once and is still a very pleasant person." By the "idiocy" of the wife, Saint-Loup meant no doubt her desperate desire to move in grand society, which is the thing that grand society judges most severely; by the good qualities of the husband, he meant perhaps something of the qualities that were recognised in him by his mother when she declared that he was the best of the family. He, at least, did not worry about duchesses, though this it must be admitted is a form of "intelligence" which differs as much from the intelligence that characterises thinkers as the "intelligence" admired by the public in this or that rich man who has "been clever enough to make a fortune." However, Saint-Loup's words did not displease me, because they reminded me that pretentiousness is near akin to stupidity and that simplicity has a flavour which though it lies beneath the surface is agreeable. I had, it is true, had no opportunity to savour that of M. de Cambremer. But this was merely an instance of the law that a person is many different persons according to who is judging him, quite apart from the different standards by which different people judge. In the case of M. de Cambremer, I had known only the rind. His flavour, therefore, though avouched to me by others, was to me personally unknown.

Bloch left us outside his house, overflowing with bitterness against Saint-Loup and saying to his face that men of his sort, privileged dandies who strutted about at headquarters, ran no risks and that he, as a plain private soldier, had no wish to "get a hole in his skin just because of William." "It seems that the Emperor William is seriously ill," replied Saint-Loup. Bloch, like everybody connected with the Stock Exchange, was more than usually credulous of sensational reports. "Yes," he said, "there is even a strong rumour that he is dead." In Stock Exchange circles every monarch who is ill, whether it be Edward VII or William II, is dead, every town which is about to be besieged has already been captured. "It is only being kept secret," added Bloch, "in order not to damage the morale of the Boches. But he died the night before last. My father has it from an absolutely first-class source." Absolutely first-class sources were the only ones to which M. Bloch senior paid any attention, and it was always with such a source that thanks to his "important connexions" he was fortunate enough to be in touch, when he heard before anyone else that Foreign Bonds were going to go up or that De Beers were going to fall. However, if just at that moment De Beers had a rise or Foreign Bonds "came on offer," if the market in the former was "firm and active" and that in the latter "hesitant and weak, with a note of caution," the first-class source did not, for that reason, cease to be a first-class source. So Bloch informed us of the death of the Kaiser with an air of mystery and self-importance, but also of fury. He was exasperated beyond measure at hearing Robert say: "the Emperor William." I believe that under the blade of the guillotine Saint-Loup and M. de Guermantes could not have spoken otherwise. Two men of "society," surviving alone on a desert island where they would have nobody to impress by a display of good manners, would recognise each other by these little signs of breeding, just as two Latinists in the same circumstances would continue to quote Virgil correctly. Saint-Loup, even under torture at the hands of the Germans, could never have used any other expression than "the Emperor William." And this good breeding, whatever else one may think of it, is a symptom of formidable mental shackles. The man who cannot throw them off can never be more than a man of the world. However, his elegant mediocrity—particularly when it is allied, as is often the case, with hidden generosity and unexpressed heroism—is a delightful quality in comparison with the vulgarity of Bloch, at once coward and braggart, who started now to scream at Saint-Loup: "Can't you simply say William? The trouble is you've got the wind up. Even in Paris you crawl on your belly before him! Pooh! we're going to have some fine soldiers at the frontier, they'll lick the boots of the Boches. You and your friends in fancy uniforms, you're fit to parade in a tournament and that's about all."

"Poor Bloch is absolutely determined that I am to do nothing but strut about on parade," said Saint-Loup to me with a smile, when we had left our friend. And I sensed that this was not at all what Robert wished to do, although at the time I did not realise what his intentions were as clearly as I did later when, as the cavalry remained inactive, he got leave to serve as an officer in the infantry and then in the light infantry, or when, later still, there came the sequel which the reader will learn in due course. But Robert's patriotism was something that Bloch was unaware of simply because Robert chose not to display it. If Bloch had treated us to a viciously anti-militarist profession of faith once he had been passed as "fit," he had previously made the most chauvinistic statements when he thought that he would be discharged on the grounds of short sight. But Saint-Loup would have been incapable of making these statements; in the first place from that sort of moral delicacy which prevents people from expressing sentiments that lie too deep within them and that seem to them quite natural. My mother, in the past, would not only not have hesitated for a second to die for my grandmother, but would have suffered horribly if anyone had prevented her from doing so. Nevertheless, I cannot retrospectively imagine on her lips any such phrase as "I would give my life for my mother." And the same reticence, in his love of France, was displayed by Robert, who at this moment seemed to me much more Saint-Loup (in so far as I could form a picture of his father) than Guermantes. And then Robert would also have been saved from expressing the chauvinistic sentiments of Bloch by the fact that his intelligence was in itself to some extent a moral quality. Among intelligent and genuinely serious workers there is a certain aversion for those who make literature out of the subject they are engaged on, those who use it for self-

display. Robert and I had not been at the Lycée or at the Sorbonne together, but we had attended, independently, certain courses of lectures by the same teachers, and I remember the smile he had for the ones who—as happens sometimes when a man is giving a remarkable series of lectures—tried to pass themselves off as geniuses by giving their theories an ambitious name. We only had to mention them for Robert to burst out laughing. Our personal and instinctive preference was, naturally, not for the Cottards or the Brichots, but we had nevertheless a certain respect for any man with a really thorough knowledge of Greek or medicine who did not for that reason think himself entitled to behave as a charlatan. I have said that, if in the past all Mamma's actions had as their basis the sentiment that she would have given her life for her mother, she had yet never formulated this sentiment to herself, and that in any case it would have seemed to her not merely unnecessary and ridiculous but shocking and shameful to express it to others; in the same way it was impossible for me to imagine on the lips of Saint-Loup—talking to me about his equipment, the things he had to do in Paris, our chances of victory, the weakness of the Russian army, how England would act—it is impossible for me to imagine on his lips even the most eloquent phrase that even the most deservedly popular minister might have addressed to a wildly cheering Chamber of Deputies. I cannot, however, say that in this negativeness which checked him from expressing the noble sentiments that he felt, he was not to some extent influenced by the "Guermentes spirit," of which we have seen so many similar instances in Swann. For, if I found him more Saint-Loup than anything else, he was, nevertheless, also Guermentes, and consequently, among the numerous motives which animated his courage, there were some which did not exist for his friends of Doncières, those young men enamoured of their profession with whom I had dined night after night and of whom so many went to their deaths at the battle of the Marne or elsewhere, leading their men into action.

As for the young socialists who were at Doncières when I was there but whom I did not get to know because they did not belong to the same set as Saint-Loup, they could see now for themselves that the officers of that set were by no means "nobs," with the implications of haughty pride and base self-indulgence which the "plebs," the ex-ranker officers, the freemasons attached to that word. And conversely, this same patriotism was found by the officers of aristocratic birth to exist in full measure among the socialists whom I had heard them accuse, while I was at Doncières at the height of the Dreyfus case, of being "men without a country." The patriotism of the military caste, as sincere and profound as any other, had assumed a fixed form which the members of that caste regarded as sacrosanct and which they were infuriated to see heaped with "opprobrium," but the radical-socialists, who were independent and to some extent unconscious patriots without any fixed patriotic religion, had failed to perceive the profound and living reality that lay behind what they thought were empty and malignant formulas.

No doubt, like his friends, Saint-Loup had formed the habit of inwardly cultivating, as the truest part of himself, the search for and the elaboration of the best possible manoeuvres which would lead to the greatest strategic and tactical successes, so that, for him as for them, the life of the body was something relatively unimportant which could easily be sacrificed to this inner part of the self, the real vital core within them, around which their personal existence was of value only as a protective outer skin. But in Saint-Loup's courage there were also more individual elements, and amongst these it would have been easy to recognise the generosity which in its early days had constituted the charm of our friendship, and also the hereditary vice which had later awoken from dormancy in him and which, at the particular intellectual level which he had not been able to transcend, caused him not only to admire courage but to exaggerate his horror of effeminacy into a sort of intoxication at any contact with virility. He derived, chastely no doubt, from spending days and nights in the open with Senegalese soldiers who might at any moment be called upon to sacrifice their lives, a cerebral gratification of desire into which there entered a vigorous contempt for "little scented gentlemen" and which, however contrary it might seem, was not so very different from that which he had obtained from the cocaine in which he had indulged excessively at Tansonville and of which heroism—one drug taking the place of another—was now curing him. And another essential part of his courage was that double habit of courtesy which, on the one hand, caused him to bestow praise on others but where he himself was concerned made him content to do what had to be done and say nothing about it—the opposite of a Bloch, who had said to him just now "You—of course you'd funk it," and yet was doing nothing himself—and on the other hand impelled him to hold as of no value the things that he himself possessed, his fortune, his rank, and even his life, so that he was ready to give them away: in a word, the true nobility of his nature.

"Are we in for a long war?" I said to Saint-Loup. "No, I believe it will be very short," he replied. But here, as always, his arguments were bookish. "Bearing in mind the prophecies of Moltke, re-read," he said to me, as if I had already read it, "the decree of the 28th October, 1913, about the command of large formations; you will see that the replacement of peacetime reserves has not been organised or even foreseen, a thing which the authorities could not have failed to do if the war were likely to be a long one." It seemed to me that the decree in question could be interpreted not as a proof that the war would be short, but as a failure on the part of its authors to foresee that it would be long, and what kind of war it would be, the truth being that they suspected neither the appalling wastage of material of every kind that would take place in a war of stable fronts nor the interdependence of different theatres of operations.

Outside the limits of homosexuality, among the men who are most opposed by nature to homosexuality, there exists a certain conventional idea of virility, which the homosexual finding at his disposal proceeds, unless he is a man of unusual intelligence, to distort. This ideal—to be seen in certain professional soldiers, certain diplomats—can be singularly exasperating. In its crudest form it is simply the gruffness of the man with the heart of gold who is determined not to show his emotions, the man who at the moment of parting from a friend who may very possibly be killed has a secret desire to weep, which no one suspects because he

conceals it beneath a mounting anger which culminates, at the actual moment of farewell, in a sort of explosion: "Well, now, damn it! Shake hands with me, you old ruffian, and take this purse, it's no use to me, don't be an idiot." The diplomat, the officer, the man who believes that nothing counts except a great task in the service of the nation but who was fond nevertheless of the "poor boy" in his legation or his battalion who has died from a fever or a bullet exhibits the same taste for virility in a form that is less clumsy, and more sophisticated, but at bottom just as odious. He does not want to mourn for the "poor boy," he knows that soon he and everybody else will forget him, just as a kind-hearted surgeon soon forgets though, for a whole evening after some little girl has died in an epidemic, he feels a grief which he does not express. Should the diplomat be a writer and describe this death, he will not say that he felt grief. No—first from "manly reticence," secondly from that skilled artistry which arouses emotion by dissembling it. With one of his colleagues he will watch by the side of the dying man. Not for one second will they say that they feel grief. They will talk of the affairs of the legation or the battalion and their remarks may be even more terse than usual: "B. said to me: 'Don't forget we have the general's inspection tomorrow. See to it that your men are well turned out.' Habitually so gentle, he spoke in a sharper tone than usual. I noticed that he avoided looking at me, I too felt myself to be overwrought." And the reader understands that this "sharp tone" is simply grief showing itself in men who do not want to appear to feel grief, an attitude which might be ridiculous and nothing more but is in fact also wretched and ugly, because it is the manner of feeling grief of those who think that grief does not matter, that there are more serious things in life than being parted from one's friends, etc., so that when someone dies they give the same impression of falsehood, of nothingness, as on New Year's Day the gentleman who hands you a present of marrons glacés and just manages to say with a titter: "With the compliments of the season!"

To conclude the narrative of the officer or the diplomat watching at the deathbed, his head covered because the wounded or sick man has been carried out of doors, the moment comes when all is over. " 'I must go back and get my kit cleaned,' I thought. But I do not know why, at the moment when the doctor let go the pulse, simultaneously B. and I, without any sign passing between us—the sun was beating vertically down, perhaps we were hot standing beside the bed—removed our caps." And the reader knows that it was not because of the heat of the sun but from emotion in the presence of the majesty of death that the two virile men, on whose lips the words grief and affection were almost unknown, now bared their heads.

In homosexuals like Saint-Loup the ideal of virility is not the same, but it is just as conventional and just as false. The falsehood consists for them in the fact that they do not want to admit to themselves that physical desire lies at the root of the sentiments to which they ascribe another origin. M. de Charlus had detested effeminacy. Saint-Loup admired the courage of young men, the intoxication of cavalry charges, the intellectual and moral nobility of friendships between man and man, entirely pure friendships, in which each is prepared to sacrifice his life for the other. War, which turns capital cities, where only women remain, into an abomination for homosexuals, is at the same time a story of passionate adventure for homosexuals if they are intelligent enough to concoct dream figures, and not intelligent enough to see through them, to recognise their origin, to pass judgment on themselves. So that while some young men were enlisting simply in order to join in the latest sport—in the spirit in which one year everybody plays diabolo—for Saint-Loup, on the other hand, war was the very ideal which he imagined himself to be pursuing in his desires (which were in fact much more concrete but were clouded by ideology), an ideal which he could serve in common with those whom he preferred to all others, in a purely masculine order of chivalry, far from women, where he would be able to risk his life to save his orderly and die inspiring a fanatical love in his men. And thus, though there were many elements in his courage, the fact that he was a great nobleman was one of them, and another, in an unrecognisable and idealised form, was M. de Charlus's dogma that it was of the essence of a man to have nothing effeminate about him. But just as in philosophy and in art ideas acquire their value only from the manner in which they are developed, and two analogous ones may differ greatly according to whether they have been expounded by Xenophon or by Plato, so, while I recognise how much, in his behaviour, the one has in common with the other, I admire Saint-Loup, for asking to be sent to the point of greatest danger, infinitely more than I do M. de Charlus for refusing to wear brightly coloured cravats.

I spoke to Saint-Loup about my friend the manager of the Grand Hotel at Balbec, who, it seems, had alleged that at the beginning of the war there had been in certain French regiments defections, which he called "defectuosities," and had accused what he called the "Prussian militariat" of having provoked them; he had even, at one moment, believed in a simultaneous landing by the Japanese, the Germans and the Cossacks at Rivebelle as threatening Balbec, and had said that the only thing to do was to "decramp." He also thought that the departure of the government and the ministries for Bordeaux was a little precipitate and declared that they were wrong to "de-cramp" so soon. This German-hater would say with a laugh of his brother: "He is in the trenches, twenty-five yards away from the Boches," until the authorities, having discovered that he was a "Boche" himself, put him in a concentration camp. "Talking of Balbec, do you remember the lift-boy who used to be in the hotel?" said Saint-Loup as he left me, in a tone suggesting that he did not quite know who the lift-boy was and was counting on me for enlightenment. "He is joining up and has written to ask me to get him into the flying corps." No doubt the young man was tired of going up in the captive cage of the lift, and the heights of the staircase of the Grand Hotel no longer sufficed him. He was going to "get his stripes" otherwise than by becoming a hall-porter, for our destiny is not always what we had supposed. "I shall certainly support his application," said Saint-Loup. "I was saying to Gilberte only this morning, we shall never have enough aeroplanes. It is aeroplanes that will enable us to see what the enemy is preparing, and aeroplanes that will



rob him of the greatest advantage of attack, which is surprise. The best army will be, perhaps, the army with the best eyes."

(I had met this lift-boy airman a few days earlier. He had spoken to me about Balbec, and, curious to know what he would say about Saint-Loup, I brought the conversation round to the subject by asking whether it was true, as I had heard, that towards young men M. de Charlus had ... etc. The lift-boy seemed surprised, he knew absolutely nothing about it. But on the other hand he made accusations against the rich young man, the one who lived with a mistress and three friends. As he seemed to lump all of them together, and as I knew from M. de Charlus who, it will be remembered, had informed me in front of Brichot that it was not so, I told the lift-boy that he must be mistaken. He met my doubts with the firmest avowals. It was the girlfriend of the rich man who had the job of picking up young men, and they all took their pleasure together. Thus M. de Charlus, the best-informed of men on the subject, had been entirely wrong, so fragmentary, secret, unpredictable is the truth. Afraid of reasoning like a bourgeois, and of seeing Charlusism where it was not, he had missed the fact that the woman was flushing out the game. "She came often enough to find me," said the lift-boy. "But she saw at once who it was she was dealing with. I refused categorically, I don't go in for that sort of monkey business. I told her I found it wholly objectionable. It's enough for one person to talk, word gets around, and you can't find another place anywhere." These last reasons weakened the virtuous declarations with which the lift-boy had begun, for they implied that he would have obliged had he been assured of discretion. Such must not have been the case where Saint-Loup was concerned. It is probable that even the rich man and his mistress and friends had been luckier, since the lift-boy quoted many conversations between him and them, held at various times, something that happens rarely when one has declined so categorically. For instance, the rich man's mistress had come to him to make the acquaintance of a page with whom he was close friends. "I don't think you know him, you weren't here then. Victor, they called him. Of course," the lift-boy added with the air of referring to inviolable and faintly secret laws, "you can't say no to a comrade who isn't well off." I remembered the invitation the rich man's noble friend had extended to me a few days before I left Balbec. But most likely this had nothing to do with it, and was dictated purely by amiability.)

"And tell me about poor Françoise, has she succeeded in getting her nephew exempted?" But Françoise, who for a long time had been making every effort to achieve this, and who, when she had been offered through the Guermantes a recommendation to General de Saint-Joseph, had replied in a tone of despair: "Oh no, that would be quite useless, there's nothing to be got from that old fogey, he's as bad as could be, he's patriotic," Françoise, as soon as there had been any question of war, however much she suffered at the thought of it, was of the opinion that it would be wrong to abandon the "poor Russians" since we were "allianced" to them. The butler, who in any case was convinced that the war would only last ten days and would end in a brilliant victory for France, would not have dared, for fear of being contradicted by events—and would not even have had enough imagination—to predict a long and indecisive war. But from this complete and immediate victory he tried at least to extract in advance the maximum of suffering for Françoise. "Things may well take an ugly turn, because it seems there are lots who refuse to march, boys of sixteen in floods of tears." And this habit of telling her disagreeable things in order to "vex" her was what he called "putting the wind up her," "making her flesh creep," "giving her a bit of a jolt." "Sixteen, Holy Mother!" said Françoise, and then suspicious for a moment: "But they said they only took them at twenty, at sixteen they're still children." "Naturally the papers have been told to say nothing about it. Anyhow, the young men, one and all, will be off to the front and there won't be many to come back. In one way it'll do some good. A good blood-letting, you know, is useful now and again. And then it will help trade. And I promise you, if there are any lads who are a bit soft and think twice about it, they'll be for the firing-squad, bang, bang, bang! I suppose it has to be done. And then, the officers, what does it matter to them? They get paid their screw, that's all they ask." Françoise turned so pale whenever one of these conversations took place that we were afraid the butler might cause her death from a heart attack.

But this did not mean that she had lost her old faults. Whenever I had a visit from a girl, however much her old servant's legs might be hurting her, if I happened to leave my room for a moment there she was at the top of a step-ladder in the dressing-room, searching, so she said, for some overcoat of mine to see if the moths had got into it, but really in order to eavesdrop. And she still, in spite of all my complaints, had her insidious manner of asking questions in an indirect way, the phrase she now used for this purpose being "because of course." Not daring to say to me: "Has this lady her own house?" she would say, her eyes timidly raised like the eyes of a good dog: "Because of course this lady has her own house ...," avoiding a blatant interrogative not so much in order to be polite as in order not to seem too curious. Then again, as the servants whom we love most—and this is particularly true when they have almost ceased to give us either the service or the respect proper to their employment—remain, unfortunately, servants and only make more clear the limitations of their caste, which we ourselves would like to do away with, when they imagine that they are penetrating most successfully into ours, Françoise often addressed me ("to get under my skin," as the butler would have said) with odd remarks which someone of my own class could not have made: for instance, with a joy carefully dissembled but as profound as if she had detected a serious illness, she would say to me if I was hot and there were beads of sweat which I had not noticed on my forehead: "But you're absolutely dripping," looking astonished as though this were some strange phenomenon and at the same time with that little smile of contempt with which we greet an impropriety ("Are you going out? You know you've forgotten to put your tie on") and also with the anxious voice which we assume when we want to alarm someone about the state of his health. One would have thought that no one in the world had ever been "dripping" before. Finally, she no longer spoke good French as she had in the past. For in her humility, in her affectionate admiration for

people infinitely inferior to herself, she had come to adopt their ugly habits of speech. Her daughter having complained to me about her and having used the words (I do not know where she had heard them): “She’s always finding fault with me because I don’t shut the doors properly and *patatipatali* and *patatatipatala*.” Françoise clearly thought that only her imperfect education had deprived her until now of this beautiful idiom. And from those lips which I had once seen bloom with the purest French I heard several times a day: “And *patatipatali* and *patatatipatala*.” It is indeed curious how little not only the expressions but also the ideas of an individual vary. The butler, having got into the habit of declaring that M. Poincaré was a wicked man, not because he was after money but because he had been absolutely determined to have a war, repeated this seven or eight times a day to an audience which was always the same and always just as interested. Not a word was altered, not a gesture or an intonation. The performance only lasted two minutes, but it was unvarying, like that of an actor. And his faulty French was quite as much to blame as that of her daughter for corrupting the language of Françoise. He thought that what M. de Rambuteau had been so annoyed one day to hear the Duc de Guermantes call “Rambuteau shelters” were called “rinals.” No doubt in his childhood he had failed to hear the “u” and had never realised his mistake, so every time he used the word—and he used it frequently—he mispronounced it. Françoise, embarrassed at first, ended by using it too, and liked to complain that the same sort of thing did not exist for women as well as for men. But as a result of her humility and her admiration for the butler she never said “urinals” but—with a slight concession to customary usage—“arinals.”

She no longer slept, no longer ate. Every day she insisted on the bulletins, of which she understood nothing, being read to her by the butler who understood hardly more of them than she did, and in whom the desire to torment Françoise was frequently dominated by a patriotic cheerfulness: he would say, with a sympathetic laugh, referring to the Germans: “Things are hotting up for them, it won’t be long before old Joffre puts salt on the tail of the comet.” Françoise had no idea what comet he was alluding to, but this strengthened her conviction that the phrase was one of those amiable and original extravagances to which a well-bred person is required by the laws of courtesy to respond good-humouredly, so gaily shrugging her shoulders as if to say: “He’s always the same,” she tempered her tears with a smile. At least she was happy that her new butcher’s boy, who in spite of his trade was anything but courageous (his first job nevertheless had been in the slaughterhouses), was not old enough to be called up. Otherwise she would have been quite capable of going to see the Minister of War to get him exempted.

The butler had not enough imagination to realise that the bulletins were not excellent and that we were not advancing towards Berlin, since he kept reading: “We have repulsed with heavy enemy losses, etc.,” actions which he celebrated as a succession of victories. I, however, was alarmed at the speed with which the scene of these victories was approaching Paris, and was astonished that even the butler, having seen in one bulletin that an engagement had taken place near Lens, was not disturbed to read in the newspaper next day that it had been followed by satisfactory operations in the neighbourhood of Jouy-le-Vicomte, of which the approaches were firmly in our hands. Now the butler knew Jouy-le-Vicomte well by name, for it was not so very far from Combray. But we read the newspapers as we love, blindfold. We do not try to understand the facts. We listen to the soothing words of the editor as we listen to the words of our mistress. We are “beaten and happy” because we believe that we are not beaten but victorious.

I had, in any case, not remained long in Paris but had returned very soon to my sanatorium. Although in principle the doctor’s treatment consisted in isolation, I had been allowed to receive, at different times, a letter from Gilberte and a letter from Robert. Gilberte wrote (this was in about September 1914) that, however much she would have liked to stay in Paris in order to get news of Robert more easily, the constant Taube raids on the city had caused her such alarm, particularly for her little girl, that she had fled by the last train to leave for Combray, that the train had not even got as far as Combray, and that it was only thanks to a peasant’s cart, on which she had had an appalling journey of ten hours, that she had succeeded in reaching Tansonville! “And there, imagine what awaited your old friend,” she concluded her letter. “I had left Paris to escape from the German aeroplanes, supposing that at Tansonville I should be perfectly safe. Before I had been there two days you will never imagine what turned up: the Germans, who having defeated our troops near La Fère, were overrunning the district. A German headquarters staff, with a regiment just behind it, presented itself at the gates of Tansonville and I was obliged to take them in, and not a hope of getting away, no more trains, nothing.” Whether the German staff had really behaved well, or whether it was right to detect in Gilberte’s letter the influence, by contagion, of the spirit of those Guermantes who were of Bavarian stock and related to the highest aristocracy of Germany, she was lavish in her praise of the perfect breeding of the staff-officers, and even of the soldiers who had only asked her for “permission to pick a few of the forget-me-nots growing near the pond,” a good breeding which she contrasted with the disorderly violence of the fleeing French troops, who had pillaged everything as they crossed the property before the arrival of the German generals. In any case, if Gilberte’s letter was in some ways impregnated with the spirit of the Guermantes—others would say the spirit of Jewish internationalism, which would probably have been unfair to her, as we shall see—the letter which I received several months later from Robert was, on the other hand, much more Saint-Loup than Guermantes and reflected in addition all the liberal culture which he had acquired. Altogether, it was a delightful letter. Unfortunately, he did not talk about strategy as he had in our conversations at Doncières, nor did he tell me to what extent he considered that the war confirmed or invalidated the principles which he had then expounded to me.

All he said was that since 1914 there had in reality been a series of wars, the lessons of each one influencing the conduct of the one that followed. For example, the theory of the “break-through” had been supplemented by a new idea: that it was necessary, before breaking through, for the ground held by the enemy

to be completely devastated by the artillery. But then it had been found that on the contrary this devastation made it impossible for the infantry and the artillery to advance over ground in which thousands of shell-holes created as many obstacles. "War," he wrote, "does not escape the laws of our old friend Hegel. It is in a state of perpetual becoming."

This was meagre in comparison with what I should have liked to know. But what was still more annoying was that he was forbidden to mention the names of generals. And anyhow, according to the little that the newspapers told me, the generals as to whom at Doncières I had been so eager to know which among them would prove most effective and courageous in a war, were not the ones who were now in command. Geslin de Bourgogne, Galliffet, Négrier were dead. Pau had retired from active service almost at the beginning of the war. Of Joffre, of Foch, of Castelnau, of Pétain, Robert and I had never spoken. "My dear boy," he wrote, "I recognise that expressions like *passeront pas* and *on les aura* are not agreeable; they have always set my teeth on edge as much as *poilu* and the rest, and of course it is tiresome to be composing an epic with words and phrases which are—worse than an error of grammar or of taste—an appalling contradiction in terms, a vulgar affectation and pretension of the kind that you and I abominate, as bad as when people think it clever to say 'coco' instead of 'cocaine.' But if you could see everybody here, particularly the men of the humbler classes, working men and small shopkeepers, who did not suspect what heroism they concealed within them and might have died in their beds without suspecting it—if you could see them running under fire to help a comrade or carry off a wounded officer and then, when they have been hit themselves, smiling a few moments before they die because the medical officer has told them that the trench has been recaptured from the Germans, I assure you, my dear boy, it gives you a magnificent idea of the French people, makes you begin to understand those great periods in history which seemed to us a little extraordinary when we learned about them as students. The epic is so magnificent that you would find, as I do, that words no longer matter. Cannot Rodin or Maillol create a masterpiece from some hideous raw material which he transforms out of all recognition? At the touch of such greatness, the word *poilu* has for me become something of which I no more feel that it may originally have contained an allusion or a joke than one does, for instance, when one reads about the *chouans*. But I do know that *poilu* is already waiting for great poets, like other words, 'deluge,' or 'Christ,' or 'barbarians,' which were already instinct with greatness before Hugo, Vigny and the rest made use of them. As I say, the people, the working men, are the best of all, but everybody is splendid. Poor young Vaugoubert, the Ambassador's son, was wounded seven times before he was killed, and each time he came back from a raid without having 'copped it' he seemed to want to apologise and to say that it was not his fault. He was a charming creature. We had become close friends. His parents were given permission to come to the funeral, on condition that they did not wear mourning and only stayed five minutes because of the shelling. The mother, a great horse of a woman whom I dare say you know, was no doubt deeply moved but showed no sign of it. But the poor father was in such a state that I assure you that I, who am now totally unfeeling because I have got used to seeing the head of the comrade who is talking to me suddenly ripped open by a landmine or even severed from its trunk, I could not contain myself when I saw the collapse of poor Vaugoubert, who was an utter wreck. The general tried to tell him that it was for France, that his son had behaved like a hero, but it was no use, this only redoubled the sobs of the poor man, who could not tear himself away from his son's body. The fact is, and that is why we must learn to put up with *passeront pas*, it is men like these, like my poor valet, like Vaugoubert, who have prevented the Germans from 'passing.' You may think we are not advancing much, but logic is beside the point, there is a secret inner feeling which tells an army that it is victorious—or a dying man that he is finished. We know that victory will be ours and we are determined that it shall be, so that we can dictate a just peace, I don't mean 'just' simply for ourselves, but truly just, just to the French and just to the Germans."

I do not wish to imply that the "calamity" had raised Saint-Loup's intelligence to a new level. But just as soldier heroes with commonplace and trivial minds, if they happened to write poems during their convalescence, placed themselves, in order to describe the war, at the level not of events, which in themselves are nothing, but of the commonplace aesthetic whose rules they had obeyed in the past, and talked, as they would have ten years earlier, of the "blood-stained dawn," "Victory's tremulous wings," and so on, so Saint-Loup, by nature much more intelligent and much more of an artist, remained intelligent and an artist, and it was with the greatest good taste that he now recorded for my benefit the observations of landscape which he made if he had to halt at the edge of a marshy forest, very much as he would have done if he had been out duck-shooting. To help me to understand certain contrasts of light and shade which had been "the enchantment of his morning," he alluded in his letter to certain paintings which we both loved and was not afraid to cite a passage of Romain Rolland, or even of Nietzsche, with the independent spirit of the man at the front, who had not the civilian's terror of pronouncing a German name, and also—in thus quoting an enemy—with a touch of coquetry, like Colonel du Paty de Clam who, waiting among the witnesses at Zola's trial and chancing to pass Pierre Quillard, the violently Dreyfusard poet, whom he did not even know, recited some lines from his symbolist play, *La Fille aux Mains Coupées*. In the same way if Saint-Loup had occasion in a letter to mention a song by Schumann, he never gave any but the German title, nor did he use any periphrasis to tell me that, when at dawn on the edge of the forest he had heard the first twittering of a bird, his rapture had been as great as though he had been addressed by the bird in that "sublime *Siegfried*" which he so looked forward to hearing after the war.

And now, on my second return to Paris, I had received, the day after I arrived, another letter from Gilberte, who had doubtless forgotten, or at least forgotten what she had said in, the letter I have described, for in this new letter her departure from Paris at the end of 1914 was presented retrospectively in a very different light.

"Perhaps you do not know, my dear friend," she wrote, "that I have now been at Tansonville for nearly two years. I arrived here at the same time as the Germans. Everybody had tried to prevent me from leaving. I was regarded as mad. 'What,' my friends said, 'here you are safe in Paris and you want to go off to enemy-occupied territory just when everybody is trying to escape from it.' I was quite aware of the strength of this argument. But I can't help it; if I have one good quality, it is that I am not a coward, or perhaps I should say, I am loyal, and when I knew that my beloved Tansonville was threatened, I simply could not leave our old bailiff to defend it alone. I felt that my place was by his side. And it was, in fact, thanks to this decision that I succeeded in more or less saving the house when all the other big houses in the neighbourhood, abandoned by their panic-stricken owners, were almost without exception reduced to ruins—and in saving not only the house but the valuable collections too, which dear Papa was so fond of." In a word, Gilberte was now persuaded that she had gone to Tansonville not, as she had written to me in 1914, in order to escape from the Germans and be in a safe place, but on the contrary in order to face them and defend her house against them. They had, as a matter of fact, not stayed long at Tansonville, but since then the house had witnessed a constant coming and going of soldiers, far more intensive than that marching up and down the streets of Combray which had once drawn tears to the eyes of Françoise, and Gilberte had not ceased, as she said, this time quite truly, to live the life of the front. So that the newspapers spoke with the highest praise of her wonderful conduct and there was some question of giving her a decoration. The end of the letter was absolutely truthful. "You have no idea what this war is like, my dear friend, or of the importance that a road, a bridge, a height can assume. How often have I thought of you, of those walks of ours together which you made so delightful, through all this now ravaged countryside, where vast battles are fought to gain possession of some path, some slope which you once loved and which we so often explored together! Probably, like me, you did not imagine that obscure Roussainville and boring Méséglise, where our letters used to be brought from and where the doctor was once fetched when you were ill, would ever be famous places. Well, my dear friend, they have become for ever a part of history, with the same claim to glory as Austerlitz or Valmy. The battle of Méséglise lasted for more than eight months; the Germans lost in it more than six hundred thousand men, they destroyed Méséglise, but they did not capture it. As for the short cut up the hill which you were so fond of and which we used to call the hawthorn path, where you claim that as a small child you fell in love with me (whereas I assure you in all truthfulness it was I who was in love with you), I cannot tell you how important it has become. The huge field of corn upon which it emerges is the famous Hill 307, which you must have seen mentioned again and again in the bulletins. The French blew up the little bridge over the Vivonne which you said did not remind you of your childhood as much as you would have wished, and the Germans have thrown other bridges across the river. For a year and a half they held one half of Combray and the French the other."

The day after I received this letter, that is to say two days before the evening on which, as I have described, I made my way through the dark streets with the sound of my footsteps in my ears and all these memories revolving in my mind, Saint-Loup, arrived from the front and very shortly to return to it, had come to see me for a few moments only, and the mere announcement of his visit had violently moved me. Françoise had been tempted to fling herself upon him, in the hope that he could obtain an exemption for the timid butcher's boy whose class was to be called up the following year. But she had been checked, without my saying anything to her, by the thought of the futility of this endeavour, for the timid slaughterer of animals had moved to another butcher's some time previously. And whether our butcher's wife was afraid of losing our custom, or whether she was telling the truth, she declared to Françoise that she did not know where the boy—who, in any case, would never make a good butcher—was working. Françoise had searched everywhere. But Paris is large and butcher's shops are numerous, and although she had visited a great many she had never succeeded in finding the timid and blood-stained young man.

When Saint-Loup came into my room I had gone up to him with that feeling of shyness, that impression of something supernatural which was in fact induced by all soldiers on leave and which one feels when one enters the presence of a man suffering from a fatal disease, who still, nevertheless, leaves his bed, gets dressed, goes for walks. It seemed (above all it had seemed at first, for upon those who had not lived, as I had, at a distance from Paris, there had descended Habit, which cuts off from things which we have witnessed a number of times the root of profound impression and of thought which gives them their real meaning), it seemed almost that there was something cruel in these leaves granted to the men at the front. When they first came on leave, one said to oneself: "They will refuse to go back, they will desert." And indeed they came not merely from places which seemed to us unreal, because we had only heard them spoken of in the newspapers and could not conceive how a man was able to take part in these titanic battles and emerge with nothing worse than a bruise on his shoulder; it was from the shores of death, whither they would soon return, that they came to spend a few moments in our midst, incomprehensible to us, filling us with tenderness and terror and a feeling of mystery, like phantoms whom we summon from the dead, who appear to us for a second, whom we dare not question, and who could, in any case, only reply: "You cannot possibly imagine." For it is extraordinary how, in the survivors of battle, which is what soldiers on leave are, or in living men hypnotised or dead men summoned by a medium, the only effect of contact with mystery is to increase, if that be possible, the insignificance of the things people say. Such were my feelings when I greeted Robert, who still had a scar on his forehead, more august and more mysterious in my eyes than the imprint left upon the earth by a giant's foot. And I had not dared to put a single question to him and he had made only the simplest remarks to me. Remarks that even differed very little from the ones he might have made before the war, as

though people, in spite of the war, continued to be what they were; the tone of conversation was the same, only the subject-matter differed—and even that not so very much!

I guessed from what he told me that in the army he had found opportunities which had gradually made him forget that Morel had behaved as badly towards him as towards his uncle. However, he still felt a great affection for him and was seized by sudden cravings to see him again, though he always postponed doing this. I thought it kinder to Gilberte not to inform Robert that to find Morel he had only to pay a call on Mme Verdurin.

I remarked apologetically to Robert how little one felt the war in Paris. He replied that even in Paris it was sometimes “pretty extraordinary.” This was an allusion to a Zeppelin raid which had taken place the previous night and he went on to ask me if I had had a good view, very much as in the old days he might have questioned me about some spectacle of great aesthetic beauty. At the front, I could see, there might be a sort of bravado in saying: “Isn’t it marvellous? What a pink! And that pale green!” when at any moment you might be killed, but here in Paris there could be no question of any such pose in Saint-Loup’s way of speaking about an insignificant raid, which had in fact looked marvellously beautiful from our balcony when the silence of the night was broken by a display which was more than a display because it was real, with fireworks that were purposeful and protective and bugle-calls that did more than summon on parade. I spoke of the beauty of the aeroplanes climbing up into the night. “And perhaps they are even more beautiful when they come down,” he said. “I grant that it is a magnificent moment when they climb, when they fly off in *constellation*, in obedience to laws as precise as those that govern the constellations of the stars—for what seems to you a mere spectacle is the rallying of the squadrons, then the orders they receive, their departure in pursuit, etc. But don’t you prefer the moment, when, just as you have got used to thinking of them as stars, they break away to pursue an enemy or to return to the ground after the all-clear, the moment of *apocalypse*, when even the stars are hurled from their courses? And then the sirens, could they have been more Wagnerian, and what could be more appropriate as a salute to the arrival of the Germans?—it might have been the national anthem, with the Crown Prince and the Princesses in the imperial box, the *Wacht am Rhein*; one had to ask oneself whether they were indeed pilots and not Valkyries who were sailing upwards.” He seemed to be delighted with this comparison of the pilots to Valkyries, and went on to explain it on purely musical grounds: “That’s it, the music of the sirens was a ‘Ride of the Valkyries’! There’s no doubt about it, the Germans have to arrive before you can hear Wagner in Paris.” In some ways the simile was not misleading. The town from being a black shapeless mass seemed suddenly to rise out of the abyss and the night into the luminous sky, where one after another the pilots soared upwards in answer to the heart-rending appeal of the sirens, while with a movement slower but more insidious, more alarming—for their gaze made one think of the object, still invisible but perhaps already very near, which it sought—the searchlights strayed ceaselessly to and fro, scenting the enemy, encircling him with their beams until the moment when the aeroplanes should be unleashed to bound after him in pursuit and seize him. And squadron after squadron, each pilot, as he soared thus above the town, itself now transported into the sky, resembled indeed a Valkyrie. Meanwhile on ground-level, at the height of the houses, there were also scraps of illumination, and I told Saint-Loup that, if he had been at home the previous evening, he might, while contemplating the apocalypse in the sky, at the same time have watched on the ground (as in El Greco’s *Burial of Count Orgaz*, in which the two planes are distinct and parallel) a first-rate farce acted by characters in night attire, whose famous names merited a report to some successor of that Ferrari whose society paragraphs had so often provided amusement to the two of us, Saint-Loup and myself, that we used also to amuse ourselves by inventing imaginary ones. And that is what we did once more on the day I am describing, just as though we were not in the middle of a war, although our theme, the fear of the Zeppelins, was very much a “war” one: “Seen about town: the Duchesse de Guermantes magnificent in a night-dress, the Duc de Guermantes indescribable in pink pyjamas and a bath-robe, etc.”

“I am sure,” he said, “that in all the large hotels you would have seen American Jewesses in their night-dresses, hugging to their ravaged bosoms the pearl necklaces which will enable them to marry a ruined duke. The Ritz, on these evenings when the Zeppelins are overhead, must look like Feydeau’s *Hôtel du libre échange*.”

“Do you remember,” I said to him, “our conversations at Doncières?”

“Ah! those were the days! What a gulf separates us from them! Will those happy times ever re-emerge

from the abyss forbidden to our plummets,  
As suns rejuvenated climb the heavens,  
Having washed themselves on deep sea-beds?”<sup>5</sup>

“But don’t let’s think about those conversations simply in order to remind ourselves how delightful they were,” I said. “I was attempting in them to arrive at a certain kind of truth. What do you think, does the present war, which has thrown everything into confusion—and most of all, so you say, the idea of war—does it render null and void what you used to tell me then about the types of battle, the battles of Napoleon, for instance, which would be imitated in the wars of the future?”

“Not in the least,” he said, “the Napoleonic battle still exists, particularly in this war, since Hindenburg is imbued with the Napoleonic spirit. His rapid movements of troops, his feints—the device, for instance, of leaving only a small covering force opposite one of his enemies, while he falls with his united strength upon the other (Napoleon in 1814) or the other stratagem of pressing home a diversion so strongly that the enemy is compelled to keep up his strength on a front which is not the really important one (for example, Hindenburg’s feint before Warsaw, which tricked the Russians into concentrating their resistance there and

brought about their defeat at the Mazurian Lakes)—his tactical withdrawals, analogous to those with which Austerlitz, Areola, Eckmühl began, everything in Hindenburg is Napoleonic, and we haven't seen the end of him. I must add that if, when we are no longer together, you try, as the war proceeds, to interpret its events, you should not rely too exclusively on this particular aspect of Hindenburg to reveal to you the meaning of what he is doing and the key to what he is about to do. A general is like a writer who sets out to write a certain play, a certain book, and then the book itself, with the unexpected potentialities which it reveals here, the impassable obstacles which it presents there, makes him deviate to an enormous degree from his preconceived plan. You know, for instance, that a diversion should only be made against a position which is itself of considerable importance; well, suppose the diversion succeeds beyond all expectation, while the principal operation results in a deadlock: the diversion may then become the principal operation. But there is one type of Napoleonic battle which I am waiting to see Hindenburg attempt, and that is the one which consists in driving a wedge between two allies, in this case the English and ourselves."

I have said that the war had not altered the stature of Saint-Loup's intelligence, but I ought to add that this intelligence, developing in accordance with laws in which heredity counted for much, had acquired a brilliancy which I had never seen in him before. What a difference between the fair-haired boy who had once been run after by smart women or women who were hoping to become smart, and the voluble talker, the theorist who never stopped juggling with words! In another generation, grafted upon another stock, like an actor re-interpreting a part played years ago by Bressant or Delaunay, he was like a successor—pink, fair and golden, whereas the other had been half and half very dark and quite white—of M. de Charlus. It was true that he did not agree with his uncle about the war, since he had ranged himself with that section of the aristocracy which put France above everything else in the world while M. de Charlus was at heart defeatist, but nevertheless he could demonstrate to anyone who had not seen the “creator of the part” what a success could be made in the role of verbal acrobat.

“It seems that Hindenburg is a revelation,” I said to him.

“An old revelation,” he retorted instantly, “or a future revolution. Instead of being soft with the enemy, we should have supported Mangin in his offensive, then we might have smashed Austria and Germany and europeanised Turkey instead of balkanising France.”

“But soon we shall have the help of the United States,” I said.

“Meanwhile, I see here only the spectacle of the disunited states. Why refuse to make more generous concessions to Italy for fear of dechristianising France?”

“How shocked your uncle Charlus would be to hear you!” I said. “The fact is that you would be only too pleased to give the Pope another slap in the face, while your uncle is in despair at the thought of the damage that may be done to the throne of Franz Josef. And in this he says that he is in the tradition of Talleyrand and the Congress of Vienna.”

“The age of the Congress of Vienna is dead and gone,” he replied; “the old secret diplomacy must be replaced by concrete diplomacy. My uncle is at heart an impenitent monarchist, who can be made to swallow carps like Mme Molé and scamps like Arthur Meyer provided that both carps and scamps are *à la Chambord*. He so hates the tricolour flag that I believe he would rather serve under the duster of the Red Bonnet, which he would take in good faith for the white flag of the Monarchists.”

Admittedly, this was mere play on words and Saint-Loup was far from possessing the sometimes profound originality of his uncle. But he was as affable and agreeable in character as the other was jealous and suspicious. And he had remained charming and pink as he had been at Balbec beneath his shock of golden hair. And one family characteristic he possessed in at least as high a degree as his uncle, that attitude of mind of the Faubourg Saint-Germain which remains deeply implanted in the men of that world who fancy that they have most completely detached themselves from it, the attitude which combines respect for clever men who are not of good family (a respect which flourishes, truly, only among the aristocracy, and which makes revolutions so unjust) with a fatuous satisfaction with themselves. Through this mixture of humility and pride, of acquired intellectual curiosity and innate authority, M. de Charlus and Saint-Loup, by different paths, and with opposite opinions, had become, with the gap of a generation between them, intellectuals whom every new idea interested and talkers whom no interruption could silence. So that a not very intelligent person might, according to the humour in which he happened to be, have found both the one and the other either dazzling or insufferably tedious.

I had gone on walking as I turned over in my mind this recent meeting with Saint-Loup and had come a long way out of my way; I was almost at the Pont des Invalides. The lamps (there were very few of them, on account of the Gothas) had already been lit, a little too early because “the clocks had been put forward” a little too early, when the night still came rather quickly, the time having been “changed” once and for all for the whole of the summer just as a central heating system is turned on or off once and for all on a fixed date; and above the city with its nocturnal illumination, in one whole quarter of the sky—the sky that knew nothing of summer time and winter time and did not deign to recognise that half past eight had become half past nine—in one whole quarter of the sky from which the blue had not vanished there was still a little daylight. Over that whole portion of the city which is dominated by the towers of the Trocadéro the sky looked like a vast sea the colour of turquoise, from which gradually there emerged, as it ebbed, a whole line of little black rocks, which might even have been nothing more than a row of fishermen's nets and which were in fact small clouds—a sea at that moment the colour of turquoise, sweeping along with it, without their noticing, the whole human race in the wake of the vast revolution of the earth, that earth upon which they are mad enough to continue their own revolutions, their futile wars, like the war which at this very moment was staining France crimson with blood. But if one looked for long at the sky, this lazy, too beautiful sky which did not condescend to change its timetable and above the city, where the lamps had been lit, indolently prolonged its lingering day in these bluish tones, one was seized with giddiness: it was no longer a flat expanse of sea but a vertically stepped series of blue glaciers. And the towers of the Trocadéro which seemed so near to the turquoise steps must, one realised, be infinitely remote from them, like the twin towers of certain towns in Switzerland which at a distance one would suppose to be near neighbours of the upper mountain slopes.

I retraced my steps, but once I had left the Pont des Invalides there was no longer any trace of day in the sky and there was practically no light in the town, so that stumbling here and there against dustbins and mistaking one direction for another, I found to my surprise that, by mechanically following a labyrinth of dark streets, I had arrived on the boulevards. There, the impression of an oriental vision which I had had earlier in

the evening came to me again, and I thought too of the Paris of an earlier age, not now so much of the Paris of the Directory as of the Paris of 1815. As in 1815 there was a march past of allied troops in the most variegated uniforms; and among them, the Africans in their red divided skirts, the Indians in their white turbans were enough to transform for me this Paris through which I was walking into a whole imaginary exotic city, an oriental scene which was at once meticulously accurate with respect to the costumes and the colours of the faces and arbitrarily fanciful when it came to the background, just as out of the town in which he lived Carpaccio made a Jerusalem or a Constantinople by assembling in its streets a crowd whose marvellous motley was not more rich in colour than that of the crowd around me. Walking close behind two zouaves who seemed hardly to be aware of him, I noticed a tall, stout man in a soft felt hat and a long heavy overcoat, to whose purplish face I hesitated whether I should give the name of an actor or a painter, both equally notorious for innumerable sodomist scandals. I was certain in any case that I was not acquainted with him; so I was not a little surprised, when his glance met mine, to see that he appeared to be embarrassed and deliberately stopped and came towards me like a man who wants to prove that you have not surprised him in an occupation which he would prefer to remain secret. For a second I asked myself who it was that, was greeting me: it was M. de Charlus. One may say that for him the evolution of his malady or the revolution of his vice had reached the extreme point at which the tiny original personality of the individual, the specific qualities he has inherited from his ancestors, are entirely eclipsed by the transit across them of some generic defect or malady which is their satellite. M. de Charlus had travelled as far as was possible from himself, or rather he was himself but so perfectly masked by what he had become, by what belonged not to him alone but to many other inverts, that for a moment I had taken him for some other invert, as he walked behind these zouaves down the wide pavement of the boulevard, for some other invert who was not M. de Charlus, who was not a great nobleman or a man of imagination and intelligence, and whose only point of resemblance to the Baron was the look that was common to them all, which in him now, at least until one had taken the trouble to observe him carefully, concealed every other quality from view.

Thus it was that, having intended to call on Mme Verdurin, I had met M. de Charlus. And certainly I should not now as in the past have found him in her drawing-room; their quarrel had grown steadily more bitter and Mme Verdurin even took advantage of present events to discredit him further. Having said for years that she found him stale, finished, more out of date in his professed audacities than the dullest philistine, she now summed up this condemnation in such a way as to make him an object of general aversion, by saying that he was "pre-war." The war had set between him and the present, so the little clan declared, an abyss which left him stranded in the deadest of dead pasts. Besides—and this was addressed particularly to the political world, which was less well informed—she made him out to be just as "bogus," just as much an "outsider" from the point of view of social position as from that of intellectual merit. "He sees nobody, nobody invites him," she said to M. Bontemps, whom she easily convinced. Anyhow, there was an element of truth in these words. The position of M. de Charlus had changed. Caring less and less about society, having quarrelled, because of his cantankerous character, and having disdained, because of his high opinion of his own social importance, to reconcile himself with most of the men and women who were the flower of society, he lived in a relative isolation which was not caused, like that in which Mme de Villeparisis had died, by the fact that the aristocracy had ostracised him, but which nevertheless in the eyes of the public for two reasons appeared to be worse. The bad reputation which M. de Charlus was now known to enjoy made ill-informed people think that it was for this reason that his company was not sought by people whom in fact he himself made a point of refusing to see. So that what was really the result of his own spleen seemed to be due to the contempt of the people upon whom he vented it. Secondly, Mme de Villeparisis had had one great bulwark: the family. But between his family and himself M. de Charlus had multiplied quarrels. His family in any case—particularly the "old Faubourg" side of it, the Courvoisier side—had always seemed to him uninteresting. And he was far from suspecting, he who, from a spirit of opposition to the Courvoisiers, had made such audacious advances in the direction of art, that the feature in him which would most have interested, for example, a Bergotte, was precisely his kinship with the whole of this old Faubourg which he despised, and the descriptions he could have given of the almost provincial life led by his female cousins, in that district bounded by the Rue de la Chaise and the Place du Palais-Bourbon in one direction and the Rue Garancière in the other.

And then, considering the question from another point of view, less transcendent and more practical, Mme Verdurin affected to believe that he was not French. "What is his nationality exactly, isn't he an Austrian?" M. Verdurin would ask innocently. "No, certainly not," Comtesse Molé would reply, her first reaction being one rather of common sense than of resentment. "No, he is Prussian," the Mistress would say. "Yes, I know what I am talking about, he has told us countless times that he is a hereditary member of the Prussian Chamber of Peers and a *Durchlaucht*." "Still, the Queen of Naples told me ..." "You know she is a dreadful spy," screamed Mme Verdurin, who had not forgotten how the fallen sovereign had behaved in her house one evening. "I know—there is absolutely no question about it—that that is what she has been living on. If we had a more energetic government, she and her kind ought all to be in a concentration camp. I mean it! In any case, you will be wise not to receive visits from that charming set, because I know that the Minister of the Interior has his eye on them, your house would be watched. I have not the slightest doubt that for two years Charlus did nothing but spy on us all." And thinking probably that there might be some doubt as to the interest that the German government would show in even the most circumstantial reports on the organisation of the little clan, Mme Verdurin went on, with a mild and perspicacious air, like someone who knows that the value of what she is saying will only seem greater if she does not raise her voice: "Let me tell you, I said to my husband the very first day: 'I don't like the way that man wormed his way into my house. There's something shady here.' We had



a property which stood on very high ground, looking down over a bay. Quite obviously he had been sent by the Germans to prepare a base for their submarines. There were many things which surprised me at the time, but which I understand now. For instance, at first, he would not come by the train with my other regular guests. I was so kind as to offer to put him up in the house. But no, he preferred to stay at Doncières, which was swarming with soldiers. All this stank to high heaven of espionage."

About the first of the charges brought against the Baron de Charlus, that of being out of date, fashionable people were only too ready to agree with Mme Verdurin. In this they were ungrateful, for M. de Charlus was to some extent their poet, the man who had been able to extract from the world of fashion a sort of essential poetry, which had in it elements of history, of beauty, of the picturesque, of the comic, of frivolous elegance. But people in society, incapable of understanding this poetry, did not see that it existed in their own lives; they sought for it rather elsewhere, and placed on an infinitely higher peak than M. de Charlus men who were much stupider than him but who professed to despise "society" and liked instead to hold forth about sociology and political economy. M. de Charlus, for instance, took a delight in repeating unconsciously characteristic remarks of the Duchesse de Montmorency and in describing the studied charm of her clothes, and spoke of her as if she were something sublime, but this merely gave him the reputation of an utter idiot in the eyes of the sort of society women who thought that the Duchesse de Montmorency was an uninteresting fool, and that dresses are made to be worn but without the wearer appearing to give them a moment's attention, and who meanwhile gave proof of their own superior intelligence by running to hear lectures at the Sorbonne or Deschanel speak in the Chamber.

In short, people in society had become disillusioned about M. de Charlus, not from having penetrated too far, but without having penetrated at all, his rare intellectual merit. The reason why he was found to be "pre-war," old-fashioned, was that the people who are least capable of judging the worth of individuals are also the most inclined to adopt fashion as a principle by which to classify them; they have not exhausted, or even grazed the surface of, the talented men of one generation, when suddenly they are obliged to condemn them all *en bloc*, for here is a new generation with a new label which will be no better understood than its predecessor.

As for the second accusation, that of being pro-German, fashionable people because of their dislike of extreme views tended to reject it, but the charge had an unwearied and particularly cruel advocate in Morel, who, having managed to retain in the newspapers and even in society the position which M. de Charlus had first achieved for him and then tried equally hard, but without success, to undermine, pursued the Baron with a hatred that was all the more infamous since, whatever the precise relations between them had been, Morel had seen and known the side of him that he concealed from so many people: his profound kindness. M. de Charlus had shown such generosity, such delicacy towards the violinist, had been so scrupulous about fulfilling his promises to him that, when Charlie left him, the image of the Baron that remained in his mind was not at all that of a vicious man (at most he regarded the Baron's vice as a disease) but of a man with loftier ideas than any other he had ever known, a man with extraordinary capacity for feeling, a kind of saint. So little disposed was he to deny this that even after the quarrel he would say in all sincerity to a young man's parents: "You can trust your son to him, he can only have the most excellent influence on him." And so when by his articles in the papers he tried to make him suffer, it was in his imagination not vice but virtue incarnate that he was scourging. Not long before the war there had begun to appear short "pieces," transparent to the so-called initiated, in which M. de Charlus was most monstrously libelled. Of one, entitled *The Misfortunes of a Dowager ending in -us or the Latter Days of the Baroness*, Mme Verdurin had bought fifty copies in order to be able to lend it to her acquaintances and M. Verdurin, declaring that Voltaire himself did not write better, took to reading it aloud. Since the war the tone of these pieces had changed. Not only was the Baron's inversion denounced, but also his alleged Germanic nationality: "Frau Bosch," "Frau von den Bosch" were the names habitually used to designate M. de Charlus. A little composition of a poetic nature appeared with the title—borrowed from some of Beethoven's dances—*Une Allemande*. Finally two short stories, *The Uncle from America and the Aunt from Frankfurt* and *The Jolly Rear Admiral*, read in proof in the little clan, had delighted even Brichot himself, who exclaimed: "So long as the most high and puissant Lady Censorship does not blue-pencil us!" The articles themselves were cleverer than their ridiculous titles. Their style derived from Bergotte but in a way which, for the reason that follows, perhaps no one but myself perceived. Bergotte's writings had had not the slightest influence on Morel. The fertilisation had been effected in a most unusual way, which I record here only because of its rarity. I have described earlier the very special manner which Bergotte had, when he spoke, of choosing and pronouncing his words. Morel, who for a long time had been in the habit of meeting him at the Saint-Loups', had at that period done "imitations" of him, in which he exactly mimicked his voice, using just the words that Bergotte would have chosen. And now that he had taken to writing, Morel used to transcribe passages of "spoken Bergotte," but without first transposing them in the way which would have turned them into "written Bergotte." Not many people having known Bergotte as a talker, the tone of his voice was not recognised, since it differed from the style of his pen. This oral fertilisation is so rare that I have thought it worth mentioning here. The flowers that it produces are, however, always sterile.

Morel, who was in the Press Office, found after a while, his French blood boiling in his veins like the juice of the grapes of Combray, that there was not much to be said for being in an office during the war, and he ended by joining up, although Mme Verdurin did everything she could to persuade him to stay in Paris. Admittedly she was indignant that M. de Cambremer, at his age, should be on the general staff, and of every man who did not come to her parties she would say: "I can't think where the wretch has managed to hide himself all this time," and if someone assured her that the wretch had been in the front line since the first

day, would reply, without any scruple about telling a lie or perhaps just because she was so used to getting things wrong: "Not at all, he has not budged from Paris, he's doing something about as dangerous as taking a minister for walks, I know what I am talking about, you can take my word for it, I was told by someone who has seen him at it"; but where the faithful were concerned it was not the same thing, she did not want to let them go off to the war, and looked upon it as a great "bore" that caused them to defect. And so she pulled every possible string to keep them in Paris, which would give her the double pleasure of having them at her dinner-parties and at the same time, before they arrived or after they left, making scathing remarks about their inactivity. However, the faithful in each case had to be made to agree to the soft job she had found for them and she was bitterly distressed to find Morel recalcitrant; in vain had she said to him over and over again: "But don't you see, you are *serving* in your office, and serving more than you would be at the front. The important thing is to be useful, to be really part of the war, to be in it. There are those who are in it, and there are the shirkers. Now you, you're in it, you have nothing to worry about, everybody knows this, nobody's going to throw stones at you." In the same way, in different circumstances, although men were at that time not so scarce and she had not been, as she was now, obliged to have a preponderance of women, if a man had lost his mother she had not hesitated to try and convince him that there was no objection to his continuing to come to her parties. "Grief is worn in the heart. If you wanted to go to a dance" (she never gave one) "I should be the first to advise you not to do it, but here, at my little Wednesdays, or in a box, nobody will be in the least surprised. We all know you have had a great grief ..." Men were scarcer now and mourning more frequent though no longer needed to prevent men from going to parties, the war itself having put a stop to that. Mme Verdurin hung on to the survivors. She tried to persuade them that they were more useful to France if they stayed in Paris, just as in the past she would have assured them that the deceased would have been happy to see them enjoying themselves. In spite of all her efforts she did not have many men; perhaps sometimes she regretted that between herself and M. de Charlus she had brought about a rupture which left no hope of a return to their former relations.

But, if M. de Charlus and Mme Verdurin no longer saw one another, they continued nevertheless, Mme Verdurin to entertain, M. de Charlus to pursue his pleasures, very much as if nothing had changed. A few little differences there were, but of no great importance: Cottard, for instance, was now to be seen at Mme Verdurin's parties in a colonel's uniform which might have come out of Loti's *Ile du Rêve* (it bore a striking resemblance to that of a Haitian admiral and at the same time, with its broad sky-blue ribbon, recalled that of the "Children of Mary"); and M. de Charlus, finding himself in a town from which the mature men for whom he had hitherto had a taste had vanished, followed the example of those Frenchmen who, after being womanisers in France, go to live in the colonies: from necessity he had acquired first the habit of and then the taste for little boys.

But the first of these newly acquired characteristics was not in evidence for long: Cottard soon died "facing the enemy," so the newspapers said, though he had never left Paris—but it was true that he had exerted himself too much for his age—and he was soon followed by M. Verdurin, whose death caused grief to one person only and that, strangely enough, was Elstir. For whereas I had been able to study Elstir's work from a point of view which was to some extent objective, the painter himself, particularly as he grew older, linked it superstitiously to the society which had provided him with models and which had also, after thus transforming itself within him through the alchemy of impressions into a work of art, given him his public, his spectators. More and more he was inclined to believe materialistically that a not inconsiderable part of beauty is inherent in objects, and just as, at the beginning, he had adored in Mme Elstir the archetype of that rather heavy beauty which he had pursued and caressed in his paintings and in tapestries, so now in the death of M. Verdurin he saw the disappearance of one of the last relics of the social framework, the perishable framework—as swift to crumble away as the very fashions in clothes which form part of it—which supports an art and certifies its authenticity, and he was as saddened and distressed by this event as a painter of *fêtes galantes* might have been by the Revolution which destroyed the elegances of the eighteenth century, or Renoir by the disappearance of Montmartre and the Moulin de la Galette; but more than this, with M. Verdurin he saw disappear the eyes, the brain, which had had the truest vision of his painting, in which, in the form of a cherished memory, his painting was to some extent inherent. No doubt young men had come along who also loved painting, but painting of another kind; they had not, like Swann, like M. Verdurin, received lessons in taste from Whistler, lessons in truth from Monet, lessons which alone would have qualified them to judge Elstir with justice. So the death of M. Verdurin left Elstir feeling lonelier, although they had not been on speaking terms for a great many years: it was for him as though a little of the beauty of his own work had been eclipsed, since there had perished a little of the universe's sum total of awareness of its special beauty.

As for the change which had overtaken the pleasures of M. de Charlus, this was no more than intermittent: by maintaining a correspondence with numerous soldiers at the front, who sometimes came on leave, he did not altogether lack the company of mature men.

At the time when I believed what people said I should have been tempted, hearing Germany, or later Bulgaria or Greece, protest their pacific intentions, to give credence to these statements. But since life with Albertine and with Françoise had accustomed me to suspect in them thoughts and projects which they did not disclose, I now allowed no pronouncement, however specious, of William II or Ferdinand of Bulgaria or Constantine of Greece, to deceive my instinct and prevent it from divining what each one of them was plotting. Of course my quarrels with Françoise or with Albertine had been merely private quarrels, of interest only to the life of that little cell, endowed with mind, that a human being is. But just as there are animal bodies and human bodies, each one of which is an assemblage of cells as large in relation to a single cell as

Mont Blanc, so there exist huge organised accumulations of individuals which are called nations: their life does no more than repeat on a larger scale the lives of their constituent cells, and anybody who is incapable of comprehending the mystery, the reactions, the laws of these smaller lives, will only make futile pronouncements when he talks about struggles between nations. But if he is master of the psychology of individuals, then these colossal masses of conglomerated individuals will assume in his eyes, as they confront one another, a beauty more potent than that of the struggle which arises from a mere conflict between two characters; and they will seem to him as huge as the body of a tall man would seem to the infusoria of which more than ten thousand would be required to fill the space of a cubic millimetre. So it had been now for some time past: the huge irregular geometric figure France, filled to its perimeter with millions of little polygons of various shapes, and another figure filled with an even greater number of polygons, Germany, had been engaged in one of these quarrels. And considered from this point of view, the body Germany and the body France, and the allied and enemy bodies, were behaving to some extent like individuals, and the blows which they were exchanging were governed by the innumerable rules of that art of boxing which Saint-Loup had expounded to me; but since, even if one chose to consider them as individuals, they were at the same time giant assemblages of individuals, the quarrel took on immense and magnificent forms, like the surge of a million-waved ocean which tries to shatter an age-old line of cliffs, or like gigantic glaciers which with their slow destructive oscillations attempt to break down the frame of mountains which surrounds them.

But in spite of this, life continued almost unchanged for many of these who have played a part in this story, and not least for M. de Charlus and the Verdurins, just as if the Germans had not been as near them as they were, since the threat of a danger momentarily checked but permanently alive leaves us absolutely indifferent if we do not picture it to ourselves. People, as they go about their pleasures, do not normally stop to think that, if certain moderating and weakening influences should happen to be suspended, the proliferation of infusoria would attain its maximum theoretical rate and after a very few days the organisms that might have been contained in a cubic millimetre would take a leap of many millions of miles and become a mass a million times greater than the sun, having in the process destroyed all our oxygen and all the substances on which we live, so that there would exist neither humanity nor animals nor earth, nor do they reflect that an irremediable and by no means improbable catastrophe may one day be generated in the ether by the incessant and frenzied activity which lies behind the apparent immutability of the sun; they busy themselves with their own affairs without thinking about these two worlds, the one too small, the other too large for us to be aware of the cosmic menaces with which they envelop us.

So it was that the Verdurins gave dinner-parties (then, after a time, Mme Verdurin gave them alone, for M. Verdurin died) and M. de Charlus went about his pleasures and hardly ever stopped to reflect that the Germans—immobilised, it is true, by a bloody barrier perpetually renewed—were only an hour by car from Paris. The Verdurins, one would imagine, did think about this fact, since they had a political salon in which every evening they and their friends discussed the situation not only of the armies but of the fleets. They thought certainly of these hecatombs of regiments annihilated and passengers swallowed by the waves; but there is a law of inverse proportion which multiplies to such an extent anything that concerns our own welfare and divides by such a formidable figure anything that does not concern it, that the death of unknown millions is felt by us as the most insignificant of sensations, hardly even as disagreeable as a draught. Mme Verdurin, who suffered even more from her headaches now that she could no longer get croissants to dip in her breakfast coffee, had eventually obtained a prescription from Cottard permitting her to have them specially made in a certain restaurant of which we have spoken. This had been almost as difficult to wangle with the authorities as the appointment of a general. The first of these special croissants arrived on the morning on which the newspapers reported the sinking of the *Lusitania*. As she dipped it in her coffee and gave a series of little flicks to her newspaper with one hand so as to make it stay open without her having to remove her other hand from the cup, "How horrible!" she said. "This is something more horrible than the most terrible stage tragedy." But the death of all these drowned people must have been reduced a thousand million times before it impinged upon her, for even as, with her mouth full, she made these distressful observations, the expression which spread over her face, brought there (one must suppose) by the savour of that so precious remedy against headaches, the croissant, was in fact one of satisfaction and pleasure.

As for M. de Charlus, his case was a little different, but worse even, for he went beyond not passionately desiring the victory of France: he desired rather, without admitting it to himself, that Germany should, if not triumph, at least not be crushed as everybody hoped she would be. And for this attitude of his the reason was, again, that the great collections of individuals called nations themselves behave to some extent like individuals. The logic that governs them is an inner logic, wrought and perpetually re-wrought by passions, like that of men and women at grips with one another in an amorous or domestic quarrel, the quarrel of a son with his father, or of a cook with her mistress, or a wife with her husband. The party who is in the wrong believes nevertheless that he is in the right—this was so in the case of Germany—and the party who is in the right sometimes supports his excellent cause with arguments which appear to him to be irrefutable only because they answer to his own passionate feelings. In these quarrels of individuals, the surest way of being convinced of the excellence of the cause of one party or the other is actually to be that party: a spectator will never to the same extent give his unqualified approval. Now within a nation the individual, if he is truly part of the nation, is simply a cell of the nation-individual. It is ridiculous to talk about the power of propaganda. Had the French been told that they were going to be beaten, no single Frenchman would have given way to despair any more than he would if he had been told that he was going to be killed by the Berthas. The real propaganda is what—if we are genuinely a living member of a nation—we tell ourselves because we have

hope, hope being a symbol of a nation's instinct of self-preservation. To remain blind to the unjustness of the cause of the individual "Germany," to recognise at every moment the justness of the cause of the individual "France," the surest way was not for a German to be without judgment, or for a Frenchman to possess it, it was, both for the one and for the other, to be possessed of patriotism. M. de Charlus, who had rare moral qualities, who was susceptible to pity, generous, capable of affection and devotion, on the other hand for various reasons—among which the fact that his mother had been a Duchess of Bavaria may have played a part—did not have patriotism. He belonged, in consequence, no more to the body France than to the body Germany. Even I myself, had I been devoid of patriotism, had I not felt myself to be one of the cells of the body France, could not, it seems to me, have judged the quarrel in the manner in which I might have judged it in the past. In my adolescence, when I believed word for word what I was told, I should no doubt, hearing the German government protest its good faith, have been tempted to believe that this good faith existed; but I had learned long ago that our thoughts do not always accord with our words; not only had I one day, from the window on the staircase, discovered a Charlus whose existence I did not suspect; more important, in Françoise, and then, alas, in Albertine, I had seen the formation of opinions and projects so contrary to their words that now, even in the role of mere spectator, I should not have allowed any of the pronouncements of the Kaiser or the King of Bulgaria to deceive my instinct. But after all I can only conjecture what I might have done if I had not been an actor in the drama, if I had not been a part of the actor France in the same way as, in my quarrels with Albertine, my sad gaze and the choking feeling in my throat had been parts of the individual "me" who was passionately interested in my cause; I could not arrive at detachment. That of M. de Charlus was complete. And given that he was nothing more than a spectator, and that, without being genuinely French, he was living in France, there was every reason why he was likely to be pro-German. In the first place, he was very intelligent and in every country fools form the bulk of the population; no doubt, had he lived in Germany, the German fools defending foolishly and with passion an unjust cause would have irritated him; but living as he did in France, the French fools defending foolishly and with passion a just cause irritated him quite as much. The logic of passion, even if it happens to be in the service of the best possible cause, is never irrefutable for the man who is not himself passionate. Inevitably M. de Charlus with his critical intelligence seized on every weak point in the reasoning of the patriots. And then the complacency that an imbecile derives from the excellence of his cause, and the certainty of victory, are particularly irritating phenomena. Inevitably M. de Charlus was irritated by the triumphant optimism of people who did not know Germany and Germany's strength as he did, who believed every month in a crushing victory for the following month, and at the end of the year were as confident in making fresh predictions as though they had never, with equal confidence, made false ones—which they had, however, forgotten, saying, if they were reminded of them, that it "was not the same thing." (Yet M. de Charlus, profound as his intelligence was in some directions, would perhaps have failed to see that in art "This is not the same thing" is what the detractors of Manet return to those who tell them "People said the same thing about Delacroix.")

Then again, M. de Charlus was merciful, the idea of a vanquished opponent caused him pain, he was always on the side of the underdog, he refrained from reading the law reports in the newspapers in order not to have to suffer in his own flesh from the anguish of the condemned man and from the impossibility of assassinating the judge, the executioner and the crowd that stood gloating to see "justice done." He was certain in any case that France could not be defeated now, and he knew on the other hand that the Germans were suffering from famine and would be obliged sooner or later to surrender unconditionally. And this idea too he more particularly disliked owing to the fact that he was living in France. His memories of Germany, after all, were distant, while the French who spoke of the crushing defeat of Germany with a joy which disgusted him, were people whose defects were known to him, their personalities unsympathetic. In such circumstances we pity more readily those whom we do not know, whom we merely imagine, than those who are near us in the vulgarity of daily life, unless—once again—we ourselves altogether are the latter and form but one flesh with them, since patriotism accomplishes the miracle that we are "for" our country as in a quarrel between lovers we are "for" ourself.

So the war for M. de Charlus was an extraordinarily fertile breeding-ground of those hatreds he was prone to which sprang up in him in a moment and had only a very brief existence, during which, however, he would have abandoned himself to any violent impulse. When he read the newspapers, the air of triumph with which day after day the journalists portrayed Germany as beaten—"the Beast at bay, reduced to impotence"—while the contrary was only too true, their cheerful and savage stupidity, intoxicated him with rage. The newspapers at this moment were written partly by well-known men who found this a means of "serving their country again," men such as Brichot, Norpois, Morel even, and Legrandin. M. de Charlus longed to meet them, to heap the most bitter sarcasms on their heads. Always particularly well-informed about sexual irregularities, he knew of some in individuals who, believing their own to be unknown, complacently denounced such things in the sovereigns of the "Empires of Prey," in Wagner, etc. He had a furious desire to find himself face to face with these men, to rub their noses in their own vice before the eyes of the world and leave them, these insulters of a vanquished opponent, dishonoured and gasping for breath.

Finally, M. de Charlus had also more particular reasons for being the pro-German that he was. One was that, himself a man of the world, he had lived much among men of the world, honourable men and men of honour, men who will not shake hands with a scoundrel; he was acquainted with their scruples and also with their hardness, he knew them to be insensible to the tears of a man whom they expel from a club or with whom they refuse to fight a duel, even if this act of "moral hygiene" should bring about the death of the black sheep's mother. And so in spite of himself, whatever admiration he might feel for England and for the

admirable fashion in which she entered the war, nevertheless this impeccable England—incapable of falsehood but forbidding the entry of wheat and milk into Germany—was in his eyes a little too much the man of honour among nations, the professional second in duels, the arbiter of affairs of honour, whereas his experience told him that men of a different type, men with a blot upon their reputation, scoundrels like some of Dostoevsky's characters, may in fact be better—though I have never been able to understand why he identified the Germans with such men, since falsehood and deceit are in themselves no evidence of a kind heart, which is something the Germans do not seem to have displayed.

One last trait must be mentioned to complete this account of the pro-Germanism of M. de Charlus: he owed it, and through a most bizarre reaction, to his "Charlusism." He found the Germans very ugly, perhaps because they were rather too near to his own blood—it was the Moroccans he was mad about and even more the Anglo-Saxons, in whom he saw living statues by Phidias. Now in him pleasure was not unaccompanied by a certain idea of cruelty of which I had not at that time learned the full force: the man whom he loved appeared to him in the guise of a delightful torturer. In taking sides against the Germans he would have seemed to himself to be acting as he did only in his hours of physical pleasure, to be acting, that is, in a manner contrary to his merciful nature, fired with passion for seductive evil and helping to crush virtuous ugliness. This too was his reaction at the time of the murder of Rasputin, an event which, happening as it did at a supper-party *à la* Dostoevsky, caused a general surprise because people found in it so strong a Russian flavour (this impression would have been stronger still had the public not been unaware of aspects of the case that were perfectly well known to M. de Charlus), because life disappoints us so often that in the end we come to believe that literature bears no relation to it and we are therefore astounded when we see the precious ideas that literature has revealed to us display themselves, without fear of getting spoiled, gratuitously, naturally, in the midst of daily life, when we see, for instance, that a supper-party and a murder taking place in Russia actually have something Russian about them.

The war dragged on indefinitely and those who, already several years earlier, had reported on good authority that negotiations for peace had been begun, even specifying the clauses of the treaty, were at no pains now, when they talked to you, to make excuses for their previous false rumours. They had forgotten them and were ready in all sincerity to propagate others which they would forget just as quickly. It was the period when there were constant Gotha raids; the air was perpetually buzzing with the vibration, vigilant and sonorous, of French aeroplanes. But at intervals the siren rang out like the heart-rending scream of a Valkyrie—the only German music to have been heard since the war—until the moment when the fire-engines announced that the alert was over, while beside them, like an invisible street-urchin, the all-clear at regular intervals commented on the good news and hurled its cry of joy into the air.

M. de Charlus was astonished to see that even men like Brichot who before the war had been militarists and had never ceased to reproach France for her lack of military preparedness, were not content now with reproaching Germany for the excesses of her militarism, but criticised even her admiration of the army. No doubt they expressed quite different opinions the moment there was any danger of slowing down the war against Germany and continued, for the best reasons, to denounce the pacifists of their own country. But Brichot, for example, having consented, in spite of his bad eyesight, to discuss in some lectures certain works which had appeared in neutral countries, gave high praise to a novel by a Swiss author which has a satirical passage about two children—militarists in embryo—who are struck dumb with symbolic admiration at the sight of a dragoon. There were other reasons why this satire was likely to displease M. de Charlus, who deemed that a dragoon may be a very beautiful thing. But above all he did not understand Brichot's admiration, if not for the book, which the Baron had not read, at least for its spirit, so different from that which had animated Brichot himself before the war. At that time everything that a military man did was right, even the irregularities of General de Boisdeffre, the disguises and strategies of Colonel du Paty de Clam, the forgery of Colonel Henry. By what extraordinary volte-face (it was in reality merely another aspect of the same very noble passion, the passion of patriotism, which, from being militarist when it was struggling against Dreyfusism, a phenomenon of anti-militarist tendencies, had been obliged itself to become almost anti-militarist now that the struggle was against the hyper-militaristic Germany) had Brichot come to exclaim: "O marvellous and mighty spectacle, fit lure for the youth of an age that is all brutality and knows only the cult of force: a dragoon! Well may one judge what the base soldiery will be of a generation reared in the cult of these manifestations of brutal force." He approved too of another Swiss novelist, Spitteler, who "wanting something to oppose to the hideous conception of the sword supreme, symbolically exiled to the depths of the forests the dreamy figure, mocked, calumniated and solitary, whom he calls the Mad Student, his delightful incarnation of the sweetness—unfashionable, alas, and perhaps soon to be forgotten if the grim rule of the ancient god of the militarists is not destroyed—the adorable sweetness of the times of peace."

"Now tell me," M. de Charlus said to me, "you know Cottard and you know Cambremer. Every time I see them, they talk to me about Germany's extraordinary lack of psychology. But between ourselves, do you think that hitherto they have cared much about psychology, or that even now they are capable of giving proof of any skill in it? You may be sure that I am not exaggerating. Even if he is talking about the very greatest of Germans, about Nietzsche or Goethe himself, you will hear Cottard say: 'with the habitual lack of psychology which characterises the Teutonic race.' Naturally there are things in the war which cause me greater distress, but you must admit that this is exasperating. Norpois is more intelligent, I grant you, although since the beginning of the war he has on every occasion been wrong. But what can one say of these articles of Brichot's which are arousing universal enthusiasm? You know as well as I do, my dear sir, the merit of the man, whom I like very much, even after the schism which has cut me off from his little church, which causes me to see

much less of him than I used to. But still I have a certain regard for this usher with the gift of the gab and a vast amount of learning, and I confess that it is very touching that at his age—and with his strength failing as it clearly has been failing for some years past—he should, as he says, have taken it upon himself to ‘serve again.’ But after all, good intentions are one thing, talent is another, and talent Brichot has never had. I admit that I share his admiration for certain elements of greatness in the present war. I do, however, find it strange that a blind partisan of antiquity like Brichot, who could not be sarcastic enough about Zola for discovering more poetry in a working-class home or a coal-mine than in the famous palaces of history, or about Goncourt for elevating Diderot above Homer and Watteau above Raphael, should incessantly drum into our ears that Thermopylae and even Austerlitz were nothing compared with Vauquois. And this time, to make things worse, the public, after resisting the modernists of literature and art, is falling into line with the modernists of war, because it is an accepted fashion to think like this and also because little minds are crushed, not by the beauty, but by the hugeness of the action. It is true that *kolossal* is now spelt only with a *k*, but fundamentally, what people are bowing the knee to is simply the colossal. By the way, talking of Brichot, have you seen Morel? I am told that he wants to see me again. He has only to take the first step. I am the older man, it is not for me to make a move.”

Unfortunately only the next day, to anticipate a little, M. de Charlus found himself face to face with Morel in the street; Morel, to inflame his jealousy, took him by the arm and told him various tales which were more or less true and which agitated M. de Charlus and made him feel that he needed Morel’s presence beside him that evening, that he must not be allowed to go anywhere else. But the young man, catching sight of a friend of his own age, quickly said good-bye to M. de Charlus, whereupon the Baron, hoping that this threat—which naturally he would never carry out—would make Morel stay, said to him: “Take care, I shall have my revenge.” Morel, however, went off with a laugh, giving his astonished young friend a pat on the neck and putting his arm round his waist.

No doubt the remark which M. de Charlus had just made to me about Morel’s wishing to see him was proof of the extent to which love—and that of the Baron must have been extremely persistent—while it makes a man more imaginative and quicker to take offence, at the same time makes him more credulous and less proud. But when M. de Charlus went on: “He is a boy who is mad about women and thinks of nothing else,” his words were truer than he thought. He said this out of vanity and out of love, so that people might suppose that Morel’s attachment to him had not been followed by others of the same nature. I certainly did not believe a word of it, I who had seen, what M. de Charlus still did not know, that for fifty francs Morel had once given himself to the Prince de Guermantes for a night. And if, when he saw M. de Charlus pass in the street, Morel (except on the days when, from a need to confess, he would bump into him so as to have the opportunity to say gloomily: “Oh! I am so sorry, I quite see that I have behaved disgustingly towards you”), seated at a café on the pavement with his friends, would join them in noisily pointing at the Baron and making those little clucking noises with which people make fun of an old invert, I was persuaded that this was in order to conceal his own activities; and that likewise, taken aside by the Baron, each one of these public accusers would have done everything that the latter asked of him. I was wrong. If a strange development had brought to inversion—and in every social class—men like Saint-Loup who were furthest removed from it, a movement in the contrary direction had detached from these practices those in whom they were most habitual. In some the change had been wrought by tardy religious scruples, by the emotion they had felt when certain scandals had blazed into publicity, or by the fear of non-existent diseases in which they had been made to believe either, in all sincerity, by a relative who was often a concierge or a valet, or, disingenuously, by a jealous lover who had thought that in this way he would keep for himself alone a young man whom he had, on the contrary, succeeded in detaching from himself as well as from others. Thus it was that the former lift-boy at Balbec would now not have accepted for silver or gold propositions which he had come to regard as no less criminal than treasonable proposals from the enemy. In the case of Morel, however, his refusal of all offers without exception, as to which M. de Charlus had unwittingly spoken a truth which at one and the same time justified his illusions and destroyed his hopes, came from the fact that, two years after having left M. de Charlus, he had fallen in love with a woman whom he now lived with and that she, having the stronger will of the two, had managed to impose upon him an absolute fidelity. So that Morel, who at the time when M. de Charlus was showering so much money upon him had given a night to the Prince de Guermantes for fifty francs, would not now have accepted from the latter or from any other man whatever an offer even of fifty thousand. In default of honour and disinterestedness, his mistress had inculcated in him some concern for people’s opinion of him, which made him not averse even to demonstrating, with a show of bravado, that all the money in the world meant nothing to him when it was offered on certain conditions. Thus, in the flowering of the human species, the interplay of different psychological laws operates always in such a way as to compensate for any process that might otherwise, in one direction or the other, through plethora or through rarefaction, bring about the annihilation of the race. And thus, too, among flowers, a similar wisdom, which Darwin was the first to bring to light, governs their different modes of fertilisation, opposing them successively one to another.

“It is a strange thing,” M. de Charlus went on, in the shrill little voice with which he sometimes spoke, “I hear people who appear to be perfectly happy all day long and enjoy their cocktails, declare that they will never last until the end of the war, that their hearts won’t stand it, that they can think of nothing else, that they will quite suddenly die. And what is really extraordinary is that this does in fact happen! How curious it is! Is it a question of nourishment, because the food they eat is all so badly prepared now, or is it because, to prove their zeal, they harness themselves to tasks which are useless but destroy the mode of life which kept them alive? Anyhow, I have noted an astonishing number of these strange premature deaths, premature at least

from the point of view of the deceased. I forget what I was saying to you just now, about Norpois and his admiration for the war. But what a singular manner he has of writing about it! First, have you noticed the pullulation in his articles of new expressions which, when they have eventually worn themselves out by dint of being employed day after day—for really Norpois is indefatigable, I think the death of my aunt Villeparisis must have given him a second youth—are immediately replaced by yet other commonplaces? In the old days I remember you used to amuse yourself by recording the fashionable phrases which appeared and had their vogue and then disappeared: ‘he who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind’; ‘the dogs bark, but the caravan moves on’; ‘give me a good policy and I will give you good finances, as Baron Louis said’; ‘these are symptoms which it would be exaggerated to take tragically but wise to take seriously’; ‘to work for the King of Prussia’ (this last, inevitably, has come to life again). Well, since then, alas, how many of the species have I seen born and die! We have had ‘the scrap of paper,’ ‘the Empires of Prey,’ ‘the famous *Kultur* which consists in massacring defenceless women and children,’ ‘victory belongs, as the Japanese say, to the side which can hold out for a quarter of an hour longer than the other,’ ‘the Germano-Turanians,’ ‘scientific barbarism,’ ‘if we want to win the war, as Mr Lloyd George has forcibly said’ (but that’s out of date now), and ‘the fighting spirit of our troops’ or ‘the pluck of our troops.’ Even the syntax of the excellent Norpois has undergone in consequence of the war as profound a change as the baking of bread or the speed of transport. Have you observed that the excellent man, wanting to proclaim his own desires as a truth on the verge of being realised, does not dare nevertheless to employ the future pure and simple, since this would run the risk of being contradicted by events, but has adopted as a sign of future tense the verb ‘to know’?”

I confessed to M. de Charlus that I did not quite understand what he meant.

(I ought to mention here that the Duc de Guermantes by no means shared his brother’s pessimism. Furthermore, he was as anglophile as M. de Charlus was anglophobe. And he regarded M. Caillaux as a traitor who deserved a thousand times over to be shot. When his brother asked him for proofs of the man’s treason, M. de Guermantes replied that, if we were only to convict people who signed a statement saying “I am a traitor,” the crime of treason would never be punished. But in case I should not have occasion to return to the subject, I will mention also that a few years later, when Caillaux was on trial, the Duc de Guermantes, animated as he was by the purest anti-Caillautism, met an English military attaché and his wife, an exceptionally cultivated couple with whom he made friends, as he had done at the time of the Dreyfus case with the three charming ladies; that on the first day of the acquaintance he was astounded, talking of Caillaux, whom he regarded as obviously guilty and certain to be convicted, to hear the cultivated and charming couple say: “But he will probably be acquitted, there is absolutely no evidence against him.” M. de Guermantes tried to argue that M. de Norpois, in the witness box, had fixed the unhappy Caillaux with his gaze and said to him: “You are the Giolitti of France, yes, Monsieur Caillaux, you are the Giolitti of France.” But the cultivated and charming couple had smiled, made fun of M. de Norpois, cited proofs of his senility and concluded that, though *Le Figaro* might have said that he had addressed these words to “the unhappy M. Caillaux,” he had probably in fact addressed them to a highly amused M. Caillaux. The Duc de Guermantes lost no time in changing his opinions. That this change could be brought about by the influence of an Englishwoman is not so extraordinary as one might have supposed had it been foretold even as late as 1919, when the English still spoke of the Germans only as “the Huns” and demanded savage penalties for the guilty. For their opinions too had changed and now—less than a year later—they approved every decision which was likely to distress France and be of help to Germany.)

To return to M. de Charlus: “Yes,” he said, in reply to my confession that I did not quite understand. “I mean exactly what I say: ‘to know,’ in the articles of Norpois, indicates the future, it indicates, that is to say, the desires of Norpois, and indeed the desires of us all,” he added, perhaps without complete sincerity. “I am sure you will agree with me. If ‘to know’ had not become simply a sign of the future tense, one might just find it intelligible for the subject of this verb to be a country. For instance, every time Norpois says: ‘America would not know how to remain indifferent to these repeated violations of international law,’ ‘the Dual Monarchy would not know how to fail to come to its senses,’ it is clear that such phrases express the desires of Norpois (they are also mine, and yours)—but here nevertheless the verb can still just retain its original meaning, for a country can ‘know,’ America can ‘know,’ the Dual Monarchy itself can ‘know’ (in spite of its eternal ‘lack of psychology’). But when Norpois writes: ‘These systematic devastations would not know how to persuade the neutrals,’ ‘the region of the Lakes would not know how to fail to fall speedily into the hands of the Allies,’ ‘the results of these neutralist elections would not know how to reflect the opinion of the vast majority of the country,’ there is no longer any possibility of doubt. For it is certain that these devastations, these regions, these electoral results are inanimate things which cannot ‘know.’ And in using this formula Norpois is simply addressing to the neutrals an injunction (which, I regret to say, they do not appear to be obeying) to abandon their neutrality, or to the region of the Lakes an injunction no longer to belong to the ‘Boches’ ” (M. de Charlus gave the impression of having to pluck up courage to pronounce the word “Boche,” very much as in the past, in the “tram” at Balbec, he had when he had talked about men whose taste is not for women).

“And then, have you noticed the wily fashion in which, ever since 1914, Norpois has begun his articles to the neutrals? He starts by declaring that of course it is not for France to interfere in the politics of Italy (or of Rumania or Bulgaria or whatever country it may be). These powers alone must decide, in full independence and with only their own national interests in view, whether or no it is their duty to abandon neutrality. But if these opening statements of the article (what would once have been called the exordium) are disinterested, the sequel is generally much less so. ‘Nevertheless’—this is the gist of what Norpois goes on to say—it is

quite clear that only those nations will derive a material benefit from the struggle which have ranged themselves on the side of Law and Justice. It cannot be expected that the Allies should reward, by bestowing upon them the territories which for centuries have resounded with the groans of their oppressed brethren, those peoples who, taking the line of least resistance, have not drawn their sword in the service of the Allies.' Once he has taken this first step towards a counsel of intervention, there is no holding Norpois, it is not only the principles but the moment of intervention as to which, with less and less attempt at disguise, he delivers advice. 'Certainly,' he says, sailing, as he himself would say, under false colours, 'it is for Italy, for Romania alone to decide when the hour has come to strike and what form their intervention shall take. They cannot, however, be unaware that, if they protract their tergiversations, they run the risk of losing their opportunity. Already the hoofs of the Russian cavalry are sending a shiver of unspeakable panic through the trapped millions of Germany. It must be evident that the peoples who have done nothing more than fly to the help of that victory of which already we see the resplendent dawn, will have no right or title to the reward that they may still, if they hasten, etc.' It is like the notices you see at the theatre: 'Book now. The last remaining seats will soon be sold.' And what makes this reasoning all the stupider is that Norpois has to revise it every six months, saying to Romania at regular intervals: 'The hour has come for Romania to determine whether or no she wishes to realise her national aspirations. Any further delay and it may be too late.' But though he has been saying this for three years, not only has the 'too late' not yet come, the offers that are made to Romania are constantly being improved. In the same way he invites France, etc., to intervene in Greece by virtue of her status as a protective power because the treaty that bound Greece to Serbia has not been observed. But, candidly, if France were not at war and did not desire the assistance or the benevolent neutrality of Greece, would she take it into her head to intervene as a protective power? Those moral sentiments which make France raise her voice in horror because Greece has not kept her engagements towards Serbia, are they not silent the moment it is a question of the equally flagrant violation of treaties by Romania or Italy, which countries—rightly I think, and the same is true of Greece—have failed to carry out their obligations (though these are less imperative and less far-reaching than they are said to be) as allies of Germany? The truth is that people see everything through the medium of their newspaper, and what else could they do, seeing that they are not personally acquainted with the men or the events under discussion? At the time of the Affair in which you took so passionate and so bizarre an interest, in that epoch from which it is now the convention to say that we are separated by centuries—for the philosophers of the war have spread the doctrine that all links with the past are broken—I was shocked to see men and women of my family express high esteem for anti-clericals with a Communard past whom their newspaper represented to them as anti-Dreyfusards, and at the same time severe disapproval of a Catholic general of good family who was in favour of a retrial. I am no less shocked now to see all Frenchmen execrate that same Emperor Franz Josef whom once they venerated—and rightly, I may say, I who have known him well and whom he is gracious enough to treat as his cousin. Ah! I haven't written to him since the war," he added, as if he were boldly confessing a fault for which he knew quite well he could not be blamed. "No, the first year I did write, but once only. But what would you have me do? My respect for him is unaltered, but I have many young relatives here fighting in our lines who would, I know, be most displeased were I to carry on a regular correspondence with the head of a nation that is at war with us. How could I? Criticise me who will," he continued, and again he seemed bravely to invite my reproaches, "but in these times I have not wanted a letter signed Charlus to arrive in Vienna. There is only one point in the conduct of the old monarch that I would wish to criticise at all severely, and that is that a nobleman of his rank, head of one of the most ancient and illustrious houses of Europe, should have allowed himself to be led astray by a petty landowner—a very intelligent man, of course, but still a complete upstart—like William of Hohenzollern. It is one of the more shocking anomalies of this war."

And as, the moment he returned to considerations of genealogy and precedence, which for him fundamentally dominated all others, M. de Charlus became capable of extraordinary childishness, he said to me, in the tone that he might have used in speaking of the Marne or Verdun, that there were important and extremely curious things which ought not to be omitted by anyone who came to write the history of this war. "For instance," he said, "everybody is so ignorant that no one has bothered to point out this very striking fact: the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, who is a pure Boche, continues none the less to live in Rome where, as Grand Master of our order, he enjoys the privilege of extraterritoriality. Most interesting," he added significantly, as if to say: "You see that you have not wasted your evening by meeting me." I thanked him, and he assumed the modest air of one who asks no reward for services rendered.

M. de Charlus still retained all his respect and all his affection for certain great ladies who were accused of defeatism, just as he had in the past for others who had been accused of Dreyfusism. He regretted only that by stooping to meddle in politics they had given a handle to the "polemics of the journalists." In his own attitude to them nothing had changed. So systematic was his frivolity that for him birth, combined with beauty and with other sources of prestige, was the durable thing and the war, like the Dreyfus case, merely a vulgar and fugitive fashion. Had the Duchesse de Guermantes been shot for trying to make a separate peace with Austria, he would still have considered her no less noble than before, no more dishonoured by this mischance than is Marie-Antoinette in our eyes from having been condemned to the guillotine. He was speaking seriously now and for a brief instant, with the noble air of a Saint-Vallier or a Saint-Mégrin, erect and stiff and solemn, he was free of all those mannerisms by which men of his sort betray themselves. And yet, why is it that not one of these men can ever have a voice which hits absolutely the right note? Even at this moment, when M. de Charlus's voice was so very near to solemnity, its pitch was still false, it still needed the tuning-fork to correct it. "Now, what was I saying to you?" he went on. "Ah! yes, that people hate Franz Josef now, because they take



their cue from their newspaper. As for King Constantine of Greece and the Tsar of Bulgaria, the public has oscillated more than once between aversion and sympathy, according as it has been said turn and turn about that they would join the side of the Entente or of what Brichot calls the Central Empires. Brichot, by the way, is telling us at every moment that 'the hour of Venizelos will strike.' Now I do not doubt that M. Venizelos is a statesman of great capabilities, but who says that the Greeks are so particularly eager to have him? We are told that he wanted Greece to keep her engagements towards Serbia. Even so, it would be as well to know what these engagements were and whether they were more far-reaching than those which Italy and Romania did not scruple to violate. We display for the manner in which Greece implements her treaties and respects her constitution an anxiety which we certainly would not display were it not in our interest to do so. Had there been no war, do you think the 'guarantor' powers would even have noticed the dissolution of the Chambers? What I see is simply that one by one the supports of the King of Greece are being withdrawn from him, so that when the day arrives when he no longer has an army to defend him he can be thrown out of the country or put into prison. I was saying just now that the public judges the King of Greece and the King of the Bulgars only as it is told to judge them by the newspapers. But here again, what opinion of these monarchs could people have except that of their newspapers, seeing that they are not acquainted with them? I personally have seen a great deal of them both, I knew Constantine of Greece very well indeed when he was Diadoch, he is a really splendid man. I have always thought that the Emperor Nicholas had a great affection for him. Of course I mean to imply nothing dishonourable. Princess Christian used to talk openly about it, but she is a terrible scandalmonger. As for the Tsar of the Bulgars, he is an out-and-out nancy and a monstrous liar, but very intelligent, a remarkable man. He likes me very much."

M. de Charlus, who could be so delightful, became horrid when he touched on these subjects. He brought to them that same sort of complacency which we find so exasperating in the invalid who keeps drawing attention to his good health. I have often thought that in the "twister" of Balbec, the faithful who so longed to hear the admission which he avoided making, would in fact have been unable to endure any real display of his mania; ill at ease, breathing with difficulty as one does in a sick-room or in the presence of a morphine addict who takes out his syringe in public, they would themselves have put a stop to the confidences which they imagined they desired. It was, indeed, exasperating to hear the whole world accused, and often without any semblance of proof, by someone who omitted himself from the special category to which one knew perfectly well that he belonged and in which he so readily included others. In spite of all his intelligence, he had in this context fabricated for himself a narrow little philosophy (at the bottom of which there was perhaps just a spark of that interest in the curiousness of life which Swann had felt) which explained everything by reference to these special causes and in which, as always happens when a man stoops to the level of his own vice, he was not only unworthy of himself but exceptionally satisfied with himself. Thus it was that this dignified and noble man put on the most imbecile smile to complete the following little speech: "As there are strong presumptions of the same kind as for Ferdinand of Coburg in the case of the Emperor William, this may well be the reason why Tsar Ferdinand has joined the side of the 'Empires of Prey.' After all, it is very understandable, one is indulgent to a *sister*, one refuses her nothing. To my mind that would be a very pretty explanation of Bulgaria's alliance with Germany." And at this stupid explanation M. de Charlus pealed with laughter as though he really found it most ingenious—an explanation which, even had it been based upon true facts, was in the same puerile category as the observations which M. de Charlus made about the war when he judged it from the point of view of a feudal lord or a Knight of St John of Jerusalem. He ended with a more sensible remark: "What is astonishing," he said, "is that this public which judges the men and events of the war solely from the newspapers, is persuaded that it forms its own opinions."

In this M. de Charlus was right. I have been told that it was fascinating to see the moments of silence and hesitation, so exactly like those that are necessary not merely to the pronouncement but to the formation of a personal opinion, which Mme de Forcheville used to have before declaring, as though it were a heartfelt sentiment: "No, I do not think they will take Warsaw"; "I have the impression that it cannot last another winter"; "the worst thing that could happen is a patched-up peace"; "what alarms me, if you want to know, is the Chamber"; "yes, I believe all the same that we shall succeed in breaking through." And to make these statements Odette assumed a simpering air which became even more exaggerated when she said: "I don't say the German armies do not fight well, but they lack what is called pluck." In pronouncing the word "pluck" (and it was the same when she merely said "fighting spirit") she executed with her hand the sculptural gesture, and with her eyes the wink, of an art student employing a technical term of the studios. Her language now, however, even more than in the past bore witness to her admiration for the English, whom she was no longer obliged to call, as formerly, merely "our neighbours across the Channel," or at most "our friends the English": they were "our loyal allies." Needless to say she never failed, relevant or not, to quote the expression *fair play* (and to point out that in the eyes of the English the Germans were unfair players) and also: "the important thing is to win the war, as our brave allies say." She even had an unfortunate habit of associating the name of her son-in-law with the subject of English soldiers and of referring to the pleasure which he derived from living cheek by jowl with Australians and Scotsmen, New Zealanders and Canadians. "My son-in-law Saint-Loup has learned the slang of all the brave *tommies*, he can make himself understood by the ones from the most distant *dominions*—and I don't mean just the general in command of the base, he fraternises with the humblest *private*."

May this parenthesis on Mme de Forcheville serve as my excuse, while I am strolling along the boulevards side by side with M. de Charlus, for embarking upon another, of greater length but useful as an illustration of this era, on the relations of Mme Verdurin with Brichot. The truth is that if, as we have seen, poor Brichot was

judged without indulgence by M. de Charlus (because the latter was both extremely intelligent and more or less unconsciously pro-German), he was treated still worse by the Verdurins. They no doubt were chauvinistic, and this ought to have made them appreciate Brichot's articles, which were in any case quite as good as many pieces of writing which delighted Mme Verdurin. But first, the reader may remember that already at La Raspelière Brichot had become for the Verdurins, instead of the great man that he had once been in their eyes, if not actually a scapegoat like Saniette at any rate a target for their scarcely disguised ridicule. Still, at that period he remained a faithful of the faithful and thus was entitled to a share in the advantages tacitly conferred by the statutes upon all the founding or associate members of the little group. But while, under cover of the war perhaps, or through the rapid crystallisation of a long-delayed social prestige, of which in fact all the necessary elements had for a long time existed in it, invisible and in a state of saturation, the drawing-room of the Verdurins had been opening itself to a new world and the faithful, at first the baits to attract this new world, had ended by being invited less and less themselves, at the same time a parallel phenomenon had been taking place in the life of Brichot. In spite of the Sorbonne, in spite of the *Institut*, before the war he had been a celebrity only inside the Verdurin drawing-room. But when he began to write, almost every day, articles adorned with that second-rate brilliance which we have so often seen him scatter open-handed in the presence of the faithful, yet enriched too with a perfectly genuine learning which, like a true man of the Sorbonne, he made no attempt to conceal however he might clothe it in agreeable forms, the "great world" was literally dazzled. And for once it had bestowed its favour upon someone who was far from being a nonentity, upon a man who could hold the attention of an audience by the fertility of his intelligence and the resources of his memory. So that now, while three duchesses spent the evening with Mme Verdurin, three other duchesses contested the honour of having the great man at their dinner table, and one of these invitations the great man usually accepted, feeling all the freer to do this since Mme Verdurin, exasperated by the success of his articles with the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was careful never to ask him to her house when some smart woman was to be there whom he did not yet know and who would lose no time in luring him away. Thus journalism (into which he was really doing no more than pour belatedly, with applause and in return for a magnificent financial reward, what all his life he had squandered incognito and for nothing in the Verdurin drawing-room—for his articles, since he had so much knowledge and wrote with such ease, cost him no more trouble than his conversation) might have led, indeed at one moment seemed to be leading Brichot to an indefeasible glory, had it not been for Mme Verdurin. Admittedly, these articles were far from being as remarkable as fashionable people supposed. The vulgarity of the man was apparent in every line beneath the pedantry of the scholar. And side by side with images which had absolutely no meaning ("the Germans will no longer be able to look Beethoven's statue in the face; Schiller must have shuddered in his tomb; the ink which had guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium was scarcely dry; Lenin speaks, but his words are scattered on the winds of the steppe") there were trivialities such as: "twenty thousand prisoners, that is indeed a figure; our command will know how to keep a weather eye open; we mean to win, that sums it up in a nutshell." Yet mixed with all this, how much knowledge, how much intelligence, what just reasoning! Mme Verdurin, however, never began an article by Brichot without first dwelling upon the enjoyable thought that she was going to find ridiculous things in it, and she read it with the most sustained attention in order to be certain of not letting them escape her. And unfortunately it could not be denied that ridiculous things there were. But the faithful did not even wait until they had found them. The most felicitous quotation from an author who was really very little known, at least in the work to which Brichot referred, was seized upon as proof of the most insufferable pedantry, and Mme Verdurin could hardly wait for the hour of dinner when she would unloose the torrential laughter of her guests. "Well, what do you say to tonight's Brichot? I thought of you when I read the quotation from Cuvier. I honestly think the man is going mad." "I haven't read it yet," Cottard would say. "What, you haven't read it yet? But you don't know what delights you are missing. I promise you you will die of laughter." And pleased at heart that someone had not yet read the latest Brichot, since this meant that she herself could call attention to the ludicrous things in it, Mme Verdurin would tell the butler to bring *Le Temps* and would herself read the article aloud, lingering with emphasis on the most simple phrases. After dinner, for the whole of the evening, the anti-Brichot campaign would continue, but with hypocritical reservations. "I won't say it too loud because I am afraid that over there," she would say, indicating Comtesse Molé, "there is a good deal of admiration for this stuff. Fashionable people are more foolish than is generally supposed." In saying this she did her best, by speaking just loud enough, to let Mme Molé hear that she was being talked about, and at the same time to convey to her, by occasionally lowering her voice, that she did not want her to hear what she was saying. Mme Molé was cowardly enough to disown Brichot, whom in fact she thought the equal of Michelet. She said that of course Mme Verdurin was right, and so as to end by nevertheless saying something which seemed to her incontestably true, added: "What one must allow him, is that it is well written." "You call that well written?" said Mme Verdurin. "Personally, I consider that it might have been written by a pig"—an audacity which always made her fashionable guests laugh, particularly as Mme Verdurin, as though she herself were frightened by the word "pig," uttered it in a whisper, holding her hand to her lips. Her rage against Brichot was still further increased by the naïve fashion in which he displayed his pleasure at his success, in spite of the fits of ill-humour provoked in him by the censorship every time that—as he expressed it, for he liked to employ new words in order to show that he was not too donnish—"blue-pencilled" part of his article. In his presence, however, Mme Verdurin did not reveal too clearly, save by a certain grumpiness which might have been a warning to a more perspicacious man, the poor opinion which she had of the writings of "Chochotte." Only once did she criticise him, for using the word "I" too often. And it was true that he was in the habit of using it continually, firstly because, with his professorial

habits, he was constantly employing phrases like “I grant that” and even (in the sense of “I am willing to admit that”) “I am willing that,” as for instance: “I am willing that the vast development of the fronts should necessitate, etc.,” but principally because, as a militant anti-Dreyfusard of the old days who had had suspicions of German preparations long before the war, he had frequently had occasion to write: “Since 1897 I have been denouncing”; “I pointed out in 1901”; “In my little pamphlet, of the greatest rarity today (*habent sua fata libelli*) I drew attention,” and the habit, once formed, had remained with him. He turned crimson at Mme Verdurin’s remark, which had been made with acerbity. “You are right, Madame. A man who had no more love for the Jesuits than M. Combes—although he never had the honour of a preface from our sweet master of delicious scepticism, Anatole France, who was, if I am not mistaken, my adversary ... before the Flood—observed that the first person singular is always odious.”<sup>6</sup> From that moment Brichot replaced “I” by “one,” but *one* did not prevent the reader from seeing that the author was speaking of himself, indeed it permitted him to speak of himself more frequently than ever, to comment on the most insignificant of his own phrases, to build a whole article round a single negative statement, always behind the protective screen of *one*. If for example Brichot had said, in another article perhaps, that the German armies had lost some of their strength, he would begin thus: “One does not camouflage the truth here. One has said that the German armies have lost some of their strength. One has not said that they do not still possess great strength. Still less will one write that the ground gained, if it is not, etc.” In short, simply by enunciating all that he would not say and by recalling all that he had said some years ago and all that Clausewitz, Jomini, Ovid, Apollonius of Tyana and others had said in the more recent or more remote past, Brichot could easily have put together the material for a solid volume. It is to be regretted that he did not publish one, for these erudite articles are now difficult to come by. The Faubourg Saint-Germain, admonished by Mme Verdurin, began by laughing at Brichot in her drawing-room, but continued, after departing from the little clan, to admire him. Then after a while it became the fashion to scoff at him as it had previously been to admire him, and even those ladies who continued to find him dazzling in secret while they were actually reading his articles, checked themselves and mocked as soon as they were no longer alone, so as not to appear less clever than their friends. Never was Brichot so much discussed in the little clan as at this period, but in a spirit of derision. The criterion for judging the intelligence of a newcomer was simply his opinion of Brichot’s articles, and if the first time he gave the wrong reply no pains were spared to instruct him how it was that you were recognised to be foolish or clever.

“Well, my poor friend,” M. de Charlus went on, “all this is very dreadful, and tedious articles are not the only things we have to deplore. We hear talk of vandalism, of the destruction of statues. But the destruction of so many marvellous young men, who while they lived were incomparable polychrome statues, is that not also vandalism? Will not a town which has lost all its beautiful men be like a town of which all the sculpture has been smashed to pieces? What pleasure can I get from dining in a restaurant where I am served by moth-eaten old buffoons who look like Father Didon, if not by hags in mob-caps who make me think I have strayed into one of Duval’s soup-kitchens? Yes, it’s as bad as that, my boy, and I think I have the right to say these things, because beauty is still beauty when it exists in a living material. How delightful to be served by rachitic creatures with spectacles on their noses and the reason for their exemption from military service written all over their faces! In these changed times, if you wish to rest your eyes on someone nice-looking in a restaurant, you must look not among the waiters who are serving you but among the customers who are eating and drinking. And then in the old days one could always see a waiter a second time, although they frequently changed, but with some English lieutenant who has perhaps never been to the restaurant before and may well be killed tomorrow, what hope is there of finding out who he is and when he will return? When Augustus of Poland, as we are told by the charming Morand, the delightful author of *Clarisse*, exchanged one of his regiments for a collection of Chinese porcelain, it is my opinion that he made a bad bargain. To think that all those huge footmen six foot tall and more, who used to adorn the monumental staircases of the lovely hostesses whose houses we visited, have one and all been killed, and that most of them joined up because it was dinning into them that the war would last two months! Ah! they did not know as I do the strength of Germany, the courage of the Prussian race,” he said, forgetting himself. And then, realising that he had revealed too much of his point of view, he went on: “It is not so much Germany that I fear for France as the war itself. People away from the front imagine that the war is no more than a gigantic boxing match, of which, thanks to the newspapers, they are spectators at a comfortable distance. But it is nothing of the sort. It is an illness which, when it seems to have been defeated at one point, returns at another. Today Noyon will be recovered from the enemy, tomorrow there will be no bread or chocolate, the next day the man who thought he was safe and was prepared, if necessary, to face death on the battlefield because he had not imagined it, will be panic-stricken to read in the newspapers that his class has been called up. As for monuments, it is not so much the quality as the quantity of the destruction that appals me, I am less horrified at the disappearance of a unique monument like Rheims than at that of all the living entities which once made the smallest village in France instructive and charming.”

My mind turned immediately to Combray, but in the past I had thought that I would lower myself in the eyes of Mme de Guermantes by confessing to the humble position which my family occupied there. I wondered now whether the facts had not been revealed to the Guermantes and to M. de Charlus, either by Legrandin or by Swann or Saint-Loup or Morel, and I said nothing, even this silence being less painful to me than a retrospective explanation. I only hoped that M. de Charlus would not mention Combray.

“I do not wish to speak ill of the Americans, Monsieur,” he went on, “it seems that they are inexhaustibly generous, and as there has been nobody to conduct the orchestra in this war, as each performer has joined in

a long time after the one before and the Americans only began when we had almost finished, they may possibly have an ardour which in us four years of war have succeeded in damping. Even before the war they were fond of our country and our art, they paid high prices for our masterpieces. They have taken many home with them. But this uprooted art, as M. Barrés would call it, is precisely the opposite of what once formed the delicious charm of France. The château explained the church, which itself, because it had been a place of pilgrimage, explained the *chanson de geste*. I need not dwell upon the illustriousness of my family and my connexions, which in any case is not the subject that concerns us. But recently I had occasion, to settle a matter of business, and in spite of a certain coolness that exists between the young couple and myself, to visit my niece Saint-Loup who lives at Combray. Combray was simply a small town like hundreds of others. But the ancestors of my family were portrayed as donors in some of the windows in the church, and in others our armorial bearings were depicted. We had our chapel there, and our tombs. And now this church has been destroyed by the French and the English because it served as an observation-post to the Germans. All that mixture of art and still-living history that was France is being destroyed, and we have not seen the end of the process yet. Of course I am not so absurd as to compare, for family reasons, the destruction of the church of Combray with that of the cathedral of Rheims, that miracle of a Gothic cathedral which seemed, somehow naturally, to have rediscovered the purity of antique sculpture, or of the cathedral of Amiens. I do not know whether the raised arm of St Firmin is still intact today or whether it has been broken. If so, the loftiest affirmation of faith and energy ever made has disappeared from this world."

"You mean its symbol, Monsieur," I interrupted. "And I adore certain symbols no less than you do. But it would be absurd to sacrifice to the symbol the reality that it symbolises. Cathedrals are to be adored until the day when, to preserve them, it would be necessary to deny the truths which they teach. The raised arm of St Firmin said, with an almost military gesture of command: 'Let us be broken, if honour requires.' Do not sacrifice men to stones whose beauty comes precisely from their having for a moment given fixed form to human truths."

"I understand what you mean," M. de Charlus replied, "and M. Barrés, who has sent us, alas, on too many pilgrimages to the statue of Strasbourg and the tomb of M. Déroulède, was both moving and graceful when he wrote that the cathedral of Rheims itself was less dear to us than the lives of our infantrymen. An assertion which makes nonsense of the wrath of our newspapers against the German general in command there who said that the cathedral of Rheims was less precious to him than the life of one German soldier. Indeed, the exasperating and depressing thing is that each country says the same. The reasons for which the industrialists of Germany declare the possession of Belfort indispensable for safeguarding their nation against our ideas of revenge, are the very same reasons as those which Barrés gives for demanding Mainz as a protection against the recurrent urge to invade which possesses the Boches. Why is it that the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine seemed to France an insufficient motive for embarking on a war, yet a sufficient motive for continuing one, for redeclaring it afresh year after year? You appear to believe that nothing can rob France of victory now and with all my heart I hope that you are right, you may be quite sure of that. But is it not a fact that since, rightly or wrongly, the Allies have come to believe that they are sure to win (for my part naturally I should be enchanted by this outcome, but what I see is mostly a profusion of victories on paper, Pyrrhic victories whose cost is not revealed to us) and the Boches no longer believe that they are sure to win, we see Germany striving to make peace quickly and France to prolong the war, France which is a just nation and does right to pronounce words of justice but is also sweet, gentle France and ought to pronounce words of mercy, were it only in order to spare her own children and to allow the flowers which bloom with each new spring to shed their lustre on other things than tombs? Be honest, my friend, you yourself once propounded a theory to me about things existing only in virtue of a creation which is perpetually renewed. The creation of the world did not take place once and for all, you said, it is, of necessity, taking place every day. Well, if you are sincere, you cannot except war from this theory. Never mind if the excellent Norpois has written (trotting out one of those oratorical phrases which are as dear to him as 'the dawn of victory' and 'General Winter'): 'Now that Germany has determined on war, the die is cast,' the truth is that every morning war is declared afresh. And the men who wish to continue it are as guilty as the men who began it, more guilty perhaps, for the latter perhaps did not foresee all its horrors."

"Besides, can we be sure that a war thus prolonged, even if it must eventually end in victory, is without danger? It is difficult to speak of things which have no precedent and of the repercussions upon an organism of an operation which is being attempted for the first time. Generally, it is true, novelties which people find alarming pass off very well. The most prudent republicans thought that it was mad to separate the Church from the State. It was as easy as sending a letter through the post. Dreyfus was rehabilitated, Picquart was made Minister of War, and nobody uttered a murmur. Yet what may we not fear from the stress and strain of a war which has continued without pause for several years? What will men do when they return from it? Will fatigue have broken them or will it have driven them mad? All this could have grave results, if not for France, at least for the government, perhaps even for the present form of government. You once made me read Maurras's excellent novel *Aimée de Coigny*. The original Aimée, you remember, was waiting for the collapse of the Empire to ensue from the war that it was waging in 1812, and I should be surprised if she has not her counterpart today. If a present-day Aimée de Coigny exists, will her hopes with regard to the Republic be fulfilled? I wouldn't want that."

"But to return to the war itself, can we say that the man who first began it was the Emperor William? I am very doubtful about that. And if it was, what has he done that Napoleon, for instance, did not do—something that I certainly find abominable, but that I am astonished to see also inspiring such horror in those who burn

incense before Napoleon, those who on the day that war was declared exclaimed like General Pau: 'I have been waiting forty years for this day. It is the most glorious day of my life.' Heaven knows whether anyone protested with greater energy than myself at the time when a deference out of all proportion was paid by society to the nationalists and the military men, when every friend of the arts was accused of occupying himself with things of baleful import to France and all civilisation of an unwarlike nature was thought to be pernicious! In those days an authentic member of the best society hardly counted compared with a general. Some madwoman came within an inch of presenting *me* to M. Syveton, as if *I* were *his* inferior. You will tell me that the rules I was striving to maintain were merely social ones. But for all their apparent frivolity they might have prevented many excesses. I have always honoured the defenders of grammar or logic. We realise fifty years later that they have averted serious dangers. Today our nationalists are the most anti-German of men, the most determined to persevere to the bitter end. But in the last fifteen years their philosophy has completely changed. It is true that they are pressing for the continuation of the war. But they are doing this only in order to exterminate a warlike race, they are doing it from love of peace. The idea of a martial civilisation, which fifteen years ago they thought so beautiful, now fills them with horror; not only do they reproach the Prussians for having allowed the military element to predominate in their state, they claim that throughout the ages military civilisations have been destructive of all that they now hold precious, not only of the arts but also of chivalry towards women. And if any critic of their views is converted to nationalism he at the same moment becomes a friend of peace. He is persuaded that in all martial civilisations women have been humiliated and crushed. One dare not reply that the 'lady' of a knight in the Middle Ages or Dante's Beatrice was perhaps placed upon a throne as elevated as the heroines of M. Becque. Any day now I expect to see myself placed at table beneath a Russian revolutionary or simply beneath one of these generals of ours who wage war out of horror of war and in order to punish a people for cultivating an ideal which fifteen years ago they themselves regarded as the only one that could invigorate a nation. It is not many months since the unhappy Tsar was honoured for his part in assembling the conference at The Hague. But now that people hail the advent of a free Russia they forget his claim to glory. So turns the wheel of the world. Meanwhile Germany uses expressions so similar to those of France that one can hardly believe she is not quoting her, she never tires of saying that she is 'struggling for existence.' When I read: 'We shall struggle against an implacable and cruel enemy until we have obtained a peace which will give us guarantees for the future against all aggression and ensure that the blood of our brave soldiers shall not have flowed in vain,' or: 'he who is not for us is against us,' I do not know whether the words are the Emperor William's or M. Poincaré's, for they have both of them, with a few trifling differences, pronounced such phrases twenty times, although to be truthful I must admit that in this instance it is the Emperor who has copied the President of the Republic. France would perhaps have been less eager to prolong the war if she had remained weak, and Germany certainly would have been in less of a hurry to end it if she had not ceased to be strong. I should say, to be as strong as she was; for strong, as you will see, she still is."

He had got into the habit of talking at the top of his voice, from excitability, from the need to find an outlet for impressions of which, never having cultivated any art, he needed to unburden himself—as an airman unloads his bombs, if necessary in open country—even where his words could impinge upon nobody, particularly in society, where they fell completely at random and where people listened to him out of snobbishness, uncritically and (to such an extent did he tyrannise his audience) one may say under compulsion and even from fear. On the boulevards this loud harangue of his was also a mark of contempt for the passers-by, for whom he no more lowered his voice than he would have stepped aside to avoid them. But it struck a discordant note there and caused astonishment and, worse than that, rendered audible to the people who turned round to look at us remarks which might well have made them take us for defeatists. I pointed this out to M. de Charlus but succeeded only in arousing his mirth. "You must admit that that would be most amusing," he said. "After all, one never knows, every evening each one of us runs the risk of being part of the next day's news. Is there really any reason why I should not be shot in a ditch at Vincennes? That is what happened to my great-uncle the Duc d'Enghien. The thirst for noble blood maddens a certain rabble—and here they show a greater fastidiousness than lions, for those beasts, as you know, would throw themselves even upon Mme Verdurin if she had so much as a scratch upon her nose. Upon what in my youth we would have called her *boko!*" And he began to roar with laughter as if we had been alone in a room.

At moments, seeing suspicious-looking individuals drawn out of the shadows by the passage of M. de Charlus conglomerate at a little distance from him, I wondered whether it would be more agreeable to him if I left him alone or remained with him. In the same way, if you meet an old man who is subject to frequent epileptic fits and see from the incoherence of his gait that an attack is probably imminent, you may ask yourself whether your company is more desired by him as a support or dreaded as that of a witness from whom he would prefer to conceal the attack and whose mere presence may perhaps suffice to bring it on, whereas absolute calm might succeed in averting it. But in the case of the sick man the possibility of the event upon which you are uncertain whether or no you ought to turn your back is revealed by his walking in circles as if he were drunk; while in that of M. de Charlus the divagations—sign of a possible incident as to which I did not know whether he desired or feared that my presence should prevent its occurrence—were transferred, as in an ingenious stage production, from the Baron himself, who was walking straight ahead, to a whole circle of supernumerary actors. All the same, it is my belief that he preferred to avoid the encounter, for he dragged me down a side-street, darker than the boulevard but into which nevertheless the latter was incessantly discharging—or else like a tributary stream they were flowing towards it—soldiers of every arm and of every nation, a rising youthful tide, compensatory and consoling for M. de Charlus, the reverse of that

ebb-tide of all men towards the frontier which in the first days of mobilisation had made a vacuum in the capital. At every moment M. de Charlus expressed his admiration for the brilliant uniforms which passed before us, which made of Paris a town as cosmopolitan as a port, as unreal as a stage setting designed by a painter who has simply put up a few scraps of architecture as an excuse for assembling the most variegated and glittering costumes.

Literally he did not know which way to turn his head; often he raised it, regretting that he did not have a pair of field-glasses (which would in fact have been of very little use to him), since because of the Zeppelin raid of two days earlier, which had caused the authorities to redouble their precautions, there were soldiers in greater numbers than usual even in the sky. The aeroplanes which a few hours earlier I had seen, like insects, as brown dots upon the surface of the blue evening, now passed like blazing fire-ships through the darkness of the night, which was made darker still by the partial extinction of the street lamps. And perhaps the greatest impression of beauty that these human shooting stars made us feel came simply from their forcing us to look at the sky, towards which normally we so seldom raise our eyes. In this Paris, whose beauty in 1914 I had seen awaiting almost defenceless the threat of the approaching enemy, there was certainly, as there had been then, the ancient unalterable splendour of a moon cruelly and mysteriously serene, which poured down its useless beauty upon the still untouched buildings of the capital; but as in 1914, and more now than in 1914, there was also something else, there were lights from a different source, intermittent beams which, whether they came from the aeroplanes or from the searchlights of the Eiffel Tower, one knew to be directed by an intelligent will, by a friendly vigilance which gave one the same kind of emotion, inspired the same sort of gratitude and calm that I had felt in Saint-Loup's room at Doncières, in the cell of that military cloister where so many fervent and disciplined hearts were exercising themselves in readiness for the day when, without hesitation, in the midst of their youth, they would consummate their sacrifice.

After the raid of two days earlier, when it had been more full of movement than the earth, the sky had become calm again as the sea becomes calm after a storm. But like the sea after a storm, it had not yet recovered absolute tranquillity. Aeroplanes were still mounting like rockets to the level of the stars, and searchlights, as they quartered the sky, swept slowly across it what looked like a pale dust of stars, of errant milky ways. Meanwhile the aeroplanes took their places among the constellations and seeing these "new stars" one might well have supposed oneself to be in another hemisphere.

M. de Charlus spoke to me of his admiration for these airmen of ours, and went on, since he was no more capable of checking the flow of his pro-German feelings than of his other inclinations, even though at the same time he denied both the one and the other tendency: "I must add of course that I have just as much admiration for the Germans who go up in the Gothas. And when it comes to the Zeppelins, think of the courage that is needed! They are heroes, there is no other word for it. What difference can it make that they are attacking civilians, if guns are firing at them? Are you afraid of the Gothas and the bombardment?" I admitted that I was not, but perhaps I was wrong. No doubt, my idleness having given me the habit, when it was a question of my work, of putting it off from one day to another, I imagined that death too might be postponed in the same fashion. How should one be afraid of a bombardment when one is convinced that one will not be hit today? Anyhow, formed in isolation, the idea of bombs being dropped, the idea of the possibility of death, had added nothing tragic to the image which I had in my mind of the German flying machines, until from one of them, storm-tossed and partly hidden from my sight by the thick billowing mists of an agitated sky, from an aeroplane which, though I knew it to be murderous, I imagined only as stellar and celestial, I had one evening seen the gesture of a bomb dropped upon us. For the novel reality of a danger is perceived only through the medium of that new thing, not assimilable to anything that we already know, to which we give the name "an impression" and which is often, as in the present case, epitomised in a line, a line which defines an intention and possesses the latent potentiality of the action which has given it its particular form, like the invisible line described by this falling bomb or those other lines which I had seen at the same time from the Pont de la Concorde, on all sides of the threatening, hunted aeroplane, as though they had been reflexions in the clouds of the fountains of the Champs-Élysées and the Place de la Concorde and the Tuileries: the beams of the searchlights travelling through the sky like luminous jets of water, which also were lines full of intention, full of the provident and protective intentions of men of power and wisdom to whom, as on that night in the barracks at Doncières, I felt grateful for condescending to employ their strength, with this so beautiful precision, in watching over our safety.

The night was as beautiful as in 1914, and the threat to Paris was as great. The moonlight was like a soft and steady magnesium flare, by the light of which some camera might, for the last time, have been recording nocturnal images of those lovely groups of buildings like the Place Vendôme and the Place de la Concorde, to which my fear of the shells that were perhaps about to destroy them imparted by contrast, as they stood in their still intact beauty, a sort of plenitude, as if they were bending forward and freely offering their defenceless architecture to the blows that might fall. "You are not afraid?" M. de Charlus repeated. "The people of Paris don't realise the situation. I am told that Mme Verdurin gives parties every day. I know it only from hearsay, personally I know absolutely nothing about them, I have completely broken off relations," he added, lowering not only his eyes as if a telegraph boy had passed, but also his head and his shoulders and raising his arm with the gesture that signifies, if not "I wash my hands of them" at any rate "I can tell you nothing about them" (not that I had asked him anything). "I know that Morel still goes there a lot," he went on (it was the first time that he had mentioned him again). "It is rumoured that he much regrets the past and would like to make it up with me," he continued, exhibiting at one and the same time the credulity of a man of the Faubourg who says: "People say that there are more talks than ever going on between France and

Germany, and even that negotiations have been started,” and that of the lover whom the most cruel rebuffs are unable to convince. “In any case, if he wants it, he only has to say so. I am older than he, it is not for me to take the first step.” And certainly there was no need to say this, so evident was it. But it was not even sincere, and this made one very embarrassed for M. de Charlus, for one felt that, by saying that it was not for him to take the first step, he was in fact making one and was waiting for me to offer to undertake a reconciliation.

Naturally I was familiar with the credulity, naïve or feigned, of people who love someone, or simply are not invited to someone’s house, and attribute to that someone a desire of which, in fact, in spite of wearisome solicitations, he has given no hint. But from the sudden tremor of the voice with which M. de Charlus pronounced these words, from the anxious look which flickered in the depths of his eyes, I got the impression that there was something more here than an ordinary attempt at bluff. I was not mistaken, and I will relate straight away the two facts which proved subsequently that I was right. (I take a leap of many years for the second of these incidents, which was posterior to the death of M. de Charlus, who was not to die until a much later period and whom we shall have occasion to see again a number of times, greatly changed from what we have known him to be, particularly the last time of all, when he had come to forget Morel completely.) The first of these incidents took place only two or three years after the evening on which I walked down the boulevards with M. de Charlus. About two years after this evening, I met Morel. I thought immediately of M. de Charlus, of the pleasure it would give him to see the violinist again, and I urged Morel to go and see him, even if it were only once. “He has been good to you,” I said, “he is an old man now, he may die, you should settle old scores and obliterate all trace of your quarrel.” Morel appeared to be entirely of my opinion as to the desirability of making peace, but he none the less refused categorically to visit M. de Charlus even once. “You are wrong,” I said. “Is it from obstinacy, from indolence, from spite, from misplaced vanity, from concern for your virtue (you may be sure that it will not be attacked), from coquettishness?” At this point the violinist, twisting his features as he forced himself to make an admission which no doubt was extremely painful, replied with a shudder: “No, it is from none of all those things. As for virtue, I don’t give a damn for it. Spite? On the contrary, I am beginning to pity him. It is not from coquettishness, which could serve no purpose. It is not from having too much to do, for there are whole days when I stay at home and twiddle my thumbs. No, it is not for any of these reasons. It is—but never say this to anybody, I am mad to tell you—it is, it is ... from fear!” He began to tremble in every limb. I confessed that I did not understand him. “No, don’t ask me, don’t let’s talk about it, you do not know him as I do, I may say that you do not know him at all.” “But what harm can he do you? In any case, he won’t want to harm you if you put an end to the bitterness that exists between you. And then, you know that at heart he is very kind.” “Good heavens, yes! I know he is kind. And wonderfully considerate, and honest. But let me alone, don’t let’s talk about it, I beseech you—it’s a shameful admission, but I am afraid!”

The second incident dates from after the death of M. de Charlus. I was brought one or two things which he had left me as mementoes, and also a letter enclosed in three envelopes, which he had written at least ten years before his death. He had been seriously ill at the time and had put all his affairs in order, but then had recovered, only to fall later into the condition in which we shall see him on the day of an afternoon party given by the Princesse de Guermantes—and the letter, put aside in a strong-box with the objects which he was bequeathing to a few friends, had remained there for seven years, seven years during which he had completely forgotten Morel. It was written in a firm and delicate hand-writing and was couched in the following terms:

“My dear friend, the ways of Providence are inscrutable. Sometimes a fault in a very ordinary man is made to serve its purposes by helping one of the just not to slip from his lofty eminence. You know Morel, you know the humbleness of his origin and the height (my own level, no less) to which I wished to raise him. You are aware that he preferred to return not to the dust and ashes from which every man—for man surely is the true phoenix—may be born again, but to the slime in which the viper crawls. He fell, and in so doing he saved me from falling from where I belong. You know that my arms contain the device of Our Lord himself: *Inculcabis super leonem et aspidem*, with the crest of a man having beneath the soles of his feet, as heraldic supporters, a lion and a serpent. Well, if I have succeeded as I have in crushing the lion proper that I am, it is thanks to the serpent and his prudence, which just now I was thoughtless enough to call a fault, for the profound wisdom of the Gospel makes a virtue of it, a virtue at least for other people. Our serpent, of the once harmonious and well-modulated hisses, was, when he had a charmer—a charmer charmed, moreover—not merely musical and reptilian, he had, to the point of cowardice, that virtue, prudence, which I now hold to be divine. This divine prudence it was that made him resist the appeals to come back and see me which I conveyed to him, and I shall have no peace in this world or hope of forgiveness in the next if I do not confess the truth to you. He was, in resisting my appeals, the instrument of divine wisdom, for I was resolved, had he come, that he should not leave my house alive. One of us two had to disappear. I had decided to kill him. God counselled him prudence to preserve me from crime. I do not doubt that the intercession of the Archangel Michael, my patron saint, played a great part in this and I beseech him to pardon me for having so neglected him over many years and for having so ill responded to the innumerable favours which he has conferred upon me, especially in my struggle against evil. I owe it to this Servant of God—I say the words in the plenitude of my faith and my understanding—that the heavenly Father inspired Morel not to come. And so it is I who am now about to die.

Your faithfully devoted, *Semper idem*,  
P. G. Charlus.

Reading these words I understood Morel's fear. Certainly there was in the letter more than a small element of pride and of literature. But the confession was true. And Morel had known better than I that the "practically mad side" of her brother-in-law's character which Mme de Guermantes used to hint at was not confined, as until this revelation I had supposed, to his momentary exhibitions of superficial and ineffective rage.

But I must return to my narrative. I am walking down the boulevards by the side of M. de Charlus, who has just made a vague attempt to use me as an intermediary for overtures of peace between himself and Morel. Seeing that I made no reply, "Anyhow," he went on, "I do not know why it is that he no longer gives concerts. There is no music now on the pretext that there is a war on, but people dance and go out to dinner and women invent something called Ambrine for their skin. Social amusements fill what may prove, if the Germans continue to advance, to be the last days of our Pompeii. And if the city is indeed doomed, that in itself will save it from frivolity. The lava of some German Vesuvius—and their naval guns are no less terrible than a volcano—has only to surprise these good people at their toilet and to eternise their gestures by interrupting them, and in days to come it will be part of a child's education to look at pictures in his school-books of Mme Molé about to put on a last layer of powder before going out to dine with a sister-in-law, or Sosthène de Guermantes adding the final touches to his false eyebrows; these things will be the subject of lectures by the Brichots of the future, for the frivolity of an age, when ten centuries have passed over it, is matter for the gravest erudition, particularly if it has been embalmed by a volcanic eruption or by the substances akin to lava which a bombardment projects. What documents for the future historian if asphyxiating gases, like the fumes of Vesuvius, and the collapse of a whole city, like the catastrophe which buried Pompeii, should preserve intact all the imprudent dowagers who have not yet sent off their paintings and their statues to safety in Bayonne! And indeed, for the last year, have we not already seen fragments of Pompeii every evening: people burying themselves in their cellars, not in order to emerge with some old bottle of Mouton Rothschild or Saint-Émilion, but to conceal along with themselves their most treasured belongings, like the priests of Herculaneum whom death surprised in the act of carrying away the sacred vessels? Attachment to an object always brings death to its possessor. True, Paris was not, like Herculaneum, founded by Hercules. But how many points of resemblance leap to the eye! And this lucid vision that is given to us is not unique to ourselves, it has been granted to every age. If I reflect that tomorrow we may suffer the fate of the cities of Vesuvius, these in their turn sensed that they were threatened with the doom of the accursed cities of the Bible. On the wall of a house in Pompeii has been found the revealing inscription: *Sodoma, Gomora*."

Perhaps it was this name of Sodom and the ideas that it evoked in him, or possibly the idea of the bombardment, that made M. de Charlus for an instant raise his eyes to heaven, but soon he brought them back to earth. "I admire all the heroes of this war," he said. "Why, my dear boy, those English soldiers whom at the beginning I rather thoughtlessly dismissed as mere football players presumptuous enough to measure themselves against professionals—and what professionals!—well, purely from the aesthetic point of view they are quite simply Greek athletes, you understand me, my boy, Greek athletes, they are the young men of Plato, or rather they are Spartans. I have a friend who has been to Rouen where their base is, he has seen marvels, marvels almost unimaginable. It is not Rouen any longer, it is another town. Of course the old Rouen still exists, with the emaciated saints of the cathedral. And naturally, that is beautiful too, but it is something quite different. And our *poilus*! I cannot tell you how deliciously full of character I find our *poilus*, the young Parisian boys, like that one there, for instance, who is passing us, with his knowing expression, his alert and humorous face. I often stop them for one reason or another and we chat for a moment or two, and what subtlety, what good sense! And the boys from the provinces, how amusing and nice they are, with the way they roll their *r*'s and their regional dialects! I have always lived a lot in the country, I have slept in farms, I know how to talk to them. Still, our admiration for the French must not make us depreciate our enemies, that would only be to disparage ourselves. And you don't know what a soldier the German soldier is; you haven't seen him, as I have, march past on parade, doing the goose-step, *unter den Linden*."

And returning to that ideal of virility which he had outlined to me at Balbec and which, with time, had assumed a more philosophical form in his mind, but using also absurd arguments which at moments, even just after he had said something out of the ordinary, gave his hearer a glimpse of the flimsiness of mental fabric of a mere society gentleman, albeit an intelligent one: "You see," he said to me, "that splendid sturdy fellow the Boche soldier is strong and healthy and thinks only of the greatness of his country, *Deutschland über Alles*, which is not so stupid as you might think, whereas we, while they were preparing themselves in a virile fashion, were hopelessly sunk in dilettantism." This word probably signified for M. de Charlus something analogous to literature, for immediately, remembering no doubt that I was fond of literature and had at one time intended to devote myself to it, he slapped me on the shoulder (taking the opportunity to lean so heavily upon me that the blow hurt as much as, in the days when I was doing my military service, the recoil of a "76" against my shoulder-blade) and said, as if to soften the reproach: "Yes, we were sunk in dilettantism, all of us, you too, you may remember. Like me you may say your *mea culpa*. We have been too dilettante." From astonishment at this reproach, from lack of readiness in repartee, from deference towards my interlocutor, and also because I was touched by his friendly kindness, I replied as though I too, as he suggested, had cause to beat my breast—an idiotic reaction, for I could not be accused of the slightest suggestion of dilettantism. "Well," he said to me, "I must leave you here" (the group which had escorted him at a distance had finally abandoned us), "I am going off to bed like a very old gentleman, particularly as, so it seems, the war has changed all our habits—isn't that one of the imbecile aphorisms which Norpois is so fond of?" I knew, as a matter of fact, that when he went home at night M. de Charlus did not cease to be surrounded by soldiers, for



he had turned his house into a military hospital and had done this, I believe, in obedience to the dictates much less of his imagination than of his kind heart.

It was a transparent and breathless night; I imagined that the Seine, flowing between the twin semicircles of the span and the reflection of its bridges, must look like the Bosphorus. And—a symbol perhaps of the invasion foretold by the defeatism of M. de Charlus, or else of the cooperation of our Muslim brothers with the armies of France—the moon, narrow and curved like a sequin, seemed to have placed the sky of Paris beneath the oriental sign of the crescent.

M. de Charlus lingered a few moments more, while he said good-bye to me with a shake of my hand powerful enough to crush it to pieces—a Germanic peculiarity to be found in those who think like the Baron. For several seconds he continued, as Cottard would have said, to “knead” my hand, as if he had wished to restore to my joints a suppleness which they had never lost. In certain blind men the sense of touch makes good to a certain extent the lack of sight. I do not exactly know what sense it was taking the place of here. Perhaps he thought that he was merely shaking my hand, as no doubt he thought that he was merely seeing a Senegalese soldier who passed in the darkness without deigning to notice that he was being admired. But in each case the Baron was mistaken, the intensity of contact and of gaze was greater than propriety permitted. “Don’t you see all the Orient of Decamps and Fromentin and Ingres and Delacroix in this scene?” he asked me, still immobilised by the passage of the Senegalese. “As you know, I for my part am interested in things and in people only as a painter, a philosopher. Besides, I am too old. But how unfortunate that to complete the picture one of us two is not an odalisque!”

It was not the Orient of Decamps or even of Delacroix that began to haunt my imagination when the Baron had left me, but the old Orient of those *Arabian Nights* which I had been so fond of; losing myself gradually in the network of these dark streets, I thought of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid going in search of adventures in the hidden quarters of Baghdad. The weather was warm and my walk had made me hot and thirsty, but the bars had all closed long ago and, because of the scarcity of petrol, the rare taxis which I met, driven by Levantines or negroes, did not even take the trouble to respond to my signs. The only place where I might have been able to get something to drink and rest until I felt strong enough to walk home would have been a hotel. But in the street, rather remote from the centre of the town, to which I had penetrated, every hotel, since the Goths had begun to drop their bombs on Paris, had closed. The same was true of almost all the shops, the shopkeepers, either owing to lack of staff or because they had taken fright themselves, having fled to the country and left on their door a handwritten notice announcing in some conventional phrase that they would re-open at a distant date (though even that seemed problematical). The few establishments which had managed to survive announced in the same fashion that they were open only twice a week. One felt that poverty, dereliction, fear inhabited the whole quarter. I was all the more surprised, therefore, to see that among these abandoned houses there was one in which life seemed, on the contrary, to have been victorious and terror and bankruptcy to have yielded to activity and wealth. Behind the closed shutters of each window the lights, dimmed on account of police regulations, revealed nevertheless a complete disregard for economy. And at every moment the door opened to allow some fresh visitor to enter or leave. It was a hotel which, because of the money its proprietors must be making, could not fail to have aroused the envy of all the neighbouring tradespeople; and I too became curious when, at a distance of fifteen yards, that is to say too far off for me to be able to make him out clearly in the profound darkness, I saw an officer come out and walk rapidly away.

Something, however, struck me: not his face, which I did not see, nor his uniform, which was disguised by a heavy greatcoat, but the extraordinary disproportion between the number of different points which his body successively occupied and the very small number of seconds within which he made good this departure which had almost the air of a sortie from a besieged town. So that my mind turned, if I did not explicitly recognise him—I will not say even to the build, nor to the slimness or the carriage or the swift movements of Saint-Loup—but to the sort of ubiquity which was so special to him. This military man with the ability to occupy so many different positions in space in such a short time disappeared down a side-street without seeing me, and I was left wondering whether it would be wise to enter a hotel whose modest appearance made me think that it could hardly have been Saint-Loup who had emerged. And yet I recalled involuntarily that he had—unjustly—been involved in a case of espionage because his name had been found in some letters captured on a German officer. He had, of course, been completely exonerated by the military authorities. But in spite of myself I associated this recollection with what I now saw. Was this hotel being used as a meeting-place of spies?

The officer had only just disappeared when I saw some private soldiers of various arms go in, which further strengthened my suspicions. I was now, however, extremely thirsty. I should probably be able to get something to drink inside and at the same time I might attempt, although I felt nervous at the prospect, to assuage my curiosity. And so, but not, I think, primarily from curiosity about the officer I had seen, I hesitated no longer but climbed the little staircase at the top of which the door of a sort of hall stood open, no doubt on account of the heat. I thought at first that I might fail to discover very much, for from the staircase, where I remained in shadow, I saw several people come and ask for a room and receive the answer that there were absolutely none left. The objection to these people, I guessed, was simply that they did not belong to the nest of espionage, for a moment later a common sailor presented himself and was promptly given room No. 28. From where I stood in the darkness I could, without being seen, observe a few soldiers and two men of the working classes who were chatting tranquilly in a stiflingly hot little room, gaudily decorated with coloured pictures of women cut from illustrated magazines and reviews.

These men, as they chatted quietly together, were expounding patriotic ideas: "After all, you've got to do what the other blokes do," said one. "Well, you can be jolly sure *I* don't mean to get killed," was the reply of another, who evidently was going off the next day to a dangerous post, to some expression of good wishes which I had not heard. "I reckon, at twenty-two, after only doing six months, it would be a bit hard," he exclaimed in a voice in which could be heard, even more plainly than the desire to go on living, the assurance that his reasoning was correct, as though the fact that he was only twenty-two could not fail to give him a better chance of survival, as though it were out of the question that he should be killed. "It's terrific in Paris," said another; "you'd never know there's a war on. How about you, Julot, d'you still mean to join up?" "Of course I do, I can't wait to take a pot-shot or two at these filthy Boches." "This Joffre, you know, he's just a man who sleeps with the politicians' wives, he's never done a thing himself." "That's a dreadful way to talk," said a slightly older man, an airman, and then, turning to the workman who had just made the statement: "I should advise you not to talk like that in the front line, the *poilus* would soon do you in." The banality of these scraps of conversation did not inspire me with any great wish to hear more, and I was about to make my entrance or go back down the stairs when I was jolted out of my indifference by hearing a series of remarks which made me shudder: "I'm amazed the boss isn't back yet, damn it, at this hour of the night I don't know where he's going to find any chains." "Anyhow, the chap's already tied up." "Tied up? Well, he is and he isn't. Tie me up like that and I'd soon untie myself." "But the padlock's closed." "Of course it's closed, but it's not so impossible to open it. The trouble is the chains aren't long enough. Don't you try and tell me, I was beating the stuffing out of him all last night until my hands were covered with blood." "Are you doing the beating tonight?" "No. It's not me, it's Maurice. But it'll be me on Sunday, the boss promised me." I understood now why the strong arm of the sailor had been needed. If peaceable citizens had been turned away, it was not because the hotel was a nest of spies. An appalling crime was about to be committed, unless someone arrived in time to discover it and have the criminals arrested. And yet the whole scene, in the midst of this peaceful and threatened night, was like a dream or a fairy-tale, so that it was at once with the pride of an emissary of justice and the rapture of a poet that I at length, my mind made up, entered the hotel.

I touched my hat lightly and the people in the room, without rising to their feet, replied more or less civilly to the greeting. "Can you tell me who is in charge here? I should like a room and something to drink sent up to it." "Will you wait a minute, the boss has gone out." "There's the director, he's upstairs," suggested one of the men who had taken part in the conversation. "But you know he can't be disturbed." "Do you think they will give me a room?" "Expect so." "43 must be free," said the young man who was sure he would not be killed because he was twenty-two years old. And he moved a little way along the sofa to make room for me. "Suppose we open the window a bit, you can cut the smoke with a knife in here!" said the airman; and indeed they all had their pipe or their cigarette. "Yes, but in that case close the shutters first, you know it's forbidden to show any light because of the Zeppelins." "We've finished with the Zeppelins. There's even been something in the papers about their having all been shot down." "We've finished with this, we've finished with that, what d'you know about it? When you've done fifteen months at the front, as I have, and shot down your fifth Boche aeroplane, you'll be able to talk. What d'you want to believe the papers for? They were over Compiègne yesterday, they killed a mother and two children." "A mother and two children!" said the young man who hoped not to be killed, with blazing eyes and a look of profound compassion upon his energetic and open countenance, which I found very likeable. "There's been no news of big Julot lately. His 'godmother' hasn't had a letter from him for eight days, and it's the first time he's been so long without writing." "Who is she, his 'godmother'?" "The woman who looks after the toilets just beyond the Olympia." "Do they sleep together?" "What an idea! She's a married woman, she couldn't be more respectable. She sends him money every week out of pure kindness of heart. She's a real good sort." "Do you know him then, big Julot?" "Do I know him!" retorted scornfully the young man of twenty-two. "He's a close friend of mine and one of the best. There's not many I think as highly of as I do of him: a real pal, always ready to do you a good turn. Yes, it would be a catastrophe all right if anything had happened to him." Someone proposed a game of dice and, from the feverish haste with which the young man of twenty-two shook them and cried out the results, with his eyes starting out of his head, it was easy to see that he had the gambler's temperament. I did not quite catch the next remark that someone made to him, but he exclaimed with a note of profound pity in his voice: "Julot a ponce! You mean he *says* he's a ponce. But he's no more a ponce than I am. I've seen him with my own eyes paying his woman, yes, paying her. That's to say, I don't say Jeanne l'Algérienne didn't give him a little something now and then, but it was never more than five francs, and what's that from a woman in a brothel earning more than fifty francs a day? A present of five francs! Some men are just too stupid to live. And now she's at the front, well, her life may be hard, I grant you, but she can earn as much as she wants—and she sends him nothing. Bah, that chap a ponce? There's plenty who could call themselves a ponce at that rate. Not only is he not a ponce, in my opinion he's an imbecile." The oldest of the group, whom the boss had no doubt for that reason put in charge of the others, with instructions to make them behave with a certain restraint, had been to the lavatory for a moment and heard only the end of this conversation. But he could not help looking in my direction and seemed visibly upset at the impression such talk must have made on me. Without addressing himself specially to the young man of twenty-two, though it was he who had been expounding this theory of venal love, he said, in a general manner: "You're talking too much and too loud, the window is open, there are people asleep at this hour. You know quite well that if the boss came back and heard you talking like that, he wouldn't be at all pleased."

At that very moment the door was heard to open and everyone was silent, thinking it was the boss, but it was only a foreign chauffeur who was welcomed as an old friend by everybody in the room. But seeing a

magnificent watchchain displayed upon the chauffeur's jacket, the young man of twenty-two threw him a questioning and amused glance, followed by a frown and a severe wink in my direction. I understood that the first look meant: "What's that, did you steal it? My congratulations." And the second: "Don't say anything, because of this fellow we don't know." Suddenly the boss came in, carrying several yards of heavy iron chains—sufficient to secure quite a number of convicts—and sweating. "What a weight!" he said. "If you weren't all so idle, I shouldn't be obliged to fetch them myself." I told him that I wanted a room. "Just for a few hours. I can't find a cab and I am rather unwell. But I should like something to drink sent up." "Pierrot, go and fetch some *cassis* from the cellar and tell them to get No. 43 ready. There's 7 ringing again. They say they're ill. Ill my foot, I wouldn't be surprised if they'd been doping themselves, they look half cracked, it's time they were shown the door. Has anybody put a pair of sheets in 22? Good! There goes 7 again, run and see what it is. Well, Maurice, what are you standing there for? You know someone's waiting for you, go up to 14b. And get a move on." And Maurice hurried out after the boss, who seemed a little annoyed that I had seen his chains and disappeared carrying them with him. "How is it you're so late?" the young man of twenty-two asked the chauffeur. "What do you mean, late? I'm an hour early. But it's too hot in the streets. My appointment's not till midnight." "Who have you come for then?" "Pretty Pamela," said the dark-skinned chauffeur, whose laugh uncovered a set of fine white teeth. "Ah!" said the young man of twenty-two.

Presently I was taken up to Room 43, but it was so unpleasantly stuffy and my curiosity was so great that, having drunk my *cassis*, I started to go downstairs again, then, changing my mind, turned round and went up past the floor of Room 43 to the top of the building. Suddenly from a room situated by itself at the end of a corridor, I thought I heard stifled groans. I walked rapidly towards the sounds and put my ear to the door. "I beseech you, mercy, have pity, untie me, don't beat me so hard," said a voice. "I kiss your feet, I abase myself, I promise not to offend again. Have pity on me." "No, you filthy brute," replied another voice, "and if you yell and drag yourself about on your knees like that, you'll be tied to the bed, no mercy for you," and I heard the noise of the crack of a whip, which I guessed to be reinforced with nails, for it was followed by cries of pain. At this moment I noticed that there was a small oval window opening from the room on to the corridor and that the curtain had not been drawn across it; stealthily in the darkness I crept as far as this window and there in the room, chained to a bed like Prometheus to his rock, receiving the blows that Maurice rained upon him with a whip which was in fact studded with nails, I saw, with blood already flowing from him and covered with bruises which proved that the chastisement was not taking place for the first time—I saw before me M. de Charlus.

Suddenly the door opened and a man came in who fortunately did not see me. It was Jupien. He went up to the Baron with an air of respect and a smile of understanding: "Well, you don't need me, do you?" The Baron asked Jupien to send Maurice out of the room for a moment. Jupien did so with perfect unconcern. "We can't be heard, can we?" said the Baron to Jupien, who assured him that this was the case. The Baron knew that Jupien, with an intelligence worthy of a man of letters, was yet quite lacking in practical sense and constantly talked about people in their presence with innuendoes which deceived nobody and nicknames which everybody understood.

"Just a second," interrupted Jupien, who had heard a bell ring in Room No. 3. It was a deputy of the Liberal Action party, who was about to leave. Jupien did not need to look at the bell-board, for he recognised the man's ring. Indeed the deputy came every day after lunch, but today he had been obliged to re-arrange his timetable, for at twelve o'clock he had given away his daughter in marriage at the church of Saint-Pierre-de-Chaillot. So he had come in the evening but was anxious to leave early on account of his wife, who very easily became nervous if he was late in getting home, particularly in these days of bombardment. Jupien always liked to accompany him downstairs in order to show his deference for the status of "honourable," and in this he was quite disinterested. For although this deputy (who repudiated the exaggerations of *L'Action Française* and would in any case have been incapable of understanding a line of Charles Maurras or Léon Daudet) stood well with the ministers, whom he flattered by inviting them to his shooting-parties, Jupien would not have dared to ask him for the slightest support in his difficulties with the police. He knew that, had he ventured to mention that subject to the affluent and apprehensive legislator, he would not have saved himself even the most harmless "raid" but would immediately have lost the most generous of his clients. After having escorted the deputy as far as the door, from which he set off with his hat pulled down over his eyes and his collar turned up and with a rapid gliding movement not unlike the style of his electoral manifestos, by which devices he hoped to render his face invisible, Jupien went upstairs again to M. de Charlus. "It was Monsieur Eugène," he said to him. In Jupien's establishment, as in a sanatorium, people were referred to only by their Christian names, though their real names, either to satisfy the curiosity of the visitor or to enhance the prestige of the house, were invariably added in a whisper. Sometimes, however, Jupien was unaware of the real identity of a client and imagined and said that he was some well-known financier or nobleman or artist—fleeting errors not without charm for the man to whom the wrong name was attached—and in the end had to resign himself to the idea that he still did not know who Monsieur Victor was. Sometimes too, to please the Baron, he was in the habit of inverting the procedure that is customary on certain social occasions ("Let me introduce you to M. Lebrun," then a whisper: "He wants to be called M. Lebrun but he is really Grand Duke X—of Russia"). Jupien on the other hand felt that it was not quite sufficient to introduce M. de Charlus to a young milkman. He would murmur to him with a wink: "He's a milkman but he's also one of the most dangerous thugs in Belleville" (and it was with a superbly salacious note in his voice that Jupien uttered the word "thug"). And as if this recommendation were not sufficient, he would try to add one or two further "citations." "He has had several convictions for theft and burglary, he was in Fresnes for assaulting" (the same

salacious note in his voice) "and practically murdering people in the street, and he's been in a punishment battalion in Africa. He killed his sergeant."

The Baron was slightly cross with Jupien for his lack of prudence, for he knew that in this house which he had instructed his factotum to purchase for him and to manage through a subordinate, everybody, thanks to the blunders of Mlle d'Oloron's uncle, was more or less aware of his identity and his name (many, however, thought that it was not a title but a nickname, and mispronounced and distorted it, so that their own stupidity and not the discretion of Jupien had served to protect the Baron). But he found it simpler to let himself be reassured by Jupien's assurances, and now, relieved to know that they could not be heard, he said to him: "I did not want to speak in front of that boy, who is very nice and does his best. But I don't find him sufficiently brutal. He has a charming face, but when he calls me a filthy brute he might be just repeating a lesson." "I assure you, nobody has said a word to him," replied Jupien, without perceiving how improbable this statement was. "And besides, he was involved in the murder of a concierge in La Villette." "Ah! that is extremely interesting," said the Baron with a smile. "But I'll tell you who I have here: the killer of oxen, the man of the slaughter-houses, who is so like this boy; he happened to be passing. Would you care to try him?" "Yes, certainly I should." I saw the man of the slaughter-houses enter the room; he was indeed a little like Maurice, but—and this was odder—they both had in them something of a type which I had never myself consciously observed in Morel's face but which I now clearly saw to exist there; they bore a resemblance, if not to Morel as I had seen him, at least to a certain countenance which eyes seeing Morel otherwise than I did might have constructed out of his features. No sooner had I, out of features borrowed from my recollections of Morel, privately made for myself this rough model of what he might represent to somebody else, than I realised that the two young men, one of whom was a jeweller's assistant while the other worked in a hotel, were in a vague way substitutes for Morel. Was I to conclude that M. de Charlus, at least in a certain aspect of his loves, was always faithful to a particular type and that the desire which had made him select these two young men one after the other was the identical desire which had made him accost Morel on the platform at Doncières station; that all three resembled a little the ephebe whose form, engraved in the sapphire-like eyes of M. de Charlus, gave to his glance that strange quality which had alarmed me the first day at Balbec? Or that, his love for Morel having modified the type which he pursued, to console himself for Morel's absence he sought men who resembled him? A third hypothesis which occurred to me was that perhaps, in spite of appearances, there had never existed between him and Morel anything more than relations of friendship, and that M. de Charlus caused young men who resembled Morel to come to Jupien's establishment so that he might have the illusion, while he was with them, of enjoying pleasure with Morel himself. It is true that, if one thought of everything that M. de Charlus had done for Morel, this hypothesis was bound to seem most unlikely, did one not know that love drives us not only to the greatest sacrifices on behalf of the person we love, but sometimes even to the sacrifice of our desire itself, a desire which in any case we find all the harder to gratify if the loved person is aware of the strength of our love.

Something else that makes this hypothesis less unlikely than at first sight it appears (though probably it does not correspond to the reality) lies in the nervous temperament, in the profoundly passionate character of M. de Charlus—in this resembling Saint-Loup—which in the early days of his relations with Morel might have played the same part, in a more decent and negative way, as it did at the beginning of his nephew's relations with Rachel. A man's relations with a woman whom he loves (and the same may be true of love for a young man) may remain platonic for a reason which is neither the woman's virtue nor a lack of sensuality in the love which she inspires. The reason may be that the lover, too impatient from the very excess of his love, does not know how to wait with a sufficient show of indifference for the moment when he will obtain what he desires. Over and over again he returns to the charge, he writes incessantly to the woman, he tries constantly to see her, she refuses, he is in despair. Henceforth she understands that if she accords him her company, her friendship, this happiness in itself will seem so considerable to the man who thought he had lost it, that she may spare herself the trouble of giving him anything more and may take advantage of a moment when he can no longer endure not to see her, when he is determined at any price to end the war, to impose upon him a peace of which the first condition will be the platonic nature of their relations. In any case, during the period which preceded this treaty, the lover, always anxious, hoping all the time for a letter, a glance, has given up thinking of physical possession, which at first had been the object of the desire which had tormented him; that desire has withered away with waiting and its place has been taken by needs of another order, needs which can, however, if they remain unsatisfied, cause him yet greater pain. So that the pleasure which at the beginning he had hoped to obtain from caresses, he receives later not in its natural form but instead from friendly words, from mere promises of the loved woman's presence, which after the effects of uncertainty—sometimes after a single look, black with a heavy cloud of disdain, which has withdrawn her to such a distance that he thinks he will never see her again—bring with them a delicious relief from tension. A woman divines these things and knows that she can afford the luxury of never giving herself to a man who, because he has been too agitated to conceal it during the first few days, has allowed her to become aware of his incurable desire for her. She is only too pleased to receive, without giving anything in return, much more than she is accustomed to be given when she gives herself. Men with a nervous temperament believe therefore in the virtue of their idol. And the halo which they place round her is a product, but as we have seen an indirect one, of their excessive love. The woman then finds herself very much in the position—though she of course is conscious, while they are not—of those unwittingly crafty drugs like sleeping-draughts and morphine. It is not to the people to whom they bring the pleasure of sleep or a genuine well-being that these drugs are an absolute necessity; it is not by such people as these that they would be bought at any price, bartered against

all the sick man's possessions, but by that other class of sick men (who may perhaps be the same individuals but become different with the passage of a few years), those whom the medicine does not send to sleep, to whom it gives no thrill of pleasure, but who, so long as they are without it, are prey to an agitation which at any price, even the price of their own death, they need desperately to end.

In the case of M. de Charlus, which on the whole, with slight discrepancies due to the identity of sex, accords very well with the general laws of love, for all that he belonged to a family more ancient than the Capets, that he was rich and vainly sought after by fashionable society while Morel was nobody, he would have got nowhere by saying to Morel, as he had once said to me: "I am a prince, I want to help you"—it was still Morel who had the upper hand so long as he refused to surrender. And for him to persist in this refusal, it was perhaps enough that he should feel himself to be loved. The horror that grand people have for the snobs who move heaven and earth to make their acquaintance is felt also by the virile man for the invert, by a woman for every man who is too much in love with her. M. de Charlus possessed, and would have offered Morel a share in, immense advantages. But it is possible that all this might have hurled itself in vain against a determined will. And in that case, M. de Charlus would have suffered the same fate as the Germans—in whose ranks in fact his ancestry placed him—who in the war at that moment taking its course were indeed, as the Baron was a little too fond of repeating, victorious on every front. But of what use were their victories, since after every one they found the Allies yet more firmly resolved to refuse them the one thing that they, the Germans, wanted: peace and reconciliation? Napoleon too, as he advanced into Russia, had again and again magnanimously invited the authorities to meet him. But nobody came.

I made my way downstairs and went back into the little ante-room where Maurice, uncertain whether he would be sent for again (he had been told by Jupien to wait just in case), was engaged in a game of cards with one of his friends. There was a lot of excitement about a *croix de guerre* which had been found lying on the ground—nobody knew who had lost it and to whom it ought to be returned so that the owner should not be punished. Then there was talk of the generosity of an officer who had been killed trying to save his batman. "All the same, there are some good blokes among the rich. I'd gladly get myself killed for a chap like that," said Maurice, who evidently performed his terrible fustigations of the Baron simply from mechanical habit, as a result of a neglected education, from need of money and from a certain preference for making it in a manner which was supposed to be less trouble, and was perhaps really more trouble, than ordinary work. But as M. de Charlus had feared, he was perhaps really very kind-hearted and certainly, so it seemed, a young man of exemplary courage. He almost had tears in his eyes as he spoke of the death of this officer, and the young man of twenty-two was no less moved. "Yes, indeed, they're fine blokes. For poor chaps like us there's not much to lose, but when it's a toff who has a whole troop of flunkeys and can go to posh bars every night of his life, it's really terrific! You can scoff as much as you like, but when you see blokes like that dying, it really does something to you. Rich people like that, God shouldn't let them die—for one thing they're too useful to the working man. A death like that makes you want to kill every Boche to the last man. And then look what they did at Louvain, and cutting off the hands of little children! No, I don't know, I'm no better than the next man, but I'd rather face the music and be shot to bits than give in to barbarians like that; they're not men, they're real barbarians, don't you try and tell me anything else." All these young men were patriots at heart. One only, who had been slightly wounded in the arm but was soon going to have to return to the front, did not rise to the level of the others. "Darn it," he said, "it wasn't the right sort of wound" (the kind that gets you invalidated out), very much as in the past Mme Swann would have said: "Somehow or other I've caught this most tiresome influenza."

The door opened to re-admit the chauffeur, who had been taking the air for a moment. "What, finished already? You weren't long," he said, catching sight of Maurice, whom he supposed to be still engaged in beating the individual whom, in allusion to a newspaper which was appearing at that time, they had nicknamed "the Man in Chains." "It may not have seemed long to you out in the fresh air," replied Maurice, vexed that the others should see that he had failed to give satisfaction upstairs. "But if you'd been obliged to wallop away with all your might in this heat, like me! If it wasn't for the fifty francs he gives ..." "And then, he's a man who talks well; you can see he's educated. Does he say it will soon be over?" "He says we'll never beat them, it will end without either side really winning." "Bloody hell, if he says that he must be a Boche ..." "I've already told you you're talking too loud," said the oldest of the group to the others, seeing that I had returned, and then to me: "Have you finished with your room?" "Shut your trap, you're not the boss here." "Yes, I've finished, and I've come to pay." "It would be better if you paid the *patron*. Maurice, go and fetch him." "But I don't want to bother you." "It's no trouble." Maurice went upstairs, and came back saying: "The *patron* will be down in a second." I gave him two francs for his pains. He blushed with pleasure. "Oh! thank you very much. I'll send it to my brother who's a prisoner. No, he doesn't have a bad time. It depends a lot on the camp you're in."

Meanwhile, two very smart clients, in white tie and tails and wearing overcoats—two Russians, as I guessed from the very slight accent with which they spoke—were standing in the doorway and deliberating whether they should enter. It was visibly the first time that they had been to the place, to which no doubt they had come on somebody's recommendation, and they appeared torn between desire, temptation and extreme fright. One of the two—a good-looking young man—kept repeating every ten seconds to the other, with a smile that was half a question and half an attempt at persuasion: "Well! After all, what do we care?" But though no doubt he meant by this that after all they did not care about the consequences, it is probable that he cared rather more than he implied, for the remark was not followed by any movement to cross the threshold but by a further glance at his companion, followed by the same smile and the same "After all, what do we care?" And

in this "After all, what do we care?" I saw a perfect example of that portentous language, so unlike the language we habitually speak, in which emotion deflects what we had intended to say and causes to emerge in its place an entirely different phrase, issued from an unknown lake wherein dwell these expressions alien to our thoughts which by virtue of that very fact reveal them. I remember an occasion when Françoise, whose approach we had not heard, was about to come into the room while Albertine was completely naked in my arms, and Albertine, wanting to warn me, blurted out: "Good heavens, here's the beautiful Françoise!" Françoise, whose sight was no longer very good and who was merely going to cross the room at some distance from us, would no doubt have noticed nothing. But the unprecedented phrase "the beautiful Françoise," which Albertine had never uttered before in her life, was in itself enough to betray its origin; Françoise sensed that the words had been plucked at random by emotion and had no need to look to understand what was happening; she went out muttering in her dialect the word *poutana*. On another occasion, many years later, after Bloch had become the father of a family and had married off one of his daughters to a Catholic, an ill-mannered gentleman said to the young woman that he thought he had heard that her father was a Jew and asked what his name was. Whereupon she, who had been Mlle Bloch with a *k* sound from the day she was born, replied "Bloch" with the Teutonic *ch* which the Duc de Guermantes would have used.

The *patron*, to return to the scene in the hotel (into which the two Russians had decided to penetrate—"After all, what do we care?"), had still not arrived when Jupien came in to say that they were talking too loud and that the neighbours would complain. But seeing me he was rooted to the spot in amazement. "Go out on to the landing, all of you." They were all rising to their feet when I said to him: "It would be simpler if these young men stayed where they are and you and I went outside for a moment." He followed me, very agitated. I explained to him why I had come. Clients could be heard inquiring of the *patron* whether he could introduce them to a footman, a choir-boy, a negro chauffeur. Every profession interested these old lunatics, every branch of the armed forces, every one of the allied nations. Some asked particularly for Canadians, influenced perhaps unconsciously by the charm of an accent so slight that one does not know whether it comes from the France of the past or from England. The Scots too, because of their kilts and because dreams of a landscape with lakes are often associated with these desires, were at a premium. And as every form of madness is, if not in every case aggravated by circumstances, at least imprinted by them with particular characteristics, an old man in whom curiosity of every kind had no doubt been satisfied was asking insistently to be introduced to a disabled soldier. Slow footsteps were heard on the stairs. With the indiscretion that was natural to him, Jupien could not refrain from telling me that it was the Baron who was coming down, and at all costs he must not see me, but that if I liked to go into the bedroom adjoining the ante-room where the young men were, he would open the ventilator, a device which he had fixed up so that the Baron could see and hear without being seen, and which he said he would use in my favour against him. "Only don't move." And pushing me into the dark, he left me. In any case he had no other room to give me, his hotel, in spite of the war, being full. The one which I had just left had been taken by the Vicomte de Courvoisier who, having got away from the Red Cross at X—for two days, had come to Paris for an hour's entertainment before going on to the Château de Courvoisier to be reunited with his wife, to whom he would explain that he had not been able to catch the fast train. He had no suspicion that M. de Charlus was a few yards away from him, and the latter would have been equally surprised to know that his cousin was there, never having met him in the establishment of Jupien, who was himself ignorant of the Vicomte's carefully concealed identity.

The Baron soon entered the ante-room, walking with difficulty on account of his injuries, though doubtless he must have been used to them. Although his pleasure was at an end and he had only come in to give Maurice the money which he owed him, he directed at the young men a tender and curious glance which travelled round the whole circle, promising himself with each of them the pleasure of a moment's chat, platonic but amorously prolonged. And in the sprightly frivolity which he exhibited before this harem which appeared almost to intimidate him, I recognised those jerky movements of the body and the head, those languishing glances which had struck me on the evening of his first visit to La Raspelière, graces inherited from some grandmother whom I had not known, which in ordinary life were disguised by more virile expressions on his face but which from time to time were made to blossom there coquettishly, when circumstances made him anxious to please an inferior audience, by the desire to appear a great lady.

Jupien had recommended the young men to the Baron's favour by swearing that they were all pimps from Belleville and would sell you their own sisters for a few francs. And in this he was at the same time lying and telling the truth. Better, more soft-hearted than he made them out to be, they did not belong to a race of savages. But the clients who believed them to be thugs spoke to them nevertheless with complete truthfulness, a truthfulness which they imagined these terrible beings to share. For a man given to sadistic pleasures may believe that he is talking to a murderer but this will not alter his own purity of heart, he will still be astounded by the mendacity of his companion, who is not a murderer at all but wants to earn a little easy money and whose father or mother or sister alternately die, come to life, and die again as he contradicts himself in his conversation with the client whom he is attempting to please. The client, in his naïvety, is astounded, for with his arbitrary conception of the gigolo, while he gets a thrill of delight from the numerous murders of which he believes him to be guilty, he is horrified by any simple contradiction or lie which he detects in his words.

Everybody in the room seemed to know him, and M. de Charlus stopped for a long time before each one, talking to them in what he thought was their language, both from a pretentious affectation of local colour and because he got a sadistic pleasure from contact with a life of depravity. "You're disgusting, you are, I saw you outside the Olympia with two tarts. After a bit of brass, no doubt. Just shows how faithful you are to me."

Luckily for the man to whom these remarks were addressed, he did not have time to declare that he would never have accepted "brass" from a woman, a claim which would have damped the Baron's ardour, but reserved his protest for the final phrase, which he answered by saying: "But of course I'm faithful to you." This remark gave M. de Charlus a lively pleasure, and as, in spite of himself, the kind of intelligence that was natural to him showed through the character which he affected, he turned to Jupien: "How nice of him to say that! And how well he says it! One would really think it was true. And after all, what does it matter whether it is true or not since he manages to make me believe it? What charming little eyes he has! There, I'm going to give you two big kisses for your trouble, my dear boy. You will think of me in the trenches. Things are not too bad there?" "Whew, there are some days, when a grenade just misses you ..." And the young man proceeded to imitate the noise of the grenade, the aeroplanes, etc. "But one's got to do what the others do, and you can be absolutely sure that we will go on to the end." "To the end! If one only knew to what end!" said the Baron in a melancholy manner, giving rein to his "pessimism." "You haven't seen what Sarah Bernhardt said in the papers: 'France will go on to the end. If necessary, the French will let themselves be killed to the last man.'" "I do not doubt for a single moment that the French would bravely let themselves be killed to the last man," said M. de Charlus, as if this were the simplest thing in the world and although he himself had no intention of doing anything whatsoever, hoping by this remark to correct the impression of pacifism which he gave when he forgot himself. "That I do not doubt, but I ask myself to what extent *Madame* Sarah Bernhardt is qualified to speak in the name of France ... But I don't think I have made the acquaintance of this charming, this delightful young man," he added, spying another whom he did not recognise or perhaps had not seen before. He greeted him as he would have greeted a prince at Versailles, and making the most of this opportunity to have a supplementary pleasure for nothing—just as, when I was little and my mother had finished giving an order at Boissier's or Gouache's, I would accept the offer of a sweet which one of the ladies behind the counter would invite me to select from those glass bowls over which she and her colleagues held sway—he took the hand of the charming young man and gave it a long squeeze, in the Prussian manner, smilingly fixing him with his eyes for the interminable time which photographers used to take to pose you when the light was bad. "Sir, I am charmed, I am enchanted to make your acquaintance. What pretty hair he has!" he said, turning to Jupien. Next he went up to Maurice to give him his fifty francs, but first, putting his arm round his waist: "You never told me that you had knifed an old hag of a concierge in Belleville." And M. de Charlus shrieked with ecstatic laughter and brought his face close to that of Maurice. "Oh! Monsieur le Baron," said the gigolo, who had not been warned, "how can you believe such a thing?" Whether the report was in fact false, or whether it was true and the perpetrator of the deed nevertheless thought it abominable and one of those things that it is better to deny, he went on: "Me touch a fellow-creature? A Boche, yes, because that's war, but a woman, and an old woman at that!" This declaration of virtuous principles had the effect of a douche of cold water upon the Baron, who brusquely moved away from Maurice, having first handed him his money, but with the disgusted air of someone who has been cheated, who pays because he does not want to make a fuss but is far from pleased. The bad impression made upon the Baron was accentuated by the manner in which the recipient thanked him, with the words: "I shall send this to the old folks and keep a bit for my brother at the front as well." By these touching sentiments M. de Charlus was almost as gravely disappointed as he was irritated by the rather conventional peasant's language in which they were expressed. Occasionally Jupien warned the young men that they ought to be more perverse. Then one of them, as if he were confessing to something diabolical, would hazard: "I say, Baron, you won't believe me, but when I was a kid I used to watch my parents making love through the key-hole. Pretty vicious, wasn't it? You look as if you think that's a cock and bull story, but I swear it's the truth." And M. de Charlus was driven at once to despair and to exasperation by this factitious attempt at perversity, the result of which was only to reveal such depths both of stupidity and of innocence. Yet even the most determined thief or murderer would not have satisfied him, for that sort of man does not talk about his crimes; and besides there exists in the sadist—however kind he may be, in fact all the more the kinder he is—a thirst for evil which wicked men, doing what they do not because it is wicked but from other motives, are unable to assuage.

The young man realised his mistake and tried to repair it by saying that he loathed the sight of a copper and by daringly inquiring of the Baron: "How about a date?"—but it was too late, the charm was dispelled. One had a distinct feeling of sham, as with the books of authors who force themselves to write slang. It was in vain that the young man described in detail all the "filthy things" that he did with his wife; M. de Charlus merely reflected that these "filthy things" amounted to very little. And in this he was not simply being insincere. Nothing is more limited than pleasure and vice. In that sense one may say truly, altering slightly the meaning of the phrase, that we revolve always in the same vicious circle.

If M. de Charlus was believed to be not a baron but a prince, there was, conversely, general regret in the establishment for the death of someone of whom the gigolos said: "I don't know his name, but it seems that he is a baron," and who was none other than the Prince de Foix (the father of Saint-Loup's friend). Supposed by his wife to spend a lot of time at his club, in reality he would sit for hours at Jupien's, retailing fashionable gossip to an audience from the underworld. Like his son, he was tall and good-looking. M. de Charlus, no doubt because he had always known him in society, remained strangely ignorant that the Prince shared his own tastes, to such a degree that he was even said to have had designs at one time upon his own son, Saint-Loup's friend, then still at school. This was probably untrue: on the contrary, excellently informed about activities whose existence many do not suspect, he watched with care over the company kept by his son. One day a man—and a man not of exalted origin—followed the young Prince de Foix as far as his father's house, where he threw a note in at the window, which the father picked up. But the follower, though genealogically

this was not the case, from another point of view belonged to the same world as M. de Foix the father. He therefore had no difficulty in finding among those who shared their common secrets an intermediary who silenced M. de Foix by proving to him that it was his son who had himself provoked this rash act of an elderly man. And this was quite possible. For the Prince de Foix had succeeded in preserving his son from the external influence of bad company but not from heredity. The young Prince de Foix, however, remained, like his father, in this respect unknown to his social equals, although in a different world his behaviour was wild in the extreme.

"How simple he is! You would never say he was a baron," said some of the frequenters of the establishment when M. de Charlus had left, after being escorted to the street door by Jupien, to whom he did not fail to complain of the young man's virtuousness. From the air of annoyance of Jupien, whose duty it was to have trained the young man in advance, it was clear that the fictitious murderer would presently get a terrific dressing-down. "The truth is exactly the opposite of what you told me," added the Baron, so that Jupien might profit by the lesson for another time. "He seems most good-natured, he expresses sentiments of respect for his family." "Still, he's on bad terms with his father," Jupien objected. "It's true they live together, but they work in different bars." Obviously this was not much of a crime compared with murder, but Jupien had been caught unprepared with an answer. The Baron said no more, for, if he wanted others to prepare his pleasures for him, he wanted to give himself the illusion that they were unprepared. "He is a real crook, he said all that to mislead you, you are too gullible," Jupien went on, in an attempt to exculpate himself which succeeded only in wounding the vanity of M. de Charlus.

"It seems that he has a million francs a day to spend," said the young man of twenty-two, who saw no improbability in this statement. The car which had come to fetch M. de Charlus was now heard to drive away. At the same moment there entered the room with a slow step, by the side of a soldier who had evidently emerged with her from a neighbouring bedroom, what appeared to me to be an elderly lady in a black skirt. I soon realised my mistake: it was a priest—that thing so rare, and in France altogether exceptional, a bad priest. Evidently the soldier was teasing his companion about the discrepancy between his conduct and his habit, for the other with a serious air, raising a finger towards his hideous face with the gesture of a doctor of theology, said sententiously: "What do you expect? I am not" (I expected him to say "a saint") "a good girl." He was, however, ready to depart and he said good-bye to Jupien, who had just come upstairs again after seeing the Baron to the door. But absent-mindedly the bad priest had forgotten to pay for his room. Jupien, who had always a ready wit, shook the collecting box in which he placed the contribution of each client and said, as he made it clink: "For the expenses of the church, Monsieur l'Abbé!" The horrid creature apologised, put in his coin and disappeared.

Jupien came to fetch me from the cave of darkness in which I had been standing without daring to move. "Come into the hall for a moment where my young men are sitting, while I go upstairs and lock up the bedroom; since you have taken a room, it's quite natural." The *patron* was there, so I paid him. At that moment a young man in a dinner-jacket came in and asked the *patron* with an air of authority: "Will I be able to have Léon at a quarter to eleven instead of eleven tomorrow morning, as I have a luncheon engagement?" "That will depend," replied the *patron*, "on how long the Abbé keeps him." This reply appeared not to satisfy the young man in a dinner-jacket, who seemed to be on the point of launching into abuse of the Abbé, but his fury was diverted when he caught sight of me. Going straight up to the *patron*: "Who is this? What does this mean?" he muttered in a quiet but angry voice. The *patron*, very put out, explained that my presence was quite harmless, that I had taken a room. The young man in a dinner-jacket appeared to be not in the slightest degree pacified by this explanation. He kept repeating: "This is extremely unpleasant, things of this sort ought not to happen, you know I detest them, if you are not careful I will never set foot here again." The execution of this threat did not, however, appear to be imminent, for he went off in a rage, but not without asking that Léon should try to be free at a quarter to eleven, or better still half past ten. Jupien came back to fetch me and we went downstairs together and out into the street.

"I do not want you to misjudge me," he said to me. "This house does not bring me in as much profit as you might think. I am obliged to let rooms to respectable people, though of course if they were my only customers I should simply be throwing money down the drain. Here, contrary to the doctrine of the Carmelites, it is thanks to vice that virtue is able to live. No, if I took this house, or rather if I got the manager whom you have seen to take it, it was purely and simply in order to render a service to the Baron and amuse his old age." Jupien was here referring not merely to scenes of sadism like those which I had witnessed and to the actual vicious practices of the Baron. The latter, even for conversation, for company, for a game of cards, now only enjoyed the society of lower-class people who exploited him. No doubt the snobbery of the gutter may be understood as easily as snobbery of the other kind. The two had in fact long been united, alternating one with the other, in M. de Charlus, who thought no one was smart enough to be numbered among his social acquaintances, no one sufficiently a ruffian to be worth knowing in other ways. "I detest the intermediate style," he would say. "Bourgeois comedy is stiff and affected. Let me have either the princesses of classical tragedy or broad farce. No half-way houses—either *Phèdre* or *Les Saltimbanques*." But in the end the balance between the two forms of snobbery had been broken. Perhaps because he was an old man and tired, perhaps because sensuality had come to enter into even his trivial relationships, the Baron now lived only among his "inferiors," thus unintentionally taking his place as the successor of more than one among his great ancestors, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, the Prince d'Harcourt, the Duc de Berry, whom we see in the pages of Saint-Simon passing their lives in the midst of their lackeys, who extracted enormous sums from them, and sharing their amusements, to such an extent that people who had to visit them were embarrassed, for their sakes, to



find these great noblemen familiarly engaged in a game of cards or a drinking-bout with their domestic servants. "And above all," Jupien went on, "it is to keep him out of trouble, because the Baron, you know, is a big baby. Even now that he has here everything that he can desire, he still wanders about in search of sordid adventures. And with his generosity, that sort of thing could have disagreeable consequences in these days. Only the other day there was a page-boy from a hotel who was absolutely terrified because of all the money the Baron offered him if he would go to his house! (To his house, what imprudence!) The boy, who in fact only cares about women, was reassured when he understood what was wanted of him. Hearing all these promises of money, he had taken the Baron for a spy. And he was greatly relieved when he realised that he was being asked to sell not his country but his body, which is possibly not a more moral thing to do, but less dangerous and in any case easier." And listening to Jupien, I said to myself: "How unfortunate it is that M. de Charlus is not a novelist or a poet! Not merely so that he could describe what he sees, but because the position in which a Charlus finds himself with respect to desire causes scandals to spring up around him, and compels him to take life seriously, to load pleasure with a weight of emotion. He cannot get stuck in an ironical and superficial view of things because a current of pain is perpetually reawakened within him. Almost every time he makes a declaration of love he is violently snubbed, if he does not run the risk of being sent to prison." A slap in the face or a box on the ear helps to educate not only children but poets. If M. de Charlus had been a novelist, the house which Jupien had set up for him, by reducing so greatly the risks—at least (for a raid by the police was always a possibility) the risk emanating from an individual casually encountered in the street, of whose inclinations the Baron could not have felt certain—would have been a misfortune for him. But in the sphere of art M. de Charlus was no more than a dilettante, who never dreamt of writing and had no gift for it.

"Besides, I may as well admit to you," Jupien continued, "that I have very few scruples about making money in this way. The actual thing that is done here is—I can no longer conceal the fact from you—something that I like, it is what I have a taste for myself. Well, is it forbidden to receive payment for things that one does not regard as wickedness? You are better educated than I am, and you will tell me no doubt that Socrates was of the opinion that he could not accept money for his lessons. But in our age professors of philosophy do not hold that view, nor do doctors or painters or playwrights or theatrical producers. Do not imagine that this trade of mine brings me into contact only with the dregs of society. No doubt the director of an establishment of this kind, like a great courtesan, receives only men, but he receives men who are conspicuous in every walk of life and who are generally, on their own level, among the most intelligent, the most sensitive, the most agreeable of their profession. In no time at all, I assure you, this house could be transformed into an information bureau or a school of wit." Nevertheless, I was still under the impression of the blows which I had seen inflicted upon M. de Charlus.

And the truth is that, when one knew M. de Charlus well—his pride, his satiety with social pleasures, his fancies which changed easily into passions for men of the lowest class and the worst character—one could very easily understand that the possession of a huge fortune, the charm of which, had he been an upstart, would have been that it enabled him to marry his daughter to a duke and invite Highnesses to his shooting-parties, pleased him simply because it allowed him to have at his disposal in this way one or perhaps several establishments with a permanent supply of young men whose company he enjoyed. And perhaps this might have come to pass even without his special vice, heir as he was to so many great noblemen, dukes or princes of the blood, of whom Saint-Simon tells us that they never associated with anybody "who could boast a name."

"Meanwhile," I said to Jupien, "this house is anything but what you say it might become. It is worse than a madhouse, since the mad fancies of the lunatics who inhabit it are played out as actual, visible drama—it is a veritable pandemonium. I thought that I had arrived, like the Caliph in the *Arabian Nights*, in the nick of time to rescue a man who was being beaten, and in fact it was a different tale from the *Arabian Nights* which I saw enacted before me, the one in which a woman who has been turned into a dog willingly submits to being beaten in order to recover her former shape." Jupien appeared to be very upset by my words, for he realised that I had seen the Baron being beaten. He was silent for a moment, while I stopped a cab which was passing; then suddenly, with that pretty wit which had so often struck me in this self-educated man when in the courtyard of our house he had greeted me or Françoise with some graceful phrase: "You have mentioned one or two of the tales in the *Arabian Nights*," he said. "But there is another I know of, not unrelated to the title of a book which I think I have seen at the Baron's" (he was alluding to a translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* which I had sent M. de Charlus). "If ever you are curious, one evening, to see, I will not say forty but a dozen thieves, you have only to come here; to know whether I am in the house you have only to look up at that window; if I leave my little window open with a light visible it means that I am in the house and you may come in; it is my private *Sesame*. I say only *Sesame*. As for *Lilies*, if they are what you seek I advise you to go elsewhere." And with a somewhat offhand gesture of farewell—for an aristocratic clientele and the habit of ruling like a pirate chief over a gang of young men had imparted a certain lordliness to his manners—he was about to take his leave of me when the noise of an explosion—a bomb which had fallen before the sirens could give warning—made him advise me to stay with him for a moment. Soon the anti-aircraft barrage began, and with such violence that one could sense very near, just above our heads, the presence of the German aeroplane.

In an instant the streets became totally black. At moments only, an enemy aeroplane flying very low lit up the spot upon which it wished to drop a bomb. I set off, but very soon I was lost. I thought of that day when, on my way to La Raspelière, I had met an aeroplane and my horse had reared as at the apparition of a god. Now, I thought, it would be a different meeting—with the god of evil, who would kill me. I started to walk

faster in order to escape, like a traveller pursued by a tidal wave; I groped my way round dark squares from which I could find no way out. At last the flames of a blazing building showed me where I was and I got back on to the right road, while all the time the shells burst noisily above my head. But my thoughts had turned to another subject. I was thinking of Jupien's house, perhaps by now reduced to ashes, for a bomb had fallen very near me just after I had left it—that house upon which M. de Charlus might prophetically have written *Sodoma*, as the unknown inhabitant of Pompeii had done, with no less prescience or perhaps when the volcano had already started to erupt and the catastrophe had begun. But what mattered sirens and Gothas to the men who had come to seek their pleasure? The social setting or the natural scene which surrounds our love-making barely impinges upon our thoughts. The tempest may rage over the sea, the ship roll and plunge in every direction, the sky pour down avalanches convulsed by the wind, and at most we bestow the attention of a single second, forced from us by physical discomfort, upon this immense scenic background against which we ourselves are so insignificant, both we and the body which we long to approach. The siren with its warning of bombs troubled Jupien's visitors no more than an iceberg would have done. Indeed, the threat of physical danger delivered them from the fear which for long had morbidly harassed them. For it is wrong to suppose that the scale of our fears corresponds to that of the dangers by which they are inspired. A man may be afraid of not sleeping and not in the least afraid of a serious duel, afraid of a rat and not of a lion. For a few hours now the police would have their hands full looking after something as trivial as the lives of the city's inhabitants and their reputations were temporarily in no danger. But if some, their fears allayed, remained in Jupien's establishment, others were tempted not so much by the thought of recovering their moral liberty as by the darkness which had suddenly settled upon the streets. Some of these, like the Pompeians upon whom the fire from heaven was already raining, descended into the passages of the Métro, black as catacombs. They knew that they would not be alone there. And darkness, which envelops all things like a new element, has the effect, irresistibly tempting for certain people, of suppressing the first halt on the road to pleasure—it permits us to enter without impediment into a region of caresses to which normally we gain access only after a certain delay. Whether the coveted object is a woman or a man, supposing even that the first approach is easy and that there is no need of the gallant speeches which in a drawing-room might run on for ever (at any rate in daylight), on a normal evening, even in the most dimly lit street, there is at least a preamble in which the eyes alone feed on the unripe fruit, and fear of passers-by, fear even of the coveted being, prevents us from doing more than look and speak. In the darkness this time-honoured ritual is instantly abolished—hands, lips, bodies may go into action at once. There is always the excuse of darkness, and of the mistakes that darkness engenders, if we are not well received. And if we are, this immediate response of a body which does not withdraw but approaches, gives us of the woman (or the man) whom we have selected the idea that she is without prejudices and full of vice, which adds an extra pleasure to the happiness of having bitten straight into the fruit without first coveting it with our eyes and without asking permission. Meanwhile the darkness persisted; plunged into the new element, imagining that they had travelled to a distant country and were witnessing a natural phenomenon like a tidal wave or an eclipse, that they were enjoying not an artificially prepared, sedentary pleasure but a chance encounter in the unknown, the men who had come away from Jupien's house celebrated, while the bombs mimicked the rumbling of a volcano, deep in the earth as in a Pompeian house of ill fame, their secret rites in the shadows of the catacombs.

The Pompeian paintings of Jupien's house were admirably suited, recalling as they did the later days of the Revolution, to the age so similar to the Directory which was about to begin. Already, without waiting for peace, concealing themselves in the darkness so as not too openly to infringe the regulations of the police, everywhere newfangled dances were being evolved and frenziedly danced by their devotees throughout the night. And at the same time certain artistic opinions less anti-German in tone than those of the first years of the war were coming into vogue, allowing suffocated minds to breathe once more—but still before you dared to present these ideas you needed to produce a certificate of your patriotism. A professor might write a remarkable book on Schiller and it would be reviewed in the newspapers. But before discussing the author of the book they would record, as a sort of *imprimatur*, that he had been at the Marne or Verdun, that he had been mentioned in despatches five times or had two sons killed. Then and then only did they praise the lucidity, the depth of his work on Schiller, whom it was permissible to describe as “great” provided that he was called not “that great German” but “that great Boche.” This was the pass-word, and having passed this test the article was allowed to proceed.

The clients who had not wished to leave had collected together in one room in Jupien's house. They were not acquainted with one another, but one could see that they all belonged nevertheless roughly to the same world, rich and aristocratic. The appearance of each one had in it something repugnant, a reflexion, I presumed, of their failure to resist degrading pleasures. One, an enormous man, had a face covered with red blotches like a drunkard. I was told that formerly he had not drunk much himself but had merely enjoyed making young men drunk. But, terrified at the idea of being called up (although he seemed to be in his fifties) and being very stout, he had started to drink without stopping in order to get his weight above a hundred kilos, as nobody over this limit was accepted for the army. And now, this calculation having transformed itself into a passion, the moment that he was left alone, wherever it might be, he would disappear and be found again in a wine-shop. But as soon as he spoke I saw that, though his intelligence was commonplace, he was a man with a good deal of knowledge, education and culture. Another man came in, very young and of great physical distinction. This one, who clearly belonged to the best society, had as yet it is true no external marks of vice, but—and this was more disturbing—the interior signs were there. Very tall, with a charming face, his speech revealed an intelligence of quite a different order from that of his alcoholic neighbour, an intelligence that might without exaggeration be called really outstanding. But to everything that he said there was added a facial expression which would have suited a different phrase. As though, while possessing the whole treasure-house of the expressions of the human countenance, he lived in some world of his own, he displayed these expressions in the wrong order, appearing to scatter smiles and glances at random without any connexion with the remarks that were being addressed to him. I hope for his sake—if, as he certainly is, he is still alive—that he was the victim not of a lasting malady but of a brief intoxication. Probably, had one asked all these men for their visiting cards, one would have been surprised to see that they belonged to an exalted social class. But some vice or other, and that greatest of all vices, the lack of will-power which prevents a man from resisting any vice in particular, brought them together in this place, in isolated rooms it is true, but evening after evening so I was told, so that, though their names might be known to fashionable hostesses, the latter had gradually lost sight of their faces and no longer ever received their visits. Invitations might still be sent to them, but habit brought them back to their composite haunt of depravity. They made, moreover, little attempt at concealment, unlike the page-boys, young workmen, etc., who ministered to their pleasures. And this fact, for which a number of reasons could be given, is best explained by this one: for a man with a job, whether in industry or in domestic service, to go to Jupien's was much the same as for a woman supposed respectable to go to a house of assignation; some, while ready to admit that they had gone there, denied having gone more than once, and Jupien himself, lying to protect their reputations or to discourage competition, would declare: "Oh, no, he doesn't come to my establishment, he wouldn't go *there*." For men with a social position it was not so serious, particularly as other men with a social position who do not go *there* know nothing about the place and do not concern themselves with your life. But in an aeroplane factory, for instance, if one or two fitters have gone *there*, their comrades, who have spied on them, would not dream of following their example for fear of being found out.

As I made my way home, I reflected upon the speed with which conscience ceases to be a partner in our habits, which she allows to develop freely without bothering herself about them, and upon the astonishing picture which may consequently present itself to us if we observe simply from without, and in the belief that they engage the whole of the individual, the actions of men whose moral or intellectual virtues may at the same time be developing independently in an entirely different direction. Clearly it was a gross fault in their education, or a complete absence of education, combined with a propensity for making money in the way which, if not the least painful (for there were many forms of work which must in the long run be pleasanter—but then does not an invalid in the same way fabricate for himself, with fads, privations and remedies, an existence much more painful than the one imposed upon him by the often trivial disease against which he imagines himself to be fighting by these methods?), was at least less laborious than any other, which had led these ordinary young men to do, quite innocently one may almost say and for a very moderate reward, things which caused them no pleasure and which must in the beginning have inspired in them a lively disgust. On this evidence one might have supposed them to be fundamentally bad, but not only were they in the war splendid soldiers, men of incomparable courage, in civil life too they had often been kind-hearted and sometimes wholly admirable people. They had long ceased to speculate upon the morality or immorality of the life they led, because it was the life that was led by everybody round them. So it is that, when we study certain periods of ancient history, we are astonished to see men and women individually good participate without scruple in mass assassinations or human sacrifices which probably seemed to them natural things. And our own age no doubt, when its history is read two thousand years hence, will seem to an equal degree to have bathed men of pure and tender conscience in a vital element which will strike the future reader as monstrously pernicious, but to which at the time these men adapted themselves without difficulty. Similarly, I knew few men, I may even say I knew none, who in point of intelligence and sensibility were as gifted as Jupien; for the store of knowledge which gave such a delightful quality of wit to his conversation came to him not from that instruction at school or that liberal education at a university which might have made him indeed a remarkable man, but from which many fashionable youths derive no profit. It was simply his innate good sense, his natural taste, which had enabled him, from a few books read at random, without a guide, at odd moments, to construct that correct and elegant manner of speaking in which all the symmetries of language were revealed and their beauty displayed. Yet the trade that he followed might with good reason be regarded, though certainly as one of the most lucrative, as the lowest of all. As for M. de Charlus, whatever disdain his aristocratic pride may have given him for the thought of what people would say, how was it that some feeling of personal dignity and self-respect had not forced him to refuse his sensuality certain satisfactions for which the only imaginable excuse might seem to be complete insanity? But in him, as in Jupien, the practice of separating morality from a whole order of actions (and this is something that must also often happen to men who have public duties to perform, those of a judge for instance or a statesman and many others as well) must have been so long established that Habit, no longer asking Moral Sentiment for its opinion, had grown stronger from day to day until at last this consenting Prometheus had had himself nailed by Force to the rock of Pure Matter.

No doubt, as I saw clearly enough, a new stage had been reached in the malady of M. de Charlus, which since I had first observed it had, to judge from the diverse phases which had presented themselves to my vision, pursued its development with ever-increasing speed. The poor Baron could not now be very far from the malady's final term, from

death itself, though this possibly would be preceded, in accordance with the predictions and prayers of Mme Verdurin, by an imprisonment which at his age could only hasten its coming. Yet I have perhaps been inaccurate in speaking of the rock of Pure Matter. In this Pure Matter it is possible that a small quantum of Mind still survived. This madman knew, in spite of everything, that he was the victim of a form of madness and during his mad moments he nevertheless was playing a part, since he knew quite well that the young man who was beating him was not more wicked than the little boy who in a game of war is chosen by lot to be "the Prussian," upon whom all the others hurl themselves in a fury of genuine patriotism and pretended hate. The victim of a madness, yet a madness into which there entered nevertheless a little of the personality of M. de Charlus. Even in these aberrations (and this is true also of our loves or our travels), human nature still betrays its need for belief by its insistent demands for truth. Françoise, if I spoke to her about a church in Milan, a town which she would probably never visit, or about the cathedral of Rheims—or even merely that of Arras!—which she would not be able to see since they had been more or less destroyed, spoke enviously of the rich who can afford to visit such treasures or else exclaimed with nostalgic regret: "Ah! how lovely it must have been!" although, after all these years that she had lived in Paris, she had never had the curiosity to go and see Notre-Dame. For Notre-Dame is part of Paris and Paris was the town in which the daily life of Françoise took its course, the town, in consequence, in which it was difficult for our old servant—as it would have been for me had not the study of architecture corrected in me at certain points the instincts of Combray—to situate the objects of her dreams. In the people whom we love, there is, immanent, a certain dream which we cannot always clearly discern but which we pursue. It was my belief in Bergotte and in Swann which had made me love Gilberte, my belief in Gilbert the Bad which had made me love Mme de Guermantes. And what a vast expanse of sea had been hidden away in my love—the most full of suffering, the most jealous, seemingly the most individual of all my loves—for Albertine! In any case, just because we are furiously pursuing a dream in a succession of individuals, our loves for people cannot fail to be more or less of an aberration. (And are not even the maladies of the body, at least those that are at all closely connected with the nervous system, in the nature of special tastes or special fears acquired by our organs or our joints, which indicate in this manner that they have conceived for certain climates a horror as inexplicable and as obstinate as the fondness which certain men betray for, it might be, women with an eye-glass or women on horseback? Who can say to what long-lived and unconscious dream is linked the desire that never fails to re-awaken at the sight of a woman on horseback, an unconscious dream as mysterious as is, for example, for a man who has suffered all his life from asthma, the influence of a certain town, in appearance no different from any other town, in which for the first time he breathes freely?) And if there is something of aberration or perversion in all our loves, perversions in the narrower sense of the word are like loves in which the germ of disease has spread victoriously to every part. Even in the maddest of them love may still be recognised. If M. de Charlus insisted that his hands and feet should be bound with chains of proven strength, if he asked repeatedly for the "bar of justice" and, so Jupien told me, for other ferocious instruments which it was almost impossible to obtain even from sailors—for they served to inflict punishments which have been abolished even on board ship where discipline is more rigorous than anywhere else—at the bottom of all this there persisted in M. de Charlus his dream of virility, to be attested if need be by acts of brutality, and all that inner radiance, invisible to us but projecting in this manner a little reflected light, with which his mediaeval imagination adorned crosses of judgment and feudal tortures. It was the same sentiment that made him, every time he arrived, say to Jupien: "I hope there will be no alert this evening, for already I see myself consumed by this fire from heaven like an inhabitant of Sodom." And he affected to be nervous of the Gothas, not that they caused him the slightest shadow of fear, but so as to have a pretext, as soon as the sirens sounded, to rush into the shelters in the Métro, where he hoped for pleasure from brief contact with unseen figures, accompanied by vague dreams of mediaeval dungeons and oubliettes. In short his desire to be bound in chains and beaten, with all its ugliness, betrayed a dream as poetical as, in other men, the longing to go to Venice or to keep ballet-dancers. And M. de Charlus was so determined that this dream should give him the illusion of reality that Jupien was obliged to sell the wooden bed which was in Room 43 and replace it by an iron bed which went better with the chains.

The all-clear sounded at last as I was approaching my house. A little boy in the street told me what a noise the fire-engines had made. I met Françoise coming up from the cellar with the butler. She thought that I had been killed. She told me that Saint-Loup had looked in, with apologies, to see whether he had not, in the course of the visit he had paid me during the morning, dropped his *croix de guerre*. For he had just noticed that he had lost it, and as he had to rejoin his regiment the following morning he had wanted to see whether it was in our flat. He had searched everywhere with Françoise and had found nothing. Françoise thought that he must have lost it before coming to see me, for, she said, she was almost sure, in fact she could have sworn that he was not wearing it when she saw him. In this she was mistaken. So much for the value of evidence and memory! In any case it was of no great importance. Saint-Loup was as much esteemed by his officers as loved by his men, and the matter could easily be arranged.

However, I sensed immediately, from the unenthusiastic manner in which they spoke of him, that Saint-Loup had made a poor impression on Françoise and on the butler. True, whereas the butler's son and Françoise's nephew had made every effort to get themselves into safe jobs, Saint-Loup had made efforts of the opposite kind, and with success, to be sent to as dangerous a post as possible. But this, because they judged from their own natures, was something that Françoise and the butler were incapable of believing. They were convinced that the rich are always put where there is no danger. In any case, had they known the truth concerning the heroic courage of Robert, it would have left them unmoved. He did not say "Boches," he had praised the valour of the Germans, he did not attribute to treachery the fact that we had not been victorious from the first day. That is what they would have liked to hear, that is what would have seemed to them a sign of courage. So although they continued to search for the *croix de guerre*, I found them chilly on the subject of Robert. Having my suspicions as to where the cross had been forgotten, I advised Françoise and the butler to go to bed. (However, if Saint-Loup had amused himself that evening in the fashion which I suspected, it was only to pass the time of waiting, for he had been seized once more by the desire to see Morel and had made use of all his military connexions to find out in what regiment he was serving, so that he could go and see him, but so far had only received hundreds of contradictory answers.) But the butler was never in a hurry to leave Françoise now that, thanks to the war, he had found a means of torturing her even more efficacious than the expulsion of the nuns or the Dreyfus case. That evening, and every time I went near them during the few more days that I spent in Paris before leaving to go to a new sanatorium, I heard the butler say to a terrified Françoise: "They're

not in a hurry of course, they're biding their time, but when the time is ripe they will take Paris, and on that day we shall see no mercy!" "Heavens above, Mother of God," cried Françoise, "aren't they satisfied to have conquered poor Belgium? She suffered enough, that one, at the time of her innovation." "Belgium, Françoise? What they did in Belgium will be nothing compared to this!" And as the war had flooded the conversation of working-class people with a quantity of terms with which they had become acquainted through their eyes alone, by reading the newspapers, and which they consequently did not know how to pronounce, the butler went on to say: "I cannot understand how everybody can be so stupid. You will see, Françoise, they are preparing a new attack with a wider *scoop* than all the others." At this I rebelled, if not in the name of pity for Françoise and strategic common sense, at least in that of grammar, and declared that the word should be pronounced "*scope*," but succeeded only in causing the terrible phrase to be repeated to Françoise every time I entered the kitchen, for to the butler the pleasure of alarming his companion was scarcely greater than that of showing his master that, though he had once been a gardener at Combray and was a mere butler, he was nevertheless a good Frenchman according to the rule of Saint-André-des-Champs and possessed, by virtue of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the right to use the pronunciation "*scoop*" in full independence and not to let himself be dictated to on a point which formed no part of his service and upon which in consequence, since the Revolution had made us all equals, he need listen to nobody.

To my annoyance, therefore, I had to listen to him talking to Françoise about an operation of wide "*scoop*" with an emphasis which was intended to prove to me that this pronunciation was the result not of ignorance but of an act of will following upon ripe reflexion. He confounded the government and the newspapers in a single "*they*" full of mistrust, saying: "They tell us about the losses of the Boches, they don't tell us about our own, it seems that they are ten times as big. They tell us that the enemy are at the end of their tether, that they have nothing to eat, personally I believe they are a hundred times better off than we are for food. It's no use stuffing us with lies. If the enemy had nothing to eat, they wouldn't fight as they did the other day when they killed a hundred thousand of our young men not twenty years old." Thus at every moment he exaggerated the triumphs of the Germans, as in the past he had those of the Radicals; and at the same time he recounted their atrocities in order that these triumphs might be yet more painful to Françoise, who never stopped saying: "Ah! Holy Mother of the Angels! Ah! Mary, Mother of God!", and sometimes, in order to be disagreeable to her in a different way, he said: "Anyhow, we are no better than they are, what we're doing in Greece is no prettier than what they have done in Belgium. You will see that we shall turn everybody against us, we shall find ourselves fighting every nation in the world," whereas the truth was exactly the opposite. On days when the news was good he destroyed its effect by assuring Françoise that the war would last thirty-five years, and if there was talk of the possibility of an armistice, he declared that peace would not last more than a few months and would be followed by battles which would make the present ones look like child's play, such battles that after them there would be nothing left of France.

The victory of the Allies seemed, if not near at hand, at least more or less certain, and it must unfortunately be admitted that the butler was greatly distressed at the prospect. For he had reduced the "*world*" war, like everything else, to the war which he was secretly waging against Françoise (of whom, nevertheless, he was fond, just as one may be fond of the person whom one enjoys infuriating every day by beating him at dominoes) and victory in his eyes took the shape of the first conversation in which he would have the pain of hearing Françoise say: "Well, it's over at last, and they'll have to give us more than we gave them in '70." He believed, nevertheless, that this fatal day of reckoning was perpetually about to arrive, for an unconscious patriotism made him suppose, like all Frenchmen, victims of the same mirage as myself since my illness, that victory—like my recovery—was just round the corner. This event he anticipated by announcing to Françoise that victory might perhaps come, but that his heart bled at the thought, for revolution would follow hard on its heels and then invasion. "Ah! this blooming war, the Boches will be the only ones to recover from it quickly, Françoise. They have already made hundreds of thousands of millions out of it. But as for their coughing up a *sou* to us, what nonsense! They will print that in the newspapers perhaps," he added out of prudence and so as to be ready for any eventuality, "in order to appease the people, just as for three years now they have been saying that the war will be over tomorrow." Françoise was only too easily disturbed by these words, because, having at first believed the optimists rather than the butler, she saw now that the war, which she had thought would end in a fortnight in spite of "*the innovation of poor Belgium*," was indeed still going on, that we were not advancing (the phenomenon of fixed front warfare was beyond her comprehension) and that, according to one of the innumerable "*godsons*" to whom she gave everything that she earned with us, "*they*" were concealing various awkward facts. "It's the working man who will have to pay," concluded the butler. "They will take your field away from you, Françoise." "Ah! God in Heaven!" But to these distant misfortunes he preferred nearer ones and devoured the newspapers in the hope of being able to announce a defeat to Françoise. He waited for pieces of bad news as eagerly as if they had been Easter eggs, hoping that things would go badly enough to terrify Françoise but not badly enough to cause him any material suffering. Thus the prospect of a Zeppelin raid enchanted him: he would have the spectacle of Françoise hiding in the cellars, and at the same time he was persuaded that in a town as large as Paris the bombs would never happen to fall just on our house.

Françoise meanwhile was beginning at moments to return to her Combray pacifism. She almost had doubts about the "*German atrocities*." "When the war started we were told that the Germans were murderers, brigands, real bandits, Bbboches ..." (If she gave several *b's* to Boche, it was because the accusation that the Germans were murderers seemed to her quite plausible, but the idea that they were Boches, because of the enormity of the accusation, improbable in the extreme. Only it was not at all easy to understand what mysteriously terrifying sense Françoise gave to the word Boche, since the period she was talking about was the very beginning of the war, and also on account of the air of doubt with which she pronounced the word. For a doubt whether the Germans were criminals might be ill-founded in fact but did not contain in itself, from the point of view of logic, any contradiction. But how was it possible to doubt that they were Boches, since the word, in the popular language, means nothing more nor less than German? Perhaps she was simply repeating in an indirect fashion the violent remarks she had heard at the time, in which the word Boche was emphasised with particular energy.) "I believed all that," she went on, "but I am wondering now whether we are not every bit as scoundrelly as they are." This blasphemous thought had been slyly prepared in Françoise's mind by the butler, who, seeing that she had a certain fondness for King Constantine of Greece, had not ceased to represent him to her as literally starved by us until the day when he would yield. So the abdication of this monarch

had aroused strong feelings in Françoise, who went so far as to declare: "We are no better than they are. If we were in Germany, we would do just the same."

I saw little of her, in any case, during these few days, for she spent much time at the house of those cousins of whom Mamma had said to me one day: "But you know that they are richer than you are." These cousins had given an example of that beautiful conduct which was very frequent at this period throughout the country and which would bear witness, if there were a historian to perpetuate its memory, to the greatness of France, her greatness of soul, her greatness after the fashion of Saint-André-des-Champs, a kind of conduct displayed as much by thousands of civilians living in safety far from the front as by the soldiers who fell at the Marne. There had been killed at Berry-au-Bac a nephew of Françoise who was also a nephew of the millionaire cousins, former proprietors of a large café who had retired long since after making their fortune. The young man who was killed had been the owner of a very small café and quite poor; he had gone off, twenty-five years old, when the army was mobilised, leaving his young wife alone to look after the little bar to which he hoped to return in a few months. He had been killed. And then this is what happened. The millionaire cousins of Françoise, who were not related by blood to the young woman who was their nephew's widow, had left the home in the country to which they had retired ten years earlier and had set to work again as café proprietors, without putting a sou into their own pockets; every morning at six the millionairess, a real lady, was up and dressed together with Mademoiselle her daughter, ready to help their niece and cousin by marriage. And for nearly three years now they had been washing glasses and serving drinks from early morning until half past nine at night, without a day's rest. In this book in which there is not a single incident which is not fictitious, not a single character who is a real person in disguise, in which everything has been invented by me in accordance with the requirements of my theme, I owe it to the credit of my country to say that only the millionaire cousins of Françoise who came out of retirement to help their niece when she was left without support, only they are real people who exist. And persuaded as I am that I shall not offend their modesty, for the reason that they will never read this book, it is both with childish pleasure and with a profound emotion that, being unable to record the names of so many others who undoubtedly acted in the same way, to all of whom France owes her survival, I transcribe here the real name of this family: they are called—and what name could be more French?—Larivière. If there were a few vile shirkers like the arrogant young man in a dinner-jacket whom I had seen in Jupien's establishment, whose only concern was to know whether he could have Léon at half past ten "as he had a luncheon engagement," they are redeemed by the innumerable throng of all the Frenchmen of Saint-André-des-Champs, by all the sublime soldiers and by those whom I rank as their equals, the Larivières.

The butler, to sharpen the fears of Françoise, showed her an old copy of *Lectures pour tous* which he had found, with a picture on its cover (it dated from before the war) of the "imperial family of Germany." "There's our lord and master to be," said the butler to Françoise, showing her "William." She goggled, then pointed to the feminine personage who stood by his side and said: "And there's the Williamess!"

My departure from Paris was delayed by a piece of news which caused me such grief that I was for some time rendered incapable of travelling. This was the death of Robert de Saint-Loup, killed two days after his return to the front while covering the retreat of his men. Never had any man felt less hatred for a nation than he (and as for the Emperor, for particular reasons, very possibly incorrect, he thought that William II had tried rather to prevent the war than to bring it about). Nor had he hated Germanism; the last words which I had heard on his lips, six days before he died, were the opening words of a Schumann song which he had started to hum in German on my staircase, until I had made him desist because of the neighbours. Accustomed by supreme good breeding to eliminate from his conduct all trace of apology or invective, all rhetoric, he had avoided in face of the enemy, as he had at the time of mobilisation, the actions which would have ensured his survival, through that tendency to efface himself before others of which all his behaviour was symbolic, down to his manner of coming out into the street bare-headed to close the door of my cab, every time I visited him. For several days I remained shut up in my room, thinking of him. I recalled his arrival the first time at Balbec, when, in an almost white suit, with his eyes greenish and mobile like the waves, he had crossed the hall adjoining the great dining-room whose windows gave on to the sea. I recalled the very special being that he had then seemed to me to be, the being for whose friendship I had so greatly wished. That wish had been realised beyond the limits of what I should ever have thought possible, without, however, at the time giving me more than a very slight pleasure; and then later I had come to understand the many great virtues and something else as well which lay concealed behind his elegant appearance. All this, the good as well as the bad, he had given without counting the cost, every day, as much on the last day when he advanced to attack a trench, out of generosity and because it was his habit to place at the service of others all that he possessed, as on that evening when he had run along the backs of the seats in the restaurant in order not to disturb me. And the fact that I had seen him really so little but against such varied backgrounds, in circumstances so diverse and separated by so many intervals—in that hall at Balbec, in the café at Rivebelle, in the cavalry barracks and at the military dinners in Doncières, at the theatre where he had slapped the face of the journalist, in the house of the Princesse de Guermantes—only had the effect of giving me, of his life, pictures more striking and more sharply defined and for his death a grief more lucid than we are likely to have in the case of people whom we have loved more, but with whom our association has been so nearly continuous that the image we retain of them is no more than a sort of vague average between an infinity of imperceptibly different images and our affection, satiated, has not, as with those whom we have seen only for brief moments, during meetings prematurely ended against their wish and ours, the illusion that there was possible between us a still greater affection of which circumstances alone have defrauded us. A few days after the day on which I had seen him pursuing his monocle and supposed him to be so haughty, in that hall at Balbec, there was another living form which I had seen for the first time on the beach at Balbec and which now, like his, no longer existed except in the state of memory: Albertine, making her progress along the sand that first evening, indifferent to everybody around her, a marine creature, like a seagull. For her my love had come so swiftly that, in order to be free to go out with her every day, I had never during my stay at Balbec gone over to Doncières to see Saint-Loup. And yet the history of my relations with him bore witness also to the fact that at one period I had ceased to love Albertine, since if later I had installed myself for a while near Robert at Doncières, the reason lay in my unhappiness at seeing that the feeling which I had for Mme de Guermantes was not returned. His life and Albertine's, so late made known to me, both at Balbec, and so swiftly concluded, had scarcely crossed, though it was he, I told myself, perceiving that the nimble

shuttles of the years weave links between those of our memories which seem at first most independent of each other, it was he whom I had sent to see Mme Bontemps after Albertine had left me. And then it had turned out that their two lives had each of them a parallel secret, which I had not suspected. Saint-Loup's secret caused me now more sadness perhaps than that of Albertine, whose life had become so alien to me. But I felt an inconsolable regret that her life as well as his had been so short. They had often said to me, both of them: "You who are ill ...," they had looked after me. And yet it was they who were dead, while I, both of the one and of the other, could set side by side, separated by an interval which after all was really not very long, the final image—before the trench, in the river-bed—and the first image, which even in the case of Albertine I valued now only because it was associated in my mind with that of the sun setting over the sea.

Saint-Loup's death was received by Françoise with more compassion than that of Albertine. Immediately she assumed her role of hired mourner and descanted upon the memory of the dead man with frenzied threnodies and lamentations. She paraded her grief and only put on an unfeeling expression, at the same time averting her head, when in spite of myself I betrayed mine, which she wished to appear not to have seen. For like many emotional people, she was exasperated by the emotions of others, which bore no doubt too great a resemblance to her own. She loved now to draw attention to her slightest rheumatic twinge, to a fit of giddiness, to a bump. But if I referred to one of my symptoms, in an instant she was stoical and grave again and pretended not to have heard. "Poor Marquis," she said, although she continued to believe that he would have done anything in the world in order not to go to the front and, once there, in order to run away from danger. "Poor lady," she said, thinking of Mme de Marsantes, "how she must have cried when she heard about her boy's death! If at least she had been able to see him again! But perhaps it's better that she didn't, because his nose was cut in two, he was completely dis-faced." And the eyes of Françoise filled with tears, behind which, however, there was perceptible the cruel curiosity of the peasant woman. No doubt Françoise pitied the sorrow of Mme de Marsantes with all her heart, but she regretted not knowing the form which this sorrow had taken and not being able to enjoy the afflicting spectacle of it. And as she would dearly have loved to cry and to be seen by me to cry, she said, in order to work herself up: "This has really done something to me!" In me too she sought to detect the traces of grief, with an avidity which caused me to feign a certain indifference when I spoke of Robert. And, largely no doubt out of a spirit of imitation and because she had heard the phrase used—for there are clichés in the servants' hall as well as in social coteries—she kept repeating, not however without a poor man's smugness in her voice: "All his riches did not save him from dying like anybody else, and what use are they to him now?" The butler took advantage of the occasion to say to Françoise that of course it was sad, but that it hardly counted beside the millions of men who fell every day in spite of all the efforts which the government made to conceal the fact. But this time the butler did not succeed in augmenting the sorrow of Françoise as he had hoped. For she replied: "It is true that they also die for France, but they are nobodies; it is always more interesting when it is somebody whom one knows." And Françoise, who enjoyed crying, went on to add: "You must be sure to let me know if they talk about the death of the Marquis in the newspaper."

Robert had often said to me sadly, long before the war: "Oh! my life, don't let's talk about it, I am a condemned man from the start." Was he alluding to the vice which he had succeeded hitherto in concealing from the world, but of which he was himself aware and whose seriousness he perhaps exaggerated, just as children who make love for the first time, or merely before that age seek solitary pleasure, imagine themselves to be like a plant which cannot scatter its pollen without dying immediately afterwards? Perhaps this exaggeration, for Saint-Loup as for the children, came partly from the still unfamiliar idea of sin, partly from the fact that an entirely novel sensation has an almost terrible force which later will gradually diminish; or had he really, justifying it if need be by the death of his father at an early age, a presentiment of his own premature end? Such a presentiment would seem, no doubt, to be impossible. Yet death appears to be obedient to certain laws. Often for instance, one gets the impression that children of parents who have died very old or very young are almost compelled to disappear at the same age, the former protracting until their hundredth year their incurable miseries and ailments, the latter, in spite of a happy and healthy existence, swept away at the premature but inevitable date by an illness so opportune and so accidental (whatever deep roots it may have in the victim's temperament) that it appears to be merely the formality necessary for the realisation of death. And may it not be possible that accidental death too—like that of Saint-Loup, which was perhaps in any case linked to his character in more ways than I have thought it necessary to describe—is somehow recorded in advance, known only to the gods, invisible to men, but revealed by a peculiar sadness, half unconscious, half conscious (and even, insofar as it is conscious, proclaimed to others with that complete sincerity with which we foretell misfortunes which in our heart of hearts we believe we shall escape but which will nevertheless take place) to the man who bears and forever sees within himself, as though it were some heraldic device, a fatal date?

He must have been truly magnificent in those last hours. This man who throughout his life, even when sitting down, even when walking across a drawing-room, had seemed to be restraining an impulse to charge, while with a smile he dissembled the indomitable will which dwelt within his triangular head, at last had charged. Freed from the books which encumbered it, the feudal turret had become military once more. And this Guermantes had died more himself than ever before, or rather more a member of his race, into which slowly he dissolved until he became nothing more than a Guermantes, as was symbolically visible at his burial in the church of Saint-Hilaire at Combray, completely hung for the occasion with black draperies upon which stood out in red, beneath the closed circle of the coronet, without initials or Christian names or titles, the G of the Guermantes that he had again in death become.

Even before going to this burial, which did not take place immediately, I wrote to Gilberte. I ought perhaps to have written to the Duchesse de Guermantes, but I told myself that she would receive the death of Robert with the same indifference which I had seen her display towards the deaths of so many others who had seemed to be closely linked to her life, and that she would perhaps even, with her Guermantes wit, try to show that she did not share the superstition about ties of blood. And I was too unwell to write to everybody. In the past I had believed that she and Robert were fond of each other in the sense in which that phrase is used in society, that is to say that, when they were together, they said to each other tender things which at the moment they truly felt. But away from her, he did not hesitate to declare that she was an idiot, and if she sometimes derived an egotistical pleasure from seeing him, I had observed her on the other hand to be incapable of taking the slightest trouble, of making even the smallest use of her credit in order to render him a service or even to spare him an unpleasantness. Her unkindness in refusing to give

Robert a recommendation to General de Saint-Joseph, at the time when he wanted to avoid returning to Morocco, proved surely that the devoted help which she had given him on the occasion of his marriage was no more than a sort of atonement which cost her almost nothing. So I was very astonished to hear—she was unwell at the moment when Robert was killed—that in order to spare her the shock which the news would cause her her family had thought it necessary to conceal from her for several days, under the most fallacious pretexts, the newspapers which would have informed her of his death. And my surprise increased when I heard that, after they had at last been obliged to tell her the truth, the Duchess wept for a whole day, fell sick and for a long time—more than a week, which was a long time for her—was inconsolable. When I heard of her grief, I was touched. It enabled society to say, and it enables me to vouch for the truth of the statement, that a great friendship existed between them. But then when I recall all the little malicious utterances, all the ill-natured refusals to help each other which this friendship had not excluded, I cannot help reflecting that in society a great friendship does not amount to much.

However, a little later, in circumstances which, if they touched my heart less, were historically more important, Mme de Guermantes showed herself, to my mind, in a yet more favourable light. This woman who as a girl, as the reader may remember, had behaved with such audacious impertinence towards the imperial family of Russia, and who after her marriage had addressed them always with a freedom which sometimes caused her to be charged with lack of tact, was perhaps alone, after the Russian Revolution, in giving proofs of a limitless devotion to the Grand Duchesses and the Grand Dukes. Only the year before the war she had not a little annoyed the Grand Duchess Vladimir by persistently referring to Countess Hohenfelsen, themorganatic wife of the Grand Duke Paul, as “the Grand Duchess Paul.” Nevertheless, no sooner had the Russian Revolution broken out than our ambassador in St Petersburg, M. Paléologue (“Paléo” in diplomatic society, which like society at large has its supposedly witty abbreviations), was plagued with telegrams from the Duchesse de Guermantes asking for news of the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna. And for a long time the only marks of sympathy and respect which this Princess received came to her regularly and exclusively from Mme de Guermantes.

To various individuals Saint-Loup caused not so much by his death as by what he had done in the preceding weeks a distress greater than that which afflicted the Duchess. What happened was that, only the day after the evening on which I had seen him, and two days after the Baron had said to Morel, “I will have my revenge,” the inquiries which Saint-Loup had made about the whereabouts of Morel were successful; they succeeded, that is to say, in bringing to the notice of the general under whose command Morel should have been the fact that he was a deserter, whereupon the general had him searched for and arrested and, to apologise to Saint-Loup for the punishment which he was obliged to inflict upon someone in whom he took an interest, wrote to inform him how the matter stood. Morel did not doubt that his arrest had been brought about by the rancour of M. de Charlus. He remembered the words “I will have my revenge,” thought that this was the threatened revenge, and asked to be allowed to make some disclosures. “It is quite true,” he declared, “that I am a deserter. But if I have been led astray, is it altogether my fault?” He then told apropos of M. de Charlus and M. d’Argencourt, with whom also he had quarrelled, stories in which he had not in fact himself been directly involved, but which they, with the double expansiveness of lovers and of invert, had related to him, and the result was the immediate arrest of both these gentlemen. But each of them suffered less perhaps at being arrested than at learning—what neither of them had known—that the other was his rival, and the judicial examination revealed that they had an enormous number of other obscure, quotidian rivals, picked up in the street. M. de Charlus and M. d’Argencourt were soon released. So was Morel, because the general’s letter to Saint-Loup was returned to him with the information: “Deceased, killed in action.” Out of respect for the dead man the general so arranged things that Morel was merely sent to the front. He conducted himself bravely there, survived every danger and returned, when the war was over, with the cross which M. de Charlus had in the past vainly solicited for him and which in this indirect fashion was procured for him by the death of Saint-Loup.

I have often thought since then, remembering the *croix de guerre* which went astray in Jupien’s establishment, that if Saint-Loup had lived, he could easily have got himself elected a deputy in the elections which followed the armistice, thanks to the scum of universal fatuousness which the war left in its wake and the halo which still adhered to military glory. For at that time, if the loss of a finger could abolish centuries of prejudice and allow a man of humble birth to make a brilliant marriage into an aristocratic family, the *croix de guerre*, even one won by sitting in an office, sufficed for a triumphal election to the Chamber of Deputies, if not to the Académie Française. The election of Saint-Loup, because of his “holy family,” would have caused M. Arthur Meyer to pour out floods of tears and ink. But perhaps he was too sincerely fond of the people to be good at winning their votes, although on account of his quarterings of nobility they would probably have forgiven him his democratic ideas. These he would no doubt have expounded with success before a Chamber composed of aviators. Certainly these heroes would have understood him, and a few other exceptionally intelligent and high-minded men. But thanks to the platitudinous mentality of the National Bloc, the old lags of politics who are invariably re-elected had also turned up again, and such of them as failed to enter a Chamber of aviators solicited, so that they might at least get into the Académie Française, the suffrages of the Marshals, of the President of the Republic, the President of the Chamber, etc. These men would have looked with less favour upon Saint-Loup than they did upon another of Jupien’s habitués, the deputy of Liberal Action, who was once more returned unopposed and who continued to wear the uniform of a territorial officer long after the war had been over. His election was hailed with joy by all the newspapers which had agreed to put his name forward, as well as by the noble and wealthy ladies who now dressed only in rags from feelings of propriety and from fear of taxes, while the gentlemen of the Bourse never stopped buying diamonds, not for their wives but because, having lost all confidence in the credit of any nation, they were seeking refuge in this tangible wealth and as a result sending up the price of De Beers by a thousand francs. All this tomfoolery was not exactly popular, but there was less disposition to blame the National Bloc when suddenly there appeared on the scene the victims of bolshevism, those Grand Duchesses in tatters whose husbands had been assassinated in carts, while their sons after being left to starve and then forced to work in the midst of abuse, had finally been thrown into wells and buried beneath stones because it was believed that they had the plague and might pass it on. Those of them who succeeded in escaping suddenly turned up in Paris.



Chapter Twenty-Two  
An Afternoon Party at the House of the Princess Guermantes

The new sanatorium to which I withdrew was no more successful in curing me than the first one, and many years passed before I came away. During the train journey which eventually took me back to Paris, the thought of my lack of talent for literature—a defect which I had first discovered, so I supposed, long ago on the Guermantes way, which I had again recognised, and been still more saddened by, in the course of the daily walks that I had taken with Gilberte before returning to dine very late at night at Tansonville, and which on the eve of my departure from that house I had come very near to identifying, after reading some pages of the *Goncourt Journal*, with the vanity, the falsehood of literature—this thought, less painful perhaps but more melancholy still if I referred it not to a private infirmity of my own but to the nonexistence of the ideal in which I had believed, this thought, which for a very long time had not entered my mind, struck me afresh and with a force more painful than ever before. The train had stopped, I remember, in open country. The sun was shining on a row of trees that followed the railway line, flooding the upper halves of their trunks with light. “Trees,” I thought, “you no longer have anything to say to me. My heart has grown cold and no longer hears you. I am in the midst of nature. Well, it is with indifference, with boredom that my eyes register the line which separates your radiant foreheads from your shadowy trunks. If ever I thought of myself as a poet, I know now that I am not one. Perhaps in the new, the so desiccated part of my life which is about to begin, human beings may yet inspire in me what nature can no longer say. But the years in which I might have been able to sing *her* praise will never return.” But in thus consoling myself with the thought that the observation of humanity might possibly come to take the place of an unattainable inspiration, I knew that I was merely seeking to console myself, I knew that I knew myself to be worthless. If I really had the soul of an artist, surely I would be feeling pleasure at the sight of this curtain of trees lit by the setting sun, these little flowers on the bank which lifted themselves almost to the level of the steps of my compartment, flowers whose petals I was able to count but whose colour I would not, like many a worthy man of letters, attempt to describe, for can one hope to transmit to the reader a pleasure that one has not felt? A little later I had noticed with the same absence of emotion the glitter of gold and orange which the sun splashed upon the windows of a house; and finally, as the evening advanced, I had seen another house which appeared to be built out of a strange pink substance. But I had made these various observations with the same absolute indifference as if, walking in a garden with a lady, I had seen a pane of glass, and a little further on an object of an alabaster-like material, the unusual colour of which had failed to draw me out of the most languorous boredom, but as if, nevertheless, out of politeness towards the lady, in order to say something and also in order to show that I had noticed these colours, I had pointed in passing to the tinted glass and the fragment of stucco. In the same way, to satisfy my conscience, I indicated to myself now as to someone who was travelling with me and might be able to extract from them more pleasure than I, the flame-like reflexions in the windows and the pink transparency of the house. But the companion whose attention I had drawn to these curious effects was evidently of a less enthusiastic nature than many more sympathetically disposed persons who are enraptured by such sights, for he had taken cognisance of the colours without any kind of joy.

My long absence from Paris had not prevented old friends from continuing, as my name remained on their lists, faithfully to send me invitations, and when on my return I found—together with one to a tea-party given by Berma for her daughter and her son-in-law—another to an afternoon party with music which was to take place the following day at the house of the Prince de Guermantes, the gloomy reflexions which had passed through my mind in the train were not the least of the motives which urged me to accept. Really, I said to myself, what point is there in forgoing the pleasures of social life if, as seems to be the case, the famous “work” which for so long I have been hoping every day to start the next day, is something I am not, or am no longer, made for and perhaps does not even correspond to any reality. This reasoning was, it is true, completely negative and merely deprived of their force those other reasons which might have dissuaded me from going to this fashionable concert. The positive reason that made me decide to go was the name of Guermantes, absent long enough from my mind to be able, when I read it upon the invitation card, to re-awaken a ray of my attention, to draw up from the depths of my memory a sort of section of the past of the Guermantes, attended by all the images of seigniorial forest and tall flowers which at that earlier time of my life had accompanied it, and to reassume for me the charm and the significance which I had found in it at Combray when, passing along the Rue de l’Oiseau on my way home, I used to see from outside, like some dark lacquer, the window of Gilbert the Bad, Lord of Guermantes. For a moment the Guermantes had once more seemed to me to be totally different from people in society, comparable neither with them nor with any living being, even a reigning prince, creatures begotten of the union of the sharp and windy air of the dark town of Combray in which my childhood had been spent with the past which could be sensed there, in the little street, at the height of the stained-glass window. I had had a longing to go to the Guermantes party as if in going there I must have been brought nearer to my childhood and to the depths of my memory where my childhood dwelt. And I had continued to read and re-read the invitation until in the end, rising in revolt, the letters which composed this name at once so familiar and so mysterious, like that of Combray itself, resumed their independence and outlined before my tired eyes a name that I seemed never to have seen before. (Mamma happened to be going to a little tea-party of Mme Sazerat’s which she knew beforehand she would find extremely boring, so I had no scruples about going to the *Princesse de Guermantes’s*.)

I took a cab to go to the Prince de Guermantes’s house, which was no longer his former home but a magnificent mansion that he had recently built in the Avenue du Bois. One of the mistakes of society people is not to realise that, if they want us to believe in them, it is first necessary that they should believe in themselves, or at least should respect the essential elements of our belief. At the time when I believed, even if I knew the contrary to be true, that the Guermantes lived in this or that grand house in virtue of a hereditary right, to penetrate into the palace of the sorcerer or the fairy, to compel to open before me the doors which yield only when one has pronounced the magic formula, seemed to me as difficult as to obtain an interview with the sorcerer or the fairy themselves. To persuade myself that the old manservant engaged twenty-four hours earlier or supplied by Potel and Chabot was the son, the grandson, the scion of a whole line of menials who had been in the family’s service since long before the Revolution was the easiest thing in the world, and I was only too happy to take for an ancestral portrait some painting which had been bought the previous month from Bernheim Jeune. But enchantment cannot be decanted from one vessel to another, memories are indivisible, and of the Prince de Guermantes, now that he had himself shattered the illusions of my belief by going to live in the Avenue du Bois, nothing much was left. The ceilings which I had once feared to see collapse upon the announcement of my name, those ceilings under which, for me, there would still have floated

something of the enchantment and the fears of those early days, now looked down upon the parties of an American hostess in whom I took not the slightest interest. Intrinsically, material objects have in themselves no power, but, since it is our practice to bestow power upon them, doubtless at this moment some middle-class schoolboy was feeling, in front of the house in the Avenue du Bois, the same sentiments that I had once felt as I stood before the house where the Prince de Guermantes had lived in my youth. He, this schoolboy, was still at the age of beliefs, but I had passed beyond it, I had lost that privilege, just as after one's first years one loses the ability that a baby has to break up the milk which he ingests into digestible fragments, so that the prudent adult will drink milk only in small quantities whereas babies can continue to suck it in indefinitely without pausing for breath. But at least the Prince de Guermantes's change of residence had this advantage for me, that the cab which had come to fetch me and in which, as it took me to the party, I was making these reflexions, was obliged to traverse the streets which lead to the Champs-Élysées. They were very badly paved at this time, but the moment I found myself in them I was, none the less, detached from my thoughts by that sensation of extraordinary physical comfort which one has when suddenly a car in which one is travelling rolls more easily, more softly, without noise, because the gates of a park have been opened and one is gliding over alleys covered with fine sand or dead leaves; materially nothing of the sort had happened, but I felt suddenly that all external obstacles had been eliminated, simply because I no longer had to make that effort of adaptation or attention which we make, sometimes without being conscious of it, in the presence of new things: the streets through which I was passing at this moment were those, so long forgotten, which I used once upon a time to take with Françoise when we went to the Champs-Élysées. The solid earth knew of its own accord where it had to go; its resistance was vanquished. And like an airman who hitherto has progressed laboriously along the ground, abruptly "taking off" I soared slowly towards the silent heights of memory. Among all the streets of Paris these streets will always stand out for me, as though they were made of a different substance from the others. When we reached the corner of the Rue Royale where once had stood the open-air vendor of the photographs beloved by Françoise, it seemed to me that the cab, feeling the pull of hundreds of former turns, could not do otherwise than turn of its own accord. I was not traversing the same streets as the people who were walking about the town that day, I was traversing a past, gliding, sad and sweet; a past which was moreover compounded of so many different pasts that it was difficult for me to recognise the cause of my melancholy, to know whether it was due to those walks in which the hope of meeting Gilberte had co-existed with the fear that she would not come, to the proximity of a certain house to which I had been told that Albertine had gone with Andrée, or to that vanity of all things which seems to be the significance of a route which one has followed a thousand times in a state of passion which has disappeared and which has borne no fruit, like the route which I used to take on those expeditions of feverish haste after luncheon to see, with the paste still damp upon them, the posters of *Phèdre* and *Le Domino noir*.

The cab turned into the Champs-Élysées and, as I did not particularly want to hear the whole of the concert which was being given at the Guermantes party, I stopped it and was preparing to get out in order to walk a few yards when I was struck by the spectacle presented by another cab which was also stopping. A man with staring eyes and hunched figure was placed rather than seated in the back, and was making, to keep himself upright, the efforts that might have been made by a child who has been told to be good. But his straw hat failed to conceal an unruly forest of hair which was entirely white, and a white beard, like those which snow forms on the statues of river-gods in public gardens, flowed from his chin. It was—side by side with Jupien, who was unremitting in his attentions to him—M. de Charlus, now convalescent after an attack of apoplexy of which I had had no knowledge (I had only been told that he had lost his sight, but in fact this trouble had been purely temporary and he could now see quite well again) and which, unless the truth was that hitherto he had dyed his hair and that he had now been forbidden to continue so fatiguing a practice, had had the effect, as in a sort of chemical precipitation, of rendering visible and brilliant all that saturation of metal which the locks of his hair and his beard, pure silver now, shot forth like so many geysers, so that upon the old fallen prince this latest illness had conferred the Shakespearian majesty of a King Lear. His eyes had not remained unaffected by this total convulsion, this metallurgical transformation of his head, but had, by an inverse phenomenon, lost all their brightness. But what was most moving was that one felt that this lost brightness was identical with his moral pride, and that somehow the physical and even the intellectual life of M. de Charlus had survived the eclipse of that aristocratic haughtiness which had in the past seemed indissolubly linked to them. To confirm this, at the moment which I am describing, there passed in a victoria, no doubt also on her way to the reception of the Prince de Guermantes, Mme de Saint-Euverte, whom formerly the Baron had not considered elegant enough for him. Jupien, who tended him like a child, whispered in his ear that it was someone with whom he was acquainted, Mme de Saint-Euverte. And immediately, with infinite laboriousness but with all the concentration of a sick man determined to show that he is capable of all the movements which are still difficult for him, M. de Charlus lifted his hat, bowed, and greeted Mme de Saint-Euverte as respectfully as if she had been the Queen of France or as if he had been a small child coming timidly in obedience to his mother's command to say "How do you do?" to a grown-up person. For a child, but without a child's pride, was what he had once more become. Perhaps the very difficulty that M. de Charlus had in making these gestures was in itself a reason for him to make them, in the knowledge that he would create a greater effect by an action which, painful for an invalid, became thereby doubly meritorious on the part of the man who performed it and doubly flattering to the individual to whom it was addressed, invalids, like kings, practising exaggerated civility. Perhaps also there was in the movements of the Baron that lack of co-ordination which follows upon maladies of the spinal column and the brain, so that his gestures went beyond anything that he intended. What I myself saw in them was above all a sort of gentleness, an almost physical gentleness, and of detachment from the realities of life, phenomena so strikingly apparent in those whom death has already drawn within its shadow. And the exposure of the veins of silver in his hair was less indicative of profound alterations than this unconscious humility which turned all social relations upside down and abased before Mme de Saint-Euverte—as it would have abased before the most vulgar of American hostesses (who at last would have been able to congratulate herself on the hitherto unattainable politeness of the Baron)—what had seemed to be the proudest snobbishness of all. For the Baron still lived, still thought; his intellect was not impaired. And more than any chorus of Sophocles on the humbled pride of Oedipus, more than death itself or any funeral oration on the subject of death, the humble greeting, full of effort to please, which the Baron addressed to Mme de Saint-Euverte proclaimed the fragile and perishable nature of the love of earthly greatness and all human pride. M. de Charlus, who until this moment would never have consented

to dine with Mme de Saint-Euverte, now bowed to the ground in her honour. To receive the homage of M. de Charlus had been, for her, the highest ambition of snobbery, just as, for the Baron, the central principle of snobbery had been to be rude to her. And now this inaccessible and precious essence which he had succeeded in making Mme de Saint-Euverte believe to be part of his nature, had at a single stroke been annihilated by M. de Charlus, by the earnest timidity, the apprehensive zeal with which he raised a hat from beneath which, all the while that his head remained deferentially uncovered, there streamed with the eloquence of a Bossuet the torrents of his silvery hair. Jupien helped the Baron to descend and I greeted him. He spoke to me very rapidly, in a voice so inaudible that I could not distinguish what he was saying, which wrung from him, when for the third time I made him repeat his remarks, a gesture of impatience that astonished me by its contrast with the impassivity which his face had at first displayed, which was no doubt an after-effect of his stroke. But when after a while I had grown accustomed to this pianissimo of whispered words, I perceived that the sick man retained the use of his intelligence absolutely intact.

There were, however, two M. de Charluses, not to mention any others. Of the two, one, the intellectual one, passed his time in complaining that he suffered from progressive aphasia, that he constantly pronounced one word, one letter by mistake for another. But as soon as he actually made such a mistake, the other M. de Charlus, the subconscious one, who was as desirous of admiration as the first was of pity and out of vanity did things that the first would have despised, immediately, like a conductor whose orchestra has blundered, checked the phrase which he had started and with infinite ingenuity made the end of his sentence follow coherently from the word which he had in fact uttered by mistake for another but which he thus appeared to have chosen. Even his memory was intact, and from it his vanity impelled him, not without the fatigue of the most laborious concentration, to drag forth this or that ancient recollection, of no importance, which concerned myself and which would demonstrate to me that he had preserved or recovered all his lucidity of mind. Without moving his head or his eyes, and without varying in the slightest degree the modulation of his voice, he said to me, for instance: "Look, there's a poster on that telegraph-pole like the one which I was standing near when I saw you for the first time at Avranches—no, I am mistaken, at Balbec." And it was in fact an advertisement for the same product.

I had found it difficult at first to understand what he was saying, just as one begins by seeing absolutely nothing in a room of which all the curtains are closed. But like one's eyes in half-darkness, my ears soon accustomed themselves to this pianissimo. The sound had in any case, I think, gradually grown in volume while the Baron was speaking, perhaps because the weakness of his voice was due in part to a nervous apprehension which was dispelled when he was distracted by the presence of another person and ceased to think about it, though possibly, on the other hand, the feeble voice corresponded to the real state of his health and the momentary strength with which he spoke in conversation was the result of an artificial, transient and even dangerous excitement, which might make strangers say: "He is much better, he must stop thinking about his illness," but in fact only aggravated the illness, which lost no time in resuming its sway. Whatever the explanation may be, the Baron at this moment (even making allowances for the improvement in my own hearing) was flinging down his words with greater force, as the tide, on days of bad weather, flings down its little contorted waves. And the traces of his recent attack caused one to hear at the back of his words a noise like that of pebbles dragged by the sea. Continuing to speak to me about the past, no doubt to prove to me that he had not lost his memory, he evoked it now—in a funereal fashion but without sadness—by reciting an endless list of all the people belonging to his family or his world who were no longer alive, less, it seemed, with any emotion of grief that they were dead than with satisfaction at having survived them. He appeared indeed, as he recalled their extinction, to enjoy a clearer perception of his own return towards health and it was with an almost triumphal sternness that he repeated, in a monotonous tone, stammering slightly and with a dull sepulchral resonance: "Hannibal de Bréauté, dead! Antoine de Mouchy, dead! Charles Swann, dead! Adalbert de Montmorency, dead! Boson de Talleyrand, dead! Sosthène de Doudeauville, dead!" And every time he uttered it, the word "dead" seemed to fall upon his departed friends like a spadeful of earth each heavier than the last, thrown by a grave-digger grimly determined to immure them yet more closely within the tomb.

The Duchesse de Létourville, who was not going to the Princesse de Guermantes's reception because she had just recovered from a long illness, passed near us at that moment on foot, and seeing the Baron, of whose recent attack she knew nothing, stopped to say good-day to him. But the effect of her own illness was to make her not more understanding but more impatient—with a nervous ill-humour that was nevertheless perhaps not without a large element of compassion—of the illnesses of others. Hearing the Baron pronounce certain words with difficulty and incorrectly and seeing the painful effort he had to make to move his arm, she cast her eyes first upon Jupien and then upon myself as though to demand an explanation of so shocking a phenomenon. As we said nothing, it was to M. de Charlus himself that she addressed a long look full of sadness but also of reproach. She seemed to think it very wrong of him to be out of doors and in her company in a condition as unusual as if he had come out without a tie or without shoes. And when yet another error in pronunciation was perpetrated by the Baron, augmenting both the distress and the indignation of the Duchess, she cried out to him: "Palamède!" in the interrogative and exasperated tone of those nervous people who cannot bear to be kept waiting for a single moment and will say to you sharply, if you let them come into your room before you are ready (with a word of apology for being still engaged upon your toilet), not so as to excuse themselves but in order to accuse you: "Oh, I'm disturbing you, am I?" as if it was your fault that you were being disturbed. Finally she left us, looking crosser and crosser and saying to the Baron: "Really, you ought to go home."

M. de Charlus said he would like to sit down on a chair to rest while Jupien and I went for a little walk, and with some difficulty pulled out of his pocket a book which looked to me like a prayer-book. I was not displeased to have an opportunity to learn from Jupien various details of the Baron's state of health. "I am very glad to talk to you, sir," said Jupien, "but we won't go further than the Rond-Point. Thank heaven, the Baron is better now, but I dare not leave him alone for long, he is always the same, he is too kind-hearted, he would give away everything he possesses: and then that's not the only thing, he still tries to pick people up as if he was a young man, and I have to keep my eyes open." "Particularly as he has recovered the use of his own eyes," I replied; "I was very distressed when I was told that he had lost his sight." "Yes, it's true that his eyes were affected by his stroke. For a time he could see nothing at all. Just imagine, during the cure, which as a matter of fact did him a great deal of good, he was for several months unable to see more than a man born blind." "At least that must have made your surveillance largely unnecessary?"

"Not at all, no sooner had he arrived in a hotel than he would ask me what this or that individual on the staff was like. I used to assure him that they were all horrors. But he realised that that couldn't be universally true, that I must sometimes be lying. Little rascal that he is! And then he was extraordinarily good at guessing, from the voice perhaps, I don't know. He used to contrive to send me on urgent errands. One day—you will excuse my telling you this, but you came once by chance to the Temple of Shamelessness and I have nothing to hide from you" (in fact, it was a disagreeable feature of his character that he seemed always to enjoy revealing secrets in his possession)—"I was returning from one of these supposedly urgent errands, all the faster because I guessed it to have been arranged on purpose, when as I approached the Baron's room I heard a voice saying: 'What?' and the Baron reply: 'You don't mean that this has never happened to you before?' I went into the room without knocking, and imagine my terror! The Baron, misled by a voice which was in fact deeper than is usual at that age (remember that at this period he was completely blind and in the old days, as you know, he had always been partial to men who were not quite young), was with a little boy who could not have been ten years old."

I have been told since that at that time he suffered almost every day from severe fits of mental depression, during which, though his mind was not actually wandering, he used to proclaim aloud before people whose presence or whose strict views he forgot opinions which normally he concealed, his pro-Germanism for instance. The war had long since ended, but still he groaned over the defeat of the Germans, amongst whose number he counted himself, and would say proudly: "And yet, inevitably, we shall have our revenge. For we have proved that we are the nation with the greatest capacity for resistance, and the best organisation too." Or else his confidences would take another direction, and he would cry out angrily: "Lord X— (or the Prince de XX—) had better not dare repeat what he said yesterday, it was all I could do not to reply: 'You know you're just as much one as I am.' " Needless to say, when, at the moments when he was "not quite all there," M. de Charlus made these avowals of his pro-German or other tendencies, anybody from his immediate circle who might be with him, whether it were Jupien or the Duchesse de Guermantes, would interrupt the imprudent remarks and interpret them for the benefit of others less intimately acquainted with the Baron and less discreet in a far-fetched but honourable sense.

"But, good heavens!" cried Jupien, "I was right not to want us to go too far. Look! He's already managed to get into conversation with a gardener's boy. I had better say good-bye to you, sir, I must not leave my invalid alone for a second, he is really just a big baby now."

I got out of my cab a second time just before it reached the house of the Princesse de Guermantes and I began once more to reflect upon the mood of lassitude and boredom in which I had attempted, the previous day, to note the characteristics of that line which, in a countryside reputed one of the loveliest of France, had separated upon the trunks of the trees the shadow from the light. Certainly the reasoned conclusions which I had drawn at the time did not cause me so much pain today. They were unchanged; but at this moment, as on every occasion when I found myself torn from my habits—in a new place, or going out at an unaccustomed hour—I was feeling a lively pleasure. The pleasure seemed to me today a purely frivolous one, that of going to an afternoon party given by Mme de Guermantes. But since I knew now that I could hope for nothing of greater value than frivolous pleasures, what point was there in depriving myself of them? I told myself again that I had felt, in attempting the description, not a spark of that enthusiasm which, if it is not the sole, is a primary criterion of talent. I tried next to draw from my memory other "snapshots," those in particular which it had taken in Venice, but the mere word "snapshot" made Venice seem to me as boring as an exhibition of photographs, and I felt that I had no more taste, no more talent for describing now what I had seen in the past, than I had had yesterday for describing what at that very moment I was, with a meticulous and melancholy eye, actually observing. In a few minutes a host of friends whom I had not seen for years would probably ask me to give up being a recluse and devote my days to them. And what reason had I to refuse their request, now that I possessed the proof that I was useless and that literature could no longer give me any joy whatever, whether this was my fault, through my not having enough talent, or the fault of literature itself, if it were true that literature was less charged with reality than I had once supposed?

When I thought of what Bergotte had said to me: "You are ill, but one cannot pity you for you have the joys of the mind," how mistaken he had been about me! How little joy there was in this sterile lucidity! Even if sometimes perhaps I had pleasures (not of the mind), I sacrificed them always to one woman after another; so that, had fate granted me another hundred years of life and sound health as well, it would merely have added a series of extensions to an already tedious existence, which there seemed to be no point in prolonging at all, still less for any great length of time. As for the "joys of the intelligence," could I call by that name those cold observations which my clairvoyant eye or my power of accurate ratiocination made without any pleasure and which remained always infertile?

But it is sometimes just at the moment when we think that everything is lost that the intimation arrives which may save us; one has knocked at all the doors which lead nowhere, and then one stumbles without knowing it on the only door through which one can enter—which one might have sought in vain for a hundred years—and it opens of its own accord.

Revolving the gloomy thoughts which I have just recorded, I had entered the courtyard of the Guermantes mansion and in my absent-minded state I had failed to see a car which was coming towards me; the chauffeur gave a shout and I just had time to step out of the way, but as I moved sharply backwards I tripped against the uneven paving-stones in front of the coach-house. And at the moment when, recovering my balance, I put my foot on a stone which was slightly lower than its neighbour, all my discouragement vanished and in its place was that same happiness which at various epochs of my life had been given to me by the sight of trees which I had thought that I recognised in the course of a drive near Balbec, by the sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, by the flavour of a madeleine dipped in tea, and by all those other sensations of which I have spoken and of which the last works of Vinteuil had seemed to me to combine the quintessential character. Just as, at the moment when I tasted the madeleine, all anxiety about the future, all intellectual doubts had disappeared, so now those that a few seconds ago had assailed me on the subject of the reality of my literary gifts, the reality even of literature, were removed as if by magic.

I had followed no new train of reasoning, discovered no decisive argument, but the difficulties which had seemed insoluble a moment ago had lost all importance. The happiness which I had just felt was unquestionably the same as that which I had felt when I tasted the madeleine soaked in tea. But if on that occasion I had put off the task of searching for the profounder causes of my emotion, this time I was determined not to resign myself to a failure to

understand them. The emotion was the same; the difference, purely material, lay in the images evoked: a profound azure intoxicated my eyes, impressions of coolness, of dazzling light, swirled round me and in my desire to seize them—as afraid to move as I had been on the earlier occasion when I had continued to savour the taste of the madeleine while I tried to draw into my consciousness whatever it was that it recalled to me—I continued, ignoring the evident amusement of the great crowd of chauffeurs, to stagger as I had staggered a few seconds ago, with one foot on the higher paving-stone and the other on the lower. Every time that I merely repeated this physical movement, I achieved nothing; but if I succeeded, forgetting the Guermites party, in recapturing what I had felt when I first placed my feet on the ground in this way, again the dazzling and indistinct vision fluttered near me, as if to say: “Seize me as I pass if you can, and try to solve the riddle of happiness which I set you.” And almost at once I recognised the vision: it was Venice, of which my efforts to describe it and the supposed snapshots taken by my memory had never told me anything, but which the sensation which I had once experienced as I stood upon two uneven stones in the baptistery of St Mark’s had, recurring a moment ago, restored to me complete with all the other sensations linked on that day to that particular sensation, all of which had been waiting in their place—from which with imperious suddenness a chance happening had caused them to emerge—in the series of forgotten days. In the same way the taste of the little madeleine had recalled Combray to me. But why had the images of Combray and of Venice, at these two different moments, given me a joy which was like a certainty and which sufficed, without any other proof, to make death a matter of indifference to me?

Still asking myself this question, and determined today to find the answer to it, I entered the Guermites mansion, because always we give precedence over the inner task that we have to perform to the outward role which we are playing, which was, for me at this moment, that of guest. But when I had gone upstairs, a butler requested me to wait for a few minutes in a little sitting-room used as a library, next to the room where the refreshments were being served, until the end of the piece of music which was being played, the Princess having given orders for the doors to be kept shut during its performance. And at that very moment a second intimation came to reinforce the one which had been given to me by the two uneven paving-stones and to exhort me to persevere in my task. A servant, trying unsuccessfully not to make a noise, chanced to knock a spoon against a plate and again that same species of happiness which had come to me from the uneven paving-stones poured into me; the sensation was again of great heat, but entirely different: heat combined with a whiff of smoke and relieved by the cool smell of a forest background; and I recognised that what seemed to me now so delightful was that same row of trees which I had found tedious both to observe and to describe but which I had just now for a moment, in a sort of daze—I seemed to be in the railway carriage again, opening a bottle of beer—supposed to be before my eyes, so forcibly had the identical noise of the spoon knocking against the plate given me, until I had had time to remember where I was, the illusion of the noise of the hammer with which a railwayman had done something to a wheel of the train while we stopped near the little wood. And then it seemed as though the signs which were to bring me, on this day of all days, out of my disheartened state and restore to me my faith in literature, were thronging eagerly about me, for, a butler who had long been in the service of the Prince de Guermites having recognised me and brought to me in the library where I was waiting, so that I might not have to go to the buffet, a selection of petits fours and a glass of orangeade, I wiped my mouth with the napkin which he had given me; and instantly, as though I had been the character in the *Arabian Nights* who unwittingly accomplishes the very rite which can cause to appear, visible to him alone, a docile genie ready to convey him to a great distance, a new vision of azure passed before my eyes, but an azure that this time was pure and saline and swelled into blue and bosomy undulations, and so strong was this impression that the moment to which I was transported seemed to me to be the present moment: more bemused than on the day when I had wondered whether I was really going to be received by the Princesse de Guermites or whether everything round me would not collapse, I thought that the servant had just opened the window on to the beach and that all things invited me to go down and stroll along the promenade while the tide was high, for the napkin which I had used to wipe my mouth had precisely the same degree of stiffness and starchedness as the towel with which I had found it so awkward to dry my face as I stood in front of the window on the first day of my arrival at Balbec, and this napkin now, in the library of the Prince de Guermites’s house, unfolded for me—concealed within its smooth surfaces and its folds—the plumage of an ocean green and blue like the tail of a peacock. And what I found myself enjoying was not merely these colours but a whole instant of my life on whose summit they rested, an instant which had been no doubt an aspiration towards them and which some feeling of fatigue or sadness had perhaps prevented me from enjoying at Balbec but which now, freed from what is necessarily imperfect in external perception, pure and disembodied, caused me to swell with happiness.

The piece of music which was being played might end at any moment, and I might be obliged to enter the drawing-room. So I forced myself to try as quickly as possible to discern the essence of the identical pleasures which I had just experienced three times within the space of a few minutes, and having done so to extract the lesson which they might be made to yield. The thought that there is a vast difference between the real impression which we have had of a thing and the artificial impression of it which we form for ourselves when we attempt by an act of will to imagine it did not long detain me. Remembering with what relative indifference Swann years ago had been able to speak of the days when he had been loved, because what he saw beneath the words was not in fact those days but something else, and on the other hand the sudden pain which he had been caused by the little phrase of Vinteuil when it gave him back the days themselves, just as they were when he had felt them in the past, I understood clearly that what the sensation of the uneven paving-stones, the stiffness of the napkin, the taste of the madeleine had reawakened in me had no connexion with what I frequently tried to recall to myself of Venice, Balbec, Combray, with the help of an undifferentiated memory; and I understood that the reason why life may be judged to be trivial although at certain moments it seems to us so beautiful is that we form our judgment, ordinarily, on the evidence not of life itself but of those quite different images which preserve nothing of life—and therefore we judge it disparagingly. At most I noticed cursorily that the differences which exist between every one of our real impressions—differences which explain why a uniform depiction of life cannot bear much resemblance to the reality—derive probably from the following cause: the slightest word that we have said, the most insignificant action that we have performed at any one epoch of our life was surrounded by, and coloured by the reflexion of, things which logically had no connexion with it and which later have been separated from it by our intellect which could make nothing of them for its own rational purposes, things,

however, in the midst of which—here the pink reflexion of the evening upon the flower-covered wall of a country restaurant, a feeling of hunger, the desire for women, the pleasure of luxury; there the blue volutes of the morning sea and, enveloped in them, phrases of music half emerging like the shoulders of water-nymphs—the simplest act or gesture remains immured as within a thousand sealed vessels, each one of them filled with things of a colour, a scent, a temperature that are absolutely different one from another, vessels, moreover, which being disposed over the whole range of our years, during which we have never ceased to change if only in our dreams and our thoughts, are situated at the most various moral altitudes and give us the sensation of extraordinarily diverse atmospheres. It is true that we have accomplished these changes imperceptibly; but between the memory which brusquely returns to us and our present state, and no less between two memories of different years, places, hours, the distance is such that it alone, even without any specific originality, would make it impossible to compare one with the other. Yes: if, owing to the work of oblivion, the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute, if it remains in the context of its own place and date, if it keeps its distance, its isolation in the hollow of a valley or upon the highest peak of a mountain summit, for this very reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past, that purer air which the poets have vainly tried to situate in paradise and which could induce so profound a sensation of renewal only if it had been breathed before, since the true paradises are the paradises that we have lost.

And I observed in passing that for the work of art which I now, though I had not yet reached a conscious resolution, felt myself ready to undertake, this distinctness of different events would entail very considerable difficulties. For I should have to execute the successive parts of my work in a succession of different materials; what would be suitable for mornings beside the sea or afternoons in Venice would be quite wrong if I wanted to depict those evenings at Rivebelle when, in the dining-room that opened on to the garden, the heat began to resolve into fragments and sink back into the ground, while a sunset glimmer still illumined the roses on the walls of the restaurant and the last water-colours of the day were still visible in the sky—this would be a new and distinct material, of a transparency and a sonority that were special, compact, cool after warmth, rose-pink.

Over all these thoughts I skimmed rapidly, for another inquiry demanded my attention more imperiously, the inquiry, which on previous occasions I had postponed, into the cause of this felicity which I had just experienced, into the character of the certitude with which it imposed itself. And this cause I began to divine as I compared these diverse happy impressions, diverse yet with this in common, that I experienced them at the present moment and at the same time in the context of a distant moment, so that the past was made to encroach upon the present and I was made to doubt whether I was in the one or the other. The truth surely was that the being within me which had enjoyed these impressions had enjoyed them because they had in them something that was common to a day long past and to the present, because in some way they were extra-temporal, and this being made its appearance only when, through one of these identifications of the present with the past, it was likely to find itself in the one and only medium in which it could exist and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say: outside time. This explained why it was that my anxiety on the subject of my death had ceased at the moment when I had unconsciously recognised the taste of the little madeleine, since the being which at that moment I had been was an extra-temporal being and therefore unalarmed by the vicissitudes of the future. This being had only come to me, only manifested itself outside of activity and immediate enjoyment, on those rare occasions when the miracle of an analogy had made me escape from the present. And only this being had the power to perform that task which had always defeated the efforts of my memory and my intellect, the power to make me rediscover days that were long past, the Time that was Lost.

And perhaps, if just how I had been disposed to think Bergotte wrong when he spoke of the life of the mind and its joys, it was because what I thought of at that moment as “the life of the mind” was a species of logical reasoning which had no connexion with it or with what existed in me at this moment—an error like the one which had made me find society and life itself tedious because I judged them on the evidence of untrue recollections, whereas now, now that three times in succession there had been reborn within me a veritable moment of the past, my appetite for life was immense.

A moment of the past, did I say? Was it not perhaps very much more: something that, common both to the past and to the present, is much more essential than either of them? So often, in the course of my life, reality had disappointed me because at the instant when my senses perceived it my imagination, which was the only organ that I possessed for the enjoyment of beauty, could not apply itself to it, in virtue of that ineluctable law which ordains that we can only imagine what is absent. And now, suddenly, the effect of this harsh law had been neutralised, temporarily annulled, by a marvellous expedient of nature which had caused a sensation—the noise made both by the spoon and by the hammer, for instance—to be mirrored at one and the same time in the past, so that my imagination was permitted to savour it, and in the present, where the actual shock to my senses of the noise, the touch of the linen napkin, or whatever it might be, had added to the dreams of the imagination the concept of “existence” which they usually lack, and through this subterfuge had made it possible for my being to secure, to isolate, to immobilise—for a moment brief as a flash of lightning—what normally it never apprehends: a fragment of time in the pure state. The being which had been reborn in me when with a sudden shudder of happiness I had heard the noise that was common to the spoon touching the plate and the hammer striking the wheel, or had felt, beneath my feet, the unevenness that was common to the paving-stones of the Guermantes courtyard and to those of the baptistery of St Mark’s, this being is nourished only by the essences of things, in these alone does it find its sustenance and delight. In the observation of the present, where the senses cannot feed it with this food, it languishes, as it does in the consideration of a past made arid by the intellect or in the anticipation of a future which the will constructs with fragments of the present and the past, fragments whose reality it still further reduces by preserving of them only what is suitable for the utilitarian, narrowly human purpose for which it intends them. But let a noise or a scent, once heard or once smelt, be heard or smelt again in the present and at the same time in the past, real without being actual, ideal without being abstract, and immediately the permanent and habitually concealed essence of things is liberated and our true self, which seemed—had perhaps for long years seemed—to be dead but was not altogether dead, is awakened and reanimated as it receives the celestial nourishment that is brought to it. A minute freed from the order of time has re-created in us, to feel it, the man freed from the order of time. And one can understand that this man should have confidence in his joy, even if the simple taste of a madeleine does not seem logically to contain within it the reasons

for this joy, one can understand that the word "death" should have no meaning for him; situated outside time, why should he fear the future?

But this species of optical illusion, which placed beside me a moment of the past that was incompatible with the present, could not last for long. The images presented to us by the voluntary memory can, it is true, be prolonged at will, for the voluntary memory requires no more exertion on our part than turning over the pages of a picture-book. On the day, for instance, long ago, when I was to visit the Princesse de Guermantes for the first time, I had from the sun-drenched courtyard of our house in Paris idly regarded, according to my whim, now the Place de l'Eglise at Combray, now the beach at Balbec, as if I had been choosing illustrations for that particular day from an album of water-colours depicting the various places where I had been; and with the egotistical pleasure of a collector, I had said to myself as I catalogued these illustrations stored in my memory: "At least I have seen some lovely things in my life." And of course my memory had affirmed that each one of these sensations was quite unlike the others, though in fact all it was doing was to make varied patterns out of elements that were homogeneous. But my recent experience of the three memories was something utterly different. These, on the contrary, instead of giving me a more flattering idea of myself, had almost caused me to doubt the reality, the existence of that self. And just as on the day when I had dipped the madeleine in the hot tea, in the setting of the place where I happened at the time to be—on that first day my room in Paris, today at this moment the library of the Prince de Guermantes, a few minutes earlier the courtyard of his house—there had been, inside me and irradiating a little area outside me, a sensation (the taste of the madeleine dipped in the tea, a metallic sound, a step of a certain kind) which was common both to my actual surroundings and also to another place (my aunt Léonie's bedroom, the railway carriage, the baptistery of St Mark's). And now again, at the very moment when I was making these reflexions, the shrill noise of water running through a pipe, a noise exactly like those long-drawn-out whistles which sometimes on summer evenings one heard the pleasure-steamers emit as they approached Balbec from the sea, made me feel—what I had once before been made to feel in Paris, in a big restaurant, by the sight of a luxurious dining-room, half-empty, summery and hot—something that was not merely a sensation similar to the one I used to have at the end of the afternoon in Balbec when, the tables already laid and glittering with linen and silver, the vast window-bays still open from one end to the other on to the esplanade without a single interruption, a single solid surface of glass or stone, while the sun slowly descended upon the sea and the steamers in the bay began to emit their cries, I had, if I had wished to join Albertine and her friends who were walking on the front, merely to step over the low wooden frame not much higher than my ankle, into a groove in which the whole continuous range of windows had been wound down so that the air could come into the hotel. (The painful recollection of having loved Albertine was, however, absent from my present sensation. Painful recollections are always of the dead. And the dead decompose rapidly, and there remains even in the proximity of their tombs nothing but the beauty of nature, silence, the purity of the air.) Besides, it was not only an echo, a duplicate of a past sensation that I was made to feel by the noise of the water in the pipe, it was that past sensation itself. And in this case as in all the others, the sensation common to past and present had sought to re-create the former scene around itself, while the actual scene which had taken the former one's place opposed with all the resistance of material inertia this incursion into a house in Paris of a Normandy beach or a railway embankment. The marine dining-room of Balbec, with its damask linen prepared like so many altar-cloths to receive the setting sun, had sought to shatter the solidity of the Guermantes mansion, to force open its doors, and for an instant had made the sofas around me sway and tremble as on another occasion it had done to the tables of the restaurant in Paris. Always, when these resurrections took place, the distant scene engendered around the common sensation had for a moment grappled, like a wrestler, with the present scene. Always the present scene had come off victorious, and always the vanquished one had appeared to me the more beautiful of the two, so beautiful that I had remained in a state of ecstasy on the uneven paving-stones or before the cup of tea, endeavouring to prolong or to reproduce the momentary appearances of the Combray or the Balbec or the Venice which invaded only to be driven back, which rose up only at once to abandon me in the midst of the new scene which somehow, nevertheless, the past had been able to permeate. And if the present scene had not very quickly been victorious, I believe that I should have lost consciousness; for so complete are these resurrections of the past during the second that they last, that they not only oblige our eyes to cease to see the room which is near them in order to look instead at the railway bordered with trees or the rising tide, they even force our nostrils to breathe the air of places which are in fact a great distance away, and our will to choose between the various projects which those distant places suggest to us, they force our whole self to believe that it is surrounded by these places or at least to waver doubtfully between them and the places where we now are, in a dazed uncertainty such as we feel sometimes when an indescribably beautiful vision presents itself to us at the moment of our falling asleep.

Fragments of existence withdrawn from Time: these then were perhaps what the being three times, four times brought back to life within me had just now tasted, but the contemplation, though it was of eternity, had been fugitive. And yet I was vaguely aware that the pleasure which this contemplation had, at rare intervals, given me in my life, was the only genuine and fruitful pleasure that I had known. The unreality of the others is indicated clearly enough—is it not?—either by their inability to satisfy us, as is the case with social pleasures, the only consequence of which is likely to be the discomfort provoked by the ingestion of unwholesome food, or with friendship, which is a simulacrum, since, for whatever moral reasons he may do it, the artist who gives up an hour of work for an hour of conversation with a friend knows that he is sacrificing a reality for something that does not exist (our friends being friends only in the light of an agreeable folly which travels with us through life and to which we readily accommodate ourselves, but which at the bottom of our hearts we know to be no more reasonable than the delusion of the man who talks to the furniture because he believes that it is alive), or else by the sadness which follows their satisfaction, a sadness which I had felt, for instance, on the day when I had been introduced to Albertine, at having taken pains (not even in fact very great pains) in order to achieve something—getting to know this girl—which seemed to me trivial simply because I had achieved it. And even a more profound pleasure, like the pleasure which I might have hoped to feel when I was in love with Albertine, was in fact only experienced inversely, through the anguish which I felt when she was not there, for when I was sure that she would soon be with me, as on the day when she had returned from the Trocadéro, I had seemed to experience no more than a vague dissatisfaction, whereas my exaltation and my joy grew steadily greater as I probed more and more deeply into the noise of the spoon on the

plate or the taste of the tea which had brought into my bedroom in Paris the bedroom of my aunt Léonie and in its train all Combray and the two ways of our walks.

To this contemplation of the essence of things I had decided therefore that in future I must attach myself, so as somehow to immobilise it. But how, by what means, was I to do this? Naturally, at the moment when the stiffness of the napkin had restored Balbec to me and for an instant caressed my imagination not only with the sight of the sea as it had been that morning but with the smell of my room, the speed of the wind, the sensation of looking forward to lunch, of wondering which of the different walks I should take (all this being attached to the feel of the linen like those thousand wings of the angels which revolve a thousand times in a minute), or at the moment when the unevenness of the two paving-stones had extended in every direction and dimension the desiccated and insubstantial images which I normally had of Venice and St Mark's and of all the sensations which I had felt there, reuniting the piazza to the cathedral, the landing-stage to the piazza, the canal to the landing-stage, and to all that the eyes see the world of desires which is seen only by the mind—naturally at those moments I had been tempted, if not, because of the time of the year, to go and walk once more through the watery streets of Venice which for me were above all associated with the spring, at least to return to Balbec. But this thought did not for an instant detain me. I knew for one thing that countries were not such as their names painted them to my imagination, so that now it was scarcely ever except in my dreams, while I was asleep, that a place could lie spread before me wrought in that pure matter which is entirely distinct from the matter of the common things that we see and touch but of which, when I had imagined these common things without ever having seen them, they too had seemed to me to be composed: and I knew also that the same was true of that other species of image which is formed by the memory, so that not only had I failed to discover the beauty of Balbec as I had imagined it when I had gone there for the first time, I had failed also when I went back the second time to rediscover the remembered beauty which that first visit had left me. Experience had taught me only too well the impossibility of attaining in the real world to what lay deep within myself; I knew that Lost Time was not to be found again on the piazza of St Mark's any more than I had found it again on my second visit to Balbec or on my return to Tansonville to see Gilberte, and that travel, which merely dangled once more before me the illusion that these vanished impressions existed outside myself, could not be the means which I sought. And I did not want to let myself be sidetracked once more, for the task before me was to discover at long last whether or no it was possible to attain to what—disappointed as I had always been by the actuality of places and people—I had, although once the septet of Vinteuil had seemed to point to the contrary conclusion, come to think of as unrealisable. I did not intend, then, to make yet another experiment in a direction which I had long known could lead nowhere. Impressions such as those to which I wished to give permanence could not but vanish at the touch of a direct enjoyment which had been powerless to engender them. The only way to savour them more fully was to try to get to know them more completely in the medium in which they existed, that is to say within myself, to try to make them translucent even to their very depths. I had not known pleasure at Balbec any more than I had known pleasure when I lived with Albertine, for the pleasure of living with her had been perceptible to me only in retrospect. When I recapitulated the disappointments of my life as a lived life, disappointments which made me believe that its reality must reside elsewhere than in action, what I was doing was not merely to link different disappointments together in a purely fortuitous manner and in following the circumstances of my personal existence. I saw clearly that the disappointment of travel and the disappointment of love were not different disappointments at all but the varied aspects which are assumed, according to the particular circumstances which bring it into play, by our inherent powerlessness to realise ourselves in material enjoyment or in effective action. And thinking again of the extra-temporal joy which I had been made to feel by the sound of the spoon or the taste of the madeleine, I said to myself: "Was this perhaps that happiness which the little phrase of the sonata promised to Swann and which he, because he was unable to find it in artistic creation, mistakenly assimilated to the pleasures of love, was this the happiness of which long ago I was given a presentiment—as something more supratemporal even than the mood evoked by the little phrase of the sonata—by the call, the mysterious, rufescent call of that septet which Swann was never privileged to hear, having died like so many others before the truth that was made for him had been revealed? A truth that in any case he could not have used, for though the phrase perhaps symbolised a call, it was incapable of creating new powers and making Swann the writer that he was not."

And then, after I had dwelt for some little time upon these resurrections of the memory, the thought came to me that in another fashion certain obscure impressions, already even at Combray on the Guermantes way, had solicited my attention in a fashion somewhat similar to these reminiscences, except that they concealed within them not a sensation dating from an earlier time, but a new truth, a precious image which I had sought to uncover by efforts of the same kind as those that we make to recall something that we have forgotten, as if our finest ideas were like tunes which, as it were, come back to us although we have never heard them before and which we have to make an effort to hear and to transcribe. I remembered—with pleasure because it showed me that already in those days I had been the same and that this type of experience sprang from a fundamental trait in my character, but with sadness also when I thought that since that time I had never progressed—that already at Combray I used to fix before my mind for its attention some image which had compelled me to look at it, a cloud, a triangle, a church spire, a flower, a stone, because I had the feeling that perhaps beneath these signs there lay something of a quite different kind which I must try to discover, some thought which they translated after the fashion of those hieroglyphic characters which at first one might suppose to represent only material objects. No doubt the process of decipherment was difficult, but only by accomplishing it could one arrive at whatever truth there was to read. For the truths which the intellect apprehends directly in the world of full and unimpeded light have something less profound, less necessary than those which life communicates to us against our will in an impression which is material because it enters us through the senses but yet has a spiritual meaning which it is possible for us to extract. In fact, both in the one case and in the other, whether I was concerned with impressions like the one which I had received from the sight of the steeples of Martinville or with reminiscences like that of the unevenness of the two steps or the taste of the madeleine, the task was to interpret the given sensations as signs of so many laws and ideas, by trying to think—that is to say, to draw forth from the shadow—what I had merely felt, by trying to convert it into its spiritual equivalent. And this method, which seemed to me the sole method, what was it but the creation of a work of art? Already the consequences came flooding into my mind: first, whether I considered reminiscences of the kind evoked by the noise of the spoon or the



taste of the madeleine, or those truths written with the aid of shapes for whose meaning I searched in my brain, where—church steeples or wild grass growing in a wall—they composed a magical scrawl, complex and elaborate, their essential character was that I was not free to choose them, that such as they were they were given to me. And I realised that this must be the mark of their authenticity. I had not gone in search of the two uneven paving-stones of the courtyard upon which I had stumbled. But it was precisely the fortuitous and inevitable fashion in which this and the other sensations had been encountered that proved the trueness of the past which they brought back to life, of the images which they released, since we feel, with these sensations, the effort that they make to climb back towards the light, feel in ourselves the joy of rediscovering what is real. And here too was the proof of the trueness of the whole picture formed out of those contemporaneous impressions which the first sensation brings back in its train, with those unerring proportions of light and shade, emphasis and omission, memory and forgetfulness to which conscious recollection and conscious observation will never know how to attain.

As for the inner book of unknown symbols (symbols carved in relief they might have been, which my attention, as it explored my unconscious, groped for and stumbled against and followed the contours of, like a diver exploring the ocean-bed), if I tried to read them no one could help me with any rules, for to read them was an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us. How many for this reason turn aside from writing! What tasks do men not take upon themselves in order to evade this task! Every public event, be it the Dreyfus case, be it the war, furnishes the writer with a fresh excuse for not attempting to decipher this book: he wants to ensure the triumph of justice, he wants to restore the moral unity of the nation, he has no time to think of literature. But these are mere excuses, the truth being that he has not or no longer has genius, that is to say instinct. For instinct dictates our duty and the intellect supplies us with pretexts for evading it. But excuses have no place in art and intentions count for nothing: at every moment the artist has to listen to his instinct, and it is this that makes art the most real of all things, the most austere school of life, the true last judgment. This book, more laborious to decipher than any other, is also the only one which has been dictated to us by reality, the only one of which the “impression” has been printed in us by reality itself. When an idea—an idea of any kind—is left in us by life, its material pattern, the outline of the impression that it made upon us, remains behind as the token of its necessary truth. The ideas formed by the pure intelligence have no more than a logical, a possible truth, they are arbitrarily chosen. The book whose hieroglyphs are patterns not traced by us is the only book that really belongs to us. Not that the ideas which we form for ourselves cannot be correct in logic; that they may well be, but we cannot know whether they are true. Only the impression, however trivial its material may seem to be, however faint its traces, is a criterion of truth and deserves for that reason to be apprehended by the mind, for the mind, if it succeeds in extracting this truth, can by the impression and by nothing else be brought to a state of greater perfection and given a pure joy. The impression is for the writer what experiment is for the scientist, with the difference that in the scientist the work of the intelligence precedes the experiment and in the writer it comes after the impression. What we have not had to decipher, to elucidate by our own efforts, what was clear before we looked at it, is not ours. From ourselves comes only that which we drag forth from the obscurity which lies within us, that which to others is unknown.

(A level ray of the setting sun recalls to me instantaneously an episode in my early childhood to which I had never since that time given a thought: my aunt Léonie had a fever which Doctor Perceped feared might be typhoid and for a week I was made to sleep in Eulalie’s little room looking out on the Place de l’Eglise, which had nothing but rush mats on the floor and over the window a muslin curtain that was always buzzing with a sunshine to which I was not accustomed. And seeing how the recollection of this little old-fashioned servant’s bedroom suddenly added to my past life a long stretch of time so different from the rest and so delicious, I thought by contrast of the nullity of the impressions which had been contributed to it by the most sumptuous entertainments in the most princely mansions. The only thing at all sad about this room of Eulalie’s was that at night, because the viaduct was so near, one heard the hooting of the trains. But as I knew that these were bellows produced by machines under human control, they did not terrify me as, in a prehistoric age, I might have been terrified by the ululations of a neighbouring mammoth taking a free and unco-ordinated stroll.)

I had arrived then at the conclusion that in fashioning a work of art we are by no means free, that we do not choose how we shall make it but that it pre-exists us and therefore we are obliged, since it is both necessary and hidden, to do what we should have to do if it were a law of nature—to discover it. But this discovery which art obliges us to make, is it not, I thought, really the discovery of what, though it ought to be more precious to us than anything in the world, yet remains ordinarily for ever unknown to us, the discovery of our true life, of reality as we have felt it to be, which differs so greatly from what we think it is that when a chance happening brings us an authentic memory of it we are filled with an immense happiness? In this conclusion I was confirmed by the thought of the falseness of so-called realist art, which would not be so untruthful if we had not in life acquired the habit of giving to what we feel a form of expression which differs so much from, and which we nevertheless after a little time take to be, reality itself. I began to perceive that I should not have to trouble myself with the various literary theories which had at moments perplexed me—notably those which practitioners of criticism had developed at the time of the Dreyfus case and had taken up again during the war, according to which “the artist must be made to leave his ivory tower” and the themes chosen by the writer ought to be not frivolous or sentimental but rather such things as great working-class movements or—in default of crowds—at least no longer as in the past unimportant men of leisure (“I must confess that the depiction of these useless characters rather bores me,” Bloch had been fond of saying), but noble intellectuals or men of heroic stature.

In any case, quite apart from what I might think of the logical propositions which they contained, these theories seemed to me to indicate very clearly the inferiority of those who upheld them—my reaction was that of the truly well-brought-up child who, lunching in a strange house and hearing his hosts say: “We are frank, we don’t hide our light under a bushel here,” feels that the remark indicates a moral quality inferior to right conduct pure and simple, which says nothing. Authentic art has no use for proclamations of this kind, it accomplishes its work in silence. Moreover, those who theorised in this way used hackneyed phrases which had a curious resemblance to those of the idiots whom they denounced. And it is perhaps as much by the quality of his language as by the species of aesthetic theory which he advances that one may judge of the level to which a writer has attained in the moral and intellectual part of his work. Quality of language, however, is something the critical theorists think that they can do without, and

those who admire them are easily persuaded that it is no proof of intellectual merit, for this is a thing which they cannot infer from the beauty of an image but can recognise only when they see it directly expressed. Hence the temptation for the writer to write intellectual works—a gross impropriety. A work in which there are theories is like an object which still has its price-tag on it. (And as to the choice of theme, a frivolous theme will serve as well as a serious one for a study of the laws of character, in the same way that a prosector can study the laws of anatomy as well in the body of an imbecile as in that of a man of talent, since the great moral laws, like the laws of the circulation of the blood or of renal elimination, vary scarcely at all with the intellectual merit of individuals.) A writer reasons, that is to say he goes astray, only when he has not the strength to force himself to make an impression pass through all the successive states which will culminate in its fixation, its expression. The reality that he has to express resides, as I now began to understand, not in the superficial appearance of his subject but at a depth at which that appearance matters little; this truth had been symbolised for me by that clink of a spoon against a plate, that starched stiffness of a napkin, which had been of more value to me for my spiritual renewal than innumerable conversations of a humanitarian or patriotic or internationalist or metaphysical kind. “Enough of style,” had been the cry, “enough of literature, let us have life!” And one may well imagine how since the beginning of the war even the simple theories of M. de Norpois, his denunciations of the “flute-players,” had enjoyed a second vogue. For plenty of people who lack the artistic sense, who lack, that is to say, the faculty of submitting to the reality within themselves, may yet possess the ability to expatiate upon the theory of art until the crack of doom. And if they happen to be diplomats or financiers to boot, involved in the “realities” of the present age, they are likely to believe that literature is an intellectual game destined in the future to be progressively eliminated. (Some critics now liked to regard the novel as a sort of procession of things upon the screen of a cinematograph. This comparison was absurd. Nothing is further from what we have really perceived than the vision that the cinematograph presents.)

The idea of a popular art, like that of a patriotic art, if not actually dangerous seemed to me ridiculous. If the intention was to make art accessible to the people by sacrificing refinements of form, on the ground that they are “all right for the idle rich” but not for anybody else, I had seen enough of fashionable society to know that it is there that one finds real illiteracy and not, let us say, among electricians. In fact, an art that was “popular” so far as form was concerned would have been better suited to the members of the Jockey Club than to those of the General Confederation of Labour—and as for subject, the working classes are as bored by novels of popular life as children are by the books which are written specially for them. When one reads, one likes to be transported into a new world, and working men have as much curiosity about princes as princes about working men. At the beginning of the war M. Barrès had said that the artist (he happened to be talking about Titian) must first and foremost serve the glory of his country. But this he can do only by being an artist, which means only on condition that, while in his own sphere he is studying laws, conducting experiments, making discoveries which are as delicate as those of science, he shall think of nothing—not even his country—but the truth which is before him. Let us not imitate the revolutionaries who out of “civic sense” despised, if they did not destroy, the works of Watteau and La Tour, painters who have brought more honour upon France than all those of the Revolution. Anatomy is not perhaps the occupation that a kind-hearted man would choose, if he or any artist had the possibility of choice, and certainly it was not the kindness of a virtuous heart (though he was a truly kind man) that made Choderlos de Laclos write *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, nor was it any affection for the lower or upper bourgeoisie that made Flaubert choose the themes of *Madame Bovary* and *L'Education sentimentale*—but this is no valid criticism of the work of these writers.

Some people were also saying that the art of an age of haste would be brief, just as many people before the war had predicted that it would be short. The railway, according to this mode of thinking, was destined to kill contemplation and there was no sense in regretting the age of the diligence. But in fact the car has taken over its function and once more deposits tourists outside forgotten churches.

As I entered the library where I had been pursuing this train of thought I had remembered what the Goncourts say about the magnificent first editions which it contains and I had promised myself that I would look at them while I was waiting. And all this while, without paying very much attention to what I was doing, I had been taking first one and then another of the precious volumes from the shelves, when suddenly, at the moment when I carelessly opened one of them—it was George Sand's *François le Champi*—I felt myself unpleasantly struck by an impression which seemed at first to be utterly out of harmony with the thoughts that were passing through my mind, until a moment later, with an emotion so strong that tears came to my eyes, I recognised how very much in harmony with them it was. Imagine a room in which a man has died, a man who has rendered great services to his country; the undertaker's men are getting ready to take the coffin downstairs and the dead man's son is holding out his hand to the last friends who are filing past it; suddenly the silence is broken by a flourish of trumpets beneath the windows and he feels outraged, thinking that this must be some plot to mock and insult his grief; but presently this man who until this moment has mastered his emotions dissolves into tears, for he realises that what he hears is the band of a regiment which has come to share in his mourning and to pay honour to his father's corpse. Like this dead man's son, I had just recognised how completely in harmony with the thoughts in my mind was the painful impression which I had experienced when I had seen this title on the cover of a book in the library of the Prince de Guermantes, for it was a title which after a moment's hesitation had given me the idea that literature did really offer us that world of mystery which I had ceased to find in it. And yet the book was not a very extraordinary one, it was *François le Champi*. But that name, like the name Guermantes, was for me unlike the names which I had heard for the first time only in later life. The memory of what had seemed to me too deep for understanding in the subject of *François le Champi* when my mother long ago had read the book aloud to me, had been reawakened by the title, and just as the name of Guermantes, after a long period during which I had not seen the Guermantes, contained for me the essence of the feudal age, so *François le Champi* contained the essence of the novel, and for a second this memory substituted itself for the quite commonplace idea of “one of George Sand's novels about Berry.” At a dinner-party, where thought always remains superficial, I might no doubt have been able to talk about *François le Champi* and the Guermantes without either the novel or the family being what they had been to me at Combray. But alone, as I was at this moment, I was plunged by these names to a greater depth. At such moments the idea that some woman whom I had met at parties was a cousin of Mme de Guermantes, a cousin that is to say of a personage of the magic lantern, seemed to me incomprehensible, and equally incomprehensible was the idea that the best books I had ever read might be—I will not say superior to, though that is

in fact of course what they were—but even equal to this extraordinary *François le Champi*. This was a very deeply buried impression that I had just encountered, one in which memories of childhood and family were tenderly intermingled and which I had not immediately recognised. My first reaction had been to ask myself, angrily, who this stranger was who was coming to trouble me. The stranger was none other than myself, the child I had been at that time, brought to life within me by the book, which knowing nothing of me except this child had instantly summoned him to its presence, wanting to be seen only by his eyes, to be loved only by his heart, to speak only to him. And this book which my mother had read aloud to me at Combray until the early hours of the morning had kept for me all the charm of that night. Admittedly the “pen” of George Sand, to borrow a phrase from Brichot, who was so fond of saying that a book was written with a “lively pen,” no longer seemed to me, as for so long it had seemed to my mother before she had gradually come to model her literary tastes upon mine, in the least a magic pen. But it was a pen which, unintentionally, like a schoolboy amusing himself with a real pen, I had charged with electricity, and now a thousand trifling details of Combray which for years had not entered my mind came lightly and spontaneously leaping, in follow-my-leader fashion, to suspend themselves from the magnetised nib in an interminable and trembling chain of memories.

Certain people, whose minds are prone to mystery, like to believe that objects retain something of the eyes which have looked at them, that old buildings and pictures appear to us not as they originally were but beneath a perceptible veil woven for them over the centuries by the love and contemplation of millions of admirers. This fantasy, if you transpose it into the domain of what is for each one of us the sole reality, the domain of his own sensibility, becomes the truth. In that sense and in that sense alone (but it is a far more important one than the other), a thing which we have looked at in the past brings back to us, if we see it again, not only the eyes with which we looked at it but all the images with which at the time those eyes were filled. For things—and among them a book in a red binding—as soon as we have perceived them are transformed within us into something immaterial, something of the same nature as all our preoccupations and sensations of that particular time, with which, indissolubly, they blend. A name read long ago in a book contains within its syllables the strong wind and brilliant sunshine that prevailed while we were reading it. And this is why the kind of literature which contents itself with “describing things,” with giving of them merely a miserable abstract of lines and surfaces, is in fact, though it calls itself realist, the furthest removed from reality and has more than any other the effect of saddening and impoverishing us, since it abruptly severs all communication of our present self both with the past, the essence of which is preserved in things, and with the future, in which things incite us to enjoy the essence of the past a second time. Yet it is precisely this essence that an art worthy of the name must seek to express; then at least, if it fails, there is a lesson to be drawn from its impotence (whereas from the successes of realism there is nothing to be learnt), the lesson that this essence is, in part, subjective and incommunicable.

Nor is this all. A thing which we saw, a book which we read at a certain period does not merely remain for ever conjoined to what existed then around us; it remains also faithfully united to what we ourselves then were and thereafter it can be handled only by the sensibility, the personality that were then ours. If, even in thought, I pick from the bookshelf *François le Champi*, immediately there rises within me a child who takes my place, who alone has the right to spell out the title *François le Champi*, and who reads it as he read it once before, with the same impression of what the weather was like then in the garden, the same dreams that were then shaping themselves in his mind about the different countries and about life, the same anguish about the next day. Or if I see something which dates from another period, it is a young man who comes to life. So that my personality of today may be compared to an abandoned quarry, which supposes everything it contains to be uniform and monotonous, but from which memory, selecting here and there, can, like some sculptor of genius, extract innumerable different statues. And this is true of everything that we see again after a lapse of time, books in this respect behaving just like other things: the way in which the covers of a binding open, the grain of a particular paper, may have preserved in itself as vivid a memory of the fashion in which I once imagined Venice and of the desire that I had to go there as the actual phrases of a book. An even more vivid memory perhaps, for phrases sometimes are an obstruction, just as sometimes when we look at a photograph of a person we recollect him less clearly than we do when we are merely thinking about him. Certainly, there are many books which I read in my childhood, including even, I am sorry to say, some of those of Bergotte himself, which now, if I happen to be tired one evening, I take up merely in the spirit in which I might go for a train journey, with the hope, that is, of resting myself by the sight of objects that I do not see every day and by breathing the atmosphere of an earlier time. But it can happen that this deliberate attempt at evocation is actually thwarted by the prolonged reading of the book. There is, for instance, a book by Bergotte (there was a copy in the Prince's library, with a dedication both sycophantic and platitudinous in the extreme), which I read years ago one winter day when I was unable to see Gilberte and which I now search in vain for the phrases which I then thought wonderful. Certain words almost make me believe that I have found them, but it cannot be so, for of the beauty that I once saw in them there is no trace. But the volume itself still glistens with the snow that covered the Champs-Élysées on the day when I first read it—I open its pages and the scene is before my eyes.

So it is that, if I had been tempted to become a bibliophile like the Prince de Guermantes, I should only have been one in my own peculiar fashion, though I should not have despised that beauty, independent of the intrinsic value of a book, which is attached to it in the eyes of collectors by their knowing the libraries through which it has passed, knowing for instance that it was given by such and such a sovereign, on the occasion of such and such an event, to such and such a famous man, by their having followed it from sale to sale through the course of its life—that beauty, which is in a certain sense the historic beauty of a book, would not be lost upon me. But it is rather in the history of my own life, and not simply as a connoisseur of the past in general, that I should seek this beauty; and I should attach it often not to a particular copy but to the work itself, to *François le Champi*, for instance, first contemplated by me in my little bedroom at Combray, during the night that was perhaps the sweetest and the saddest of my life, when I had alas! (at a time when the Guermantes still seemed to me mysterious and inaccessible) won from my parents that first abdication of their authority from which, later, I was to date the decline of my health and my will, and my renunciation, each day disastrously confirmed, of a task that daily became more difficult—and rediscovered by me today, in the library of these same Guermantes, on this most wonderful of all days which had suddenly illuminated for me not only the old groping movements of my thought, but even the whole purpose of my life and perhaps of art

itself. As for particular copies of books, I should have been able to take an interest in them too, but in a living sense. The first edition of a work would have been more precious in my eyes than any other, but by this term I should have understood the edition in which I read it for the first time. I should seek out original editions, those, that is to say, in which I once received an original impression of a book. For the impressions that one has later are no longer original. In the case of novels I should collect old-fashioned bindings, those of the period when I read my first novels, those that so often heard Papa say to me: "Sit up straight!" Like the dress which a woman was wearing when we saw her for the first time, they would help me to rediscover the love that I then had, the beauty on which I have since superimposed so many less and less loved images, they would help me to find that first image again, even though I am no longer the "I" who first beheld it, even though I must make way for the "I" that I then was if that "I" summons the thing that it once knew and that the "I" of today does not know.

The library which I should thus assemble would contain volumes of an even greater value; for the books which I read in the past at Combray or in Venice, enriched now by my memory with vast illuminations representing the church of Saint-Hilaire or the gondola moored at the foot of San Giorgio Maggiore and the Grand Canal incrustated with sparkling sapphires, would have become the equals of those ancient "picture books"—illustrated bibles or books of hours—which the collector nowadays opens not to read their text but to savour once more the enchantment of the colours which some rival of Fouquet has added to it and which make these volumes the treasures that they are. And yet, even to open these books for the purpose merely of looking at the pictures with which, when I read them long ago, they were not yet adorned, would seem to me in itself so dangerous that, even in the sense which I have described, which is the only one that I can understand, I should not, I think, be tempted to become a bibliophile. I know very well how easily these images, deposited by the mind, can be effaced by the mind. For the old images it substitutes new ones which no longer have the same power of resurrection. And if I still possessed the *François le Champi* which Mamma unpacked one evening from the parcel of books which my grandmother was to have given me for my birthday, I should never look at it; I should be too afraid that I might gradually insinuate into it my impressions of today and smother my original impressions beneath them, that I might see it become so far a thing of the present that, when I asked it to evoke once more the child who spelt out its title in the little bedroom at Combray, the child, not recognising its voice, would no longer reply to its summons and would remain for ever buried in oblivion.

An image presented to us by life brings with it, in a single moment, sensations which are in fact multiple and heterogeneous. The sight, for instance, of the binding of a book once read may weave into the characters of its title the moonlight of a distant summer night. The taste of our breakfast coffee brings with it that vague hope of fine weather which so often long ago, as with the day still intact and full before us, we were drinking it out of a bowl of white porcelain, creamy and fluted and itself looking almost like vitrified milk, suddenly smiled upon us in the pale uncertainty of the dawn. An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what we call reality is a certain connexion between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them—a connexion that is suppressed in a simple cinematographic vision, which just because it professes to confine itself to the truth in fact departs widely from it—a unique connexion which the writer has to rediscover in order to link for ever in his phrase the two sets of phenomena which reality joins together. He can describe a scene by describing one after another the innumerable objects which at a given moment were present at a particular place, but truth will be attained by him only when he takes two different objects, states the connexion between them—a connexion analogous in the world of art to the unique connexion which in the world of science is provided by the law of causality—and encloses them in the necessary links of a well-wrought style; truth—and life too—can be attained by us only when, by comparing a quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a metaphor. Had not nature herself—if one considered the matter from this point of view—placed me on the path of art, was she not herself a beginning of art, she who, often, had allowed me to become aware of the beauty of one thing only in another thing, of the beauty, for instance, of noon at Combray in the sound of its bells, of that of the mornings at Doncières in the hiccups of our central heating? The link may be uninteresting, the objects trivial, the style bad, but unless this process has taken place the description is worthless.

But my train of thought led me yet further. If reality were indeed a sort of waste product of experience, more or less identical for each one of us, since when we speak of bad weather, a war, a taxi rank, a brightly lit restaurant, a garden full of flowers, everybody knows what we mean, if reality were no more than this, no doubt a sort of cinematograph film of these things would be sufficient and the "style," the "literature" that departed from the simple data that they provide would be superfluous and artificial. But was it true that reality was no more than this? If I tried to understand what actually happens at the moment when a thing makes some particular impression upon one—on the day, for instance, when as I crossed the bridge over the Vivonne the shadow of a cloud upon the water had made me cry: "Gosh!" and jump for joy; or the occasion when, hearing a phrase of Bergotte's, all that I had disengaged from my impression was the not specially relevant remark: "How splendid!"; or the words I had once heard Bloch use in exasperation at some piece of bad behaviour, words quite inappropriate to a very commonplace incident: "I must say that that sort of conduct seems to me absolutely fantastic!"; or that evening when, flattered at the politeness which the Guermantes had shown to me as their guest and also a little intoxicated by the wines which I had drunk in their house, I could not help saying to myself half aloud as I came away alone: "They really are delightful people and I should be happy to see them every day of my life"—I realised that the words in each case were a long way removed from the impressions that I or Bloch had in fact received. So that the essential, the only true book, though in the ordinary sense of the word it does not have to be "invented" by a great writer—for it exists already in each one of us—has to be translated by him. The function and the task of a writer are those of a translator.

And if in some cases—where we are dealing, for instance, with the inaccurate language of our own vanity—the rectification of an oblique interior discourse (which deviates gradually more and more widely from the first and central impression) until it merges with the straight line which the impression ought to have produced is a laborious undertaking which our idleness would prefer to shirk, there are other circumstances—for example, where love is involved—in which this same process is actually painful. Here all our feigned indifferences, all our indignation at the lies of whoever it is whom we love (lies which are so natural and so like those that we perpetrate ourselves), in a

word all that we have not ceased, whenever we are unhappy or betrayed, not only to say to the loved one but, while we are waiting for a meeting with her, to repeat endlessly to ourselves, sometimes aloud in the silence of our room, which we disturb with remarks like: "No, really, this sort of behaviour is intolerable," and: "I have consented to see you once more, for the last time, and I don't deny that it hurts me," all this can only be brought back into conformity with the felt truth from which it has so widely diverged by the abolition of all that we have set most store by, all that in our solitude, in our feverish projects of letters and schemes, has been the substance of our passionate dialogue with ourselves.

Even where the joys of art are concerned, although we seek and value them for the sake of the impression that they give us, we contrive as quickly as possible to set aside, as being inexpressible, precisely that element in them which is the impression that we sought, and we concentrate instead upon that other ingredient in aesthetic emotion which allows us to savour its pleasure without penetrating its essence and lets us suppose that we are sharing it with other art-lovers, with whom we find it possible to converse just because, the personal root of our own impression having been suppressed, we are discussing with them a thing which is the same for them and for us. Even in those moments when we are the most disinterested spectators of nature, or of society or of love or of art itself, since every impression is double and the one half which is sheathed in the object is prolonged in ourselves by another half which we alone can know, we speedily find means to neglect this second half, which is the one on which we ought to concentrate, and to pay attention only to the first half which, as it is external and therefore cannot be intimately explored, will occasion us no fatigue. To try to perceive the little furrow which the sight of a hawthorn bush or of a church has traced in us is a task that we find too difficult. But we play a symphony over and over again, we go back repeatedly to see a church until—in that flight to get away from our own life (which we have not the courage to look at) which goes by the name of erudition—we know them, the symphony and the church, as well as and in the same fashion as the most knowledgeable connoisseur of music or archaeology. And how many art-lovers stop there, without extracting anything from their impression, so that they grow old useless and unsatisfied, like celibates of Art! They suffer, but their sufferings, like the sufferings of virgins and of lazy people, are of a kind that fecundity or work would cure. They get more excited about works of art than real artists, because for them their excitement is not the object of a laborious and inward-directed study but a force which bursts outwards, which heats their conversations and empurples their cheeks; at concerts they will shout "Bravo, bravo" till they are hoarse at the end of a work they admire and imagine as they do so that they are discharging a duty. But demonstrations of this kind do not oblige them to clarify the nature of their admiration and of this they remain in ignorance. Meanwhile, like a stream which can find no useful channel, their love of art flows over into even their calmest conversations, so that they make wild gestures and grimace and toss their heads whenever they mention the subject. "I was at a concert the other day. They played the first piece and I must say it left me cold. Then they started on the quartet. By Jove, what a difference!" (At this moment the face of the music-lover expresses a sudden anxiety, as if he were thinking: "Don't I see sparks? And I smell burning! Something's on fire.") "It's the most exasperating thing I've ever heard, damn it! It's not exactly a good composition, but it's stunning, it's something quite out of the ordinary." And yet, ludicrous though they may be, such people are not altogether to be despised. They are the first attempts of nature in her struggle to create the artist, experiments as misshapen, as unviable as those first animals that came before the species of today and were so constituted that they could not survive for long. And, with their sterile velleities, the art-lovers are as touching to contemplate as those early machines which tried to leave the ground and could not, but which yet held within them, if not the secret, the still to be discovered means, at least the desire of flight. "You know, old boy," goes on the music-lover, as he takes you by the elbow, "this is the eighth time I've heard it, and I promise you it won't be the last." And indeed, since they fail to assimilate what is truly nourishing in art, they need artistic pleasures all the time, they are victims of a morbid hunger which is never satisfied. So they go to concert after concert to applaud the same work and think that they have a duty to put in an appearance whenever it is performed just as other people think they have a duty to attend a board meeting or a funeral. Then presently, whether it be in music or in literature or in painting, other works come along, works that may even be the very opposite of the ones which they supersede. For the ability to launch ideas and systems—and still more of course the ability to assimilate them—has always been much commoner than genuine taste, even among those who themselves produce works of art, and with the multiplication of reviews and literary journals (and with them of factitious vocations as writer or artist) has become very much more widespread. Not so long ago, for instance, the best part of the younger generation, the most intelligent and the most disinterested of them, through a change of fashion admired nothing but works with a lofty moral and sociological, and even religious, significance. This they imagined to be the criterion of a work's value, renewing the old error of David and Chénavard and Brunetière and all those who in the past thought like them. Bergotte, whose prettiest phrases had in fact demanded much deeper reflexion on the part of the reader, was rated lower now than writers who seemed more profound simply because they wrote less well. The intricacy of his style was all right for fashionable people but not for anybody else, said democratic critics, paying to fashionable people a tribute which they did not deserve. The truth is that as soon as the reasoning intelligence takes upon itself to judge works of art, nothing is any longer fixed or certain: you can prove anything you wish to prove. Whereas the reality of talent is something universal, whether it be a gift or an acquirement, and the first thing that a reader has to do is to find out whether this reality is present beneath a writer's superficial mannerisms of thought and style, it is upon just these superficial mannerisms that criticism seizes when it sets out to classify authors. Because he has a peremptory tone, because he parades his contempt for the school that preceded him, criticism hails as a prophet a writer who in fact has no message that is new. And so frequent are these aberrations of criticism that a writer might almost with reason prefer to be judged by the general public (were not the public incapable even of understanding what an artist has attempted in a realm of discovery which is outside its experience). For there is a closer analogy between the instinctive life of the public and the talent of a great writer, which is simply an instinct religiously listened to in the midst of a silence imposed upon all other voices, an instinct made perfect and understood, than between this same talent and the superficial verbiage and changing criteria of the established judges of literature. From decade to decade their wordy battles are renewed, for it is not only social groups that are kaleidoscopic but ideas too about society and politics and religion; refracted through large bodies they can assume a momentary amplitude but their life-span is the brief one of ideas which owe their success to their novelty and gain the adherence only of such minds as are not particular about

proof. So it is that parties and schools follow upon one another's heels, attaching to themselves always the same minds, those men of moderate intelligence who are an easy prey to the successive enthusiasms into which others more scrupulous and less easily satisfied in the matter of proof will decline to plunge. And unfortunately, just because those in the first category are no more than half-minds, they need to buttress themselves in action, with the result that, being more active than the better minds, they draw the crowd after them and create around them not only inflated reputations and victims of undeserved contempt but wars too, both civil and foreign, which a little self-examination of an old-fashioned Jansenist kind might well have prevented.

As for the enjoyment which is derived by a really discerning mind and a truly living heart from a thought beautifully expressed in the writings of a great writer, this is no doubt an entirely wholesome enjoyment, but, precious though the men may be who are truly capable of enjoying this pleasure—and how many of them are there in a generation?—they are nevertheless in the very process reduced to being no more than the full consciousness of another. If, for instance, a man of this type has done everything in his power to make himself loved by a woman who could only have made him unhappy, but has not even succeeded, in spite of efforts redoubled over the years, in persuading her to meet him in private, instead of seeking to express his sufferings and the danger from which he has escaped, he reads over and over again, appending to it “a million words” and the most moving memories of his own life, this observation of La Bruyère: “Men often want to love where they cannot hope to succeed; they seek their own undoing without being able to compass it, and, if I may put it thus, they are forced against their will to remain free.” Whether or no this is the meaning that the aphorism had for the man who wrote it (to give it this meaning, which would make it finer, he should have said “to be loved” instead of “to love”), there is no doubt that, with this meaning, the sensitive lover of literature reanimates it and swells it with meaning until it is ready to burst, he cannot repeat it to himself without overflowing with joy, so true and beautiful does he find it—but in spite of all this he has added to it nothing, it remains merely an observation of La Bruyère.

How could the literature of description possibly have any value, when it is only beneath the surface of the little things which such a literature describes that reality has its hidden existence (grandeur, for example, in the distant sound of an aeroplane or the outline of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, the past in the taste of a madeleine, and so on) and when the things in themselves are without significance until it has been extracted from them? Gradually, thanks to its preservation by our memory, the chain of all those inaccurate expressions in which there survives nothing of what we have really experienced comes to constitute for us our thought, our life, our “reality,” and this lie is all that can be reproduced by the art that styles itself “true to life,” an art that is as simple as life, without beauty, a mere vain and tedious duplication of what our eyes see and our intellect records, so vain and so tedious that one wonders where the writer who devotes himself to it can have found the joyous and impulsive spark that was capable of setting him in motion and making him advance in his task. The greatness, on the other hand, of true art, of the art which M. de Norpois would have called a dilettante's pastime, lay, I had come to see, elsewhere: we have to rediscover, to reapprehend, to make ourselves fully aware of that reality, remote from our daily preoccupations, from which we separate ourselves by an ever greater gulf as the conventional knowledge which we substitute for it grows thicker and more impermeable, that reality which it is very easy for us to die without ever having known and which is, quite simply, our life. Real life, life at last laid bare and illuminated—the only life in consequence which can be said to be really lived—is literature, and life thus defined is in a sense all the time immanent in ordinary men no less than in the artist. But most men do not see it because they do not seek to shed light upon it. And therefore their past is like a photographic darkroom encumbered with innumerable negatives which remain useless because the intellect has not developed them. But art, if it means awareness of our own life, means also awareness of the lives of other people—for style for the writer, no less than colour for the painter, is a question not of technique but of vision: it is the revelation, which by direct and conscious methods would be impossible, of the qualitative difference, the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain for ever the secret of every individual. Through art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own and of which, without art, the landscapes would remain as unknown to us as those that may exist on the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists, worlds more different one from the other than those which revolve in infinite space, worlds which, centuries after the extinction of the fire from which their light first emanated, whether it is called Rembrandt or Vermeer, send us still each one its special radiance.

This work of the artist, this struggle to discern beneath matter, beneath experience, beneath words, something that is different from them, is a process exactly the reverse of that which, in those everyday lives which we live with our gaze averted from ourselves, is at every moment being accomplished by vanity and passion and the intellect, and habit too, when they smother our true impressions, so as entirely to conceal them from us, beneath a whole heap of verbal concepts and practical goals which we falsely call life. In short, this art which is so complicated is in fact the only living art. It alone expresses for others and renders visible to ourselves that life of ours which cannot effectually observe itself and of which the observable manifestations need to be translated and, often, to be read backwards and laboriously deciphered. Our vanity, our passions, our spirit of imitation, our abstract intelligence, our habits have long been at work, and it is the task of art to undo this work of theirs, making us travel back in the direction from which we have come to the depths where what has really existed lies unknown within us. And surely this was a most tempting prospect, this task of re-creating one's true life, of rejuvenating one's impressions. But it required courage of many kinds, including the courage of one's emotions. For above all it meant the abrogation of one's dearest illusions, it meant giving up one's belief in the objectivity of what one had oneself elaborated, so that now, instead of soothing oneself for the hundredth time with the words: “She was very sweet,” one would have to transpose the phrase so that it read: “I experienced pleasure when I kissed her.” Certainly, what I had felt in my hours of love is what all men feel. One feels, yes, but what one feels is like a negative which shows only blackness until one has placed it near a special lamp and which must also be looked at in reverse. So with one's feelings: until one has brought them within range of the intellect one does not know what they represent. Then only, when the intellect has shed light upon them, has intellectualised them, does one distinguish, and with what difficulty, the lineaments of what one felt.

But I realised also that the suffering caused by the thought that our love does not belong to the person who inspires it, a suffering which I had first known in connexion with Gilberte, is for two reasons salutary. The first and the less important is that, brief though our life may be, it is only while we are suffering that we see certain things which at other times are hidden from us—we are, as it were, posted at a window, badly placed but looking out over an expanse of sea, and only during a storm, when our thoughts are agitated by perpetually changing movements, do they elevate to a level at which we can see it the whole law-governed immensity which normally, when the calm weather of happiness leaves it smooth, lies beneath our line of vision; perhaps only for a few great geniuses does this movement of thought exist all the time, uncontingent upon the agitations of personal grief, yet can we be sure, when we contemplate the ample and regular development of their joyous creations, that we may not too readily infer from the joyousness of their work that there was joy also in their lives, which perhaps on the contrary were almost continuously unhappy? But the principal reason is that, if our love is not only the love of a Gilberte (and this fact is what we find so painful), the reason is not that it is also the love of an Albertine but that it is a portion of our mind more durable than the various selves which successively die within us and which would, in their egoism, like to keep it to themselves, a portion of our mind which must, however much it hurts us (and the pain may in fact be beneficial), detach itself from individuals so that we can comprehend and restore to it its generality and give this love, the understanding of this love, to all, to the universal spirit, and not merely first to one woman and then to another with whom first one and then another of the selves that we have successively been has desired to be united.

I was surrounded by symbols (Germantes, Albertine, Gilberte, Saint-Loup, Balbec, etc.) and to the least of these I had to restore the meaning which habit had caused them to lose for me. Nor was that all. When we have arrived at reality, we must, to express it and preserve it, prevent the intrusion of all those extraneous elements which at every moment the gathered speed of habit lays at our feet. Above all I should have to be on my guard against those phrases which are chosen rather by the lips than by the mind, those humorous phrases such as we utter in conversation and continue at the end of a long conversation with other people to address, factitiously, to ourselves although they merely fill our mind with lies—those, so to speak, purely physical remarks, which, in the writer who stoops so low as to transcribe them, are accompanied always by, for instance, the little smile, the little grimace which at every turn disfigures the spoken phrase of a Sainte-Beuve, whereas real books should be the offspring not of daylight and casual talk but of darkness and silence. And as art exactly reconstitutes life, around the truths to which we have attained inside ourselves there will always float an atmosphere of poetry, the soft charm of a mystery which is merely a vestige of the shadow which we have had to traverse, the indication, as precise as the markings of an altimeter, of the depth of a work. (For the quality of depth is not inherent in certain subjects, as those novelists believe who are spiritually minded only in a materialistic way: they cannot penetrate beneath the world of appearances and all their noble intentions, like the endless virtuous tirades of certain people who are incapable of the smallest act of kindness, should not blind us to the fact that they have lacked even the strength of mind to rid themselves of those banalities of form which are acquired through imitation.)

As for the truths which the intellectual faculty—even that of the greatest minds—gathers in the open, the truths that lie in its path in full daylight, their value may be very great, but they are like drawings with a hard outline and no perspective; they have no depth because no depths have had to be traversed in order to reach them, because they have not been re-created. Yet it happens to many writers that after a certain age, when more mysterious truths no longer emerge from their innermost being, they write only with their intellect, which has grown steadily in strength, and then the books of their riper years will have, for this reason, greater force than those of their youth but not the same bloom.

I felt, however, that these truths which the intellect educes directly from reality were not altogether to be despised, for they might be able to enshrine within a matter less pure indeed but still imbued with mind those impressions which are conveyed to us outside time by the essences that are common to the sensations of the past and of the present, but which, just because they are more precious, are also too rare for a work of art to be constructed exclusively from them. And—capable of being used for this purpose—I felt jostling each other within me a whole host of truths concerning human passions and character and conduct. The perception of these truths caused me joy; and yet I seemed to remember that more than one of them had been discovered by me in suffering, and others in very trivial pleasures (every individual who makes us suffer can be attached by us to a divinity of which he or she is a mere fragmentary reflexion, the lowest step in the ascent that leads to it, a divinity or an Idea which, if we turn to contemplate it, immediately gives us joy instead of the pain which we were feeling before—indeed the whole art of living is to make use of the individuals through whom we suffer as a step enabling us to draw nearer to the divine form which they reflect and thus joyously to people our life with divinities). And then a new light, less dazzling, no doubt, than that other illumination which had made me perceive that the work of art was the sole means of rediscovering Lost Time, shone suddenly within me. And I understood that all these materials for a work of literature were simply my past life; I understood that they had come to me, in frivolous pleasures, in indolence, in tenderness, in unhappiness, and that I had stored them up without divining the purpose for which they were destined or even their continued existence any more than a seed does when it forms within itself a reserve of all the nutritious substances from which it will feed a plant. Like the seed, I should be able to die once the plant had developed and I began to perceive that I had lived for the sake of the plant without knowing it, without ever realising that my life needed to come into contact with those books which I had wanted to write and for which, when in the past I had sat down at my table to begin, I had been unable to find a subject. And thus my whole life up to the present day might and yet might not have been summed up under the title: A Vocation. Insofar as literature had played no part in my life the title would not have been accurate. And yet it would have been accurate because this life of mine, the memories of its sadnesses and its joys, formed a reserve which fulfilled the same function as the albumen lodged in the germ-cell of a plant, from which that cell starts to draw the nourishment which will transform it into a seed long before there is any outward sign that the embryo of a plant is developing, though already within the cell there are taking place chemical and respiratory changes, secret but extremely active. In the same way my life was linked to what, eventually, would bring about its maturation, but those who would one day draw nourishment from it would remain ignorant, as most of us do when we eat those grains that are human food, that the rich substances which they

contain were made for the nourishment not of mankind but of the grain itself and have had first to nourish its seed and allow it to ripen.

In this context, certain comparisons which are false if we start from them as premises may well be true if we arrive at them as conclusions. The man of letters envies the painter, he would like to take notes and make sketches, but it is disastrous for him to do so. Yet when he writes, there is not a single gesture of his characters, not a trick of behaviour, not a tone of voice which has not been supplied to his inspiration by his memory; beneath the name of every character of his invention he can put sixty names of characters that he has seen, one of whom has posed for the grimaces, another for the monocle, another for the fits of temper, another for the swaggering movement of the arm, etc. And in the end the writer realises that if his dream of being a sort of painter was not in a conscious and intentional manner capable of fulfilment, it has nevertheless been fulfilled and that he too, for his work as a writer, has unconsciously made use of a sketch-book. For, impelled by the instinct that was in him, the writer, long before he thought that he would one day become one, regularly omitted to look at a great many things which other people notice, with the result that he was accused by others of being absent-minded and by himself of not knowing how to listen or look, but all this time he was instructing his eyes and his ears to retain for ever what seemed to others puerile trivialities, the tone of voice in which a certain remark had been made, or the facial expression and the movement of the shoulders which he had seen at a certain moment, many years ago, in somebody of whom perhaps he knows nothing else whatsoever, simply because this tone of voice was one that he had heard before or felt that he might hear again, because it was something renewable, durable. There is a feeling for generality which, in the future writer, itself picks out what is general and can for that reason one day enter into a work of art. And this has made him listen to people only when, stupid or absurd though they may have been, they have turned themselves, by repeating like parrots what other people of similar character are in the habit of saying, into birds of augury, mouthpieces of a psychological law. He remembers only things that are general. By such tones of voice, such variations in the physiognomy, seen perhaps in his earliest childhood, has the life of other people been represented for him and when, later, he becomes a writer, it is from these observations that he composes his human figures, grafting on to a movement of the shoulders common to a number of people—a movement as truthfully delineated as though it had been recorded in an anatomist's note-book, though the truth which he uses it to express is of a psychological order—a movement of the neck made by someone else, each of many individuals having posed for a moment as his model.

(It may be that, for the creation of a work of literature, imagination and sensibility are interchangeable qualities and that the latter may with no great harm be substituted for the former, just as in people whose stomach is incapable of digesting this function is relegated to the intestine. A man born with sensibility but without imagination might, in spite of this deficiency, be able to write admirable novels. For the suffering inflicted upon him by other people, his own efforts to ward it off, the long conflict between his unhappiness and another person's cruelty, all this, interpreted by the intellect, might furnish the material for a book not merely as beautiful as one that was imagined, invented, but also in as great a degree exterior to the day-dreams that the author would have had if he had been left to his own devices and happy, and as astonishing to himself, therefore, and as accidental as a fortuitous caprice of the imagination.)

The stupidest people, in their gestures, their remarks, the sentiments which they involuntarily express, manifest laws which they do not themselves perceive but which the artist surprises in them. Because he makes observations of this kind the writer is popularly believed to be ill-natured. But this belief is false: in an instance of ridiculous behaviour the artist sees a beautiful generality, and he no more condemns on this account the individual in whom he observes it than a surgeon would despise a patient for suffering from some quite common disorder of the circulation; the writer, in fact, is the least inclined of all men to scoff at folly. Unhappily, he is more unhappy than ill-natured: when it concerns his own passions, while well aware of their universality, he frees himself less easily from the personal sufferings which they cause. Naturally, when some insolent fellow insults us, we would rather he had paid us a compliment, and *a fortiori*, when a woman whom we adore betrays us, what would we not give for this not to have happened! But then the pain of an affront, the anguish of abandonment, would have been lands which we should never know, lands whose discovery, painful though it may be for the man, is nevertheless invaluable for the artist. And so, though it is neither his wish nor theirs, the ill-natured and the ungrateful find their place in his work. The writer who writes a pamphlet involuntarily associates with his glory the riff-raff whom he castigates in it, and in every work of art one can recognise those whom the artist has most hated and also, alas! those whom he has most loved. They indeed have quite simply been posing for the artist at the very moment when, much against his will, they made him suffer most. When I was in love with Albertine, I had realised very clearly that she did not love me and I had had to resign myself to the thought that through her I could gain nothing more than the experience of what it is to suffer and to love, and even, at the beginning, to be happy.

And when we seek to extract from our grief the generality that lies within it, to write about it, we are perhaps to some extent consoled for yet another reason apart from those that I have mentioned, which is that to think in terms of general truths, to write, is for the writer a wholesome and necessary function the fulfilment of which makes him happy, it does for him what is done for men of a more physical nature by exercise, perspiration, baths. This conclusion, I must admit, I was a little reluctant to accept. I was ready to believe that the supreme truth of life resides in art, and I could see, too, that I was no more capable by an effort of memory of being still in love with Albertine than I was of continuing to mourn my grandmother's death, and yet I asked myself whether a work of art of which they would not be conscious could really for them, for the destiny of these two poor dead creatures, be a fulfilment. My grandmother, whom with so little feeling I had seen agonise and die beside me! I longed that in expiation, when my work should be finished, I might, incurably stricken, suffer for long hours, abandoned by all, and then die! And there were others less dear to me, or for whom I had cared nothing at all, for whom I felt an infinite pity, all those whose sufferings, or merely whose follies, my thought, in its effort to understand their destinies, had used for its own selfish purpose. All those men and women who had revealed some truth to me and who were now no more, appeared again before me, and it seemed as though they had lived a life which had profited only myself, as though they had died for me. Saddening too was the thought that my love, to which I had clung so tenaciously, would in my book be so detached from any individual that different readers would apply it, even in detail, to what they had felt for other women. But had I a right to be shocked at this posthumous infidelity, shocked that strangers should find new and



alien objects for my feelings in unknown women, when this infidelity, this division of love between a number of women, had begun in my lifetime and even before I had started to write? It was true that I had suffered successively for Gilberte, for Mme de Guermantes, for Albertine. But successively I had also forgotten them, and only the love which I dedicated to different women had been lasting. The profanation of one of my memories by unknown readers was a crime that I had myself committed before them. I felt something near to horror at myself, the self-horror that some nationalist party might come to feel after a long war fought in its name, from which it alone had profited and in which many noble victims had suffered and succumbed without ever knowing (and for my grandmother at least what a recompense this would have been!) what the outcome of the struggle would be. And my only consolation for the thought that she did not know that at last I was getting down to work was (such is the lot of the dead) that, if she could not enjoy my progress, she had at least long ceased to be conscious of my inactivity, of my wasted life, which had been such an unhappiness to her. And certainly there were others besides my grandmother and Albertine, there were many from whom I had been able to assimilate a single phrase or look although as individual human beings I had no recollection of them; a book is a huge cemetery in which on the majority of the tombs the names are effaced and can no longer be read. Sometimes on the other hand we remember a name well enough but do not know whether anything of the individual who bore it survives in our pages. That girl with the very deep-set eyes and the drawing voice, is she here? and if she is, in what part of the ground does she lie? we no longer know, and how are we to find her beneath the flowers? But since we live at a great distance from other human beings, since even our strongest feelings—and in this class had been my love for my grandmother and for Albertine—at the end of a few years have vanished from our hearts and become for us merely a word which we do not understand, since we can talk casually of these dead people with fashionable acquaintances whose houses we still visit with pleasure though all that we loved has died, surely then, if there exists a method by which we can learn to understand these forgotten words once more, is it not our duty to make use of it, even if this means transcribing them first into a language which is universal but which for that very reason will at least be permanent, a language which may make out of those who are no more, in their truest essence, a lasting acquisition for the minds of all mankind? And as for that law of change which made these loved words unintelligible to us, if we succeed at least in explaining it, is not even our infirmity transformed into strength of a new kind?

And so I had to resign myself, since nothing has the power to survive unless it can become general and since the mind's own past is dead to its present consciousness, to the idea that even the people who were once most dear to the writer have in the long run done no more than pose for him like models for a painter.

When we turn to our own future, the work in which our unhappiness has collaborated may be interpreted both as an ominous sign of suffering and as an auspicious sign of consolation. For, when we say that the loves and griefs of a poet have been useful to him, have helped him to construct his work, that the unknown women who had not the least idea what they were doing, have—one through her cruelty to him, another through her mockery—brought each their stone for the building of the monument which they will never see, we do not sufficiently reflect that the life of the writer does not come to an end with this particular work, that the same nature which caused him to have certain sufferings, which then entered into his work, will continue to live after the work has been concluded and will cause him to love other women in conditions which would be similar, were they not made slightly to differ by the modifications that time brings about in circumstances, in the subject himself, in his appetite for love and in his resistance to pain. And from this point of view this first work of his must be considered simply as an unhappy love which fatally presages others of the kind: his life will resemble his work and in future the poet will scarcely need to write, for he will be able to find in what he has already written the anticipatory outline of what will then be happening. Thus it was that my love for Albertine, however different the two might be, was already inscribed in my love for Gilberte, in the midst of the happy days of which, for the first time, I had heard the name of Albertine pronounced and her character described by her aunt, without suspecting that this insignificant seed would develop and would one day overshadow the whole of my life.

But from another point of view the work is a promise of happiness, because it shows us that in every love the particular and the general lie side by side and it teaches us to pass from one to the other by a species of gymnastic which fortifies us against unhappiness by making us neglect its particular cause in order to gain a more profound understanding of its essence. Indeed—as I was to experience in the sequel—even at a time when we are in love and suffer, if our vocation has at last been realised, we feel so strongly during the hours in which we are at work that the individual whom we love is being dissolved into a vaster reality that at moments we succeed in forgetting her and we come to suffer from our love merely as we might from some purely physical disease in which the loved one played no part, some kind of malady of the heart. It is true that this only happens at a certain stage of our love and that if the work comes a little later its effect may appear to be the opposite. For when once the women whom we love, through their cruelty or their triviality, have succeeded in spite of us in destroying our illusions, have reduced themselves to nothing and become detached from the amorous chimera which we had fabricated in our imagination—if at this point we set ourselves to work, our mind will exalt them once more and identify them, for the purposes of our self-analysis, with objects of our love, and in this case literature, recommencing the ruined work of amorous illusion, will give a sort of second life to sentiments which have ceased to exist. And certainly we are obliged to re-live our individual suffering, with the courage of the doctor who over and over again practises on his own person some dangerous injection. But at the same time we have to conceptualise it in a general form which will in some measure enable us to escape from its embrace, which will turn all mankind into sharers in our pain, and which is even able to yield us a certain joy. Where life immures, the intelligence cuts a way out, for if there exists no remedy for a love that is not shared, the awareness of a state of suffering is something from which we can extricate ourselves, if only by deducing the consequences which it entails. The intelligence knows nothing of those closed situations of life from which there is no escape.

Sometimes, when a painful passage has remained in an inchoate state, a mere rough draft, a new tenderness and a new suffering come our way which enable us to complete it, to fill it out. And on the score of these great but useful unhappinesses we have little ground for complaint: they are plentiful and we seldom have to wait long for them. (In love, our fortunate rival, which is as much as to say our enemy, is our benefactor. To a woman who previously excited in us a mere paltry physical desire he instantly adds an immense value, foreign to her but confounded by us with her.

If we had no rivals, pleasure would not transform itself into love. If we had none, or if we believed that we had none. For it is not necessary that rivals should really exist. The progress of our work requires only that they should have that illusory life which is conferred upon non-existent rivals by our suspicion, our jealousy.) Nevertheless one must make haste to take advantage of them when they come, for they do not last very long: either one consoles oneself or else, when they are too severe, if one's heart is no longer very robust one dies. For if unhappiness develops the forces of the mind, happiness alone is salutary to the body. But unhappiness, even if it did not on every occasion reveal to us some new law, would nevertheless be indispensable, since through its means alone we are brought back time after time to a perception of the truth and forced to take things seriously, tearing up each new crop of the weeds of habit and scepticism and levity and indifference. Yet it is true that truth, which is not compatible with happiness or with physical health, is not always compatible even with life. Unhappiness ends by killing. At every new torment which is too hard to bear we feel yet another vein protrude, to unroll its sinuous and deadly length along our temples or beneath our eyes. And thus gradually are formed those terrible ravaged faces, of the old Rembrandt, the old Beethoven, at whom the whole world mocked. And the pockets under the eyes and the wrinkled forehead would not matter much were there not also the suffering of the heart. But since strength of one kind can change into a strength of another kind, since heat which is stored up can become light and the electricity in a flash of lightning can cause a photograph to be taken, since the dull pain in our heart can hoist above itself like a banner the visible permanence of an image for every new grief, let us accept the physical injury which is done to us for the sake of the spiritual knowledge which grief brings; let us submit to the disintegration of our body, since each new fragment which breaks away from it returns in a luminous and significant form to add itself to our work, to complete it at the price of sufferings of which others more richly endowed have no need, to make our work at least more solid as our life crumbles away beneath the corrosive action of our emotions. Ideas come to us as the substitutes for griefs, and griefs, at the moment when they change into ideas, lose some part of their power to injure our heart; the transformation itself, even, for an instant, releases suddenly a little joy. But substitutes only in the order of time, for the primary element, it seems, is the idea, and grief is merely the mode in which certain ideas make their first entry into us. But within the tribe of ideas there are various families and some of them from the very first moment are joys.

These reflexions enabled me to give a stronger and more precise meaning to the truth which I had often dimly perceived, particularly when Mme de Cambremer had expressed surprise that I could give up seeing a remarkable man like Elstir for the sake of Albertine. Even from an intellectual point of view I had felt that she was wrong, but I did not know what it was that she had failed to understand: the nature of the lessons through which one serves one's apprenticeship as a man of letters. In this process the objective value of the arts counts for little; what we have to bring to light and make known to ourselves is our feelings, our passions, that is to say the passions and feelings of all mankind. A woman whom we need and who makes us suffer elicits from us a whole gamut of feelings far more profound and more vital than does a man of genius who interests us. It is for us later to decide, according to the plane upon which we are living, whether an infidelity through which some woman has made us suffer is of little or great account beside the truths which it has revealed to us and which the woman who exulted in our suffering would hardly have been able to understand. In any case these infidelities are not likely to be wanting. A writer need have no anxieties on that score when he embarks upon a long labour. Let his intellect begin the work and as he proceeds he will meet with griefs, enough or more than enough, which will undertake to finish it. As for happiness, that is really useful to us in one way only, by making unhappiness possible. It is necessary for us to form in happiness ties of confidence and attachment that are both sweet and strong in order that their rupture may cause us the heart-rending but so valuable agony which is called unhappiness. Had we not been happy, if only in hope, the unhappinesses that befall us would be without cruelty and therefore without fruit.

And more even than the painter, the writer, in order to achieve volume and substance, in order to attain to generality and, so far as literature can, to reality, needs to have seen many churches in order to paint one church and for the portrayal of a single sentiment requires many individuals. For if art is long and life is short, we may on the other hand say that, if inspiration is short, the sentiments which it has to portray are not of much longer duration. It is our passions which draw the outline of our books, the ensuing intervals of repose which write them. And when inspiration is born again, when we are able to resume our work, the woman who was posing for us to illustrate a sentiment no longer has the power to make us feel it. We must continue to paint the sentiment from another model, and if this means infidelity towards the individual, from a literary point of view, thanks to the similarity of our feelings for the two women, which makes a work at the same time a recollection of our past loves and a prophecy of our new ones, there is no great harm in these substitutions. And this is one reason for the futility of those critical essays which try to guess who it is that an author is talking about. A work, even one that is directly autobiographical, is at the very least put together out of several intercalated episodes in the life of the author—earlier episodes which have inspired the work and later ones which resemble it just as much, the later loves being traced after the pattern of the earlier. For to the woman whom we have loved most in our life we are not so faithful as we are to ourselves, and sooner or later we forget her in order—since this is one of the characteristics of that self—to be able to begin to love again. At most our faculty of loving has received from this woman whom we so loved a particular stamp, which will cause us to be faithful to her even in our infidelity. We shall need, with the woman who succeeds her, those same morning walks or the same practice of taking her home every evening or giving her a hundred times too much money. (A curious thing, this circulation of the money which we give to women who because of that make us unhappy, that is to say are the cause of our writing books: it almost seems as though a writer's works, like the water in an artesian well, mount to a height which is in proportion to the depth to which suffering has penetrated his heart.) These substitutions add then to our work something that is disinterested and more general and they convey also the austere lesson that it is not to individuals that we should attach ourselves, that it is not individuals who really exist and are, in consequence, capable of being expressed, but ideas. Nevertheless, while we have these models at our disposal we must make haste and lose no time; for those who pose for us as "happiness" can in general spare us only a few sittings, and the same may be true alas!—since grief, yes, grief too passes so quickly—of those who pose as "grief." Yet grief, even when it does not, by revealing it to us, provide the raw material of our writing, is valuable to us as an incitement to work. The imagination, the reflective faculty may be admirable machines in themselves but they may also be inert. Suffering sets them in motion. And then at least the woman who poses for us as grief favours us with an

abundance of sittings, in that studio which we enter only in these periods and which lies deep within us. And they are, these periods, like an image of our life with its different griefs. For they too contain different griefs within themselves, and at the very moment when we thought that all had become calm a new one makes its appearance. New in every sense of the word: perhaps because an unforeseen situation forces us to enter more profoundly into contact with ourself, these painful dilemmas which love is constantly putting in our way teach us and reveal to us, layer after layer, the material of which we are made. So when Françoise, seeing that Albertine had the run of the flat and passed in and out of all the rooms like a dog creating disorder everywhere and that she was ruining me and causing me unhappiness of every kind, used to say (for at that time I had already written some articles and done a few translations): "Ah! if only, instead of this girl who makes him waste all his time, Monsieur had got himself a nicely brought up young secretary who could have sorted all Monsieur's paperies for him!", I had perhaps been wrong in thinking that she spoke wisely. By making me waste my time, by causing me unhappiness, Albertine had perhaps been more useful to me, even from a literary point of view, than a secretary who would have arranged my "paperies." But all the same, when a living creature is so faultily constituted (and perhaps, if such a creature exists in nature, it is man) that he cannot love without suffering, and that he has to suffer in order to apprehend truths, the life of such a creature becomes in the end extremely wearisome. The happy years are the lost, the wasted years, one must wait for suffering before one can work. And then the idea of the preliminary suffering becomes associated with the idea of work and one is afraid of each new literary undertaking because one thinks of the pain one will first have to endure in order to imagine it. And once one understands that suffering is the best thing that one can hope to encounter in life, one thinks without terror, and almost as of a deliverance, of death.

If I had had to admit, albeit I found the idea somewhat repugnant, that the writer plays with life and exploits other people for the purpose of his books, I could not fail to observe also that this is sometimes very far from being the case. The history and the circumstances of Werther, the noble Werther, had not alas! been mine. Without for a moment believing in Albertine's love I had twenty times wanted to kill myself for her, I had ruined myself, I had destroyed my health for her. For when it is a question of writing, one is scrupulous, one examines things meticulously, one rejects all that is not truth. But when it is merely a question of life, one ruins oneself, makes oneself ill, kills oneself all for lies. It is true that these lies are a lode from which, if one has passed the age for writing poetry, one can at least extract a little truth. Sorrows are servants, obscure and detested, against whom one struggles, beneath whose dominion one more and more completely falls, dire and dreadful servants whom it is impossible to replace and who by subterranean paths lead us towards truth and death. Happy are those who have first come face to face with truth, those for whom, near though the one may be to the other, the hour of truth has struck before the hour of death!

When I considered my past life, I understood also that its slightest episodes had contributed towards giving me the lesson in idealism from which I was going to profit today. My meetings with M. de Charlus, for instance, had they not, even before his pro-German tendencies taught me the same lesson, demonstrated to me, even better than my love for Mme de Guermantes or for Albertine, or Saint-Loup's love for Rachel, the truth of the axiom that matter is indifferent and that anything can be grafted upon it by thought; an axiom which in the phenomenon, so ill-understood and so needlessly condemned, of sexual inversion is seen to be of even greater scope than in that, in itself so instructive, of love? For love shows us Beauty fleeing from the woman whom we no longer love, and coming to take up her abode in a face which anybody else would find hideous and which to ourselves too might have seemed, as one day it will seem, unpleasing: but even more striking is the spectacle of the goddess, taking with her the reverent homage of a great nobleman who thereupon instantly abandons a beautiful princess, migrating to a new perch beneath the cap of an omnibus conductor. And my astonishment every time I had seen after an interval, in the Champs-Élysées or in the street or on the beach, the face of Gilberte or of Mme de Guermantes or of Albertine, was this not a proof that a memory is prolonged only in a direction which diverges from the impression with which originally it coincided but from which gradually it further and further departs?

The writer must not be indignant if the invert who reads his book gives to his heroines a masculine countenance. For only by the indulgence of this slightly aberrant peculiarity can the invert give to what he is reading its full general import. Racine himself was obliged, as a first step towards giving her a universal validity, for a moment to turn the antique figure of Phèdre into a Jansenist; and if M. de Charlus had not bestowed upon the "traitress" for whom Musset weeps in *La Nuit d'Octobre* or *Souvenir* the features of Morel, he would neither have wept nor have understood, since it was only along this path, narrow and indirect, that he had access to the verities of love. For it is only out of habit, a habit contracted from the insincere language of prefaces and dedications, that the writer speaks of "my reader." In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have perceived in himself. And the recognition by the reader in his own self of what the book says is the proof of its veracity, the contrary also being true, at least to a certain extent, for the difference between the two texts may sometimes be imputed less to the author than to the reader. Besides, the book may be too learned, too obscure for a simple reader, and may therefore present to him a clouded glass through which he cannot read. And other peculiarities can have the same effect as inversion. In order to read with understanding many readers require to read in their own particular fashion, and the author must not be indignant at this; on the contrary, he must leave the reader all possible liberty, saying to him: "Look for yourself, and try whether you see best with this lens or that one or this other one."

If I had always taken so great an interest in dreams, was this not because, making up for lack of duration by their potency, they help us better to understand the subjective element in, for instance, love through the simple fact that they reproduce—but with miraculous swiftness—the process vulgarly known as getting a woman under one's skin, so effectively that within a sleep of a few minutes we can fall passionately in love with an ugly woman, a thing which in real life could only happen after years of habit and intimacy—as though they were intravenous injections of love discovered by some wonderworking doctor, of love and sometimes also of suffering? With the same speed the amorous suggestions which they have instilled into us are dissipated, and sometimes, when the loving nocturnal visitant has vanished from our sight and reappeared in her familiar shape of an ugly woman, there vanishes with her something more precious, a whole ravishing landscape of feelings of tenderness, of voluptuous pleasure, of vaguely

blurred regrets, a whole embarkation for the Cythera of passion, of which we should like to note, for our waking state, the subtle and deliciously lifelike gradations of tone, but which fades away like a discoloured canvas that can no longer be restored. And it was perhaps also because of the extraordinary effects which they achieve with Time that dreams had fascinated me. Have we not often seen in a single night, in a single minute of a night, remote periods, relegated to those enormous distances at which we can no longer distinguish anything of the sentiments which we felt in them, come rushing upon us with almost the speed of light as though they were giant aeroplanes instead of the pale stars which we had supposed them to be, blinding us with their brilliance and bringing back to our vision all that they had once contained for us, giving us the emotion, the shock, the brilliance of their immediate proximity, only, once we are awake, to resume their position on the far side of the gulf which they had miraculously traversed, so that we are tempted to believe—wrongly, however—that they are one of the modes of rediscovering Lost Time?

I had realised before now that it is only a clumsy and erroneous form of perception which places everything in the object, when really everything is in the mind; I had lost my grandmother in reality many months after I had lost her in fact, and I had seen people present various aspects according to the idea that I or others possessed of them, a single individual being several different people for different observers (Swann, for instance, for my family and for his friends in society, the Princesse de Luxembourg for the judge at Balbec and for those who knew her identity) or even for the same observer at different periods over the years (the name of Guermantes, and the different Swanns, for me). I had seen that love places in a person who is loved what exists only in the person who loves, indeed I could hardly have failed to become aware of this when I had seen stretched to its maximum the distance between objective reality and love (in Rachel, for instance, as she appeared to Saint-Loup and to me, in Albertine as she appeared to me and to Saint-Loup, in Morel or the omnibus conductor as they appeared to other people and to M. de Charlus, who in spite of this showered delicate attentions upon them, recited Musset's poems to them, etc.). Finally, to a certain extent, the Germanophilia of M. de Charlus (like the expression on the face of Saint-Loup when he had looked at the photograph of Albertine) had helped me to free myself for a moment, if not from my Germanophobia, at least from my belief in the pure objectivity of this feeling, had helped to make me think that perhaps what applied to love applied also to hate and that, in the terrible judgment which at this time France passed on Germany—that she was a nation outside the pale of humanity—the most important element was an objectification of feelings as subjective as those which had caused Rachel and Albertine to appear so precious, the one to Saint-Loup and the other to me. What, in fact, made it possible that this perversity was not entirely intrinsic to Germany was that, just as I as an individual had had successive loves and at the end of each one its object had appeared to me valueless, so I had already seen in my country successive hates which had, for example, at one time condemned as traitors—a thousand times worse than the Germans into whose hands they were delivering France—those very Dreyfusards such as Reinach with whom today patriotic Frenchmen were collaborating against a race whose every member was of necessity a liar, a savage beast, a madman, excepting only those Germans who, like the King of Romania, the King of the Belgians, or the Empress of Russia, had embraced the French cause. It is true that the anti-Dreyfusards would have replied to me: "But it is not the same thing." But then it never is the same thing, any more than it is the same person with whom after an interval we fall in love; otherwise, faced with the same phenomenon as before, someone who was a second time taken in by it would have no alternative but to blame his own subjective condition, he could not again believe that the qualities or the defects resided in the object. And so, since the phenomenon, outwardly, is not the same, the intellect has no difficulty in basing upon each set of circumstances a new theory (that it is against nature to have schools directed by the religious orders, as the radicals believe, or that it is impossible for the Jewish race to be assimilated into a nation, or that there exists an undying hatred between the Teutonic and the Latin races, the yellow race having been temporarily rehabilitated). This subjective element in the situation struck one forcibly if one had any conversation with neutrals, since the pro-Germans among them had, for instance, the faculty of ceasing for a moment to understand and even to listen when one spoke to them about the German atrocities in Belgium. (And yet they were real, these atrocities: the subjective element that I had observed to exist in hatred as in vision itself did not imply that an object could not possess real qualities or defects and in no way tended to make reality vanish into pure relativism.) And if, after so many years had slipped away and so much time had been lost, I felt this influence to be dominant even in the sphere of international relations, had I not already had some notion of its existence right at the beginning of my life, when I was reading in the garden at Combray one of those novels by Bergotte which, even today, if I chance to turn over a few of its forgotten pages where I see the wives of some villain described, I cannot put down until I have assured myself, by skipping a hundred pages, that towards the end this same villain is humiliated as he deserves to be and lives long enough to learn that his sinister schemes have failed? For I no longer have any clear recollection of what happened to these characters, though in this respect they are scarcely to be distinguished from the men and women who were present this afternoon at Mme de Guermantes's party and whose past life, in many cases at least, was as vague in my mind as if I had read it in a half-forgotten novel. The Prince d'Agriente, for instance: had he ended by marrying Mlle X—? Or was it rather the brother of Mlle X—who might have married the sister of the Prince d'Agriente? Or was I confusing it all with something that I had read long ago or recently dreamed?

Dreams were another of the facts of my life which had always most profoundly impressed me and had done most to convince me of the purely mental character of reality, and in the composition of my work I would not scorn their aid. At a time when I was still living, in a rather less disinterested fashion, for love of one kind or another, a dream would come to me, bringing strangely close, across vast distances of lost time, my grandmother, or Albertine, whom briefly I began to love again because in my sleep she had given me a version, highly diluted, of the episode with the laundry-girl in Touraine. And I thought that in the same way dreams would bring sometimes within my grasp truths or impressions which my efforts alone and even the contingencies of nature failed to present to me; that they would re-awaken in me something of the desire, the regret for certain non-existent things which is the necessary condition for working, for freeing oneself from the dominion of habit, for detaching oneself from the concrete. And therefore I would not disdain this second muse, this nocturnal muse who might sometimes do duty for the other one.

I had seen aristocrats turn into vulgar people when their intelligence was vulgar. ("Make yourself at home," for instance the Duc de Guermantes would say, using an expression that Cottard might have used.) I had seen everybody believe, during the Dreyfus Affair or during the war, and in medicine too, that truth is a particular piece of knowledge which cabinet ministers and doctors possess, a Yes or No which requires no interpretation, thanks to the possession

of which the men in power *knew* whether Dreyfus was guilty or not and *knew*, without having to send Roques to make an inquiry on the spot, whether Sarraïl in Salonika had or had not the resources to launch an offensive at the same time as the Russians, in the same way that an X-ray photograph is supposed to indicate without any need for interpretation the exact nature of a patient's disease.

It occurred to me, as I thought about it, that the raw material of my experience, which would also be the raw material of my book, came to me from Swann, not merely because so much of it concerned Swann himself and Gilberte, but because it was Swann who from the days of Combray had inspired in me the wish to go to Balbec, where otherwise my parents would never have had the idea of sending me, and but for this I should never have known Albertine. Certainly, it was to her face, as I had seen it for the first time beside the sea, that I traced back certain things which I should no doubt include in my book. And in a sense I was right to trace them back to her, for if I had not walked on the front that day, if I had not got to know her, all these ideas would never have been developed (unless they had been developed by some other woman). But I was wrong too, for this pleasure which generates something within us and which, retrospectively, we seek to place in a beautiful feminine face, comes from our senses: but the pages I would write were something that Albertine, particularly the Albertine of those days, would quite certainly never have understood. It was, however, for this very reason (and this shows that we ought not to live in too intellectual an atmosphere), for the reason that she was so different from me, that she had fertilised me through unhappiness and even, at the beginning, through the simple effort which I had had to make to imagine something different from myself. Had she been capable of understanding my pages, she would, for that very reason, not have inspired them. But Swann had been of primary importance, for had I not gone to Balbec I should never have known the Guermantes either, since my grandmother would not have renewed her friendship with Mme de Villeparisis nor should I have made the acquaintance of Saint-Loup and M. de Charlus and thus got to know the Duchesse de Guermantes and through her her cousin, so that even my presence at this very moment in the house of the Prince de Guermantes, where out of the blue the idea for my work had just come to me (and this meant that I owed to Swann not only the material but also the decision), came to me from Swann. A rather slender stalk, perhaps, to support thus the whole development of my life, for the "Guermantes way" too, on this interpretation, had emanated from "Swann's way." But often this begetter of all the various aspects of a man's life is someone very much inferior to Swann, someone utterly insignificant. Suppose some schoolfriend who meant nothing to me had described an attractive girl who was to be enjoyed there (whom probably I should not in fact have met), would not that have been enough to send me to Balbec? Often, meeting years later some friend of our youth whom we never particularly liked, we scarcely trouble to shake hands with him, and yet, did we but think of it, it is from a casual remark which he made to us, "You ought to come to Balbec" or something of the kind, that our whole life and our work have originated. But if it does not occur to us to thank him, this is no proof of ingratitude. For when he uttered those words he had no thought of the huge consequences which they would have for us. It is our sensibility and our intelligence which have exploited the circumstances, which, once he has given them their first impulsion, have engendered one another as cause and effect without his having been able to foresee either—to return to my own story—my living with Albertine or the masked ball given by the Guermantes or anything else that had happened. No doubt the impulsion that he gave was necessary, and on that account the external form of our life and even the material which we shall use in our work derive from him. Without Swann, as I have said, my parents would never have had the idea of sending me to Balbec. (Yet Swann was not for this reason responsible for the sufferings which he himself had indirectly caused me: they sprang from my weakness, just as his own weakness had made him suffer through Odette.) But whoever it is who has thus determined the course of our life has, in so doing, excluded all the lives which we might have led instead of our actual life. If Swann had not talked to me about Balbec, I should not have known Albertine, the dining-room of the hotel, the Guermantes. I should have gone to some other town, I should have known other people, my memory and my books would be filled with quite different scenes, which I cannot even imagine and the novelty of which, their unknownness, I find so seductive that I almost regret that I was not directed instead towards them and that Albertine and the beach of Balbec and Rivebelle and the Guermantes did not for ever remain unknown to me.

Jealousy is a good recruiting-sergeant who, when there is a gap in our picture, goes out into the street and brings us in the desirable woman who was needed to fill it. Perhaps in our eyes she had ceased to be a beauty? She has become one again, for we are jealous of her and therefore she will fill the gap. Once we are dead, we shall have no joy that our picture was completed in this fashion. But this consideration does not in the least discourage us. We feel merely that life is a little more complicated than it is said to be, and circumstances too. And it is absolutely necessary that we should portray this complexity. The jealousy that is so useful is not necessarily born of a look, or an anecdote, or a retroflexion. It may be found, ready to sting us, between the leaves of a directory—what for Paris is called *Tout-Paris* and for the country the *Annuaire des Châteaux*. We had heard, for instance, but without paying any attention, some beauty to whom we have become indifferent say that she would have to go and see her sister for a few days in the Pas-de-Calais, near Dunkirk; we had also, in the past, but again without paying any attention, thought that perhaps the beauty had formerly been pursued by Monsieur E—, whom she had ceased to see, since she had ceased to go to the bar where she used to meet him. What could her sister be? A housemaid perhaps? Out of tact, we had never asked. And now suddenly, opening the *Annuaire des Châteaux* at random we find that Monsieur E— has his country-house in the Pas-de-Calais, near Dunkirk. At once all is clear: to oblige the beauty he has taken her sister into his employment as a housemaid, and if the beauty no longer sees him in the bar, the reason is that he gets her to come and see him at home, either in Paris, where he lives most of the year, or in the Pas-de-Calais, since he cannot do without her even for the few weeks that he is there. Drunk with rage and love, we paint furiously away at the picture. And yet, suppose we are wrong? May not the truth be that Monsieur E— no longer sees the beauty but, wanting to help her, has recommended her sister to a brother of his who lives all the year round in the Pas-de-Calais? And in that case she is going, perhaps quite by chance, to see her sister at a time when Monsieur E— is not there, for they are no longer interested in each other. And then there is another possibility, that the sister is not a housemaid in the house near Dunkirk or anywhere else, but has relations in the Pas-de-Calais. Our anguish of the first moment gives way before these last hypotheses, which calm our jealousy. But it makes no difference. Jealousy, concealed between the leaves of the *Annuaire des Châteaux*, came at the right moment, and now the space that stood empty in our canvas is filled to

abundance. And the whole composition takes shape, thanks to the presence, evoked by jealousy, of the beauty of whom already we are no longer jealous and whom we no longer love.

At this moment the butler came in to tell me that the first piece of music was finished, so that I could leave the library and go into the rooms where the party was taking place. And thereupon I remembered where I was. But I was not in the least disturbed in the train of thought upon which I had embarked by the fact that a fashionable gathering, my return to society, had provided me with that point of departure for a new life which I had been unable to find in solitude. There was nothing extraordinary about this fact, there was no reason why an impression with the power to resuscitate the timeless man within me should be linked to solitude rather than to society (as I had once supposed and as had perhaps once been the case for me, and perhaps ought still to have been the case, had I developed harmoniously instead of going through this long standstill which seemed only now to be coming to an end). For, as this impression of beauty came to me only when, an immediate sensation—no matter how insignificant—having been thrust upon my consciousness by chance, a similar sensation, spontaneously born again within me, somehow in a single moment diffused the first sensation over different periods of my life and succeeded in filling with a general essence the empty space which particular sensations never failed to leave in my mind, as this was how I came to experience beauty I might just as well receive sensations of the appropriate kind in a social as in a natural environment, since they are supplied by chance, aided no doubt by that special kind of excitement which, on the days when we happen to be jolted out of the normal routine of our lives, causes even the simplest things to begin once again to give us those sensations which habit, in its economical way, ordinarily begrudges our nervous system. Why it was that precisely and uniquely this kind of sensation should lead to the production of a work of art was a question to which I proposed to try and find an objective answer, by following up the thoughts which had come to me, linked in a continuous chain, in the library, and I felt that the impulse given to the intellectual life within me was so vigorous now that I should be able to pursue these thoughts just as well in the drawing-room, in the midst of the guests, as alone in the library; it seemed to me that, from this point of view, even in the midst of a numerous gathering I should be able to maintain my solitude. For just as great events that impinge upon us from without fail to influence the powers of our mind, so that a mediocre writer who lives in a heroic age does not cease to be a mediocre writer, for the same reason, I realised, what is dangerous in social life is merely the social and worldly inclinations with which one approaches it. In itself it can no more turn one into a mediocre writer than an epic war can turn a bad poet into a sublime one. In any case, whether or no it was a good plan, theoretically, for a work of art to be constructed in this fashion, and whatever might be the result of the examination of this point which I intended to make, I could not deny that, so far as I was concerned, whenever genuinely aesthetic impressions had come to me, they had always followed upon sensations of this kind. It is true that such impressions had been rather rare in my life, but they dominated it, and I could still rediscover in the past some of these peaks which I had unwisely lost sight of (a mistake I would be careful not to make again). And already I could say that this characteristic, though it might, in the exclusive importance that it assumed in my thinking, be personal to me, was nevertheless, as I was reassured to find, akin to characteristics, less marked but still perceptible and at bottom not at all dissimilar, of certain well-known writers. Is it not from a sensation of the same species as that of the madeleine that Chateaubriand suspends the loveliest episode in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*: "Yesterday evening I was walking alone ... I was roused from my reflexions by the warbling of a thrush perched upon the highest branch of a birch tree. Instantaneously the magic sound caused my father's estate to reappear before my eyes; I forgot the catastrophes of which I had recently been the witness and, transported suddenly into the past, I saw again those country scenes in which I had so often heard the fluting notes of the thrush." And of all the lovely sentences in those memoirs are not these some of the loveliest: "A sweet and subtle scent of heliotrope was exhaled by a little patch of beans that were in flower; it was brought to us not by a breeze from our own country but by a wild Newfoundland wind, unrelated to the exiled plant, without sympathy of shared memory or pleasure. In this perfume, not breathed by beauty, not cleansed in her bosom, not scattered where she had walked, in this perfume of a changed sky and tillage and world there was all the diverse melancholy of regret and absence and youth." And in one of the masterpieces of French literature, Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*, just as in the book of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* which describes Combourg, there figures a sensation of the same species as the taste of the madeleine and the warbling of the thrush. Above all in Baudelaire, where they are more numerous still, reminiscences of this kind are clearly less fortuitous and therefore, to my mind, unmistakable in their significance. Here the poet himself, with something of a slow and indolent choice, deliberately seeks, in the perfume of a woman, for instance, of her hair and her breast, the analogies which will inspire him and evoke for him

the azure of the sky immense and round

and

a harbour full of masts and pennants.

I was about to search in my memory for the passages in Baudelaire at the heart of which one may find this kind of transposed sensation, in order once and for all to establish my place in so noble a line of descent and thus to give myself the assurance that the work which I no longer had any hesitation in undertaking was worthy of the pains which I should have to bestow upon it, when, having arrived at the foot of the flight of stairs which led down from the library, I found myself suddenly in the main drawing-room, in the middle of a party which, as I soon discovered, was to seem to me very different from those that I had attended in the past, and was to assume a special character in my eyes and take on a novel significance. In fact, as soon as I entered the crowded room, although I did not falter in the project which I had gone so far towards formulating within me, I was witness of a spectacular and dramatic effect which threatened to raise against my enterprise the gravest of all objections. An objection which I should manage no doubt to surmount, but which, while I continued silently to reflect upon the conditions that are necessary to a work of art, could not fail, by presenting to my gaze in a hundred different forms a consideration more likely than any other to make me hesitate, constantly to interrupt my train of thought.

For a few seconds I did not understand why it was that I had difficulty in recognising the master of the house and the guests and why everyone in the room appeared to have put on a disguise—in most cases a powdered wig—which changed him completely. The Prince himself, as he stood receiving his guests, still had that genial look of a king in a fairy-story which I had remarked in him the first time I had been to his house, but today, as though he too felt bound to comply with the rules for fancy dress which he had sent out with the invitations, he had got himself up with a white beard and dragged his feet along the ground as though they were weighted with soles of lead, so that he gave the impression of trying to impersonate one of the “Ages of Man.” (His moustaches were white too, as though the hoar-frost of Hop o’ my Thumb’s forest still lay thick upon them. They seemed to get in the way of his mouth, which he had difficulty in moving, and one felt that having made his effect he ought to have taken them off.) So successful was this disguise that I recognised him only by a process of logical deduction, by inferring from the mere resemblance of certain features the identity of the figure before me. I do not know what young Fezensac had put on his face, but, while others had whitened either half their beard or merely their moustache, he had not bothered to use a dye like the rest but had found some means of covering his features with wrinkles and making his eyebrows sprout with bristles; and all this did not suit him in the least, it had the effect of making his face look hardened, bronzed, rigid and solemn, and aged him to such an extent that one would no longer have said he was a young man at all. Still greater was my surprise when a moment later I heard the name Duc de Châtellerault applied to a little elderly man with the silvery moustaches of an ambassador, in whom, thanks to a tiny fragment which still survived of the look that I remembered, I was just able to recognise the youth whom I had once met at Mme de Villeparisis’s tea-party. The first time that I thus succeeded in identifying somebody, by trying to dismiss from my mind the effects of his disguise and building up, through an effort of memory, a whole familiar face round those features which had remained unaltered, my first thought ought to have been—and perhaps for a fraction of a second was—to congratulate him on having made himself up with such wonderful skill that one had initially, before recognising him, that hesitation which a great actor, appearing in a role in which he is unlike himself, can cause an audience to feel when he first comes on to the stage, so that knowing from the programme what to expect, it yet, for a moment, remains silent and puzzled before bursting into applause.

From the point of view of disguise, the most extraordinary of all the guests, the real star turn of the afternoon, was my personal enemy, M. d’Argencourt. Not only had he concealed his real beard, which was hardly even pepper-and-salt in colour, beneath a fantastic bushy growth of a quite improbable whiteness, but altogether (such is the power of small physical changes to shrink or enlarge a human figure and, even more, to alter the apparent character, the personality of an individual) he had turned into a contemptible old beggarman, and the diplomat whose solemn demeanour and starched rigidity were still present to my memory acted his part of old dotard with such verisimilitude that his limbs were all of a tremble and the features of what had once been a haughty countenance were permanently relaxed in an expression of smiling idiocy. Disguise, carried to this extent, ceases to be a mere art, it becomes a total transformation of the personality. And indeed, although certain details assured me that it was really Argencourt who presented this ludicrous and picturesque spectacle, I had to traverse an almost infinite number of successive states of a single face if I wished to rediscover that of the Argencourt whom I had known and who was now, though he had had no other materials than his own body with which to effect the change, so different from himself. Clearly this was the last extremity to which that body could be brought without suffering utter disintegration; already the immobile face and the proudly arched chest were no more than a bundle of rags, twitching and convulsed. With difficulty, by recalling certain smiles with which in the past Argencourt had sometimes for a moment tempered his disdain, was I able to see in the man before me the Argencourt whom I had once known, to understand that this smile of a doddering old-clothes-man existed potentially in the correct gentleman of an earlier day. But even supposing that the same intention lay behind Argencourt’s smile now as in the past, because of the prodigious transformation of his face the actual physical matter of the eye through which he

had to express this intention was so different that the smile which resulted was entirely new and even appeared to belong to a new person. I was tempted to laugh aloud at the sight of this sublime old gaffer, as senile in his amiable caricature of himself as was, in a more tragic vein, M. de Charlus thunderstruck into humble politeness. M. d'Argencourt, in his impersonation of an aged man in a farce by Regnard rewritten in an exaggerated fashion by Labiche, was as easy of access, as affable as M. de Charlus in the role of King Lear, punctiliously doffing his hat to the most unimportant passer-by. Yet it did not occur to me to tell him how impressed I was by the extraordinary vision which he offered to my eyes. And this was not because of any survival of my old feeling of antipathy, for indeed he had so far become unlike himself that I had the illusion of being in the presence of a different person, as gentle, as kindly, as inoffensive as the other Argencourt had been hostile, overbearing, and dangerous. So far a different person that the sight of this hoary clown with his ludicrous grin, this snowman looking like General Dourakine<sup>7</sup> in his second childhood, made me think that it must be possible for human personality to undergo metamorphoses as total as those of certain insects. I had the impression that I was looking into a glass-case in a museum of natural history at an instructive example of a later phase in the life-cycle of what had once been the swiftest and surest of predatory insects, and before this flabby chrysalis, more subject to vibration than capable of movement, I could not feel the sentiments which in the past M. d'Argencourt had always inspired in me. However, I was silent, I refrained from congratulating him on presenting a spectacle which seemed to extend the boundaries within which the transformations of the human body can take place.

For whereas at a fancy-dress ball or behind the scenes at a theatre civility leads one, if anything, to exaggerate the difficulty—to talk even of the impossibility—of recognising the person beneath the disguise, here on the contrary an instinct had warned me to do just the contrary; I felt that the success of the disguise was no longer in any way flattering because the transformation was not intentional. And I realised something that I had not suspected when I entered the room a few minutes earlier: that every party, grand or simple, which takes place after a long interval in which one has ceased to go into society, provided that it brings together some of the people whom one knew in the past, gives one the impression of a masquerade, a masquerade which is more successful than any that one has ever been to and at which one is most genuinely “intrigued” by the identity of the other guests, but with the novel feature that the disguises, which were assumed long ago against their wearers’ will, cannot, when the party is over, be wiped off with the make-up. Intrigued, did I say, by the identity of the other guests? No more, alas, than they are intrigued by one’s own. For the difficulty which I experienced in putting a name to the faces before me was shared evidently by all those who, when they happened to catch sight of mine, paid no more attention to it than if they had never seen it before or else laboriously sought to extract from my present appearance a very different recollection.

In performing this extraordinary “number,” this brilliant study in caricature which offered certainly the most striking vision which I was likely to retain of him, M. d'Argencourt might be likened to an actor who at the end of a play makes a final appearance on the stage before the curtain falls for the last time in the midst of a storm of laughter. And if I no longer felt any ill will towards him, it was because in this man who had rediscovered the innocence of childhood there was no longer any recollection of the contemptuous notions which he might once have had of me, no longer any memory of having seen M. de Charlus suddenly drop my arm, either because these sentiments had ceased to exist in him or because in order to arrive at me they were obliged to pass through physical refractors which so distorted them that in the course of their journey they completely changed their meaning, so that M. d'Argencourt appeared to be kind for want of the physical means of expressing that he was still unkind, from inability to repress his unfailingly friendly mirth. I have compared him to an actor, but in fact, unencumbered as he was by any conscious soul, it was rather as a puppet, a trembling puppet with a beard of white wool, that I saw him being shakily put through his paces up and down this drawing-room, in a puppet-show which was both scientific and philosophical and in which he served—as though it had been at the same time a funeral oration and a lecture at the Sorbonne—both as a text for a sermon on the vanity of all things and as an object lesson in natural history.

A puppet-show, yes, but one in which, in order to identify the puppets with the people whom one had known in the past, it was necessary to read what was written on several planes at once, planes that lay behind the visible aspect of the puppets and gave them depth and forced one, as one looked at these aged marionettes, to make a strenuous intellectual effort; one was obliged to study them at the same time with one’s eyes and with one’s memory. These were puppets bathed in the immaterial colours of the years, puppets which exteriorised Time, Time which by habit is made invisible and to become visible seeks bodies, which, wherever it finds them, it seizes upon, to display its magic lantern upon them. As immaterial now as Golo long ago on the doorknob of my room at Combray, the new, the unrecognisable Argencourt was there before me as the revelation of Time, which by his agency was rendered partially visible, for in the new elements which went to compose his face and his personality one could decipher a number which told one the years of his age, one could recognise the hieroglyph of life—of life not as it appears to us, that is to say permanent, but as it really is: an atmosphere so swiftly changing that at the end of the day the proud nobleman is portrayed, in caricature, as a dealer in old clothes.

There were other people in the room in whom these changes, these veritable alienations seemed to belong rather to the realm of human psychology than of natural history, so that one was astonished, when one heard certain names, to learn that the same individual could present, not like M. d'Argencourt the characteristics of a new and different species, but the external features of a different personality. From this young girl, for instance, as from M. d'Argencourt, time had extracted possibilities that one could never have suspected, but these possibilities, though it was through her physiognomy or her body that they had expressed themselves,



seemed to be of a moral order. The features of the face, if they change, if they group themselves differently, if their oscillations take on a slower rhythm, assume with a different aspect a different significance. In a woman, for instance, whom one had known as stiff and prim, an enlargement out of all recognition of the cheeks, an unpredictable arching of the nose, caused one the same surprise—and often it was an agreeable surprise—as one would have felt at some sensitive and profound remark, some noble and courageous action that one would never have expected of her. On either side of this nose, this new nose, one saw opening out horizons which one would not have dared to hope for. With these cheeks kindness and delicate affection, once out of the question, had become possible. And in the presence of this chin one could utter sentiments that one would never have dreamed of voicing when confronted with its predecessor. All these new features of the face implied new features also of the character; the thin, severe girl had turned into a vast and indulgent dowager. And no longer in a zoological sense, as with M. d'Argencourt, but in a social and moral sense one could say of her that she was a different person.

For all these reasons a party like this at which I found myself was something much more valuable than an image of the past: it offered me as it were all the successive images—which I had never seen—which separated the past from the present, better still it showed me the relationship that existed between the present and the past; it was like an old-fashioned peepshow, but a peepshow of the years, the vision not of a moment but of a person situated in the distorting perspective of Time.

As for the woman whose lover M. d'Argencourt had been, considering the length of time that had elapsed she had not changed very much, that is to say her face was not too utterly demolished for the face of a human creature subject, as we all are, to deformation at every moment of her trajectory into the abyss towards which she had been launched, that abyss whose direction we can express only by means of comparisons that are all equally invalid, since we can borrow them only from the world of space and their sole merit, whether we give them the orientation of height, length or depth, is to make us feel that this inconceivable yet apprehensible dimension exists. To find a name for the faces before me I had been obliged, in effect, to follow the course of the years back towards their source, and this forced me, by a necessary consequence, to re-establish, to give their real place to those years whose passage I had hardly noticed. And from this point of view, freeing me from the illusions produced in us by the apparent sameness of space, the totally changed aspect of, for instance, M. d'Argencourt was a striking revelation to me of that chronological reality which under normal conditions is no more than an abstract conception to us, just as the first sight of some strange dwarf tree or giant baobab apprises us that we have arrived in a new latitude.

Life at such moments seems to us like a theatrical pageant in which from one act to another we see the baby turn into a youth and the youth into a mature man, who in the next act totters towards the grave. And as it is through endless small changes that we feel that these beings, who enter our field of vision only at long intervals, can have become so different, we feel that we ourselves must have followed the same law in virtue of which they have been so totally transformed that, without having ceased to exist, indeed just because they have never ceased to exist, they no longer in any way resemble what we observed them to be in the past.

A young woman whom I had known long ago, white-haired now and compressed into a little old witch, seemed to suggest that it is necessary, in the final scene of a theatrical entertainment, for the characters to be disguised beyond all recognition. But her brother was still so straight-backed, so like himself, that one was surprised on his youthful face to see a bristling moustache dyed white. Indeed everywhere the patches of white in beards and moustaches hitherto entirely black lent a note of melancholy to the human landscape of the party, as do the first yellow leaves on the trees when one is still looking forward to a long summer, when before one has begun to enjoy the hot weather one sees that the autumn has arrived. So that at last I, who from childhood had lived from day to day and had received, of myself and of others, impressions which I regarded as definitive, became aware as I had never been before—by an inevitable inference from the metamorphoses which had taken place in all the people around me—of the time which had passed for them, a notion which brought with it the overwhelming revelation that it had passed also for me. And their old age, in itself a matter of indifference to me, froze my blood by announcing to me the approach of my own. At this point, as though to proclaim the lesson aloud and drive it home, there came to my ears at brief intervals a series of remarks which struck them like the trump of the Last Judgment. The first of these was made by the Duchesse de Guermantes; I had just caught sight of her, passing between a double hedge of curious onlookers, who, not fully aware of the marvellous artifices of toilet and aesthetic which evoked these responses within them, yet feeling themselves moved by the sight of this fair, reddish head, this salmon-pink body almost concealed by its fins of black lace and throttled by jewels, gazed at it, with its hereditary sinuosity of line, as they might have gazed at some archaic sacred fish, loaded with precious stones, in which was incarnate the protective genius of the Guermantes family. "Ah! how wonderful to see you," she said to me, "you, my oldest friend!" And though the vanity of the sometime young man from Combray who had never for a moment thought that he might become one of her friends, really participating in the real mysterious life that went on in the houses of the Guermantes, with the same title to her friendship as M. de Bréauté or M. de Forestelle or Swann or all those others who were now dead, might well have been flattered by these words, more than anything I was saddened by them. "Her oldest friend!" I said to myself. "Surely she exaggerates. One of the oldest perhaps, but can I really be ..." At that moment a nephew of the Prince came up to me: "You, as a veteran Parisian ..." he said to me, and while he was still speaking I was handed a note. Outside the house I had made the acquaintance of a young Létourville, who was related in some way which I had forgotten to the Duchess but who knew at least who I was. He had just left Saint-Cyr, and, telling myself that he would be a nice friend for me, like Saint-Loup, who could initiate me into military matters and explain the changes which

had taken place in the army, I had told him that I would see him again at the party and that we might arrange to have dinner together one evening, and for this he had thanked me very civilly. But I had stayed too long lost in thought in the library and the note which he had left for me was to tell me that he had not been able to wait, and to leave me his address. The letter of this imagined comrade ended thus: "With the respectful wishes of your young friend, Létourville." "Young friend!" That was how in the past I had written to men thirty years older than myself, to Legrandin, for example. And now this second lieutenant, whom in my mind's eye I saw as my comrade after the fashion of Saint-Loup, called himself my "young friend"! Since the days of Doncières, it seemed, it was not only military methods that had changed; from this M. de Létourville, with whom I imagined myself sharing the pleasures of a youthful comradeship—and why not, since I appeared to myself to be youthful?—I was separated, it seemed, by an arc traced by an invisible compass whose existence I had not suspected, which removed me so far from the boyish second lieutenant that in the eyes of this "young friend" I was an old gentleman.

Almost immediately afterwards, hearing someone mention the name of Bloch, I asked whether he meant young Bloch or his father (who, though I was not aware of this, had died during the war, from grief, it was said, at seeing France invaded). "I didn't know he had any children," said the Prince, "I didn't even know he was married. But clearly it is the father we are talking about. He is not in the least like a young Bloch," he added with a laugh. "He is quite old enough to have grown-up sons." And I realised that it was my former schoolfriend who was being discussed. A moment later he came into the room. And indeed superimposed upon the features of Bloch I saw the mild but didactic countenance, the frail movements of the head quickly coming to rest like a piece of clockwork, in which I should have recognised the learned weariness of some amiable old man if at the same time I had not recognised my friend standing before me, so that at once my memories animated him with an uninterrupted flow of youthful enthusiasm which he now no longer seemed to possess. For me, who had known him on the threshold of life and had never ceased to see him thus, he was the friend of my boyhood, an adolescent whose youth I measured by the youth which unconsciously, not believing that I had lived since that time, I attributed to myself. I heard someone say that he quite looked his age, and I was astonished to observe on his face some of those signs which are indeed characteristic of men who are old. Then I understood that this was because he was in fact old and that adolescents who survive for a sufficient number of years are the material out of which life makes old men.

Someone, hearing that I had not been well, asked me whether I was not afraid of catching the influenza of which there was an epidemic at that moment, whereupon another well-wisher reassured me by saying: "Oh! no, it's usually only the young who get it. A man of your age has very little to fear." I was assured also that some of the servants had recognised me. They had whispered my name, and had even, as a lady informed me ("You know the expressions they use"), been heard by her to say: "Look, there's father ..." (and then my surname), and as I had no children this could only be an allusion to my age.

"What do you mean, did I know the Marshal?" said the Duchess to me. "But I knew figures far more typical of the period: the Duchesse de Galliera, Pauline de Périgord, Monsignor Dupanloup." Hearing her, I naïvely regretted that I had not known what she described as relics of an earlier time. I ought to have reflected that what one calls an earlier time is the period of which one has oneself known only the end: things that we see on the horizon assume a mysterious grandeur and seem to us to be closing over a world which we shall not behold again; but meanwhile we are advancing, and very soon it is we ourselves who are on the horizon for the generations that come after us; all the while the horizon retreats into the distance, and the world, which seemed to be finished, begins again. "I even, when I was a girl," Mme de Guermantes went on, "once saw the Duchesse de Dino. But then, you know I'm no longer a chicken." These last words upset me. "She shouldn't have said that," I thought, "that's the way for an old woman to talk." And immediately I reflected that in fact she was an old woman. "As for you," she continued, "you are always the same, you never seem to change." And this remark I found almost more painful than if she had told me that I had changed, for it proved—if it was so extraordinary that there was so little sign of change in me—that a long time had elapsed. "Yes," she said, "you are astonishing, you look as young as ever," another melancholy remark, which can only mean that in fact, if not in appearance, we have grown old. There was worse to come, for she added: "I have always regretted that you never married. But, who knows, perhaps after all it is fortunate. You would have been old enough to have sons in the war, and if they had been killed, like poor Robert (I still often think of him), sensitive as you are, how would you ever have survived their loss?" And I was able to see myself, as though in the first truthful mirror which I had ever encountered, reflected in the eyes of old people, still young in their own opinion as I in mine, who, when I spoke of "an old man like myself in the hope of being contradicted, showed in their answering looks, which saw me not as they saw themselves but as I saw them, not a glimmer of protest. For we failed to see our own appearance, our own age, but each one of us, as though it were a mirror that faced him, saw those of the others. And no doubt the discovery that they have grown old causes less sadness to many people than it did to me. But in the first place old age, in this respect, is like death. Some men confront them both with indifference, not because they have more courage than others but because they have less imagination. And then, a man who from his childhood on has aimed at one single idea and who, from idleness and perhaps also because of poor health, has perpetually put off its realisation, every evening striking out as though it had never existed the day that has slipped away and is lost, so that the illness which hastens the ageing of his body retards that of his mind, such a man is more surprised and more appalled to see that all the while he has been living in Time than one who lives little inside himself and, regulating his activities by the calendar, does not in a single horrifying moment discover the total of the years whose mounting sum he has followed day by day. But there was a more serious reason for my distress: I had made the discovery of this

destructive action of Time at the very moment when I had conceived the ambition to make visible, to intellectualise in a work of art, realities that were outside Time.

In some of the guests at the party the successive replacement, accomplished in my absence, of each cell by other cells, had brought about a change so complete, a metamorphosis so entire that I could have dined opposite them in a restaurant a hundred times without suspecting that I had known them in the past any more than I would have guessed the royal identity of a sovereign travelling incognito or the hidden vice of a stranger. And even this comparison is hardly adequate to the cases in which I had heard the name of the person before me, for it is perhaps not so extraordinary that a stranger sitting opposite one should be a criminal or a king, but these were people whom I had once known, or rather I had known people who bore the same name and yet were so different that I could not believe that they were the same. Nevertheless, just as I would have tried to introduce into the stranger the idea of royalty or of vice, which in a very short time can give a new face to the unknown person towards whom one might so easily, when one's eyes were still blindfolded, have committed the gaffe of behaving with inappropriate insolence or civility, and in whose unchanged features, once one knows who he is, one discerns traces of distinction or of guilt, so now I set to work to introduce into the face of the unknown, utterly unknown, woman before me the idea that she was, let us say, Mme Sazerat, and I succeeded eventually in restoring the meaning that I had once known to reside in her face, which would, however, have remained for me utterly alienated from its owner—as much the face of another person, wanting in all the human attributes which I had once known it to possess, as that of a man turned back into a monkey—if the name and the affirmation of identity had not, in spite of the arduous nature of the problem, set me on the path of its solution. Sometimes, however, the old image came to light again in my mind with such precision that I was able to essay a confrontation; and then, like a witness brought face to face with a suspect, I was obliged, so great was the difference, to say: “No, I do not recognise this person.”

But was I right to tell myself that these special characteristics of individuals would die? I had always considered each one of us to be a sort of multiple organism or polyp, not only at a given moment of time—so that when a speck of dust passes it, the eye, an associated but independent organ, blinks without having received an order from the mind, and the intestine, like an embedded parasite, can fall victim to an infection without the mind knowing anything about it—but also, similarly, where the personality is concerned and its duration through life, I had thought of this as a sequence of juxtaposed but distinct “I’s” which would die one after the other or even come to life alternately, like those which at Combray took one another's place within me when evening approached. But I had seen also that these moral cells of which an individual is composed are more durable than the individual himself. I had seen the vices and the courage of the Guermantes recur in Saint-Loup, as also at different times in his life his own strange and ephemeral defects of character, and as in Swann his Semitism. And now I could observe the same phenomenon in Bloch. He had lost his father some years previously, and when I had written to him at the time, he had at first been unable to answer my letter, for, quite apart from the strong family sentiments which often exist in Jewish families, the idea that his father was an altogether exceptional man had imparted to his affection the character of a cult. He had found his loss unbearable and had had to take refuge in a sanatorium, where he stayed for nearly a year. To my condolences he replied in a tone of profound grief which was at the same time almost haughty, so enviable in his eyes was the privilege which I had enjoyed of approaching this exceptional man whose very ordinary two-horse carriage he would have liked to present to some historical museum. And now, as he sat at table in the midst of his family, he was animated by the same wrath against his father-in-law as had animated his own father against M. Nissim Bernard and even interrupted his meals to deliver the same tirades against him. So that just as, in listening to the conversation of Cottard and Brichot and so many others, I had felt that, through the influence of culture and fashion, a single undulation propagates identical mannerisms of speech and thought through a whole vast extent of space, it seemed to me now that throughout the whole duration of time great cataclysmic waves lift up from the depths of the ages the same rages, the same sadnesses, the same heroisms, the same obsessions, through one superimposed generation after another, and that each geological section cut through several individuals of the same series offers the repetition, as of shadows thrown upon a succession of screens, of a picture as unchanged—though often not so insignificant—as that of Bloch exchanging angry words with his father-in-law, M. Bloch the elder doing the same in the same fashion with M. Nissim Bernard, and many other pairs of disputants whom I had myself never known.

Gilberte de Saint-Loup<sup>8</sup> said to me: “Shall we go and dine together by ourselves in a restaurant?” and I replied: “Yes, if you don't find it compromising to dine alone with a young man,” As I said this, I heard everybody round me laugh, and I hastily added: “or rather, with an old man.” I felt that the phrase which had made people laugh was one of those which my mother might have used in speaking of me, my mother for whom I was still a child. And I realised that I judged myself from the same point of view as she did. If in the end I had registered, as she had, certain changes which had taken place since my early childhood, these were, nevertheless, changes which were now very remote. I had not advanced beyond the particular one which, long ago, almost before the remark corresponded with the facts, had made people say: “He's almost a grown-up man now.” I still thought that was what I was, but by now the description was absurdly out of date. I did not realise how much I had changed. And indeed, though these people just now had burst out laughing, what was it that made them so sure of the change? I had not a single grey hair, my moustache was black. I should have liked to ask them what the evidence was which revealed the terrible fact.

And now I began to understand what old age was—old age, which perhaps of all the realities is the one of which we preserve for longest in our life a purely abstract conception, looking at calendars, dating our letters, seeing our friends marry and then in their turn the children of our friends, and yet, either from fear or from

sloth, not understanding what all this means, until the day when we behold an unknown silhouette, like that of M. d'Argencourt, which teaches us that we are living in a new world; until the day when a grandson of a woman we once knew, a young man whom instinctively we treat as a contemporary of ours, smiles as though we were making fun of him because to him it seems that we are old enough to be his grandfather—and I began to understand too what death meant and love and the joys of the spiritual life, the usefulness of suffering, a vocation, etc. For if names had lost most of their individuality for me, words on the other hand now began to reveal their full significance. The beauty of images is situated in front of things, that of ideas behind them. So that the first sort of beauty ceases to astonish us as soon as we have reached the things themselves, but the second is something that we understand only when we have passed beyond them.

The cruel discovery which I had just made could not fail to be of service to me so far as the actual material of my book was concerned. For I had decided that this could not consist uniquely of the full and plenary impressions that were outside time, and amongst those other truths in which I intended to set, like jewels, those of the first order, the ones relating to Time, to Time in which, as in some transforming fluid, men and societies and nations are immersed, would play an important part. I should pay particular attention to those changes which the aspect of living things undergoes, of which every minute I had fresh examples before me, for, whilst all the while thinking of my work, which I now felt to be launched with such momentum that no passing distractions could check its advance, I continued to greet old acquaintances and to enter into conversation with them. The process of ageing, I found, was not marked in them all by signs of the same sort. I saw someone who was inquiring after my name, and I was told that it was M. de Cambremer. He came up to me and to show that he had recognised me, "Do you still have your fits of breathlessness?" he asked, and, upon my replying in the affirmative, went on: "Well, at least you see that it is no bar to longevity," as if I were already a centenarian. While speaking to him, I fixed my eyes on two or three features which I was able, by an effort of thought, to reintegrate into that complex of my recollections—totally different though it was—which I called his personality. But for a brief moment he turned his head aside. And then I saw that he had been made unrecognisable by the attachment of enormous red pouches to his cheeks, which prevented him from opening his mouth or his eyes completely, and the sight of these startled me into silence, since I did not dare to look at what I took to be some form of anthrax which it seemed more polite not to refer to unless he mentioned it first. However, like a courageous invalid, he made no allusion to his malady but talked and laughed, and I feared to appear lacking in sympathy if I did not ask, no less than in tact if I did ask, what was its nature. "But surely they have become less frequent with age?" he continued, still on the subject of my fits of breathlessness. I replied that they had not. "Oh! but my sister has them much less than she used to," he said, in a tone of contradiction, as though what was true of his sister must also be true of me, and as though age were one of a number of remedies which had helped Mme de Gaucourt and which, therefore, he was quite certain must be beneficial to me. Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin joined us and I became more and more afraid that they must think me callous for failing to deplore the symptoms which I observed on her husband's face, yet still I could not pluck up courage to broach the subject myself. "I expect you're glad to see him again," she said. "Yes, but how is he?" I replied, as though doubtful what answer I should receive. "Why, pretty well, as you can see for yourself." She had not noticed the disfigurement which offended my eyes and which was merely one of the masks in the collection of Time, a mask which Time had fastened to the face of the Marquis, but gradually, adding layer to layer so slowly that his wife had perceived nothing. When M. de Cambremer had finished his questions about my breathlessness, it was my turn to inquire in a low voice of someone standing near whether the Marquis's mother was still alive. And now I was beginning to discover that, in the appreciation of the passage of time, the first step is the hardest. At first one finds it extremely difficult to imagine that so much time has elapsed, later the difficulty is to understand how the lapse can have been so slight. Similarly, when one first suddenly becomes aware of the distance separating the thirteenth century from the present, it is difficult to believe that churches built in that age can still exist—but in fact they are to be found all over France. Within a few minutes I had developed, though very much more rapidly, in the same fashion as those who, after finding it hard to believe that somebody they knew in their youth has reached the age of sixty, are very much more surprised fifteen years later to learn that the same person is still alive and is only seventy-five. Having been assured that M. de Cambremer's mother had not died, I asked him how she was. "She is wonderful still," he said, using to describe her an adjective which in certain families—by contrast with those tribes where aged parents are treated without pity—is applied to old people in whom the continued exercise of the most rudimentary and unspiritual faculties, such as hearing, going to mass on foot, sustaining the demise of their relatives with insensibility, is endowed in the eyes of their children with an extraordinary moral beauty.

If some of the women in the room had acknowledged the arrival of old age by starting to paint their faces, it was also manifested in a contrary fashion by the absence of make-up on the features of certain men, where I had never consciously observed it in the past and who yet seemed to me greatly changed since they had given up the hopeless attempt to please and ceased to use it. One of these was Legrandin. The suppression of the pink, which I had never suspected of being artificial, upon his lips and his cheeks gave to his countenance the greyish tinge and also the sculptural precision of stone, so that with his long-drawn and gloomy features he was like some Egyptian god. Or perhaps less like a god than a ghost. He no longer had the heart either to paint himself or to smile, to make his eyes sparkle, to elaborate his ingenious speeches. One was astonished to see him so pale and so dejected, opening his mouth only at rare intervals to make remarks as trivial as those uttered by the spirits of the dead when we summon them to our presence. One wondered what could be the cause that prevented him from being lively, eloquent, charming, as one does when a medium, putting

questions that call for long and fascinating answers to the "double" of a man who in his life-time was brilliant, elicits from him only the most uninteresting replies. And one told oneself that this cause, which had substituted for a Legrandin of rapid movements and rich colour a pale and melancholy phantom Legrandin, was old age.

There were some people whose hair had not turned white. I recognised for instance, when he came up to say a word to his master, the old valet of the Prince de Guermantes. The coarse hairs which bristled all over his cheeks as well as on his skull were still of a red that verged upon pink, yet one could hardly suspect him of using dye like the Duchesse de Guermantes. Nevertheless, he appeared old. One felt merely that in the human race there exist species, like the mosses and the lichens and a great many others in the vegetable kingdom, which do not change at the approach of winter.

Others again had preserved their faces intact and seemed merely to walk with difficulty; at first one supposed that they had something wrong with their legs; only later did one realise that age had fastened its soles of lead to their feet. A few, of whom the Prince d'Agriente was one, seemed actually to have been embellished by age. His tall, thin figure, with its lacklustre eye and hair that seemed destined to remain a carrot red for all eternity, had turned, through a metamorphosis more appropriate to an insect, into an entirely different old man, whose red hair, too long exposed to view, had been taken out of service like a table-cloth too long in use and replaced by white. His chest had acquired a new corpulence, robust and almost military, which must have necessitated a positive explosion of the fragile chrysalis that I had known; a conscious gravity flooded his eyes, which were tinged also with a new kindness which made him bow to right and left. And as, in spite of his altered appearance, a certain resemblance could be detected between the puissant prince before me and the portrait preserved in my memory, I marvelled at the power to renew in fresh forms that is possessed by Time, which can thus, while respecting the unity of the individual and the laws of life, effect a change of scene and introduce bold contrasts into two successive aspects of a single person; for many of these people could be identified immediately, but only as rather bad portraits of themselves hanging side by side in an exhibition in which an inaccurate and spiteful artist has hardened the features of one sitter, robbed another of her fresh complexion and her slender figure, spread a gloom over the countenance of a third. Comparing these effigies with those that the eyes of my memory could show me, I preferred the latter. Just as often, when asked by a friend to choose a photograph, one finds the one he offers less good than some other and would like to refuse it, so to each of these people, presented with the new image which they showed me of themselves, I should have liked to say: "No, not this one, it is not so good of you, it's not really like you." I would not have dared to add: "Instead of your own straight and handsome nose, it has given you your father's crooked nose, which I have never seen on you." And yet this was what had happened: the nose was new, but it was a family nose. If this was a portrait-gallery, Time, the artist, had made of all the sitters portraits that were recognisable; yet they were not likenesses, and this was not because he had flattered them but because he had aged them. He was an artist, moreover, who worked very slowly. That replica of Odette's face, for instance, which I had seen as the merest outline of a sketch in Gilberte's face on the day on which I first met Bergotte, Time had at long last now wrought into the most perfect likeness; he was one of those painters who keep a work by them for half a lifetime, adding to it year after year until it is completed.

In some of the guests I recognised after a while not merely themselves but themselves as they had been in the past. Ski, for instance, was no more altered than a flower or a fruit which had been dried. Aged but still immature, one of those first attempts which nature abandons in the rough, he was a living confirmation of the theory which I had been formulating about the bachelor devotees of art. "Marvellous!" he said, taking me by the arm. "I have heard it eight times ..." There were others, too, who had not ripened with age, not only art-lovers like Ski but men who had spent their lives in society. Their faces might be surrounded with a first circle of wrinkles and a sweep of white hair but they were still the same babyish faces, with the naïve enthusiasm of an eighteen-year-old. They were not old men, they were very young men in an advanced stage of withering. The marks of life were not deeply scored here, and death, when it came, would find it as easy to restore to these features their youthfulness as it is to clean a portrait which only a little surface dirt prevents from shining with its original brilliance. These men made me think that we are victims of an illusion when, hearing talk of a celebrated old man, we instantly make up our minds that he is kind and just and gentle; for I felt that, forty years earlier, these elderly men had been ruthless young men and that there was no reason to suppose that they had not preserved their youthful arrogance and their vanity, their duplicity and their guile.

And yet, in complete contrast with these, I had the surprise of talking to men and women whom I remembered as unendurable and who had now, I found, lost almost every one of their defects, possibly because life, by disappointing or by gratifying their desires, had rid them of most of their conceit or their bitterness. A rich marriage, with the consequence that struggle and ostentation had ceased to be necessary, the influence perhaps of the wife herself, the slowly acquired knowledge of values beyond those that had formed the whole creed of a frivolous youth, had allowed them to relax the tensions in their character and to display their good qualities. Growing old, they seemed to have acquired a different personality, like those trees whose essential nature appears to be changed by the autumn which alters their colours; the essential marks of old age were manifested in them, but old age, here, was a moral phenomenon. In others, it was almost entirely physical, and so strange were its effects that a person (Mme d'Arpajon, for instance) seemed to me at the same time unknown and familiar. Unknown, for it was impossible to suspect that it was she and in spite of every effort I could not help showing signs, as I responded to her salutation, of the mental activity which made me hesitate between three or four individuals, not one of whom was Mme d'Arpajon and any one of whom I

thought that I might be greeting, and greeting with a fervour which must have astonished her, for, fearing in my uncertainty to appear too chilly should she turn out to be an old and close friend, I had made up for the doubtful expression of my eyes by the warmth of my hand-shake and my smile. And yet, in a way, her new appearance was not unfamiliar to me. It was the appearance, often seen by me in the course of my life, of certain stout, elderly women, of whom at the time I had never suspected that, many years earlier, they could have looked like Mme d'Arpajon. So different was she to look at from the woman I had known that one was tempted to think of her as a creature condemned, like a character in a pantomime, to appear first as a young girl, then as a stout matron, with no doubt a final appearance still to come as a quavering, bent old crone. Like a swimmer in difficulties almost out of sight of the shore, she seemed with infinite effort scarcely to move through the waves of time which beat upon her and threatened to submerge her. Yet gradually, as I studied her face, hesitant and uncertain like a failing memory which has begun to lose the images of the past, I succeeded in rediscovering something of the face which I had known, by playing a little game of eliminating the squares and the hexagons which age had added to her cheeks. For in her case the material which the years had superimposed consisted of geometrical shapes, though on the cheeks of other women it might be of quite a different character. On those, for instance, of Mme de Guermantes, in many respects so little changed and yet composite now like a bar of nougat, I could distinguish traces here and there of verdigris, a small pink patch of fragmentary shell-work, and a little growth of an indefinable character, smaller than a mistletoe berry and less transparent than a glass bead.

Some men walked with a limp, and one was aware that this was the result not of a motor accident but of a first stroke: they had already, as the saying is, one foot in the grave. There were women too whose graves were waiting open to receive them: half paralysed, they could not quite disentangle their dress from the tombstone in which it had got stuck, so that they were unable to stand up straight but remained bent towards the ground, with their head lowered, in a curve which seemed an apt symbol of their own position on the trajectory from life to death, with the final vertical plunge not far away. Nothing now could check the momentum of this parabola upon which they were launched; they trembled all over if they attempted to straighten themselves, and their fingers let fall whatever they tried to grasp.

Certain faces, beneath their hood of white hair, had already the rigidity, the sealed eyelids of those who are about to die, and their lips, shaken by an incessant tremor, seemed to be muttering a last prayer. A countenance of which every line was unchanged needed only the substitution of white hair for black or fair to look totally different, for, as theatrical costumiers know, a powdered wig is in itself an adequate disguise which will make its wearer unrecognisable. The Marquis de Beaussergent, whom I had seen, as a young lieutenant, in Mme de Cambremer's box on the day on which Mme de Guermantes had been with her cousin in hers, still had the same perfectly regular features, indeed they had become even more regular, since the pathological rigidity brought about by arteriosclerosis had even further exaggerated the impassive rectitude of his dandy's physiognomy and given to his features the intense hardness of outline, almost grimacing in its immobility, that they might have had in a study by Mantegna or Michelangelo. His complexion, once almost ribaldly red, was now solemnly pale; silvery hair, a slight portliness, the dignity of a Doge, an air of fatigue, even of somnolence, all combined to give him a new and premonitory impression of doomed majesty. The square light brown beard had gone and in its place was a square white beard, of the same trim proportions, which so totally transformed his appearance that, noticing that the second lieutenant whom I remembered now had five bands of braid on his sleeve, my first thought was to congratulate him, not on having been promoted colonel but on looking so well in the part of colonel, a disguise for which he seemed to have borrowed, together with the uniform, the lugubrious gravity of the senior officer that his father had been. But there was another guest whose face, in spite of the substitution of a white for a fair beard, had remained lively, smiling and boyish, so that the change of beard merely made him appear more rubicund and more pugnacious and enhanced the sparkle in his eye, giving to the still youthful man about town the inspired air of a prophet.

The transformations effected, in the women particularly, by white hair and by other new features, would not have held my attention so forcibly had they been merely changes of colour, which can be charming to behold; too often they were changes of personality, registered not by the eye but, disturbingly, by the mind. For to "recognise" someone, and, *a fortiori*, to learn someone's identity after having failed to recognise him, is to predicate two contradictory things of a single subject, it is to admit that what was here, the person whom one remembers, no longer exists, and also that what is now here is a person whom one did not know to exist; and to do this we have to apprehend a mystery almost as disturbing as that of death, of which it is, indeed, as it were the preface and the harbinger. I knew what these changes meant, I knew what they were the prelude to, and that is why the white hair of these women, along with all the other changes, profoundly disquieted me. I was told a name and I was dumbfounded to think that it could be used to describe both the fair-haired girl, the marvellous waltzer, whom I had known in the past, and the massive white-haired lady making her way through the room with elephantine tread. Along with a certain rosiness of complexion, the name was perhaps the only thing common to these two women, the girl in my memory and the lady at the Guermantes party, who were more unlike one another than an *ingénue* and a dowager in a play. To have succeeded in giving to the waltzer this huge body, in encumbering and retarding her movements by the adjustment of an invisible metronome, in substituting—with perhaps as sole common factor the cheeks, larger certainly now than in youth but already in those days blotched with red—for the feather-light fair girl this ventripotent old campaigner, it must have been necessary for life to accomplish a vaster work of dismantlement and reconstruction than is involved in the replacement of a steeple by a dome, and when one considered that this

work had been effected not with tractable inorganic matter but with living flesh which can only change imperceptibly, the overwhelming contrast between the apparition before me and the creature that I remembered pushed back the existence of the latter into a past that was more than remote, that was almost unimaginable. One was terrified, because it made one think of the vast periods which must have elapsed before such a revolution could be accomplished in the geology of a face, to see what erosions had taken place all the way along the nose, what huge alluvial deposits at the edge of the cheeks surrounded the whole face with their opaque and refractory masses. It was difficult to find a link between the two figures, past and present, to think of the two individuals as possessing the same name; for just as one has difficulty in thinking that a dead person was once alive or that a person who was alive is now dead, so one has difficulty, almost as great and of the same kind (for the extinction of youth, the destruction of a person full of energy and high spirits, is already a kind of annihilation), in conceiving that she who was once a girl is now an old woman when the juxtaposition of the two appearances, the old and the young, seems so totally to exclude the possibility of their belonging to the same person that alternately it is the old woman and then the girl and then again the old woman who seems to one to be a dream, so that one might well refuse to believe that *this* can ever have been *that*, that the material of *that* has not taken refuge elsewhere but has itself, thanks to the subtle manipulations of Time, turned into this, that it is the same matter incorporated in the same body, were it not for the evidence of the similar name and the corroborative testimony of friends, to which an appearance of verisimilitude is given only by the pink upon the cheeks, once a small patch surrounded by the golden corn of fair hair, now a broad expanse beneath the snow.

And often these fair-haired dancers had acquired, along with a wig of white hair, the friendship of duchesses whom in the past they had not known. Nor was this all: having in their youth done nothing but dance, they had been "touched" by art as once a noble lady might have been touched by grace. And as the seventeenth-century lady, when this happened, withdrew into a life of religion, so now her descendant lived in an apartment filled with cubist paintings, a cubist painter worked for her alone and she lived only for him.

As in a snowy landscape, the degree of whiteness attained by a person's hair seemed in general to be an indication of the depth of time through which he or she had lived, just as in a range of mountains the higher peaks, even though they appear to the eye to be on the same level as the rest, nevertheless reveal their greater altitude by the intensity of their snowy whiteness. But there were exceptions to this rule, particularly among the women. Thus the tresses of the Princesse de Guermantes, which, when they were grey and had the lustre of silk, seemed to surround her bulging temples with silver, having in the process of turning white acquired the mattness of wool or tow, seemed now on the contrary, for that reason, to be grey, like snow which has become dirty and lost its brilliance.

Some of the old men whose features had changed tried nevertheless to preserve, fixed upon them in a state of permanency, one of those fugitive expressions which one assumes for a second when posing for a photograph, either in order to show off some good point in one's appearance to the best effect or to conceal a deformity; they seemed to have become, once and for all, snapshots of themselves insusceptible of change.

All these people had taken so much time putting on their disguises that generally these passed unobserved by the men and women who saw them every day. Often they had even been granted a reprieve, thanks to which up to a very late hour they were able to remain themselves. But in these cases the disguise, when it finally came, was assumed more rapidly; for disguise, one way or another, was unavoidable. Mme X—, for instance, had never seemed to me to bear any resemblance to her mother, whom I had known only as an old woman, looking like a little hunched Turk. The daughter, on the other hand, I had always known as a charming woman with an upright carriage, and this for many years she had continued to be, for too many years, in fact, for like someone who must not forget, before night falls, to put on his Turkish disguise, she had left things late and had then been obliged precipitately, almost instantaneously, to hunch herself up so as faithfully to reproduce the appearance of an old Turkish woman that had once been presented by her mother.

Someone offered to re-introduce me to a friend of my youth, whom for ten years I had seen almost every day. As I went up to him he said, in a voice which I recognised very well: "How delightful to see you again after all these years!" But if he was delighted, I was astonished. The familiar voice seemed to be emitted by a gramophone more perfect than any I had ever heard, for, though it was the voice of my friend, it issued from the mouth of a corpulent gentleman with greying hair whom I did not know, and I could only suppose that somehow artificially, by a mechanical device, the voice of my old comrade had been lodged in the frame of this stout elderly man who might have been anybody. And yet I knew that this was my friend; the man who had re-introduced us after all these years was not someone one could suspect of playing a practical joke. My friend himself declared that I had not changed, and I realised that in his own eyes he had not changed. I looked at him more closely. And in fact, except that he had grown so much stouter, he had preserved many features of his former self. And yet I could not take it in that it was he. Then I made an effort to remember. In his youth he had had blue eyes, always laughing and perpetually mobile, in search evidently of something the nature of which I had not asked myself, but something no doubt entirely disinterested, Truth perhaps, pursued in perpetual uncertainty, with a sort of boyish irresponsibility and yet with a wavering respect for all the friends of his family. And now that he had become an important politician, able and masterful, his blue eyes, which in any case had not found what they were seeking, had lost their mobility, and this gave them a look of narrow concentration, as though the brow above them were constantly frowning. His expression was no longer one of gaiety, innocence and spontaneity but of guile and dissimulation. Decidedly, I thought, this must be somebody else, but then suddenly I heard, evoked by something that I had said, his laugh, his old loud, unforced laugh, the one that went with the perpetual gay mobility of his glance. Experienced concert-goers

find that orchestrated by X—the music of Z—becomes absolutely different, a somewhat subtle distinction which the ignorant public does not comprehend—but to hear the wild, choking laugh of a boy emerge from beneath a look which was as pointed as a well-sharpened blue pencil though set slightly crooked in the face, was more than a mere difference of orchestration. He stopped laughing; I should have liked to recognise my friend, but, like Ulysses in the *Odyssey* when he rushes forward to embrace his dead mother, like the spiritualist who tries in vain to elicit from a ghost an answer which will reveal its identity, like the visitor at an exhibition of electricity who cannot believe that the voice which the gramophone restores unaltered to life is not a voice spontaneously emitted by a human being, I was obliged to give up the attempt.

Nobody was exempt from change, but I had to qualify this statement with the observation that for certain people the tempo of Time itself may be accelerated or retarded. By chance I had met in the street, some four or five years earlier, the Vicomtesse de Saint-Fiacre (the daughter-in-law of the one who had been a friend of the Guermantes). Her sculptural features seemed to assure her of eternal youth, and indeed she was still young. But I was quite unable to recognise her now, in spite of her smiles and her greetings, in the lady before me whose features were so eroded that the original lines of her face could no longer be restored. For three years she had been taking cocaine and other drugs. Her eyes, deeply ringed with black, were almost frantic, and her mouth opened in a ghastly grin. She spent months on end now, I was told, without leaving her bed or her *chaise longue*, and had got up just for this party. Time has, it seems, special express trains which bring their passengers swiftly to a premature old age. But on the parallel track trains almost as rapid may be moving in the opposite direction. I took M. de Courgivaux for his son, for he looked the younger of the two—though he must have been more than fifty, he seemed younger than he had when he was thirty. He had found an intelligent doctor and given up alcohol and salt, and the result was that he had returned to his early thirties and on this particular day looked even younger still, for the reason that, that very morning, he had had his hair cut.

A curious thing was that the phenomenon of old age seemed, in its different modes, to take into account particular social habits. Thus certain great noblemen, who had always worn the plainest alpaca cloth and on their heads old straw hats which a man of the lower middle class would have refused to put on, had aged in the same fashion as the gardeners and the peasants in whose society they had spent their lives. Patches of brown had begun to spread over their cheeks and their faces had turned yellower and darker like the pages of an old book.

I thought also of all those who were not at the party because they were too weak or too ill to be there, those whom their secretary, seeking to give the illusion of their survival, had excused by one of those telegrams which from time to time were handed to the Princess, those invalids, moribund for years, who no longer leave their beds, no longer move, and even in the midst of the frivolous attentions of visitors, drawn to them by the curiosity of a tourist or the pious hopes of a pilgrim, with their eyes closed and their rosaries clutched in hands which feebly push back the sheet that is already a mortuary shroud, are like monumental figures, carved by illness until the skeleton is barely covered by a flesh which is white and rigid as marble, lying stretched upon a tomb.

There were men in the room whom I knew to be related to each other without it ever having crossed my mind that they had a feature in common. In admiring, for instance, the old hermit with white hair who was Legrandin in a new guise, I suddenly observed, with the satisfaction almost of a zoologist when he makes a scientific discovery, in the transitions between the planes of his cheeks the same construction as in the cheeks of his young nephew, Léonor de Cambremer, who appeared nevertheless to bear no resemblance to him; and to this first common feature I added another which I had never yet noticed in Léonor de Cambremer, and then again others, none of which was included in the youthful synthesis of the nephew which habitually presented itself to me, until soon I had of him a caricature which was truer and more profound for not being a literal representation: his uncle now seemed to me simply a young Cambremer who to amuse himself had assumed the countenance of the old man that he would in fact one day be, so that now it was not merely what had become of the young men of my own youth but what would one day become of those of today that impressed upon me with such force the sensation of Time.

The women sought to remain in contact with whatever had been most individual in their charm, but often the new matter of their face no longer lent itself to this purpose. Those features upon which had been engraved, if not their youth, at least their beauty, had disappeared, and they had endeavoured, with the face that remained to them, to construct a new beauty for themselves. Displacing, if not the centre of gravity, at least the central point of the perspective of their face, and grouping their features around it in a new pattern, they began at the age of fifty to display a beauty of a new type, in the same way that late in life a man may embark on a new profession or a piece of ground which has become useless as a vineyard may be turned over to the production of sugar beet. And in the midst of these new features a second youth was made to bloom. The only women who failed to adjust themselves to this kind of transformation were the ones who were either too beautiful or too ugly. The former were like some block of marble, the lines in which, once it has been carved, are final and admit of no change; ageing, they merely crumbled away like a statue. The others, those who had some deformity of face, actually had certain advantages over the beautiful women. In the first place they were the only women whom one instantly recognised. One knew, for example, that in the whole of Paris there could only be one mouth like *that*, so that at this party, where I failed to recognise almost everybody, I could at least put a name to the possessor of the mouth. And then they did not even appear to have aged. Old age is something human; these were monsters, and they no more seemed to have “changed” than whales.



Others too, both men and women, seemed not to have aged; their figures were just as slim, their faces as young. But if, to speak to them, one approached rather near to the face with the smooth skin and the delicate contours it then appeared quite different, like the surface of a plant or a drop of water or blood when you look at it under a microscope. At close quarters I could distinguish numerous greasy patches on the skin which I had supposed to be smooth and which now, because of these marks, I found repulsive. Nor could the lines of the face stand up to this magnification. That of the nose was seen now to be broken and rounded, its regularity marred by the same oily patches as the rest of the face; and the eyes at short range retreated behind pockets of flesh which destroyed the resemblance of the person before me to the one whom I had known in the past and thought that I had met again. So that these particular guests were young when seen at a distance but their age increased with the enlargement of the face and the possibility of studying its different planes; it was dependent upon the spectator, who to see them as young had to place himself correctly and to view them only with that distant inspection which diminishes its object like the lens selected by an oculist for a long-sighted elderly person; old age here, like the presence of infusoria in a drop of water, was made apparent not so much by the advance of the years as by a greater degree of accuracy in the scale of the observer's vision.

Some women no doubt were still easily recognisable: their faces had remained almost the same and they had merely, out of propriety and in harmony with the season, put on the grey hair which was their autumn attire. But there were others, and there were men too, whose metamorphosis was so complete, their identity so impossible to establish—that old monk, for instance, in a corner of the room and the notorious rake whom one remembered, were they the same person?—that it was of the art not so much of the actor as of certain prodigiously gifted mimes, of whom the supreme example is Fregoli, that these fabulous transformations reminded one. The old woman whose charm had resided in her indefinable and melancholy smile would have liked to weep, at first, when she realised that this smile could no longer break through with its radiance to the surface of the plaster mask with which age had covered her face. Then suddenly, weary of trying to please and finding it more intelligent, more amusing to resign herself to the inevitable, she had started to use it like a mask in the theatre, as a way of making people laugh. But with few exceptions the women strained every nerve in a ceaseless struggle against old age and held out the mirror of their features towards beauty, as it receded, as to a setting sun whose last rays they longed passionately to preserve. To achieve this end some of them tried to plane away all the irregularities of their face, to enlarge its smooth, white surface, renouncing the piquancy of dimples that had not long to live, the archness of a smile condemned and already half disarmed, while others, seeing that beauty had vanished beyond recall and taking refuge perforce in expression, like an actress whose skill in the art of diction makes up for the loss of her voice, clung desperately to a pout, to a pretty crow's-foot, to a dreamy glance, to a smile sometimes which, because of the incoordination of muscles that no longer obeyed the brain, made them look as though they were in tears.

Even in the case of the men who had changed very little—those, for instance, whose moustaches had merely turned white—one felt that the changes were not strictly speaking material. One might have been looking at these men through a vapour which imparted its own colour to them, or through a tinted optical glass which altered the appearance of their faces and above all, by making them slightly blurred, showed one that what it enabled us to see “life-size” was in reality a long way away, separated from us, it is true, by a distance other than spatial but from the depths of which, nevertheless, as from a further shore, we felt that they had as much difficulty in recognising us as we them. Only perhaps Mme de Forcheville, as though she had been injected with some liquid, some sort of paraffin with the property of inflating the skin but protecting it from change, might have been an old-fashioned cocotte “stuffed” for the benefit of posterity. Setting out from the idea that people have remained unchanged, one finds them old. But once one starts with the idea that they are old, meeting them again one does not think that they look too bad. In the case of Odette one could say much more than this; her appearance, once one knew her age and expected to see an old woman, seemed a defiance of the laws of chronology, more miraculous even than the defiance of the laws of nature by the conservation of radium. If I failed at first to recognise her, this was, uniquely, not because she had but because she had not changed. I had learnt in the last hour to take into account the new items that are added to people by Time and that had to be subtracted by me if I wanted to find my friends again as I had known them in the past, and I now rapidly made this calculation, adding to the former Odette the number of years which had passed over her; but the result at which I arrived was a person who could not, it seemed, be the one before me, precisely because she, the woman at the party, was so like the Odette of old days. In part, of course, this effect was achieved by rouge and dye. Beneath her flat golden hair—a little like the ruffled chignon of a big mechanical doll, above a face with a fixed expression of surprise which might also have belonged to a doll—on top of which rested a straw hat that was also flat, she might well have been “The Exhibition of 1878” (of which she would without a doubt, above all had she then been as old as she was today, have been the most fantastic marvel) coming forward on to the stage to speak her two lines in a New Year revue, but the Exhibition of 1878 played by an actress who was still young.

Another figure from the same period, who had been a minister before the era of Boulangism and was now in the government again, passed beside us, wafting to the ladies a tremulous and remote smile, but with the air of being imprisoned in a thousand chains of the past, like a little phantom paraded up and down by an invisible hand or—diminished in stature and altered in substance—a reduced version of himself in pumice stone. This former Prime Minister, now so well received in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, had at one time been the object of criminal proceedings, and had been execrated both by society and by the people. But thanks to the renewal of the individuals who compose these two bodies and to the renewal, within the surviving individuals, of passions and even of memories, nobody now knew this and he was held in high honour. For

the fact is that there is no humiliation so great that one should not accept it with unconcern, knowing that at the end of a few years our misdeeds will be no more than an invisible dust buried beneath the smiling and blooming peace of nature. The man whose reputation is momentarily under a cloud will soon find himself, thanks to the balancing mechanism of Time, caught and held between two new social levels which will have for him nothing but deference and admiration. But Time alone will achieve this result and at the moment of his downfall nothing can console him for the fact that the young dairy-maid across the street heard the crowd shout "Bribery and corruption!" at him and saw them shake their fists as he climbed into the Black Maria—for the dairy-maid does not see things in the perspective of Time and does not know that the men who receive the incense of praise from this morning's newspapers were yesterday in disgrace and that the fallen politician, who at this moment feels the shadow of prison bars upon him and yet perhaps, as he thinks of the dairy-maid, cannot find within himself the humble words which might win her sympathy, will one day be extolled by the press and sought after by duchesses. And Time in the same way makes family quarrels recede into the distance. At the Princesse de Guermantes's party, for instance, there was a couple, husband and wife, who were respectively nephew and niece of two men, now dead, who had once come to blows and—worse still—one of them, still further to humiliate the other, had sent him as seconds his concierge and his butler, indicating that in his judgment gentlemen would have been too good for him. But these stories slumbered in the pages of the newspapers of thirty years ago and nobody now remembered them. And thus the drawing-room of the Princesse de Guermantes—illuminated, oblivious, flowery—was like a peaceful cemetery. Time in this room had done more than decompose the living creatures of a former age, it had rendered possible, had created new associations.

To return to the politician, in spite of his change of physical substance, just as profound as the transformation of the moral ideas which his name now connoted to the public, in spite (to say the same thing more simply) of the lapse of so many years since he had been Prime Minister, he was once again a member of the Cabinet, whose leader had given him a portfolio in the recent re-shuffle rather in the way that a theatrical producer gives a part to an old actress friend long since retired, whom he judges nevertheless to be, even now, better able to interpret a part with subtlety than any of her younger successors and whom he knows, also, to be in financial straits, and who in the event, at the age of nearly eighty, exhibits once more to the public almost the fullness of her talent, with that continued vitality which one is later astonished to have observed up to the very threshold of death.

But if the politician was extraordinary, Mme de Forcheville was so miraculous that one could not even say that she had grown young again—it was more as though, with all her carmines and her russets, she had bloomed for a second time. Even more than the embodiment of the Universal Exhibition of 1878, she might have been the principal rarity and attraction of a flower show of today. And indeed, for me she seemed to say, not so much: "I am the Exhibition of 1878" as: "I am the Allée des Acacias of 1892." That was where, it seemed, she still might have been. And just because she had not changed she seemed scarcely to be alive. She looked like a rose that has been sterilised. I greeted her and her eyes travelled for a while over my face, searching for my name as a schoolboy searches on the face of his examiner for the answer that he might more easily have found in his own head. Then I told her who I was and at once, as though the sound of my name had broken a spell and I had lost the look of an arbutus tree or a kangaroo which age no doubt had given me, she recognised me and started to talk to me in that strangely individual voice which people who had admired her acting in some little theatre were astonished, when they were invited to meet her at a luncheon party, to find again, throughout the whole conversation, for as long as they cared to listen, in each one of her remarks. It was a voice that had not changed, exaggeratedly warm, caressing, with a trace of an English accent. And yet, just as her eyes appeared to be looking at me from a distant shore, her voice was sad, almost suppliant, like the voice of the shades in the *Odyssey*. Odette would still have been able to act. I complimented her on her youthfulness. "How nice of you, *my dear*," she said, "thank you," and, as it was difficult for her to express a sentiment, even the most sincere, in a manner that was not rendered artificial by her anxiety to be what she supposed was smart, she repeated several times: "Thank you so much, thank you so much." I meanwhile, who had once walked miles to see her pass in the Bois, who the first time that I had visited her house had listened to the sound of her voice as it fell from her lips as though it were some priceless treasure, now found the minutes that I was obliged to pass in her company interminable simply because I did not know what on earth to say to her, and I withdrew, thinking to myself that not only had Gilberte's remark, "You take me for my mother" been true<sup>9</sup> but that the likeness could only be flattering to the daughter.

Gilberte, for that matter, was by no means the only guest at the party in whom family features had become apparent which hitherto had remained as invisible in their faces as the coiled and hidden parts of a seed which one day will burst out into growth in a manner that it is impossible to foresee. Thus, in this woman or that man, at about the age of fifty an enormous maternal hook had arrived to transform a nose which until then had been straight and pure. And the complexion of another woman, a banker's daughter, from being as fresh as that of a milkmaid grew first russet and then coppery and finally assumed as it were a reflexion of the gold which her father had so lovingly handled. Some people had even in the end come to resemble the district in which they lived, bearing on their faces a sort of replica of the Rue de l'Arcade or the Avenue du Bois or the Rue de l'Elysée. But most commonly they reproduced the features of their parents.

Alas, Mme de Forcheville's second flowering was not to last for ever. Less than three years later I was to see her at an evening party given by Gilberte, not quite in her dotage but showing signs of senility and grown incapable of concealing beneath a mask of immobility what she was thinking, or rather (for thinking is too elevated a term) what she was passively experiencing, nodding her head, compressing her lips, shaking her

shoulders in response to every impression that she felt, like a drunkard or a small child or those poets who, unaware of their surroundings and seized by inspiration, compose verses in the midst of a social occasion and frown and pout as they proceed to the dinner-table with an astonished lady on their arm. The impressions of Mme de Forcheville—except that single sentiment which was the cause of her presence at the party: her tender affection for her beloved daughter and her pride that she should be giving so brilliant a party, a pride which, in the mother, could not disguise the melancholy of being herself now nothing—these impressions were not joyful, their message was merely that she must not relax her defence against the snubs which were showered upon her, a defence, however, as timorous as that of a child. On all sides one heard people say: “I don’t know whether Mme de Forcheville recognises me, perhaps I ought to get someone to introduce me to her again.” “You may as well spare yourself the trouble,” a booming voice would reply, its owner not suspecting that Gilberte’s mother could hear every word—or perhaps not caring if she could. “It’s quite unnecessary. You wouldn’t find her at all amusing! She’s best left alone in her corner. She’s a bit gaga, you know.” Furtively Mme de Forcheville shot a glance from her eyes which had remained so beautiful at the authors of these offensive remarks, then swiftly withdrew it for fear of having been rude, but was distressed nevertheless by the insult, and though she smothered her feeble indignation one saw her head shake and her breast heave until presently another glance was shot at another guest who had expressed himself just as discourteously—yet nothing of all this seemed to surprise her very much, for having felt extremely unwell for several days, she had covertly suggested to her daughter that she should put off her party, but her daughter had refused. Mme de Forcheville did not love her any the less: the sight of all the duchesses entering the room, the admiration of all the guests for the large new house, flooded her heart with joy, and when finally the Marquise de Sabran was announced, who was at that moment the lady at whom one arrived after laboriously ascending the topmost rungs of the social ladder, Mme de Forcheville felt that she had been a good and far-sighted mother and that her maternal task was accomplished. New guests arrived to titter at her and again she shot her glances and spoke to herself, if a mute language expressed only in gesture can be described as speech. Beautiful still, she had become—what she had never been in the past—infinately pathetic; she who had been unfaithful to Swann and to everybody found now that the entire universe was unfaithful to her, and so weak had she become that, the roles being reversed, she no longer dared to defend herself even against men. And soon she would not defend herself even against death. But we have anticipated, and let us now go back three years, to the afternoon party which is being given by the Princesse de Guermantes.

I had difficulty in recognising my friend Bloch, who was now in fact no longer Bloch since he had adopted, not merely as a pseudonym but as a name, the style of Jacques du Rozier, beneath which it would have needed my grandfather’s flair to detect the “sweet vale of Hebron” and those “chains of Israel” which my old schoolmate seemed definitively to have broken. Indeed an English chic had completely transformed his appearance and smoothed away, as with a plane, everything in it that was susceptible of such treatment. The once curly hair, now brushed flat, with a parting in the middle, glistened with brilliantine. His nose remained large and red, but seemed now to owe its tumescence to a sort of permanent cold which served also to explain the nasal intonation with which he languidly delivered his studied sentences, for just as he had found a way of doing his hair which suited his complexion, so he had found a voice which suited his pronunciation and which gave to his old nasal twang the air of a disdainful refusal to articulate that was in keeping with his inflamed nostrils. And thanks to the way in which he brushed his hair, to the suppression of his moustache, to the elegance of his whole figure—thanks, that is to say, to his determination—his Jewish nose was now scarcely more visible than is the deformity of a hunchbacked woman who skilfully arranges her appearance. But above all—and one saw this the moment one set eyes on him—the significance of his physiognomy had been altered by a formidable monocle. By introducing an element of machinery into Bloch’s face this monocle absolved it of all those difficult duties which a human face is normally called upon to discharge, such as being beautiful or expressing intelligence or kindness or effort. The monocle’s mere presence even absolved an interlocutor, in the first place, from asking himself whether the face was pleasant to look at or not, just as, when a shop-assistant has told you that some object imported from England is “the last word in chic,” you no longer dare to ask yourself whether you really like it. In any case, behind the lens of this monocle Bloch was now installed in a position as lofty, as remote and as comfortable as if it had been the glass partition of a limousine and, so that his face should match the smooth hair and the monocle, his features never now expressed anything at all.

Bloch asked me to introduce him to the Prince de Guermantes, and this operation raised for me not a shadow of those difficulties which I had come up against on the day when I went to an evening party at his house for the first time, difficulties which had then seemed to me a part of the natural order, whereas now I found it the simplest thing in the world to introduce to the Prince a guest whom he had invited himself and I should even have ventured, without warning, to bring to his party and introduce to him someone whom he had not invited. Was this because, since that distant era, I had become an intimate member, though for a long time now a forgotten one, of that fashionable world in which I had then been so new? Was it, on the contrary, because I did not really belong to that world, so that all the imaginary difficulties which beset people in society no longer existed for me once my shyness had vanished? Was it because, having gradually come to see what lay behind the first (and often the second and even the third) artificial appearance of others, I sensed behind the haughty disdain of the Prince a great human avidity to know people, to make the acquaintance even of those whom he affected to despise? Was it also because the Prince himself had changed, like so many men in whom the arrogance of their youth and of their middle years is tempered by the gentleness of old age—particularly as the new men and the unknown ideas whose progress they had once resisted are now familiar

to them, at least by sight, and they see that they are accepted all round them in society—a change which takes place more effectually if old age is assisted in its task by some good quality or some vice in the individual which enlarges the circle of his acquaintance, or by the revolution wrought by a political conversion such as that of the Prince to Dreyfusism?

Bloch started to question me, as years ago, when I first began to go to parties, I had questioned others—a habit which I had not quite lost—about the people whom I had known in society in the old days and who were as remote, as unlike anybody else, as those inhabitants of the world of Combray whom I had often sought to “place” exactly. But Combray for me had a shape so distinctive, so impossible to confuse with anything else, that it might have been a piece of a jigsaw puzzle which I could never succeed in fitting into the map of France. “So the Prince de Guermantes can give me no idea either of Swann or of M. de Charlus?” asked Bloch, whose manner of speaking I had borrowed long ago and who now frequently imitated mine. “None at all.” “But what was so different about them?” “To know that, you would have had to hear them talk yourself. But that is impossible. Swann is dead and M. de Charlus is as good as dead. But the differences were enormous.” And seeing Bloch’s eyes shine at the thought of what these marvellous personages must have been, I wondered whether I was not exaggerating the pleasure which I had got from their company, since pleasure was something that I had never felt except when I was alone and the real differentiation of impressions takes place only in our imagination. Bloch seemed to guess what I was thinking. “Perhaps you make it out to be more wonderful than it really was,” he said; “our hostess today, for instance, the Princesse de Guermantes, I know she is no longer young, still it is not so many years since you were telling me about her incomparable charm, her marvellous beauty. Well, I grant you she has a certain splendour, and she certainly has those extraordinary eyes you used to talk about, but I can’t say I find her so fantastically beautiful. Of course, one sees that she is a real aristocrat, but still ...” I was obliged to tell Bloch that the woman I had described to him was not the one he was talking about. The Princesse de Guermantes had died and the present wife of the Prince, who had been ruined by the collapse of Germany, was the former Mme Verdurin. “That can’t be right, I looked in this year’s *Gotha*,” Bloch naïvely confessed to me, “and I found the Prince de Guermantes, living at this address where we are now and married to someone of the utmost grandeur, let me try to remember, yes, married to Sidonie, Duchesse de Duras, *née* des Baux.” This was correct. Mme Verdurin, shortly after the death of her husband, had married the aged and impoverished Duc de Duras, who had made her a cousin of the Prince de Guermantes and had died after two years of marriage. He had served as a useful transition for Mme Verdurin, who now, by a third marriage, had become Princesse de Guermantes and occupied in the Faubourg Saint-Germain a lofty position which would have caused much astonishment at Combray, where the ladies of the Rue de l’Oiseau, Mme Goupil’s daughter and Mme Sazerat’s step-daughter, had during these last years, before she married for the third time, spoken with a sneer of “the Duchesse de Duras” as though this were a role which had been allotted to Mme Verdurin in a play. In fact, the Combray principle of caste requiring that she should die, as she had lived, as Mme Verdurin, her title, which was not deemed to confer upon her any new power in society, did not so much enhance as damage her reputation. For “to make tongues wag,” that phrase which in every sphere of life is applied to a woman who has a lover, could be used also in the Faubourg Saint-Germain of women who write books and in the respectable society of Combray of those who make marriages which, for better or for worse, are “unsuitable.” After the twice-widowed lady had married the Prince de Guermantes, the only possible comment was that he was a false Guermantes, an impostor. For me, in this purely nominal identity, in the fact that there was once again a Princesse de Guermantes and that she had absolutely nothing in common with the one who had cast her spell upon me, who now no longer existed and had been robbed of name and title like a defenceless woman of her jewels, there was something as profoundly sad as in seeing the material objects which the Princess Hedwige had once possessed—her country house and everything that had been hers—pass into the possession and enjoyment of another woman. The succession of a new individual to a name is melancholy, as is all succession, all usurpation of property; and yet for ever and ever, without interruption, there would come, sweeping on, a flood of new Princesses de Guermantes—or rather, centuries old, replaced from age to age by a series of different women, of different actresses playing the same part and then each in her turn sinking from sight beneath the unvarying and immemorial placidity of the name, one single Princesse de Guermantes, ignorant of death and indifferent to all that changes and wounds our mortal hearts.

Of course, even these external changes in the figures whom I had known were no more than symbols of an internal change which had been effected day by day. Perhaps these people had continued to perform the same actions, but gradually the idea which they entertained both of their own activities and of their acquaintances had slightly altered its shape, so that at the end of a few years, though the names were unchanged, the activities that they enjoyed and the people whom they loved had become different and, as they themselves had become different individuals, it was hardly surprising that they should have new faces.

But there were also guests whom I failed to recognise for the reason that I had never known them, for in this drawing-room, as well as upon individuals the chemistry of Time had been at work upon society. This coterie, within the specific nature of which, delimited as it was by certain affinities that attracted to it all the great princely names of Europe and by forces of an opposite kind which repelled from it anything that was not aristocratic, I had found, I thought, a sort of corporeal refuge for the name of Guermantes, this coterie, which had seemed to confer upon that name its ultimate reality, had itself, in its innermost and as I had thought stable constitution, undergone a profound transformation. The presence of people whom I had seen in quite different social settings and whom I would never have expected to penetrate into this one, astonished me less than the intimate familiarity with which they were now received in it, on Christian name terms; a certain

complex of aristocratic prejudices, of snobbery, which in the past automatically maintained a barrier between the name of Guermantes and all that did not harmonise with it, had ceased to function. Enfeebled or broken, the springs of the machine could no longer perform their task of keeping out the crowd; a thousand alien elements made their way in and all homogeneity, all consistency of form and colour was lost. The Faubourg Saint-Germain was like some senile dowager now, who replies only with timid smiles to the insolent servants who invade her drawing-rooms, drink her orangeade, present their mistresses to her. However, the sensation of time having slipped away and of the annihilation of a small part of my own past was conveyed to me less vividly by the destruction of that coherent whole which the Guermantes drawing-room had once been than by the annihilation of even the knowledge of the thousand reasons, the thousand subtle distinctions thanks to which one man who was still to be found in that drawing-room today was clearly in his natural and proper place there while another, who rubbed shoulders with him, wore in these surroundings an aspect of dubious novelty. And this ignorance was not merely ignorance of society, but of politics, of everything. For memory was of shorter duration in individuals than life, and besides, the very young, who had never possessed the recollections which had vanished from the minds of their elders, now formed part of society (and with perfect legitimacy, even in the genealogical sense of the word), and the origins of the people whom they saw there being forgotten or unknown, they accepted them at the particular point of their elevation or their fall at which they found them, supposing that things had always been as they were today, that the social position of Mme Swann and the Princesse de Guermantes and Bloch had always been very great, that Clemenceau and Viviani had always been conservatives. And as certain facts have a greater power of survival than others, the detested memory of the Dreyfus case persisting vaguely in these young people thanks to what they had heard their fathers say, if one told them that Clemenceau had been a Dreyfusard, they replied: "Impossible, you are making a confusion, he is absolutely on the other side of the fence." Ministers with a tarnished reputation and women who had started life as prostitutes were now held to be paragons of virtue. (Among the guests was a distinguished man who had recently, in a famous lawsuit, made a deposition of which the sole value resided in the lofty moral character of the witness, in the face of which both judge and counsel had bowed their heads, with the result that two people had been convicted. Consequently, when he entered the room there was a stir of curiosity and of deference. This man was Morel. I was perhaps the only person present who knew that he had once been kept by Saint-Loup and at the same time by a friend of Saint-Loup. In spite of these recollections he greeted me with pleasure, though with a certain reserve. He remembered the time when we had seen each other at Balbec, and these recollections had for him the poetry and the melancholy of youth.) Someone having inquired of a young man of the best possible family whether Gilberte's mother had not formerly been the subject of scandal, the young nobleman replied that it was true that in the earlier part of her life she had been married to an adventurer of the name of Swann, but that subsequently she had married one of the most prominent men in society, the Comte de Forcheville. No doubt there were still a few people in the room—the Duchesse de Guermantes was one—who would have smiled at this assertion (which, in its denial of Swann's position as a man of fashion, seemed to me monstrous, although I myself, long ago at Combray, had shared my great-aunt's belief that Swann could not be acquainted with "princesses"), and others also not in the room, women who might have been there had they not almost ceased to leave their homes, the Duchesses of Montmorency and Mouchy and Sagan, who had been close friends of Swann and had never set eyes on this man Forcheville, who was not received in society at the time when they went to parties. But it could not be denied that the society of those days, like the faces now drastically altered and the fair hair replaced by white, existed now only in the memories of individuals whose number was diminishing day by day. During the war Bloch had given up going out socially, had ceased to visit the houses which he had once frequented and where he had cut anything but a brilliant figure. On the other hand, he had published a whole series of works full of those absurd sophistical arguments which, so as not to be inhibited by them myself, I was struggling to demolish today, works without originality but which gave to young men and to many society women the impression of a rare and lofty intellect, a sort of genius. And so it was after a complete break between his earlier social existence and this later one that he had, in a society itself reconstituted, embarked upon a new phase of his life, honoured and glorious, in which he played the role of a great man. Young people naturally did not know that at his somewhat advanced age he was in fact making his first appearance on the social scene, particularly as, by sprinkling his conversation with the few names which he had retained from his acquaintance with Saint-Loup, he was able to impart to his prestige of the moment a sort of indefinite recession in depth. In any case he was regarded as one of those men of talent who in every epoch have flourished in the highest society, and nobody thought that he had ever frequented any other.

Survivors of the older generation assured me that society had completely changed and now opened its doors to people who in their day would never have been received, and this comment was both true and untrue. On the one hand it was untrue, because those who made it failed to take into account the curve of time which caused the society of the present to see these newly received people at their point of arrival, whilst they, the older generation, remembered them at their point of departure. And this was nothing new, for in the same way, when they themselves had first entered society, there were people in it who had just arrived and whose lowly origins others remembered. In society as it exists today a single generation suffices for the change which formerly over a period of centuries transformed a middle-class name like Colbert into an aristocratic one. And yet, from another point of view there was a certain truth in the comments; for, if the social position of individuals is liable to change (like the fortunes and the alliances and the hatreds of nations), so too are the most deeply rooted ideas and customs and among them even the idea that you cannot receive anybody who is not chic. Not only does snobbishness change in form, it might one day altogether disappear—like war itself—

and radicals and Jews might become members of the Jockey. Some people, who in my own early days in society, giving grand dinner-parties with only such guests as the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Parme, and themselves being entertained by these ladies with every show of respect, had been regarded, perhaps correctly, as among the most unimpeachable social figures of the time, yet they had passed away without leaving any trace behind them. Possibly they were foreign diplomats, formerly *en poste* in Paris and now returned to their own countries. Perhaps a scandal, a suicide, an elopement had made it impossible for them to reappear in society; perhaps they were merely Germans. But their name owed its lustre only to their own vanished social position and was no longer borne by anyone in the fashionable world: if I mentioned them nobody knew whom I was talking about, if I spelt out the name the general assumption was that they were some sort of adventurers. People, on the other hand, who according to the social code with which I had been familiar ought not to have been at this party, were now to my great astonishment on terms of close friendship with women of the very best families and the latter had only submitted to the boredom of appearing at the Princesse de Guermantes's party for the sake of these new friends. For the most characteristic feature of this new society was the prodigious ease with which individuals moved up or down the social scale.

If in the eyes of the younger generations the Duchesse de Guermantes seemed to be of little account because she was acquainted with actresses and such people, the elder, the now old ladies of her family, still considered her to be an extraordinary personage, partly because they knew and appreciated her birth, her heraldic pre-eminence, her intimate friendships with what Mme de Forcheville would have called *royalties*, but even more because she despised the parties given by the family and was bored at them and her cousins knew that they could never count upon her attendance. Her connexions with the theatrical and political worlds, in any case only vaguely known in the family, merely had the effect of enhancing her rarity and therefore her prestige. So that while in political and artistic society she was regarded as a creature whom it was hard to define, a sort of unfrocked priestess of the Faubourg Saint-Germain who consorted with Under-Secretaries of State and stars of the theatre, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain itself if one was giving an important evening party one would say: "Is it worth while even asking Oriane? She won't come. Perhaps one should, just for form's sake, but one knows what to expect." And if, at about half past ten, in a dazzling costume and with a hard glint in her eyes which bore witness to her contempt for all her female cousins, Oriane made her entrance, pausing first on the threshold with a sort of majestic disdain, and remained for a whole hour, this was even more of a treat for the old and noble lady who was giving the party than it would have been in the past for a theatrical manager who had obtained a vague promise from Sarah Bernhardt that she would contribute something to a programme, had the great actress, contrary to all expectation, turned up and recited, in the most unaffected and obliging way, not the piece which she had promised but twenty others. For although all the women there were among the smartest in Paris, the presence of this Oriane who was addressed in a condescending manner by Under-Secretaries and continued none the less ("intelligence governs the world") to try to make the acquaintance of more and more of them, had had the effect which nothing could have achieved without her, of placing the dowager's evening party in a class apart from and above all the other dowagers' evening parties of the same season (to use another of those English expressions of which Mme de Forcheville was so fond) which she, Oriane, had not taken the trouble to attend.

As soon as I had finished talking to the Prince de Guermantes, Bloch seized hold of me and introduced me to a young woman who had heard a lot about me from the Duchesse de Guermantes and who was one of the most fashionable women of the day. Not only was her name entirely unknown to me, but it appeared that those of the various branches of the Guermantes family could not be very familiar to her, for she inquired of an American woman how it was that Mme de Saint-Loup seemed to be on such intimate terms with all the most aristocratic people in the room. Now the American was married to the Comte de Farcy, an obscure cousin of the Forchevilles, for whom Forcheville was the grandest name in the world. So she replied ingeniously: "Well, isn't she a Forcheville by birth? And what could be grander than that?" But at least Mme de Farcy, though she naïvely believed the name of Forcheville to be superior to that of Saint-Loup, knew something about the latter. But to the charming lady who was a friend of Bloch and the Duchesse de Guermantes it was utterly unknown, and, being somewhat muddle-headed, she replied in all good faith to a young girl who asked her how Mme de Saint-Loup was related to their host, the Prince de Guermantes: "Through the Forchevilles," a piece of information which the girl passed on as if she had known it all her life to one of her friends, a bad-tempered and nervous girl, who turned as red as a turkeycock the first time a gentleman said to her that it was not through the Forchevilles that Gilberte was connected with the Guermantes, with the result that the gentleman supposed that he had made a mistake, adopted the erroneous explanation himself and lost no time in propagating it. For the American woman dinner-parties and fashionable entertainments were a sort of Berlitz School. She heard the names and she repeated them, without having first learnt their precise value and significance. To someone who asked whether Tansonville had come to Gilberte from her father M. de Forcheville I heard the explanation given that, on the contrary, it was a property in her husband's family, that Tansonville was a neighbouring estate to Guermantes and had belonged to Mme de Marsantes, that it had been heavily mortgaged and the mortgage paid off with Gilberte's dowry. And finally, a veteran of the old guard having exchanged memories with me of Swann, friend of the Sagans and the Mouchys, and Bloch's American friend having asked me how I had known Swann, the old man declared that this must have been in the house of Mme de Guermantes, not suspecting that what Swann represented for me was a country neighbour and a young friend of my grandfather. Mistakes of this kind have been made by the most distinguished men and are regarded as particularly serious in any society of a

conservative temper. Saint-Simon, wishing to show that Louis XIV was of an ignorance which “sometimes made him fall, in public, into the most gross absurdities,” gives of this ignorance only two examples, which are that the King, not knowing either that Renel belonged to the family of Clermont-Gallerande or that Saint-Herem belonged to that of Montmorin, treated these two men as though they were of low extraction. But at least, in so far as concerns Saint-Herem, we have the consolation of knowing that the King did not die in error, for “very late in life” he was disabused by M. de La Rochefoucauld. “Even then,” adds Saint-Simon with a touch of pity, “it was necessary to explain to him what these houses were, for their names conveyed nothing to him.”

This forgetfulness, which with its vigorous growth covers so rapidly even the most recent past, this encroaching ignorance, creates as its own counter-agent a minor species of erudition, all the more precious for being rare, which is concerned with genealogies, the true social position of people, the reasons of love or money or some other kind for which they have allied or misallied themselves in marriage with this family or that, an erudition which is highly prized in all societies where a conservative spirit rules, which my grandfather possessed in the highest degree with regard to the middle classes of Combray and of Paris and which Saint-Simon valued so highly that when he comes to celebrate the marvellous intelligence of the Prince de Conti, before speaking of the recognised branches of knowledge, or rather as though this were the first of them all, he praises him as “a man of a very fine mind, enlightened, just, exact, wide-ranging; vastly well read and of a retentive memory; skilled in genealogies, their chimeras and their realities; of a politeness variously accommodated to rank and merit, rendering all those courtesies that the princes of the blood owe but no longer render and even explaining why he acted as he did and how the other princes exceeded their rights. The knowledge which he had gained from books and from conversation afforded him material for the most obliging comments possible upon the birth, the offices, etc.” In a less exalted sphere, in all that pertained to the bourgeois society of Combray and Paris, my grandfather possessed this same knowledge with no less exactitude and savoured it with no less relish. The epicures, the connoisseurs who knew that Gilberte was not a Forcheville, that Mme de Cambremer had not been born a Méséglise nor her nephew’s young wife a Valentinois, were already reduced in number. Reduced in number and perhaps not even recruited from among the highest aristocracy (it is not necessarily among devout believers, or even among Catholics of any kind, that you will find those who are most learned on the subject of the *Golden Legend* or the stained glass of the thirteenth century), but often from a minor aristocracy, whose scions have a keener appetite for the high society which they themselves can seldom approach and which the little time that they spend in it leaves them all the more leisure to study. Still, they meet together from time to time and enjoy making each other’s acquaintance and giving succulent corporate dinners, like those of the Society of Bibliophiles or the Friends of Rheims, at which the items on the menu are genealogies. To these feasts wives are not admitted, but the husbands, when they get home, remark: “A most interesting dinner. There was a M. de La Raspelière there who kept us spell-bound with his explanation of how that Mme de Saint-Loup with the pretty daughter is not really a Forcheville at all. It was as good as a novel.”

The friend of Bloch and of the Duchesse de Guermantes was not only beautifully dressed and charming, she was also intelligent and conversation with her was agreeable, but for me rendered difficult by the novelty to my ears of the names not only of my interlocutress herself but also of most of the people she talked about, although they were the very people who formed the core of society today. The converse also was true: at her request I related various anecdotes of the past, and many of the names which I pronounced meant absolutely nothing to her, they had all sunk into oblivion (all those at least which had shone only with the individual brilliance of a single person and were not the surname, permanent and generic, of some famous aristocratic family, whose exact title even so the young woman seldom knew, having perhaps recently misheard a name at a dinner-party and proceeded to form quite wrong ideas about its pedigree) and she had for the most part never heard them mentioned, having, not merely because she was young but because she had not lived in France for long and when she first arrived had known nobody, only started to go into society some years after I myself had withdrawn from it. So that though for ordinary speech she and I used the same language, when it came to names our vocabularies had nothing in common. The name of Mme Leroi happened to fall from my lips, and by chance, thanks to some elderly admirer, himself an old friend of Mme de Guermantes, my interlocutress had heard of her. But only vaguely and inaccurately, as I saw from the contemptuous tone in which this snobbish young woman replied to me: “Yes, I know who you mean by Mme Leroi, an old friend of Bergotte’s, I believe,” a tone which barely concealed the comment: “a woman whom I should never have wished to have in my house.” I realised at once that the old friend of Mme de Guermantes, as a perfect man of the world imbued with the Guermantes spirit, one of the essential elements of which was not to appear to attach too much importance to aristocratic friendships, had thought it too stupid, too anti-Guermantes to say: “Mme Leroi, who was a friend of every Royalty and Duchess in Paris,” and had preferred to say: “She could be quite amusing. Let me tell you the retort she made to Bergotte one day.” But for people who are not already in the know information gleaned in this way from conversation is equivalent only to that which is doled out to the masses by the press and which makes them believe alternatively, depending upon the views of their newspaper, either that M. Loubet and M. Reinach are brigands or that they are great patriots. In the eyes of my interlocutress Mme Leroi had been something like Mme Verdurin as she was before her social transformation, but with less brilliance and with a little clan consisting of one member only, Bergotte. But at least this young woman, by pure chance, had heard the name of Mme Leroi, and she is one of the last of whom so much can be said. Today that name is utterly forgotten, nor is there any good reason why it should be remembered. It does not figure even in the index to the posthumous memoirs of Mme de Villeparisis, whose mind was so much occupied with the lady who bore it. And if the Marquise has omitted to mention Mme Leroi, this is less

because in her lifetime that lady had been less than friendly towards her than because, once she was dead, no one was likely to take any interest in her, it is a silence dictated less by the social resentment of a woman than by the literary tact of an author. My conversation with Bloch's fashionable friend was delightful, for she was an intelligent young woman; but this difference which I have described between our two vocabularies made it at the same time both awkward and instructive. For although we know that the years pass, that youth gives way to old age, that fortunes and thrones crumble (even the most solid among them) and that fame is transitory, the manner in which—by means of a sort of snapshot—we take cognisance of this moving universe whirled along by Time, has the contrary effect of immobilising it. And the result is that we see as always young the men and women whom we have known young, that those whom we have known old we retrospectively endow in the past with the virtues of old age, that we trust unreservedly in the credit of a millionaire and the influence of a reigning monarch, knowing with our reason, though we do not actually believe, that tomorrow both the one and the other may be fugitives stripped of all power. In a more restricted field, one that is purely social—as in a simpler problem which initiates a student into difficulties that are more complex but of the same order—the unintelligibility which, in my conversation with the young woman, resulted from the fact that the two of us had lived in the same world but with an interval of twenty-five years between us, gave me the impression, and might have strengthened within me the sense, of History.

And indeed this ignorance of people's true social position which every ten years causes the new fashionable elect to arise in all the glory of the moment as though the past had never existed, which makes it impossible for an American woman just landed in Europe to see that in an age when Bloch was nobody M. de Charlus was socially supreme in Paris and that Swann, who put himself out to please M. Bontemps, had himself been treated with every mark of friendship by the Prince of Wales, this ignorance, which exists not only in new arrivals but also in those who have always frequented adjacent but distinct regions of society, is itself also invariably an effect—but an effect operative not so much upon a whole social stratum as within individuals—of Time. No doubt we ourselves may change our social habitat and our manner of life and yet our memory, clinging still to the thread of our personal identity, will continue to attach to itself at successive epochs the recollection of the various societies in which, even if it be forty years earlier, we have lived. Bloch the guest of the Prince de Guermantes remembered perfectly well the humble Jewish environment in which he had lived at the age of eighteen, and Swann, when he was no longer in love with Mme Swann but with a waitress at that same Colombin's where at one time Mme Swann had thought it smart to go and drink tea (as she did also at the tea-room in the Rue Royale), Swann was very well aware of his own social value—he remembered Twickenham and had no doubt in his mind about the reasons for which he chose to go to Colombin's rather than to call on the Duchesse de Broglie, and he knew also that, had he been a thousand times less "smart" than he was, he would not have become the slightest bit smarter by frequenting Colombin's or the Ritz, since anybody can go to these places who pays. And no doubt the friends, too, of Bloch or of Swann remembered the little Jewish coterie or the invitations to Twickenham and thus, as though they, the friends, were other not very clearly defined "I's" of the two men, made no division in their memories between the fashionable Bloch of today and the sordid Bloch of the past, between the Swann who in his latter days could be seen at Colombin's and the Swann of Buckingham Palace. But these friends were to some extent Swann's neighbours in life, their own lives had developed along lines near enough to his own for their memories to be fairly full of him, whereas other men who were more remote from Swann—at a greater distance measured not perhaps socially but in terms of intimacy, which caused their knowledge of him to be vaguer and their meetings with him rarer—possessed of him recollections that were less numerous and in consequence conceptions that were less fixed. And after thirty years a comparative stranger of this kind no longer has any precise recollection with the power to change the value of the person whom he has before his eyes by prolonging him into the past. In the last years of Swann's life I had heard people, even people in society, say when his name was mentioned, as though this had been his title to fame: "You mean the Swann who goes to Colombin's?" And now, with reference to Bloch, even those who ought to have known better might be heard to inquire: "The Guermantes Bloch? The Bloch who is such a friend of the Guermantes?" These errors which split a life in two and, by isolating his present from his past, turn some man whom one is talking about into another, a different man, a creation of yesterday, a man who is no more than the condensation of his current habits (whereas the real man bears within himself an awareness, linking him to the past, of the continuity of his life), these errors, though they too, as I have said, are a result of the passage of Time, are not a social phenomenon but one of memory. And at that very moment I was presented with an example, of a different variety, it is true, but all the more impressive for that, of this forgetfulness which modifies for us our image of a human being. Long ago a young nephew of Mme de Guermantes, the Marquis de Villemandois, had behaved towards me with a persistent insolence which had obliged me to retaliate by adopting an equally insulting attitude towards him, so that tacitly we had become as it were enemies. This man, while I was engaged in my reflexions upon Time at the Princesse de Guermantes's party, asked someone to introduce him to me, saying that he thought that I had known some of his family, that he had read articles of mine and wanted to make, or re-make, my acquaintance. Now it is true to say that with age he had become, like many others, serious instead of rude and frivolous and that he had lost much of his former arrogance, and it is also true that I was a good deal talked about now, though on the strength of some very slight articles, in the circles which he frequented. But these motives for his cordiality, for his making advances to me, were only secondary. The principal motive, or at least the one which permitted the others to come into play, was that—either because he had a worse memory than I or because in the past, since I was then for him a much less important personage than he for me, he had paid less attention to my ripostes than I to his attacks—he had completely forgotten our feud. At most my



name recalled to him that he must have seen me, or some member of my family, in the house of one of his aunts. And being uncertain whether he was being introduced to me for the first time or whether we were old acquaintances, he made haste to talk to me about the aunt in whose house he was sure that we had met, remembering that my name had often been mentioned there and not remembering our quarrels. A name: that very often is all that remains for us of a human being, not only when he is dead, but sometimes even in his lifetime. And our notions about him are so vague or so bizarre and correspond so little to those that he has of us that we have entirely forgotten that we once nearly fought a duel with him but remember that, when he was a child, he used to wear curious yellow gaiters in the Champs-Élysées, where he, on the contrary, in spite of our assurances, has no recollection of ever having played with us.

Bloch had come bounding into the room like a hyena. "He is at home now," I thought, "in drawing-rooms into which twenty years ago he would never have been able to penetrate." But he was also twenty years older. He was nearer to death. What did this profit him? At close quarters, in the translucency of a face in which, at a greater distance or in a bad light, I saw only youthful gaiety (whether because it survived there or because I with my recollections evoked it), I could detect another face, almost frightening, racked with anxiety, the face of an old Shylock, waiting in the wings, with his make-up prepared, for the moment when he would make his entry on to the stage and already reciting his first line under his breath. In ten years, in drawing-rooms like this which their own feebleness of spirit would allow him to dominate, he would enter on crutches to be greeted as "the Master" for whom a visit to the La Trémouilles was merely a tedious obligation. And what would this profit him?

From changes accomplished in society I was all the better able to extract important truths, worthy of being used as the cement which would hold part of my work together, for the reason that such changes were by no means, as at the first moment I might have been tempted to suppose, peculiar to the epoch in which we lived. At the time when I, myself only just "arrived"—newer even than Bloch at the present day—had made my first entry into the world of the Guermantes, I must have contemplated in the belief that they formed an integral part of that world elements that were in fact utterly foreign to it, recently incorporated and appearing strangely new to older elements from which I failed to distinguish them and which themselves, though regarded by the dukes of the day as members of the Faubourg from time immemorial, had in fact—if not themselves, then their fathers or their grandfathers—been the upstarts of an earlier age. So much so that it was not any inherent quality of "men of the best society" which made this world so brilliant, but rather the fact of being more or less completely assimilated to this world which out of people who fifty years later, in spite of their diverse origins, would all look very much the same, formed "men of the best society." Even in the past into which I pushed back the name of Guermantes in order to give it its full grandeur—with good reason, for under Louis XIV the Guermantes had been almost royal and had cut a more splendid figure than they did today—the phenomenon which I was observing at this moment had not been unknown. The Guermantes of that time had allied themselves, for instance, with the family of Colbert, which today, it is true, appears to us in the highest degree aristocratic, since a Colbert bride is thought an excellent match even for a La Rochefoucauld. But it is not because the Colberts, then a purely bourgeois family, were aristocratic that the Guermantes had sought them in a matrimonial alliance, it was because of this alliance with the Guermantes that the Colberts became aristocratic. If the name of Haussonville should be extinguished with the present representative of that house, it will perhaps owe its future renown to the fact that the family today is descended from Mme de Staël, regardless of the fact that before the Revolution M. d'Haussonville, one of the first noblemen of the kingdom, found it gratifying to his vanity to be able to tell M. de Broglie that he was not acquainted with the father of that lady and was therefore no more in a position to present him at court than was M. de Broglie himself, neither of the two men for one moment suspecting that their own grandsons would later marry one the daughter and the other the grand-daughter of the authoress of *Corinne*. From the remarks of the Duchesse de Guermantes I realised that it would have been in my power to play the role of the fashionable commoner in grand society, the man whom everybody supposes to have been from his earliest days affiliated to the aristocracy, a role once played by Swann and before him by M. Lebrun and M. Ampère and all those friends of the Duchesse de Broglie who herself at the beginning of her career had by no means belonged to the best society. The first few times I had dined with Mme de Guermantes how I must have shocked men like M. de Beauséjour, less by my actual presence than by remarks indicating how entirely ignorant I was of the memories which constituted his past and which gave its form to the image that he had of society! Yet the day would come when Bloch, as a very old man, with recollections from a then distant past of the Guermantes drawing-room as it presented itself to his eyes at this moment, would feel the same astonishment, the same ill-humour in the presence of certain intrusions and certain displays of ignorance. And at the same time he would no doubt have developed and would radiate around him those qualities of tact and discretion which I had thought were the special prerogative of men like M. de Norpois but which, when their original avatars have vanished from the scene, form themselves again for a new incarnation in those of our acquaintance who seem of all people the least likely to possess them. It was true that my own particular case, the experience that I had had of being admitted to the society of the Guermantes, had appeared to me to be something exceptional. But as soon as I got outside myself and the circle of people by whom I was immediately surrounded, I could see that this was a social phenomenon less rare than I had at first supposed and that from the single fountain-basin of Combray in which I had been born there were in fact quite a number of jets of water which had risen, in symmetry with myself, above the liquid mass which had fed them. No doubt, since circumstances have always about them something of the particular and characters something of the individual, it was in an entirely different fashion that Legrandin (through his nephew's strange

marriage) had in his turn penetrated into this exalted world, a fashion quite different from that in which Odette's daughter had married into it or those in which Swann long ago and I myself had reached it. Indeed to me, passing by shut up inside my own life so that I saw it only from within, Legrandin's life seemed to bear absolutely no resemblance to my own, the two seemed to have followed widely divergent paths, and in this respect I was like a stream which from the bottom of its own deep valley does not see another stream which proceeds in a different direction and yet, in spite of the great loops in its course, ends up as a tributary of the same river. But taking a bird's-eye view, as the statistician does who, ignoring the reasons of sentiment or the avoidable imprudences which may have led some particular person to his death, counts merely the total number of those who have died in a year, I could see that quite a few individuals, starting from the same social milieu, the portrayal of which was attempted in the first pages of this work, had arrived finally in another milieu of an entirely different kind, and the probability is that, just as every year in Paris an average number of marriages take place, so any other rich and cultivated middle-class milieu might have been able to show a roughly equal proportion of men who, like Swann and Legrandin and myself and Bloch, could be found at a later stage in their lives flowing into the ocean of "high society." Moreover, in their new surroundings they recognised each other, for if the young Comte de Cambremer won the admiration of society for his distinction, his refinement, his sober elegance, I myself was able to recognise in these qualities—and at the same time in his fine eyes and his ardent craving for social success—characteristics that were already present in his uncle Legrandin, who in spite of his aristocratic elegance of bearing had been no more than a typical middle-class friend of my parents.

Kindness, a simple process of maturation which in the end sweetens characters originally more acid even than that of Bloch, is as widely disseminated as that belief in justice thanks to which, if our cause is good, we feel that we have no more to fear from a hostile judge than from one friendly towards us. And the grandchildren of Bloch would be kind and modest almost from birth. Bloch himself had perhaps not yet reached this stage of development. But I noticed that, whereas once he had pretended to think himself obliged to make a two hours' railway journey in order to visit someone who had scarcely even asked him to come, now that he was flooded with invitations not only to lunch and to dine but to stay for a fortnight here and a fortnight there, he refused many of them and did this without telling people, without bragging that he had received and refused them. Discretion, both in action and in speech, had come to him with social position and with age, with, if one may use the expression, a sort of social longevity. No doubt in the past Bloch had lacked discretion, just as he had been incapable of kindness and devoid of good sense. But certain defects, certain qualities are attached less to this or that individual than to this or that moment of existence considered from the social point of view. One may almost say that they are external to individuals, who merely pass beneath the radiance that they shed as beneath so many solstices, varying in their nature but all pre-existent, general and unavoidable. In the same way a doctor who is trying to find out whether some medicine diminishes or augments the acidity of the stomach, whether it activates or inhibits its secretions, will obtain results which differ not according to the stomach from whose secretions he has removed a small quantity of gastric juice, but according to the more or less advanced stage in the process of ingestion of the drug at which he conducts the experiment.

To return to the name of Guermantes, considered as an agglomeration of all the names which it admitted into itself and into its immediate neighbourhood, at every moment of its duration it suffered losses and recruited fresh ingredients, like a garden in which from week to week flowers scarcely in bud and preparing to take the places of those that have already begun to wither are confounded with the latter in a mass which presents always the same appearance, except to the people who have not seen the newest blooms before and still preserve in their memories a precise image of the ones that are no longer there.

More than one of the men and women who had been brought together by this party, or of whose existence it had reminded me by evoking for me the aspects which he or she had in turn presented as from the midst of different, perhaps opposite circumstances one after another they had risen before me, brought vividly before my mind the varied aspects of my own life and its different perspectives, just as a feature in a landscape, a hill or a large country house, by appearing now on the right hand and now on the left and seeming first to dominate a forest and then to emerge from a valley, reveals to a traveller the changes in direction and the differences in altitude of the road along which he is passing. As I followed the stream of memory back towards its source, I arrived eventually at images of a single person separated from one another by an interval of time so long, preserved within me by "I's" that were so distinct and themselves (the images) fraught with meanings that were so different, that ordinarily when I surveyed (as I supposed) the whole past course of my relations with that particular person I omitted these earliest images and had even ceased to think that the person to whom they referred was the same as the one whom I had later got to know, so that I needed a fortuitous lightning-flash of attention before I could re-attach this latter-day acquaintance, like a word to its etymology, to the original significance which he or she had possessed for me. Mlle Swann, on the other side of the hedge of pink hawthorn, throwing me a look of which, as a matter of fact, I had been obliged retrospectively to re-touch the significance, having learnt that it was a look of desire; Mme Swann's lover—or the man who according to Combray gossip occupied that position—studying me from behind that same hedge with an air of disapproval which, in this case too, had not the meaning which I had ascribed to it at the time, and then later so changed that I had quite failed to recognise him as the gentleman at Balbec examining a poster outside the Casino, the man of whom, when once every ten years I happened to remember that first image, I would say to myself: "How strange! That, though I did not know it, was M. de Charlus!"; Mme de Guermantes at the marriage of Dr Percepied's daughter; Mme Swann in a pink dress in my great-uncle's study;

Mme de Cambremer, Legrandin's sister, so fashionable that he was terrified that we might ask him to give us an introduction to her—all these images and many others associated with Swann, Saint-Loup and others of my friends were like illustrations which sometimes, when I chanced to come across them, I amused myself by placing as frontispieces on the threshold of my relations with these various people, but always with the feeling that they were no more than images, not something deposited within me by this particular person, not something still in any way linked to him. Not only do some people have good memories and others bad (without going so far as that perpetual forgetfulness which is the native element of such creatures as the Turkish Ambassadress, thanks to which—one piece of news having evaporated by the end of the week or the next piece having the power to exorcise its predecessor—they are always able to find room in their minds for the news that contradicts what they have previously been told), we find also that two people with an equal endowment of memory do not remember the same things. One of two men, for instance, will have paid little attention to an action for which the other will long continue to feel great remorse, but will have seized on the other hand upon some random remark which his friend let fall almost without thinking and taken it to be the key to a sympathetic character. Again, the fact that we prefer not to be proved wrong when we have uttered a false prophecy cuts short the duration of our memory of such prophecies and permits us very soon to affirm that we never uttered them. Finally, preferences of a more profound and more disinterested kind diversify the memories of different people, so that a poet, for example, who has almost entirely forgotten certain facts which someone else is able to recall, will nevertheless have retained—what for him is more important—a fleeting impression. The effect of all these causes is that after twenty years of absence where one expected to find rancour one finds often involuntary and unconscious forgiveness, but sometimes also we stumble upon a bitterness for which (because we have ourselves forgotten some bad impression that we once made) we can provide no reasonable explanation. Even where the people whom we have known best are concerned, we soon forget the dates of the various episodes in their lives. And because it was at least twenty years since she had first set eyes on Bloch, Mme de Guermantes would have sworn that he had been born in the world to which she herself belonged and had been dandled on the knees of the Duchesse de Chartres when he was two years old.

How often had all these people reappeared before me in the course of their lives, the diverse circumstances of which seemed to present the same individuals always, but in forms and for purposes that were shifting and varied; and the diversity of the points in my life through which had passed the thread of the life of each of these characters had finished by mixing together those that seemed the furthest apart, as if life possessed only a limited number of threads for the execution of the most different patterns. What, for instance, in my various pasts, could be more widely separated than my visits to my great-uncle Adolphe, the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis who was herself a cousin of the Marshal, Legrandin and his sister, and the former tailor who lived in our courtyard and was a friend of Françoise? And yet today all these different threads had been woven together to form the fabric, there of the married lives of Robert and Gilberte Saint-Loup, here of the young Cambremer couple, not to mention Morel and all the others whose conjunction had played a part in forming a set of circumstances of such a nature that the circumstances seemed to me to be the complete unity and each individual actor in them merely a constituent part of the whole. And by now my life had lasted so long that not infrequently, when it brought a person to my notice, I was able, by rummaging in quite different regions of my memory, to find another person, unlike though with the same identity, to add to and complete the first. Even to the Elstirs which I saw hanging here in a position which was itself an indication of his glory I was able to add very ancient memories of the Verdurins, the Cottards, my first conversation with the painter in the restaurant at Rivebelle, the tea-party in his studio at which I had been introduced to Albertine, and a host of other memories as well. Thus a connoisseur of painting who is shown one wing of an altar-piece remembers in what church or which museums or whose private collection the other fragments of the same work are dispersed and, in the same way as by studying the catalogues of sales and haunting the shops of the antique-dealers he finds, in the end, some object which is a twin to one he already possesses and makes a pair with it, he is able to reconstruct in his mind the predella and the whole altar as they once were. As a bucket hauled up on a winch comes to touch the rope several times and on opposite sides, so there was not a character that had found a place in my life, scarcely even a thing, which hadn't turn and turn about played in it a whole series of different roles. If after an interval of several years I rediscovered in my memory a mere social acquaintance or even a physical object, I perceived that life all this while had been weaving round person or thing a tissue of diverse threads which ended by covering them with the beautiful and inimitable velvety patina of the years, just as in an old park a simple runnel of water comes with the passage of time to be enveloped in a sheath of emerald.

It was not merely the outward appearance of these people that made one think of them as people in a dream. In their inward experience too life, which already when they were young, when they were in love, had been not far from sleep, had now more and more become a dream. They had forgotten even their resentments, their hatreds, and in order to be certain that the person before them was the one with whom ten years earlier they had not been on speaking terms they would have had to consult some mnemonic register, but one which, unfortunately, was as vague as a dream in which one has been insulted one does not quite know by whom. All these dreams together formed the substance of the apparent contradictions of political life, where one saw as colleagues in a government men who had once accused each other of murder or treason. And this dreamlike existence became as torpid as death in certain old men on the days that followed any day on which they had chanced to make love. During those days it was useless to make any demands on the President of the Republic,

he had forgotten everything. Then, if he was left in peace for a day or two, the memory of public affairs slowly returned to him, as haphazard as the memory of a dream.

Sometimes it was not merely in a single vivid image that the stranger so unlike the man or woman whom I had later come to know had first appeared before me. For years I had thought of Bergotte as the sweet bard with the snowy locks, for years my limbs had been paralysed, as though I had seen a ghost, by the apparition of Swann's grey top-hat or his wife's violet cloak, or by the mystery with which, even in a drawing-room, the name of her race enveloped the Duchesse de Guermantes; with all these, and with others too, my relations, which in the sequel were to become so commonplace, had had their origin almost in legend, in a delightful mythology which still at a later date prolonged them into the past as into some Olympian heaven where they shone with the luminous brilliance of a comet's tail. And even those of my acquaintanceships which had not begun in mystery, that for instance with Mme de Souvré, so arid today, so purely social in its nature, had preserved among their earliest moments the memory of a first smile calmer and sweeter than anything that was to follow, a smile mellifluously traced in the fullness of an afternoon beside the sea or the close of a spring day in Paris, a day of clattering carriages, of dust rising from the streets and sunny air gently stirring like water. And perhaps Mme de Souvré, had she been removed from this frame, would have been of little significance, like those famous buildings—the Salute, for example—which, without any great beauty of their own, are so well suited to a particular setting that they compel our admiration, but she formed part of a bundle of memories which I valued "all in," as the auctioneers say, at a certain price, without stopping to ask exactly how much of this value appertained to the lady herself.

One thing struck me even more forcibly in all these people than the physical or social changes which they had undergone, and this was the modification in the ideas which they possessed of one another. Legrandin in the past had despised Bloch and never addressed a word to him. Now he went out of his way to be civil. And this was not because of the improvement which had taken place in Bloch's social position—were this the case the fact would scarcely be worthy of mention, for social changes inevitably bring in their train a new pattern of relationships among those who have been affected by them. No: the reason was that people—and in saying "people" I mean "what people are for us"—do not in our memory possess the unvariability of a figure in a painting. Oblivion is at work within us, and according to its arbitrary operation they evolve. Sometimes it even happens that after a time we confuse one person with another. "Bloch? Oh yes, he was someone who used to come to Combray," and when he says Bloch, the speaker is in fact referring to me. Conversely, Mme Sazerat was firmly persuaded that it was I who was the author of a certain historical study of Philip II which was in fact by Bloch. More commonly, you forget after a while how odiously someone has behaved towards you, you forget his faults of character and your last meeting with him when you parted without shaking hands, and you remember on the other hand an earlier occasion when you got on excellently together. And it was to an earlier occasion of this kind that the manners of Legrandin adverted in his new civility towards Bloch, whether because he had lost the recollection of a particular past or because he thought it was to be deliberately eschewed, from a mixture of forgiveness and forgetfulness and that indifference which is another effect of Time. And then, as we have seen, the memories which two people preserve of each other, even in love, are not the same. I had seen Albertine reproduce with perfect accuracy some remark which I had made to her at one of our first meetings and which I had entirely forgotten. Of some other incident, lodged for ever in my head like a pebble flung with force, she had no recollection. Our life together was like one of those garden walks where, at intervals on either side of the path, vases of flowers are placed symmetrically but not opposite to one another. And if this discrepancy of memories may be observed even in the relation of love, even more understandable is it that when your acquaintance with someone has been slight you should scarcely remember who he is or should remember not what you used to think of him but something different, perhaps something that dates from an earlier epoch or that is suggested by the people in whose midst you have met him again, who may only recently have got to know him and see him therefore endowed with good qualities and a social prestige which in the past he did not possess but which you, having forgotten the past, instantly accept.

No doubt life, by placing each of these people on my path a number of times, had presented them to me in particular circumstances which, enclosing them finally on every side, had restricted the view which I had of them and so prevented me from discovering their essence. For between us and other people there exists a barrier of contingencies, just as in my hours of reading in the garden at Combray I had realised that in all perception there exists a barrier as a result of which there is never absolute contact between reality and our intelligence. Even those Guermantes around whom I had built such a vast fabric of dream had appeared to me, when at last I had first approached two of them, one in the guise of an old friend of my grandmother and the other in that of a gentleman who had looked at me in a most disagreeable manner one morning in the gardens of the Casino. So that it was in each case only in retrospect, by reuniting the individual to the name, that my encounter with them had been an encounter with the Guermantes. And yet perhaps this in itself made life more poetic for me, the thought that the mysterious race with the piercing eyes and the beak of a bird, the unapproachable rose-coloured, golden race, had so often and so naturally, through the effect of blind and varied circumstances, chanced to offer itself to my contemplation, to admit me to the circle of its casual and even of its intimate friends, to such a point that when I had wanted to get to know Mlle de Stermaria or to have dresses made for Albertine, it was to one or another of the Guermantes, as being the most obliging of my friends, that I had appealed for help. Admittedly I was bored when I went to their houses, no less bored than I was in the houses of the other society people whom I had later come to know. And in the case of the Duchesse de Guermantes, as in that of certain pages of Bergotte, even her personal charm was visible to me only at a

distance and vanished as soon as I was near her, for the reason that it resided in my memory and my imagination. But still, in spite of everything, the Guermites—and in this respect Gilberte resembled them—differed from other society people in that they plunged their roots more deeply into my past life, down to a level at which I had dreamed more and had had more belief in individuals. Bored I may have been as I stood talking this afternoon to Gilberte or Mme de Guermites, but at least as I did so I held within my grasp those of the imaginings of my childhood which I had found most beautiful and thought most inaccessible and, like a shopkeeper who cannot balance his books, I could console myself by forgetting the value of their actual possession and remembering the price which had once been attached to them by my desire. But with other people I had not even this consolation, people however with whom my relations had at one time been swollen to an immense importance by dreams that were even more ardent and formed without hope, dreams into which my life of those days, dedicated entirely to them, had so richly poured itself that I could scarcely understand how their fulfilment could be merely this thin, narrow, colourless ribbon of an indifferent and despised intimacy, in which I could rediscover nothing of what had once been their mystery, their fever and their sweetness.

“What has become of the Marquise d’Arpajon?” inquired Mme de Cambremer. “She died,” replied Bloch. “Aren’t you confusing her with the Comtesse d’Arpajon, who died last year?” The Princesse d’Agrigente joined in the discussion; as the young widow of an old husband who had been very rich and the bearer of a great name she was much sought in marriage, and this had given her great self-assurance. “The Marquise d’Arpajon is dead too,” she said, “she died nearly a year ago.” “A year ago!” exclaimed Mme de Cambremer, “that can’t be right, I was at a musical evening in her house less than a year ago.” Bloch was as incapable as any young man about town of making a useful contribution to the subject under discussion, for all these deaths of elderly people were at too great a distance, from the young men because of the enormous difference in age and from a man like Bloch, because of his recent arrival in an unfamiliar society, by way of an oblique approach, at a moment when it was already declining into a twilight which was for him illumined by no memories of its past. And even for people of the same age and the same social background death had lost its strange significance. Hardly a day passed without their having to send to inquire for news of friends and relations *in articulo mortis*, some of whom, they would be told, had recovered while others had “succumbed,” until a point was reached where they no longer very clearly remembered whether this or that person who was no longer seen anywhere had “pulled through” his pneumonia or had expired. In these regions of advanced age death was everywhere at work and had at the same time become more indefinite. At this crossroads of two generations and two societies, so ill placed, for different reasons, for distinguishing death that they almost confused it with life, the former of these two conditions had been turned into a social incident, an attribute to be predicated of somebody to a greater or lesser degree, without the tone of voice in which it was mentioned in any way indicating that for the person in question this “incident” was the end of everything. I heard people say: “But you forget that so and so is dead,” exactly as they might have said “he has had a decoration” or “he has been elected to the Academy” or—and these last two happenings had much the same effect as death, since they too prevented a man from going to parties—“he is spending the winter on the Riviera” or “his doctor has sent him to the mountains.” Perhaps, where a man was well known, what he left behind him at his death helped others to remember that his existence had come to an end. But in the case of ordinary society people of an advanced age it was easy to make a mistake as to whether or no they were dead, not only because one knew little about their past or had forgotten it but because they were in no way whatever linked to the future. And the difficulty that was universally experienced in these cases in choosing from among the alternatives of illness, absence, retirement to the country and death the one that happened to be correct, sanctioned and confirmed not merely the indifference of the survivors but the insignificance of the departed.

“But if she is still alive, why is it that one never sees her anywhere now, nor her husband either?” asked a spinster who liked to make what she supposed was witty conversation. “For the obvious reason,” replied her mother, who in spite of her years never missed a party herself, “that they are old; when you get to that age you stay at home.” Before you got to the cemetery, it seemed, there was a whole closed city of the old, where the lamps always glimmered in the fog. Mme de Saint-Euverte cut short the debate by saying that the Comtesse d’Arpajon had died in the previous year after a long illness and that more recently the Marquise d’Arpajon had also died, very rapidly, “in some quite unremarkable way,” a death which, in virtue of this latter characteristic, resembled the lives of all these people (its unremarkableness explained too why it had passed unnoticed and excused those who had been in doubt). When she heard that Mme d’Arpajon really had died, the spinster cast an anxious glance at her mother, for she feared that the news of the death of one of her “contemporaries” might “be a blow” to her—indeed she already imagined people talking about her mother’s death and explaining it in this way: “Madame d’Arpajon’s death had been a *great blow* to her.” But the old lady on the contrary, far from justifying her daughter’s fears, felt every time someone of her own age “disappeared” that she had gained a victory in a contest against formidable competitors. Their deaths were the only fashion in which she still for a moment became agreeably conscious of her own life. The spinster noticed that her mother, who had seemed not displeased to remark that Mme d’Arpajon was one of those tired old people whose days are spent in homes from which they seldom emerge, had been even less displeased to learn that the Marquise had entered the city of hereafter, the home from which none of us ever emerges at all. This observation of her mother’s want of feeling amused the daughter’s sarcastic mind. And to make her own contemporaries laugh she gave them afterwards a comical account of the gleeful fashion in which her mother had said, rubbing her hands: “Gracious me, it appears to be true that poor Madame d’Arpajon is dead.” Even the people who did not need this death to make them feel any joy in being alive, were rendered happy by it.

For every death is for others a simplification of life, it spares them the necessity of showing gratitude, the obligation of paying calls. And yet this was not the manner in which Elstir had received the news of the death of M. Verdurin.

A lady left the room, for she had other afternoon parties to attend, and had also received the commands of two queens to take tea with them. It was the Princesse de Nassau, that great courtesan of the aristocratic world whom I had known in the past. Were it not that she had shrunk in height (which gave her, her head being now situated at a much lower elevation than formerly, an air of having "one foot in the grave"), one could scarcely have said that she had aged. She had remained a Marie-Antoinette with an Austrian nose and an enchanting glance, preserved, one might almost say embalmed, by a thousand cosmetics adorably blended so as to compose for her a face that was the colour of lilac. Over this face there floated that confused and tender expression which I remembered, which was at once an allusion to all the fashionable gatherings where she was expected and an intimation that she was obliged to leave, that she promised sweetly to return, that she would slip away without any fuss. Born almost on the steps of a throne, three times married, richly kept for years at a time by great bankers, not to mention the countless whims in which she had permitted herself to indulge, she bore lightly beneath her gown, mauve like her wonderful round eyes and her painted face, the slightly tangled memories of the innumerable incidents of her life. As she passed near me, making her discreet exit, I bowed to her. She recognised me, took my hand and pressed it, and fixed upon me the round mauve pupils which seemed to say: "How long it is since we have seen each other! We must talk about all that another time." Her pressure of my hand became a squeeze, for she had a vague idea that one evening in her carriage, when she had offered to drop me at my door after a party at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, there might have been some dalliance between us. Just to be on the safe side, she seemed to allude to something that had in fact never happened, but this was hardly difficult for her since a strawberry tart could send her into an ecstasy and whenever she had to leave a party before the end of a piece of music she put on a despairing air of tender, yet not final, farewell. But she was uncertain what had passed between us in the carriage, so she did not linger long over the furtive pressure of my hand and said not a word. She merely looked at me in the manner which I have described, the manner which signified: "How long it is!" and in which one caught a momentary glimpse of her husbands and the men who had kept her and two wars, while her stellar eyes, like an astronomical clock cut in a block of opal, marked successively all those solemn hours of a so distant past which she rediscovered every time she wanted to bid you a casual good-bye which was always also an apology. And then having left me, she started to trot towards the door, partly so that her departure should not inconvenience people, partly to show me that if she had not stopped to talk it was because she was in a hurry, partly also to recapture the seconds which she had lost in pressing my hand and so arrive on time at the Queen of Spain's, where she was to have tea alone with the Queen. I even thought, when she got near the door, that she was going to break into a gallop. And indeed she was galloping towards her grave.

A stout lady came up to me and greeted me, and during the few moments that she was speaking the most diverse thoughts jostled each other in my mind. I hesitated an instant to reply to her, for I was afraid that possibly, recognising people no better than I did, she might have mistaken my identity, but then the assurance of her manner caused me on the contrary, for fear that she might be someone whom I had known extremely well, to exaggerate the amiability of my smile, while my eyes continued to scan her features for some trace of the name which eluded me. As a candidate for a degree fixes his eyes upon the examiner's face in the vain hope of finding there the answer that he would do better to seek in his own memory, so, still smiling, I fixed my eyes upon the features of the stout lady. They seemed to be those of Mme Swann, and there crept into my smile the appropriate shade of respect, while my indecision began to subside. But a moment later I heard the stout lady say: "You took me for Mamma, and it's quite true that I'm beginning to look very like her." And I recognised Gilberte.

We had a long talk about Robert, Gilberte speaking of him in an almost reverent tone, as though he had been a superior being whom she was anxious to show me that she had admired and understood. We recalled to one another the ideas which he had expounded in the past upon the art of war (for he had often repeated to her at Tansonville the theories that I had heard him develop at Doncières and elsewhere) and we marvelled how often, and on how many different points, his views had been proved correct by the events of the late war.

"I cannot tell you," I said, "how struck I am now by even the least of the things that I heard him say at Doncières and also during the war. Almost the last remark that he ever made to me, just before we said good-bye for the last time, was that he expected to see Hindenburg, a Napoleonic general, fight one of the types of Napoleonic battle, the one which aims at driving a wedge between two hostile armies—perhaps, he had added, the English and ourselves. Now scarcely a year after Robert was killed, a critic for whom he had a profound admiration and who manifestly exercised a great influence upon his military ideas, M. Henry Bidou, was saying that the Hindenburg offensive of March 1918 was 'the battle of separation fought by a single concentrated army against two armies in extended formation, a manoeuvre which the Emperor executed successfully in the Apennines in 1796 but in which he failed in Belgium in 1815.' In the course of the same conversation Robert had compared battles to plays in which it is not always easy to know what the author has intended, in which perhaps the author himself has changed his plan in mid-campaign. Now admittedly, to take this same German offensive of 1918, had Robert interpreted it in this fashion he would not have been in agreement with M. Bidou. But other critics believe that it was Hindenburg's success in the direction of Amiens, followed by his check there, then his success in Flanders and then another check, which, by virtue really of a series of accidents, made first of Amiens and then of Boulogne objectives which he had not fixed

upon before the engagement began. And as every critic can refashion a play or a campaign in his own way, there are some who see in this offensive the prelude to a lightning attack upon Paris and others a succession of unco-ordinated hammer-blows intended to destroy the English army. And even if the orders actually given by the commander do not fit in with this or that conception of his plan, the critics will always be at liberty to say, as the actor Mounet-Sully said to Coquelin when the latter assured him that *Le Misanthrope* was not the gloomy melodrama that he wanted to make it (for Molière himself, according to the evidence of contemporaries, gave a comical interpretation of the part and played it for laughs): ‘Well, Molière was wrong.’

“And when aeroplanes first started”—it was Gilberte’s turn now—“you remember what he used to say (he had such charming expressions): ‘Every army will have to be a hundred-eyed Argus’? Alas, he never lived to see his prediction fulfilled!” “Oh! yes, he did,” I replied, “he saw the battle of the Somme and he knew that it began with blinding the enemy by gouging out his eyes, by destroying his aeroplanes and his captive balloons.” “Yes, that is true. And then,” she went on, for now that she “lived only for the mind” she had become a little pedantic, “he maintained that we return always to the methods of the ancients. Well, do you realise that the Mesopotamian campaigns of this war” (she must have read this comparison at the time in Brichot’s articles) “constantly recall, almost without alteration, Xenophon’s *Anabasis*? And that to get from the Tigris to the Euphrates the English command made use of the *bellum*, the long narrow boat—the gondola of the country—which was already being used by the Chaldeans at the very dawn of history.” These words did indeed give me a sense of that stagnation of the past through which in certain parts of the world, by virtue of a sort of specific gravity, it is indefinitely immobilised, so that it can be found after centuries exactly as it was. But I must admit that, because of the books which I had read at Balbec at no great distance from Robert himself, I myself had been more impressed first in the fighting in France to come again upon those “trenches” that were familiar to me from the pages of Mme de Sévigné and then in the Middle East, apropos of the siege of Kut-el-Amara (Kut-of-the-Emir, “just as we say Vaux-le-Vicomte or Bailleau-l’Evêque,” as the curé of Combray would have said had he extended his thirst for etymologies to the languages of the East), to see the name of Baghdad once more attended closely by that of Basra, which is the Bassorah so many times mentioned in the *Arabian Nights*, the town which, whenever he had left the capital or was returning thither, was used as his port of embarkation or disembarkation, long before the days of General Townshend and General Gorringe, when the Caliphs still reigned, by no less a personage than Sindbad the Sailor.

“There is one aspect of war,” I continued, “which I think Robert was beginning to comprehend: war is human, it is something that is lived like a love or a hatred and could be told like the story of a novel, and consequently, if anyone goes about repeating that strategy is a science, it won’t help him in the least to understand war, since war is not a matter of strategy. The enemy has no more knowledge of our plans than we have of the objective pursued by the woman whom we love, and perhaps we do not even know what these plans are ourselves. Did the Germans in their offensive of March 1918 aim at capturing Amiens? We simply do not know. Perhaps they did not know themselves, perhaps it was what happened—their advance in the west towards Amiens—that determined the nature of their plan. And even if war were scientific, it would still be right to paint it as Elstir painted the sea, by reversing the real and the apparent, starting from illusions and beliefs which one then slowly brings into line with the truth, which is the manner in which Dostoevsky tells the story of a life. Quite certainly, however, war is not strategic, it might better be described as a pathological condition, because it admits of accidents which even a skilled physician could not have foreseen, such as the Russian Revolution.”

Throughout this conversation Gilberte had spoken of Robert with a deference which seemed to be addressed more to my sometime friend than to her late husband. It was as though she were saying to me: “I know how much you admired him. Please believe that I too understood what a wonderful person he was.” And yet the love which she assuredly no longer had for his memory was perhaps the remote cause of certain features of her present life. Thus Gilberte now had an inseparable friend in Andrée. And although the latter was beginning, thanks largely to her husband’s talent and her own intelligence, to penetrate, if not into the society of the Guermantes, at least into circles infinitely more fashionable than those in which she had formerly moved, people were astonished that the Marquise de Saint-Loup should condescend to be her closest friend. The friendship was taken to be a sign in Gilberte of her penchant for what she supposed was an artistic existence and for what was, unequivocally, a social decline. This explanation may be the true one. But another occurred to me, convinced as I had always been that the images which we see anywhere assembled are generally the reflexion, or in some indirect fashion an effect, of a first group of different images—quite unlike the second and at a great distance from it, though the two groups are symmetrical. If night after night one saw Andrée and her husband and Gilberte in each other’s company, I wondered whether this was not because, so many years earlier, one might have seen Andrée’s future husband first living with Rachel and then leaving her for Andrée. Very likely Gilberte at the time, in the too remote, too exalted world in which she lived, had known nothing of this. But she must have learned of it later, when Andrée had climbed and she herself had descended enough to be aware of each other’s existence. And when this happened she must have felt very strongly the prestige of the woman for whom Rachel had been abandoned by the man—the no doubt fascinating man—whom she, Rachel, had preferred to Robert. So perhaps the sight of Andrée recalled to Gilberte the youthful romance that her love for Robert had been, and inspired in her a great respect for Andrée, who even now retained the affections of a man so loved by that Rachel whom Gilberte felt to have been — more deeply loved by Saint-Loup than she had been herself. But perhaps on the contrary these recollections played no part in Gilberte’s fondness for the artistic couple, and one would have been right to

see in her conduct, as many people did, an instance merely of those twin tastes, so often inseparable in society women, for culture and loss of caste. Perhaps Gilberte had forgotten Robert as completely as I had forgotten Albertine, and, even if she knew that Rachel was the woman whom the man of many talents had left for Andrée, never when she saw them thought about this fact which had in no way influenced her liking for them. Whether my alternative explanation was not merely possible but true was a question that could be determined only by appeal to the testimony of the parties themselves, the sole recourse which is open in such a case—or would be if they were able to bring to their confidences both insight and sincerity. But the first of these is rare in the circumstances and the second unknown. Whatever the true explanation of this friendship might be, the sight of Rachel, now a celebrated actress, could not be very agreeable to Gilberte. So I was sorry to hear that she was going to recite some poetry at this party, the programme announced being Musset's *Souvenir* and some fables of La Fontaine.

In the background could be heard the Princesse de Guermantes repeating excitedly, in a voice which because of her false teeth was like the rattle of old iron: "Yes, that's it, we will forgather! We will summon the clan! I love this younger generation, so intelligent, so ready to join in! Ah!" (to a young woman) "what a mujishun you are!" And she fixed her great monocle in her round eye, with an expression half of amusement, half of apology for her inability to sustain gaiety for any length of time, though to the very end she was determined to "join in" and "forgather."

"But how do you come to be at a party of this size?" Gilberte asked me. "To find you at a great slaughter of the innocents like this doesn't at all fit in with my picture of you. In fact, I should have expected to see you anywhere rather than at one of my aunt's get-togethers, because of course she is my aunt," she added meaningfully, for having become Mme de Saint-Loup at a slightly earlier date than that of Mme Verdurin's entry into the family, she thought of herself as a Guermantes from the beginning of time and therefore attainted by the misalliance which her uncle had contracted when he married Mme Verdurin, a subject, it is true, on which she had heard a thousand sarcastic remarks made in her presence by members of the family, while naturally it was only behind her back that they discussed the misalliance which Saint-Loup had contracted when he married her. The disdain that she affected for this pinchbeck aunt was not diminished by the fact that the new Princesse de Guermantes, from the sort of perversity which drives intelligent people to behave unconventionally, from the need also to reminisce which is common in old people, and in the hope lastly of conferring a past on her new fashionable status, was fond of saying when the name of Gilberte arose in conversation: "Of course I have known her for donkey's years, I used to see a lot of the child's mother; why, she was a great friend of my cousin Marsantes. And it was in my house that she got to know Gilberte's father. And poor Saint-Loup too, I knew all his family long before he married her, indeed his uncle was one of my dearest friends in the La Raspelière days." "You see," people would say to me, hearing the Princesse de Guermantes talk in this vein, "the Verdurins were not at all bohemian, they had always been friends of Mme de Saint-Loup's family." I was perhaps alone in knowing, through my grandfather, how true it was that the Verdurins were not bohemian. But this was hardly because they had known Odette. However, you can easily dress up stories about a past with which no one is any longer familiar, just as you can about travels in a country where no one has ever been. "But really," Gilberte concluded, "since you sometimes emerge from your ivory tower, wouldn't you prefer little intimate gatherings which I could arrange, with just a few intelligent and sympathetic people? These great formal affairs are not made for you at all. I saw you a moment ago talking to my aunt Oriane, who has all the good qualities in the world, but I don't think one is doing her an injustice, do you, if one says that she scarcely belongs to the aristocracy of the mind."

I was unable to acquaint Gilberte with the thoughts which had been passing through my mind for the last hour, but it occurred to me that, simply on the level of distraction, she might be able to minister to my pleasures, which, as I now foresaw them, would no more be to talk literature with the Duchesse de Guermantes than with Mme de Saint-Loup. Certainly it was my intention to resume next day, but this time with a purpose, a solitary life. So far from going into society, I would not even permit people to come and see me at home during my hours of work, for the duty of writing my book took precedence now over that of being polite or even kind. They would insist no doubt, these friends who had not seen me for years and had now met me again and supposed that I was restored to health, they would want to come when the labour of their day or of their life was finished or interrupted, or at such times as they had the same need of me as I in the past had had of Saint-Loup; for (as I had already observed at Combray when my parents chose to reproach me at those very moments when, though they did not know it, I had just formed the most praiseworthy resolutions) the internal timepieces which are allotted to different human beings are by no means synchronised: one strikes the hour of rest while another is striking that of work, one, for the judge, that of punishment when already for the criminal that of repentance and self-perfection has long since struck. But I should have the courage to reply to those who came to see me or tried to get me to visit them that I had, for necessary business which required my immediate attention, an urgent, a supremely important appointment with myself. And yet I was aware that, though there exists but little connexion between our veritable self and the other one, nevertheless, because they both go under the same name and share the same body, the abnegation which involves making a sacrifice of easier duties and even of pleasures appears to other people to be egotism.

Was it not, surely, in order to concern myself with them that I was going to live apart from these people who would complain that they did not see me, to concern myself with them in a more fundamental fashion than would have been possible in their presence, to seek to reveal them to themselves, to realise their potentialities? What use would it have been that, for a few more years, I should waste hour after hour at



evening parties pursuing the scarcely expired echo of other people's remarks with the no less vain and fleeting sound of my own, for the sterile pleasure of a social contact which precluded all penetration beneath the surface? Was it not more worthwhile that I should attempt to describe the graph, to educe the laws, of these gestures that they made, these remarks that they uttered, their very lives and natures? Unfortunately, I should have to struggle against that habit of putting oneself in another person's place which, if it favours the conception of a work of art, is an obstacle to its execution. A habit this is which leads people, through a superior form of politeness, to sacrifice to others not only their pleasure but their duty, since from the standpoint of other people our duty, whatever it may be—and duty for a man who can render no good service at the front may be to remain behind the lines where he is useful—appears illusorily to be our pleasure.

And far from thinking myself wretched—a belief which some of the greatest men have held—because of this life without friends or familiar talk that I should live, I realised that our powers of exaltation are being given a false direction when we expend them in friendship, because they are then diverted from those truths towards which they might have guided us to aim at a particular friendship which can lead to nothing. Still, intervals of rest and society would at times be necessary to me and then, I felt, rather than those intellectual conversations which fashionable people suppose must be useful to writers, a little amorous dalliance with young girls in bloom would be the choice nutriment with which, if with anything, I might indulge my imagination, like the famous horse that was fed on nothing but roses. What suddenly I yearned for once more was what I had dreamed of at Balbec, when, still strangers to me, I had seen Albertine and Andrée and their friends pass across the background of the sea. But alas! I could no longer hope to find again those particular girls for whom at this moment my desire was so strong. The action of the years which had transformed all the individuals whom I had seen today, and among them Gilberte herself, had assuredly transformed those of the girls of Balbec who survived, as it would have transformed Albertine had she not been killed, into women too sadly different from what I remembered. And it hurt me to think that I was obliged to look for them within myself, since Time which changes human beings does not alter the image which we have preserved of them. Indeed nothing is more painful than this contrast between the mutability of people and the fixity of memory, when it is borne in upon us that what has preserved so much freshness in our memory can no longer possess any trace of that quality in life, that we cannot now, outside ourselves, approach and behold again what inside our mind seems so beautiful, what excites in us a desire (a desire apparently so individual) to see it again, except by seeking it in a person of the same age, by seeking it, that is to say, in a different person. Often had I had occasion to suspect that what seems to be unique in a person whom we desire does not in fact belong to her. And of this truth the passage of time was now giving me a more complete proof, since after twenty years, spontaneously, my impulse was to seek, not the girls whom I had known in the past, but those who now possessed the youthfulness which the others had then had. (Nor is it only the reawakening of our old sensual desires which fails to correspond to any reality because it fails to take into account the Time that has been Lost. Sometimes I found myself wishing that, by a miracle, the door might open and through it might enter—not dead, as I had supposed, but still alive—not just Albertine but my grandmother too. I imagined that I saw them, my heart leapt forward to greet them. But I had forgotten one thing, that, if in fact they had not died, Albertine would now have more or less the appearance that Mme Cottard had presented in the Balbec days and my grandmother, being more than ninety-five years old, would show me nothing of that beautiful face, calm and smiling, with which I still imagined her, but only by an exercise of the fancy no less arbitrary than that which confers a beard upon God the Father or, in the seventeenth century, regardless of their antiquity, represented the heroes of Homer in all the accoutrements of a gentleman of that age.)

I looked at Gilberte, and I did not think: "I should like to see her again," I said merely, in answer to her offer, that I should always enjoy being invited to meet young girls, poor girls if possible, to whom I could give pleasure by quite small gifts, without expecting anything of them in return except that they should serve to renew within me the dreams and the sadnesses of my youth and perhaps, one improbable day, a single chaste kiss. Gilberte smiled and then looked as though she were seriously giving her mind to the problem.

Just as Elstir loved to see incarnate before him, in his wife, that Venetian beauty which he had often painted in his works, so I excused myself by saying that there was an aesthetic element in the egotism which attracted me to the beautiful women who had the power to make me suffer, and I had a sentiment almost of idolatry for the future Gilbertes, the future Duchesses de Guermantes, the future Albertines whom I might meet and who might, I thought, inspire me as a sculptor is inspired when he walks through a gallery of noble antique marbles. I ought to have reflected, however, that prior to each of the women whom I had loved there had existed in me a sentiment of the mystery by which she was surrounded and that therefore, rather than ask Gilberte to introduce me to young girls, I should have done better to go to places where there were girls with whom I had not the slightest connexion, those places where between oneself and them one feels an insurmountable barrier, where at a distance of three feet, on the beach, for instance, as they pass one on their way to bathe, one feels separated from them by the impossible. It was in this fashion that a sentiment of mystery had attached itself for me first to Gilberte, then to the Duchesse de Guermantes, then to Albertine and to so many others. (Later no doubt the unknown, the almost unknowable, had become the known, the familiar, perhaps painful, perhaps indifferent, but retaining still from an earlier time a certain charm.) And to tell the truth, as in those calendars which the postman brings us in the hope of a New Year's gift, there was not one of the years of my life that did not have, as a frontispiece, or intercalated between its days, the image of a woman whom I had desired during that year; an image sometimes entirely arbitrary, for the reason that, often, I had never seen the woman in question, whether she were Mme Putbus's maid or Mlle d'Orgeville or some young woman or other whose name had caught my eye on the society page of a newspaper, amongst "the swarm of charming waltzers." I guessed her to be beautiful, I fell in love with her and I constructed for her an ideal body which towered above some landscape in the region of France where I had read in the *Annuaire des Châteaux* that the estates of her family were situated. In cases, however, where I had met and known the woman, the landscape against which I saw her was, at the very least, double. First she rose, each one of these women, at a different point in my life, with the imposing stature of a tutelary local deity, in the midst of one of those landscapes of my dreams which lay side by side like some chequered network over my past, the landscape to which my imagination had sought to attach her; then later I saw her from the angle of memory, surrounded by the places in which I had known her and which, remaining attached to them, she recalled to me, for if our life is vagabond our memory is sedentary and though we ourselves rush ceaselessly forward our recollections, indissolubly bound to the sites which we have left behind us, continue to lead a placid and sequestered existence among them, like those friends whom a traveller makes for a brief while in some town where he is staying and whom, leaving the town, he is obliged to leave behind him, because it is there that they, who stand on the steps of their house to bid him good-bye, will end their day and their life, regardless of whether he is still with them or not, there beside the church, looking out over the harbour, beneath the trees of the promenade. So that the shadow of, for instance, Gilberte lay not merely outside a church in the Ile-de-France where I had imagined her, but also upon a gravelled path in a park on the Méséglise way, and the shadow of Mme de Guermantes not only on a road in a watery landscape beside which rose pyramid-shaped clusters of red and purple flowers but also upon the matutinal gold of a pavement in Paris. And this second image, the one born not of desire but of memory, was, for each of these women, not unique. For my friendship with each one had been multiple, I had known her at different times when she had been a different woman for me and I myself had been a different person, steeped in dreams of a different colour. And the law which had governed the dreams of each year polarised around those dreams my recollections of any woman whom I had known during that year: all that related, for instance, to the Duchesse de Guermantes in the time of my childhood was concentrated, by a magnetic force, around Combray, while all that concerned the Duchesse de Guermantes who would presently invite me to lunch was disposed around a quite different centre of sensibility; there existed several Duchesses de Guermantes, just as, beginning with the lady in pink, there had existed several Mme Swanns, separated by the colourless ether of the years, from one to another of whom it was as impossible for me to leap as it would have been to leave one planet and travel across the ether to another. And not merely separated but different, each one bedecked with the dreams which I had had at very different periods as with a characteristic and unique flora which will be found on no other planet; so much so that, having decided that I would not accept an invitation to lunch either from Mme de Forcheville or from Mme de Guermantes, I was only able to say to myself—for in saying this I was transported into another world—that one of these ladies was identical with the Duchesse de Guermantes who was descended from Geneviève de Brabant and the other with the lady in pink because a well-informed man within me assured me that this was so, in the same authoritative manner as a scientist might have told me that a milky way of nebulae owed its origin to the fragmentation of a single star. Gilberte, too, whom nevertheless a moment ago I had asked, without perceiving the analogy, to introduce me to girls who might be friends for me of the kind that she had been in the past, existed for me now only as Mme de Saint-Loup. No longer was I reminded when I saw her of the role which had been played long ago in my love for her by Bergotte, Bergotte whom she had forgotten as she had forgotten my love and who for me had become once more merely the author of his books, without my ever recalling now (save in rare and entirely unconnected flashes of memory) the emotion which I had felt when I was presented to the man, the disillusion, the astonishment wrought in me by his conversation, in that

drawing-room with the white fur rugs and everywhere bunches of violets, where the footmen so early in the afternoon placed upon so many different consoles such an array of lamps. In fact all the memories that went to make up the first Mlle Swann were withdrawn from the Gilberte of the present day and held at a distance from her by the forces of attraction of another universe, where, grouped around a phrase of Bergotte with which they formed a single whole, they were drenched with the scent of hawthorn.

The fragmentary Gilberte of today listened to my request with a smile and then assumed a serious air as she gave it her consideration. I was pleased to see this, for it prevented her from paying attention to a group which it could hardly have been agreeable for her to observe. In this group was the Duchesse de Guermantes, deep in conversation with a hideous old woman whom I studied without being able to guess in the least who she was—she seemed to be a complete stranger to me. It was in fact to Rachel, that is to say to the actress, the famous actress now, who was going to recite some poems by Victor Hugo and La Fontaine in the course of this party, that Gilberte's aunt was talking. For the Duchess, too long conscious that she occupied the foremost social position in Paris and failing to realise that a position of this kind exists only in the minds of those who believe in it and that many newcomers to the social scene, if they never saw her anywhere and never read her name in the account of any fashionable entertainment, would suppose that she occupied no position at all, now scarcely saw—except when, as seldom as possible, and then with a yawn, she paid a few calls—the Faubourg Saint-Germain which, she said, bored her to death, and instead did what amused her, which was to lunch with this or that actress whom she declared to be enchanting. In the new circles which she frequented, having remained much more like her old self than she supposed, she continued to think that to be easily bored was a mark of intellectual superiority, but she expressed this sentiment now with a positive violence which turned her voice into a hoarse bellow. When, for instance, I mentioned Brichot, "Tedious man!" she broke in, "how he has bored me for the last twenty years!", and when Mme de Cambremer was heard to say: "You must re-read what Schopenhauer says about music," the Duchess drew our attention to this phrase by exclaiming: "*Re-read* is pretty rich, I must say. Who does she think she's fooling?" Old M. d'Albon smiled, recognising in this outburst a sample of the Guermantes wit. In Gilberte, who was more modern, it evoked no response. Daughter of Swann though she was, like a duckling hatched by a hen she was more romantically minded than her father. "I find that most touching," she would say, or: "He has a charming sensibility."

I told Mme de Guermantes that I had met M. de Charlus. She found him much more "altered" for the worse than in fact he was, for people in society make distinctions, in the matter of intelligence, not only between different members of their set between whom there is really nothing to choose in this respect, but also, in a single individual, between different phases of his life. Then she went on: "He has always been the image of my mother-in-law, but now the likeness is even more striking." There was nothing very extraordinary in this resemblance: it is well known that women sometimes so to speak project themselves into another human being with the most perfect accuracy, with the sole error of a transposition of sex. This, however, is an error of which one can scarcely say: "*felix culpa*," for the sex has repercussions upon the personality, so that in a man femininity becomes affectation, reserve touchiness and so on. Nevertheless, in the face, though it may be bearded, in the cheeks, florid as they are beneath their side-whiskers, there are certain lines which might have been traced from some maternal portrait. Almost every aged Charlus is a ruin in which one may recognise with astonishment, beneath all the layers of paint and powder, some fragments of a beautiful woman preserved in eternal youth. While we were talking, Morel came in. The Duchess treated him with a civility which disconcerted me a little. "I never take sides in family quarrels," she said. "Don't you find them boring, family quarrels?"

If in a period of twenty years, like this that had elapsed since my first entry into society, the conglomerations of social groups had disintegrated and re-formed under the magnetic influence of new stars destined themselves also to fade away and then to reappear, the same sequence of crystallisation followed by dissolution and again by a fresh crystallisation might have been observed to take place within the consciousness of individuals. If for me Mme de Guermantes had been many people, for Mme de Guermantes or for Mme Swann there were many individuals who had been a favoured friend in an era that preceded the Dreyfus Affair, only to be branded as a fanatic or an imbecile when the supervention of the Affair modified the accepted values of people and brought about a new configuration of parties, itself of brief duration, since later they had again disintegrated and re-formed. And what serves most powerfully to promote this renewal of old friendships, adding its influence to any purely intellectual affinities, is simply the passage of Time, which causes us to forget our antipathies and our disdains and even the reasons which once explained their existence. Had one analysed the fashionableness of the young Mme de Cambremer, one would have found that she was the niece of Jupien, a tradesman who lived in our house, and that the additional circumstance which had launched her on her social ascent was that her uncle had procured men for M. de Charlus. But all this combined had produced effects that were dazzling, while the causes were already remote and not merely unknown to many people but also forgotten by those who had once known them and whose minds now dwelt much more upon her present brilliance than upon the ignominy of her past, since people always accept a name at its current valuation. So that these drawing-room transformations possessed a double interest: they were both a phenomenon of the memory and an effect of Lost Time.

The Duchess still hesitated, for fear of a scene with M. de Guermantes, to make overtures to Balhy and Mistinguett, whom she found adorable, but with Rachel she was definitely on terms of friendship. From this the younger generation concluded that the Duchesse de Guermantes, despite her name, must be some sort of demi-rep who had never quite belonged to the best society. There were, it was true, a few reigning princes (the honour of whose familiar friendship two other great ladies disputed with her) whom Mme de Guermantes

still took the trouble to invite to luncheon. But on the one hand kings and queens do not often come to see you and their acquaintances are sometimes people of no social position, and then the Duchess, with the superstitious respect of the Guermantes for old-fashioned protocol (for while well-bred people bored her to tears, she was at the same time horrified by any departure from good manners), would put on her invitation cards: "Her Majesty has commanded the Duchesse de Guermantes," or "has deigned," etc. And newcomers to society, in their ignorance of these formulae, inferred that their use was simply a sign of the Duchess's lowly situation. From the point of view of Mme de Guermantes herself, this intimacy with Rachel signified perhaps that we had been mistaken when we supposed her to be hypocritical and untruthful in her condemnations of a purely fashionable life, when we imagined that in refusing to go and see Mme de Saint-Euverte she acted in the name not of intelligence but of snobbery, finding the Marquise stupid only because, not having yet attained her goal, she allowed her snobbery to appear on the surface. But the intimacy with Rachel might also signify that the intelligence of the Duchess was no more than commonplace, but had remained unsatisfied and at a late hour, when she was tired of society, had driven her, totally ignorant as she was of the veritable realities of the intellectual life, to seek for intellectual fulfilment with a touch of that spirit of fantasy which can cause perfectly respectable ladies, thinking to themselves: "How amusing it will be!", to end an evening with a prank which is in fact deadly dull: you go off and wake up some acquaintance and then, when you are in his room, you don't know what to say, so, after standing awkwardly by his bed for a few moments in your evening clothes and realising how late it is, there is nothing left to do but go home to bed yourself.

One must add that the antipathy which the changeable Duchess had recently come to feel for Gilberte may have caused her to take a certain pleasure in receiving Rachel, a course of conduct which enabled her also to proclaim aloud one of the favourite Guermantes maxims, to wit, that the family was too numerous for its members to have to espouse one another's quarrels (or even, some might have said, to take notice of one another's bereavements), an independence, a spirit of "I can't see that I am obliged" which had been reinforced by the policy that it had been necessary to adopt with regard to M. de Charlus, who, had you followed him, would have involved you in hostilities with all your acquaintances.

As for Rachel, if the truth was that she had taken very great pains to form this friendship with the Duchesse de Guermantes (pains which the Duchess had failed to detect beneath a mask of simulated disdain and deliberate incivility, which had put her on her mettle and given her an exalted idea of an actress so little susceptible to snobbery), this was no doubt in a general fashion an effect of the fascination which after a certain time the world of high society exercises upon even the most hardened bohemians, a fascination paralleled by that which the same bohemians themselves exercise upon people in society, flux and reflux which correspond to—in the political order—the reciprocal curiosity, the desire to form a mutual alliance, of two nations which have recently been at war with each other. But Rachel's desire had possibly a more particular cause. It was in Mme de Guermantes's house, it was at the hands of Mme de Guermantes herself, that she had in the past suffered the most terrible humiliation of her life. This snub Rachel had with the passage of time neither forgotten nor forgiven, but the singular prestige which the event had conferred upon the Duchess in her eyes could never be effaced.

The conversation from which I was anxious to divert Gilberte's attention was, in any case, presently interrupted, for the mistress of the house came in search of the actress to tell her that the moment for her recital had arrived. She left the Duchess and a little later appeared upon the platform.

Meanwhile at the other end of Paris there was taking place a spectacle of a very different kind. Mme Berma, as I have said, had invited a number of people to a tea-party in honour of her daughter and her son-in-law. But the guests were in no hurry to arrive. Having learnt that Rachel was to recite poetry at the Princesse de Guermantes's (which utterly scandalised Berma, who from her own lofty position as a great artist looked down on Rachel as still no more than a kept woman who, because Saint-Loup paid for the dresses which she wore on the stage, was allowed to appear in the plays in which she herself, Berma, took the leading roles—and scandalised her all the more because a rumour had run round Paris that, though the invitations were in the name of the Princesse de Guermantes, it was in effect Rachel who was acting as hostess in the Princess's house), Berma had written a second time to certain faithful friends to insist that they should not miss her tea-party, for she was aware that they were also friends of the Princesse de Guermantes, whom they had known when she was Mme Verdurin. And now the hours were passing, and still nobody arrived to visit Berma. Bloch, having been asked whether he meant to come, had ingenuously replied: "No, I would rather go to the Princesse de Guermantes's," and this, alas! was what everyone in his heart of hearts had decided. Berma, who suffered from a deadly disease which had obliged her to cut down her social activities to a minimum, had seen her condition deteriorate when, in order to pay for the luxurious existence which her daughter demanded and her son-in-law, ailing and idle, was unable to provide, she had returned to the stage. She knew that she was shortening her days, but she wanted to give pleasure to her daughter, to whom she handed over the large sums that she earned, and to a son-in-law whom she detested but flattered—for she feared, knowing that his wife adored him, that if she, Berma, did not do what he wanted, he might, out of spite, deprive her of the happiness of seeing her child. This child, with whom secretly the doctor who looked after her husband was in love, had allowed herself to be persuaded that these performances in *Phèdre* were not really dangerous for her mother. She had more or less forced the doctor to tell her this, or rather of all that he had said to her about her mother's health she had retained only this in her memory, the truth being that, in the midst of various objections of which she had taken no notice, he had remarked that he saw no grave harm in Berma's

appearing on the stage. He had said this because he had sensed that in so doing he would give pleasure to the young woman whom he loved, perhaps also from ignorance and also because he knew that the disease was in any case incurable, since a man readily consents to cut short the agony of an invalid when the action that will have this effect will be advantageous to himself—and perhaps also from the stupid idea that acting made Berma happy and was therefore likely to do her good, a stupid idea which had appeared to him to be corroborated when, having been given a box by Berma's daughter and son-in-law and having deserted all his patients for the occasion, he had found her as extraordinarily charged with life on the stage as she seemed to be moribund if you met her off it. And indeed our habits enable us to a large degree, enable even the organs of our bodies, to adapt themselves to an existence which at first sight would appear to be utterly impossible. Have we not all seen an elderly riding-master with a weak heart go through a whole series of acrobatics which one would not have supposed his heart could stand for a single minute? Berma in the same way was an old campaigner of the stage, to the requirements of which her organs had so perfectly adapted themselves that she was able, by deploying her energies with a prudence invisible to the public, to give an illusion of good health troubled only by a purely nervous and imaginary complaint. After the scene in which Phèdre makes her declaration of love to Hippolyte Berma herself might be conscious only of the appalling night which awaited her as a result of her exertions, but her admirers burst into tumultuous applause and said that she was more wonderful than ever. She would go home in terrible pain, happy nevertheless because she brought back to her daughter the blue banknotes which, with the playfulness of a true child of the footlights, she had the habit of squeezing into her stockings, whence she would draw them out with pride, hoping for a smile, a kiss. Unfortunately these banknotes merely made it possible for her son-in-law and her daughter to make new embellishments to their house, which was next door to Berma's own: hence constant hammering, which interrupted the sleep of which the great actress was so desperately in need. According to the latest change in fashion, or to conform to the taste of M. de X— or M. de Y— whom they hoped to attract to their house, they altered every room in it. And Berma, realising that sleep, which alone would have deadened her pain, had gone for good, would resign herself to lying awake, not without a secret contempt for this determination to be smart which was hastening her death and making her last days an agony. That these were its consequences was no doubt in part the reason why she despised this social ambition, contempt being a natural form of revenge upon something that does us harm and that we are powerless to prevent. But there was another reason, which was that, conscious of her own genius and having learnt at a very early age the meaninglessness of all these decrees of fashion, she for her part had remained faithful to tradition, which she had always respected and of which she was herself an embodiment, and which caused her to judge things and people as she would have judged them thirty years earlier, to judge Rachel, for example, not as the well-known actress that she was today, but as the little tart that she had once been. Berma was, one must add, no better natured than her daughter, for it was from her mother that the young woman had derived, through heredity and through the contagion of an example which an only too natural admiration had rendered more than usually potent, her egotism, her pitiless mockery, her unconscious cruelty. But all this Berma had sacrificed to her daughter and in this way she had liberated herself from it. However, even if Berma's daughter had not incessantly had workmen in her house, she would have tired her mother out just the same, since inevitably youth with its powers of attraction, its ruthless and inconsiderate strength, tires out old age and ill health, which overtax themselves in the effort to keep up with it. Every day there was yet another luncheon party, and Berma would have been condemned as selfish had she deprived her daughter of this pleasure, or even had she refused to be present herself at entertainments where the prestige of the famous mother was counted upon as a means of drawing to the house, not without difficulty, certain recent acquaintances who needed to be coaxed. And even away from home her attendance at a social function might be "promised" to these same acquaintances as a way of doing them a civility. So that the poor mother, seriously engaged in her intimate dialogue with the death that was already installed within her, was compelled to get up early in the morning and drag herself out of the house. Nor was this enough. At about this time Réjane, in the full blaze of her talent, made some appearances on the stage in foreign countries which had an enormous success, and the son-in-law decided that Berma must not allow herself to be put in the shade; determined that his own family should pick up some of the same easily acquired glory, he forced his mother-in-law to set out on tours on which she was obliged to have injections of morphine, which might at any moment have killed her owing to the condition of her kidneys.

This same ambition to be smart, this longing for social prestige, for life, had on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes's reception acted in the manner of a suction-pump, drawing to the latter's house with the irresistible force of some such machine even Berma's loyalest friends, so that at the actress's party there was, in contrast and in consequence, an absolute and deathlike void. One solitary young man had come, thinking that possibly Berma's party might be just as fashionable as the other. When Berma saw the hour pass for which she had issued the invitations and realised that everybody had deserted her, she ordered tea to be served and the four people in the room sat down at the table as though it had been spread for a funeral feast. Nothing now in her face recalled the countenance of which the photograph, one distant New Year's Day, had so disturbed me. Death, as the saying goes, was written all over her face, and she resembled nothing so much as one of the marble figures in the Erechtheum. Her hardened arteries were already almost petrified, so that what appeared to be long sculptural ribbons ran across her cheeks, with the rigidity of a mineral substance. The dying eyes were still relatively alive, by contrast at least with the terrible ossified mask, and glowed feebly like a snake asleep in the midst of a pile of stones. But already the young man, who had sat down only because it would have been rude to do anything else, was incessantly looking at his watch, for he too felt the attraction

of the brilliant party in the Guermantes mansion. Berma uttered not a word in reproach of the friends who had deserted her and who were foolish enough to hope that she would not discover that they had been to the Guermantes'. She murmured only: "A Rachel giving a party in the Princesse de Guermantes's house—that is something that could only happen in Paris." And silently and with a solemn slowness she continued to eat the cakes which the doctor had forbidden her, still with the air of playing her part in a funerary rite. The gloom of the tea-party was made more intense by the vile temper of the son-in-law, who was furious that Rachel, whom he and his wife knew very well, had not invited them. To crown his indignation the young man who had come told him that he knew Rachel so well that, if he went off to the Guermantes party straight away, he could even at this eleventh hour ask her to invite the frivolous couple. But Berma's daughter was too well aware of the low level at which her mother placed Rachel, she knew that she would die of despair at the thought of her daughter begging for an invitation from the former prostitute. So she told the young man and her husband that what he suggested was impossible. But she took her revenge as she sat at the tea-table by a series of little grimaces expressive of the desire for pleasure and the annoyance of being deprived of it by her killjoy mother. The latter pretended not to see her daughter's cross looks and from time to time, in a dying voice, addressed an amiable remark to the solitary guest. But soon the rush of air which was sweeping everything towards the Guermantes mansion, and had swept me thither myself, was too much for him; he got up and said good-bye, leaving Phèdre or death—one scarcely knew which of the two it was—to finish, with her daughter and her son-in-law, devouring the funeral cakes.

My conversation with Gilberte was interrupted by the voice of the actress which now made itself heard. Her style of recitation was intelligent, for it presupposed the existence of the poem whose words she was speaking as a whole which had been in being before she opened her mouth, a whole of which we were hearing merely a fragment, as though for a few moments, as the actress passed along a road, she had happened to be within earshot of us.

The announcement that she was to recite poems with which nearly everybody was familiar had been well received. But when the actress, before beginning to speak, was seen to shoot searching and bewildered glances in every direction, to lift her hands with an air of supplication and then to utter each word as though it were a groan, the general reaction was to feel embarrassed, almost shocked by this display of sentiment. Nobody had said to himself that a recital of poetry could be anything like this. Gradually, however, each member of an audience grows accustomed to what is taking place before him, he forgets his first sensation of discomfort, he picks out what is good in a performance, he mentally compares different ways of reciting and passes judgment: "this is excellent, this is not so good." But for the first few moments, just as when, in a trivial case in a law-court, we see a barrister advance, raise a toga'd arm in the air and start to speak in a threatening tone, we hardly dare look at our neighbours. For our immediate reaction is that this is grotesque—but we cannot be sure that it is not in fact magnificent, so for the present we suspend judgment.

Nevertheless the audience was amazed to see this woman, before she had emitted a single sound, bend her knees, stretch out her arms to cradle an invisible body and then, to recite some very well-known lines of poetry, start to speak in a voice of entreaty. People looked at one another, not knowing what expression to put on their faces: a few bad-mannered young things giggled audibly; everyone glanced at his neighbour with that stealthy glance which at a smart dinner-party, when you find beside your plate an unfamiliar implement, a lobster-fork or sugar-grinder perhaps, of which you know neither what it is for nor how to use it, you cast at some more authoritative guest in the hope that he will pick it up before you and so give you a chance to imitate him—or with which, when someone quotes a line of poetry which you do not know but of which you do not wish to appear ignorant, you turn towards a man better read than yourself and relinquish to him, as though it were a favour, as though you were courteously letting him pass through a door before you, the pleasure of naming the author. With just this same glance, as they listened to the actress, each member of the audience waited, his head lowered but his eyes furtively prying, for others to take the initiative and decide whether to laugh or to criticise, to weep or to applaud. Mme de Forcheville, who had come back specially for the occasion from Guermantes, whence, as we shall see, the Duchess had been almost expelled, had assumed an expression that was attentive, concentrated, almost bad-tempered, either in order to show that she was a connoisseur of the drama and had not come merely for social reasons, or to present a hostile front to people who were less versed in literature and might have talked to her about other things, or from the intensity with which with all her faculties she strove to discover whether she "liked" or "did not like" the performance, or perhaps because, while she found it "interesting," she nevertheless "did not like" the manner in which certain lines were recited. This attitude might, one would have thought, have been more appropriate to the Princesse de Guermantes. But as the recitation was taking place in her house and as, having become as avaricious as she was rich, she had decided that her payment to Rachel would consist of five roses, she chose rather to act as claque and gave the signal for a forced display of enthusiasm by a series of exclamations of delight. And here alone could her Verdurin past be recognised, for she had the air of listening to the poems for her own private enjoyment, of having felt a desire for someone to come and recite them to her alone, so that it seemed to be mere chance that there were in the room five hundred people, her friends, whom she had permitted to come unobtrusively and share in her pleasure.

Meanwhile I observed—without any satisfaction to my vanity, for she was old and ugly—that the actress, in a somewhat restrained fashion, was giving me the glad eye. All the time that she was reciting she allowed to flutter in and out of her eyes a smile that was both repressed and penetrating and that seemed to be the first hint of an acquiescence which she would have liked to see come from me. Certain elderly ladies meanwhile, little accustomed to the recitation of poetry, were saying to their neighbours: "Did you see?", a question which

had reference to the solemn, tragic miming of the actress, which they had no words to describe. The Duchesse de Guermantes sensed the slight wavering of opinion and turned the scale of victory with a cry of "Admirable!"; ejaculated at a pause in the middle of the poem which perhaps she mistook for the end. More than one guest thought it incumbent upon him to underline this exclamation with a look of approval and an inclination of the head, less perhaps to display his comprehension of the reciter's art than his friendly relations with the Duchess. When the poem was finished, I heard the actress thank Mme de Guermantes, who was standing near her, as I was myself, and at the same time, taking advantage of my presence beside the Duchess, she turned to me and greeted me with charming civility. At this point I realised that she was somebody whom I ought to have known and that, whereas long ago I had mistaken the passionate glances of M. de Vaugoubert for the salutation of someone who was confused as to my identity, today on the contrary what I had taken in the actress to be a look of desire was no more than a decorous attempt to make me recognise and greet her. I responded with a smile and a gesture. "I am sure he does not recognise me," said the reciter to the Duchess. "Of course I do," I said confidently, "I recognise you perfectly." "Well then, who am I?" I had not the slightest idea and my position was becoming awkward. But fortunately, if throughout one of La Fontaine's finest poems this woman who was reciting it with such conviction had, whether from good nature or stupidity or embarrassment, thought of nothing but the difficulty of saying good-afternoon to me, throughout this same beautiful poem Bloch had been wondering only how to manoeuvre himself so as to be ready, the moment the poem ended, to leap from his seat like a beleaguered army making a sally and, trampling if not upon the bodies at least upon the feet of his neighbours, arrive and congratulate the reciter, perhaps from an erroneous conception of duty, perhaps merely from a desire to make people look at him. "How curious it is to see Rachel here!" he whispered in my ear. At once the magic name broke the enchantment which had given to the mistress of Saint-Loup the unknown form of this horrible old woman.<sup>10</sup> And once I knew who she was, I did indeed recognise her perfectly. "You were wonderful," Bloch said to Rachel, and having said these simple words, having satisfied his desire, he started on his return journey—but encountered so many obstacles and made so much noise in reaching his place that Rachel had to wait more than five minutes before beginning her second poem. This was *Les Deux Pigeons*, and at the end of it Mme de Morienvall came up to Mme de Saint-Loup, whom she knew to be very well read without remembering that she had inherited the oblique and sarcastic wit of her father. "That is La Fontaine's fable, isn't it?" she asked, thinking that she had recognised it but not being absolutely certain, since she did not know the fables of La Fontaine at all well and in any case supposed them to be childish things which no one would recite at a fashionable gathering. To have such a success the entertainer had no doubt produced a pastiche of La Fontaine, thought the good lady. Unintentionally Gilberte confirmed her in this idea, for, disliking Rachel and wanting to say that with her style of diction there was nothing left of the fables, she said it in that over-subtle manner which had been her father's and which left simple people in doubt as to the speaker's meaning: "One quarter is the invention of the actress, a second is lunacy, a third is meaningless and the rest is La Fontaine," a remark which encouraged Mme de Morienvall to maintain that the poem which had just been recited was not La Fontaine's *Les Deux Pigeons*, but an arrangement of which at most a quarter was by La Fontaine himself. Given the extraordinary ignorance of all these people, this assertion caused no surprise whatever.

Meanwhile, one of his friends having arrived after the recital was over, Bloch had the satisfaction of asking him whether he had ever heard Rachel and of painting for his benefit an extraordinary picture of her art, exaggerating, indeed suddenly discovering, as he described and revealed this modernistic diction to another person, a strange pleasure of which he had felt nothing as he listened to it. Then, with exaggerated emotion, he again congratulated Rachel in a high-pitched voice which proclaimed his sense of her genius and introduced his friend, who declared that his admiration for her was unbounded. To this, Rachel, who was now acquainted with ladies of the best society and unwittingly copied them, replied: "Oh! I am most flattered, most honoured by your appreciation." Bloch's friend asked her what she thought of Berma. "Poor woman, it seems that she is living in the most abject poverty. She was once, I won't say not without talent, for what she possessed was not true talent—her taste was appalling—still, one must admit she had merit of a kind: she was more alive on the stage than most actresses, and then she had nice qualities, she was generous, she ruined herself for others. And as it is years now since she has earned a penny, because the public these days loathes the sort of thing she does ... But of course," she added with a laugh, "I must admit that someone of my generation, naturally, only heard her right at the end of her career, and even then I was really too young to form an opinion." "She didn't recite poetry very well, did she?" hazarded Bloch's friend, to flatter Rachel. "Poetry!" she replied, "she had no idea how to recite a single line. It might have been prose, or Chinese, or Volapük—anything, rather than poetry."

In spite of Rachel's words I was thinking myself that time, as it passes, does not necessarily bring progress in the arts. And just as some author of the seventeenth century, who knew nothing of the French Revolution, or the discoveries of science, or the war, may be superior to some writer of today, just as perhaps Fagon was as great a doctor as du Boulbon (a superiority in genius compensating in this case for an inferiority in knowledge), so Berma was, as the phrase goes, head and shoulders above Rachel, and Time, when simultaneously it turned Rachel into a star and Elstir into a famous painter, had inflated the reputation of a mediocrity as well as consecrated a genius.

It was scarcely surprising that Saint-Loup's former mistress should speak maliciously about Berma. She would have done this when she was young, and even if she would not have done it then, she was bound to now. When a society woman becomes an actress, a woman even of the highest intelligence and the greatest goodness of heart, and in this unfamiliar occupation displays great talent and encounters nothing but success,

one will be surprised, meeting her years later, to hear on her lips not her own individual language but that which is common to the theatrical profession, the special brand of obloquy that actresses have for their colleagues, those special qualities which are added to a member of the human race by the passage over him of "thirty years on the stage." These qualities Rachel inevitably had and her origin, as we know, was not in good society.

"You can say what you like, it was a wonderful performance, it had line, it had character, it was intelligent, one has never heard anyone recite poetry like that before," said the Duchess, for fear that Gilberte should make disparaging remarks. Gilberte wandered off towards another group, to avoid an argument with her aunt, whose comments upon Rachel were indeed of the most commonplace kind. But then, since even the best writers cease often, at the approach of old age or after producing too much, to have any talent, society women may well be excused if sooner or later they cease to have any wit. Swann already in the sharp-edged wit of the Duchesse de Guermantes found it difficult to recognise the gentle raillery of the young Princesse des Laumes. And now late in life, wearied by the least effort, Mme de Guermantes said a prodigious number of stupid things. It was true that at any moment, as happened more than once in the course of this party, she could re-become the woman whom I had known in the past and talk wittily on social topics. But alongside these moments there were others, and they were no less frequent, when beneath her beautiful eyes the sparkling conversation which for so many years, from its throne of wit, had held sway over the most distinguished men in Paris, shone, in so far as it still shone at all, in a meaningless way. When the moment came to make a joke, she would check herself for the same number of seconds as in the past, she would appear to hesitate, to have something within her that was struggling to emerge, but the joke, when at last it arrived, was pitifully feeble. But how few of her listeners noticed this! Because the procedure was the same they believed that the wit too had survived intact, like those people who, superstitiously attached to some particular make of confectionery, continue to order their petits fours from a certain shop without noticing that they have become almost uneatable. Already during the war the Duchess had shown signs of this decay. If someone pronounced the word "culture," she would stop him, smile, kindle a light in her beautiful eyes and ejaculate: "Kkkkultur," which raised a laugh among her friends, who saw in this remark the latest manifestation of the Guermantes wit. And certainly the mould was the same, and the intonation and the smile, the same that had once enchanted Bergotte, who for his part too had preserved the individual rhythm of his phrases, his interjections, his aposiopesis, his epithets, but with all this rhetorical apparatus no longer had anything to say. But newcomers, who did not know her, were surprised and said sometimes, unless they had chanced to encounter her on a day when she was amusing and "at her best": "What a stupid woman this is!"

As her life drew to its close, Mme de Guermantes had felt the quickening within her of new curiosities. Society no longer had anything to teach her. The idea that she occupied the first place in it was as evident to her as the altitude of the blue sky above the earth, and she saw no need to strengthen a position which she deemed to be unshakeable. On the other hand she read and she went to the theatre, and enjoying these activities she would have been glad to prolong them; just as in the past, in the little narrow garden where she sipped orangeade with her friends, all that was most choice in the world of grand society would come familiarly, among the scented breezes of the evening and the gusts of pollen, to sustain in her the pleasure that this grand world gave her and her appetite for it, so now a different appetite caused her to want to know the reasons behind this or that literary controversy, to want to meet the authors whose books she had read, to make friends with the actresses whom she had seen on the stage. Her tired mind required a new form of food, and in order to get to know theatrical and literary people she now made herself pleasant to women with whom formerly she would have refused to exchange cards but who, in the hope of getting the Duchess to come to their parties, could boast to her of their great friendship with the editor of some review. The first actress to be invited to her house thought that she was the only one of her kind in an exotic milieu, which however appeared more commonplace to the second when she saw that she had a predecessor. The Duchess, because on certain evenings she received reigning monarchs, thought that there was no change in her social position. But the truth was that she who alone could boast of a blood that was absolutely without taint, she who had been born a Guermantes and who when she did not sign herself "La Duchesse de Guermantes" had the right to put "Guermantes-Guermantes," she who even to her husband's sisters seemed to be something more precious than they were themselves, like a Moses saved from the waters or Christ escaped into Egypt or Louis XVII rescued from his prison in the Temple, she the purest of the pure had now, sacrificing no doubt to that hereditary need for spiritual nourishment which had brought about the social decline of Mme de Villeparisis, herself become a Mme de Villeparisis, in whose house snobbish women were afraid of meeting this or that undesirable and of whom the younger generation, observing the *fait accompli* and not knowing what had gone before it, supposed that she was a Guermantes from an inferior cask or of a less good vintage, a Guermantes *déclassée*.

If, however, the Duchess indulged a taste for the society of her inferiors, she was careful to confine this activity within strict limits and not allow it to contaminate those members of her family from whom she derived the gratification of an aristocratic pride. If at the theatre, for instance, in order to fill her role of patroness of the arts, she had invited a minister or a painter and her guest had been so ingenuous as to ask whether her sister-in-law or her husband were not in the audience, the Duchess, with a superb assumption of lofty indifference which concealed her alarm, would haughtily reply: "I have not the slightest idea. As soon as I leave my house, I know nothing of what my family is doing. For politicians, for artists, whoever they may be, I am a widow." In this way she sought to prevent the too eager social climber from drawing upon himself a snub and upon her a reprimand from Mme de Marsantes or from Basin.



"I can't tell you how pleased I am to see you," said the Duchess. "Good heavens, when was it that I saw you last?" "I believe it was at Mme d'Agrigente's—I was paying a call and I found you there, as I often did." "But of course, I was constantly going there, my dear boy, since Basin was in love with her in those days. And calling on Basin's sweetheart of the moment was always where my friends were most likely to find me, because he used to say: 'I shall expect you to visit her without fail.' I must admit that there seemed to me to be a slight impropriety in these 'digestive visits' on which he used to send me to thank the lady for her entertainment of him. But I quite soon grew accustomed to them. The tiresome thing was, however, that I was obliged to continue my relations with his mistress after he had broken off his own. I was always reminded of the line in Victor Hugo:

Take away the happiness and leave the boredom to *me*.

Naturally—you remember how the poem goes on—'I entered smiling none the less,' but it really was not fair, he ought to have left me the right to be inconstant, for in the end I accumulated so many of his discards that I had not a single afternoon to myself. Still, compared with the present that epoch now seems to me relatively agreeable. That he has started to be unfaithful again is, of course, something that I can only find flattering, it almost makes me feel younger. But I preferred his old way of doing it. Unfortunately, he was so out of practice that he had forgotten how to set about it. However, in spite of it all we are on excellent terms, we talk to each other, we are even quite fond of each other"—this the Duchess added because she was afraid that I might think that she and her husband were completely separated, rather as one says apropos of someone who is desperately ill: "But he is still able to speak, I read to him this morning for an hour." "I will tell him you are here," she continued, "he will be delighted to see you." And she went towards the Duke, who was sitting on a sofa in conversation with a lady. I observed with admiration that, except that his hair was whiter, he had scarcely changed, being still as majestic and as handsome as ever. But seeing his wife approach to speak to him he assumed an air of such fury that she had no alternative but to retreat. "I can't interrupt him just now, I don't know what he is doing, we shall see presently," said Mme de Guermantes, preferring to leave me to form my own conclusions.

Bloch now came up to us and on behalf of his American inquired the identity of a young duchess who was at the party. I replied that she was a niece of M. de Bréauté, which caused Bloch, as this name meant nothing to him, to ask for further explanations. "Bréauté!" the Duchess exclaimed, turning to me. "You remember all that, of course. How ancient it seems now, how far away! Well,"—this to Bloch—"Bréauté was a snob. They were people who lived near my mother-in-law in the country. This couldn't possibly interest you, Monsieur Bloch—though it may amuse this young man, who knew all that world long ago when I was in the midst of it myself." This last remark referred to me, and by it Mme de Guermantes brought home to me in a number of different ways how long was the time that had elapsed. First, her own friendships and opinions had so greatly changed since that period that now, in retrospect, she looked upon her charming Babal as a snob. And then, not only was he now seen at the other end of a great vista of time, but—and of this I had been quite unaware when at my first entry into society I had supposed him to be one of the quintessential notabilities of Paris, who would for ever remain associated with its social history as Colbert with the history of the reign of Louis XIV—he too bore the stamp of a provincial origin, he was a country neighbour of the old Duchess and it was as such that the Princesse des Laumes had made his acquaintance. Moreover this Bréauté, stripped of his wit and relegated to a distant past for which he himself provided a date (which proved that between then and now he had been entirely forgotten by the Duchess) and to the countryside near Guermantes, was—and this too I would never have thought possible that first evening at the Opéra, when he had appeared to me in the guise of a marine deity dwelling in his glaucous cavern—a link between the Duchess and myself, because she remembered that I had known him and therefore had been a friend of hers, if not of the same social origin as herself at any rate an inhabitant of the same social world for very much longer than a great many people who were at the party today, she remembered this and yet remembered it so hazily that she had forgotten certain details which to me on the contrary had then seemed to be of prime importance, such as that I never went to Guermantes and at the time when she came to Mlle Percepied's nuptial mass was merely a boy of a middle-class Combray family, and that, in spite of all Saint-Loup's entreaties, throughout the year which followed her apparition at the Opéra she had never invited me to her house. To me this seemed to be of supreme importance, for it was precisely during this brief period that the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes had appeared to me to be a paradise into which I should never enter. But for her, her life then was merely a part like any other of her normal, commonplace life, and as from a certain moment onwards I had dined often at her house and had also, even before that date, been a friend of her aunt and of her nephew, she no longer knew exactly at what period our friendship had begun and was unaware of the grave anachronism that she was perpetrating in supposing that we had become friends a few years earlier than in fact we had. For this would have meant that I had known the Mme de Guermantes of the name of Guermantes, whose essence it was to be unknowable, that I had been permitted to enter the name of the golden syllables, had been received into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, whereas in fact I had merely been to dine at the house of a lady who was already nothing more in my eyes than a very ordinary woman and who had occasionally invited me, not to descend into the submarine kingdom of the Nereids, but to spend an evening with her in her cousin's box. "If you want to know anything more about Bréauté," Mme de Guermantes continued, still speaking to Bloch, "though there is no earthly reason why you should, ask our friend here, who is a hundred times more interesting than Bréauté ever was. He must have dined at my house with him fifty times. It was at my house, was it not, that

you got to know Bréauté? In any case, it was there that you met Swann." And I was just as surprised that she should imagine that I might have met M. de Bréauté elsewhere than at her house (which could only have happened had I moved in that society before I became acquainted with her) as I was to see that she believed that it was through her that I had met Swann. Less untruthfully than Gilberte, who had been in the habit of saying of Bréauté: "He is an old country neighbour, I so enjoy talking to him about Tansonville," whereas in fact in the past he had never visited the Swanns at Tansonville, I might have said of Swann: "He was a country neighbour who often used to come round and see us in the evening," for indeed the memories which he recalled to my mind had nothing to do with the Guermantes. "I don't know how to describe him," she went on. "He was a man whose only subject of conversation was people with grand titles. He had a whole collection of curious anecdotes about my Guermantes relations and about my mother-in-law and about Mme de Varambon before she became a lady-in-waiting to the Princesse de Parme. But does anybody today know who Mme de Varambon was? Our friend here, yes, he knew all those people. But it is all ancient history, they are not even names today, and in any case they don't deserve to be remembered." And again it struck me that, in spite of the apparent unity of that thing which we call "society," in which, it is true, social relations reach their maximum of concentration (for all paths meet at the top) and in which there are no barriers to communication, there exist nevertheless within it, or at least there are created within it by Time, separate provinces which after a while change their names and are no longer comprehensible to those who arrive in society only when its pattern has been altered. "Mme de Varambon was a good lady who said things of an incredible stupidity," continued the Duchess, who failed to appreciate that poetry of the incomprehensible which is an effect of Time and chose rather to extract from every situation its element of ironic humour, the element that could be transformed into literature of the type of Meilhac or into the Guermantes brand of wit. "At one moment she had a mania for swallowing a certain kind of lozenge which people used to take in those days for coughs and which was called" (and she laughed as she pronounced a name that was so special, so well known formerly and so unknown today to everyone around her) "a Géraudel lozenge. 'Madame de Varambon,' my mother-in-law used to say to her, 'if you don't stop swallowing a Géraudel lozenge every five minutes, you will injure your stomach.' 'But Madame la Duchesse,' replied Mme de Varambon, 'how can they possibly injure the stomach when they go into the bronchial tubes?' And then it was she who made the remark: 'The Duchess has a most beautiful cow, so beautiful that it is always taken for a bull!' " And Mme de Guermantes would gladly have gone on relating anecdotes of Mme de Varambon, of which she and I knew hundreds, but we realised that in the ignorant memory of Bloch this name evoked none of those images which rose up for us as soon as there was mention of her or of M. de Bréauté or of the Prince d'Agriente, though perhaps for this very reason all these names were endowed in his eyes with a glamour which I knew to be exaggerated but which I found comprehensible—though not because I myself had at one time felt its influence, for it is rarely that our own errors and absurdities, even when we have penetrated to the truth behind them, make us more indulgent to those of others.

The past had been so transformed in the mind of the Duchess (or else the distinctions which existed in my mind had been always so absent from hers that what had been an event for me had gone unnoticed by her) that she was able to suppose that I had first met Swann in her house and M. de Bréauté elsewhere, thus conferring upon me a past as man about town of which she exaggerated the remoteness from the present. For the notion of time elapsed which I had just acquired was something that the Duchess had too, and, whereas my illusion had been to believe the gap between past and present shorter than in fact it was, she on the contrary actually overestimated it, she placed events further back than they really were, a notable consequence of this being her disregard of that supremely important line of demarcation between the epoch when she had been for me first a name and then the object of my love and the utterly different epoch when she had been for me merely a society woman like any other. It was of course only during this second period, when she had become for me a different person, that I had been to her house. But to her own eyes these differences were invisible and she would have seen nothing in the least odd in my going to her house two years earlier, for how was she to know that she had then been a different woman and even her doormat a different doormat, since her personality did not present to her that break in continuity which it presented to me?

"All this reminds me," I said to her, "of that first evening when I went to the Princesse de Guermantes's, when I wasn't sure that I had been invited to her party and half expected to be shown the door, and when you wore a red dress and red shoes." "Good heavens, how long ago all that was!" said the Duchesse de Guermantes, accentuating by her words my own impression of time elapsed. She seemed to be gazing into this remote past in a melancholy mood, and yet she laid a particular emphasis upon the red dress. I asked her to describe it to me, which she did most willingly. "One couldn't possibly wear a thing like that now. It was the sort of dress that was worn in those days." "But it was pretty, wasn't it?" I said. She was always afraid of giving away a point in conversation, of saying something that might depreciate her in the eyes of others. "Personally, I found it a charming fashion. If nobody wears those dresses today, it is simply because it isn't done. But they will come back, as fashions always do—in clothes, in music, in painting," she added with vigour, for she supposed there to be a certain originality in this philosophic reflexion. Then the sad thought that she was growing old caused her to resume her languid manner, which a smile, however, momentarily contradicted: "Are you sure that they were red shoes that I wore? I thought they were gold." I assured her that I had the most vivid recollection of the colour of her shoes, though I preferred not to describe the incident which made me so certain on this point. "How kind of you to remember that!" she said to me sweetly, for women call it kindness when you remember their beauty, just as painters do when you admire their work. And then, since the past, however

remote it may be for a woman like the Duchess who has more head than heart, may nevertheless chance to have escaped oblivion, "Do you recall," she said, as though to thank me for remembering her dress and her shoes, "that Basin and I brought you home in our carriage? You couldn't come in with us because of some girl who was coming to see you after midnight. Basin thought it the funniest thing in the world that you should receive visits at such an hour." Indeed that was the evening when Albertine had come to see me after the Princesse de Guermantes's party and I recalled the fact just as clearly as the Duchess, I to whom Albertine was now as unimportant as she would have been to Mme de Guermantes had Mme de Guermantes known that the girl because of whom I had had to refuse their invitation was Albertine. (In fact, she was quite in the dark as to the identity of this girl, had never known it and only referred to the incident because of the circumstances and the singular lateness of the hour.) Yes, I recalled the fact, for, long after our poor dead friends have lost their place in our hearts, their unvalued dust continues to be mingled, like some base alloy, with the circumstances of the past. And though we no longer love them, it may happen that in speaking of a room, or a walk in a public park, or a country road where they were present with us on a certain occasion, we are obliged, so that the place which they occupied may not be left empty, to make allusion to them, without, however, regretting them, without even naming them or permitting others to identify them. Such are the last, the scarcely desirable vestiges of survival after death.

If the opinions which the Duchess expressed about Rachel were in themselves commonplace, they interested me for the reason that they too marked a new hour upon the dial. For Mme de Guermantes had no more completely forgotten than Rachel the terrible evening which the latter had endured in her house, but in the Duchess's mind too this memory had been transformed. "Of course," she said to me, "it interests me all the more to hear her, and to hear her acclaimed, because it was I who discovered her, who saw her worth and praised her and got people to listen when she was quite unknown and everybody thought her ridiculous. Yes, my dear boy, this will surprise you, but the first house in which she recited in public was mine! Yes, while all the so-called avant-garde, like my new cousin," she said, pointing ironically towards the Princesse de Guermantes, who for Oriane had remained Mme Verdurin, "would have allowed her to die of hunger rather than condescend to listen to her, I had made up my mind that she was interesting and I offered her a fee to come and act in my house in front of the most distinguished audience that I could muster. I may say, though the word is rather stupid and pretentious—for the truth is that talent needs nobody to help it—that I launched her. But I am not suggesting that she needed me." I made a vague gesture of protest, and I saw that Mme de Guermantes was quite prepared to accept the contrary thesis. "You don't agree? You think that talent needs a support, needs someone to bring it into the light of day? Well, perhaps you are right. Curiously enough, that is exactly what Dumas used to say to me. In this case I am extremely flattered if I have done anything, however little, to promote not of course the talent but the reputation of so fine an artist." Mme de Guermantes preferred to abandon her idea that talent, like an abscess, forces its way to the surface unaided, partly because the alternative hypothesis was more flattering for her, but also because for some time now, mixing with newcomers to the social scene and being herself fatigued, she had become almost humble, questioning others and asking them their opinion before she formed her own. "I don't need to tell you," she went on, "that that intelligent public which calls itself society understood absolutely nothing of her art. They booed and they tittered. It was no use my saying: 'This is strange, interesting, something that has never been done before,' nobody believed me, just as nobody has ever believed anything I have said. And it was exactly the same with the piece that she recited, which was a scene from Maeterlinck. Now, of course, it is very well known but in those days people merely thought it ridiculous—not I, however, I admired it. I must say I am surprised, when I think of it, that a mere peasant like myself, with no more education than all the other provincial girls around her, should from the very first moment have felt drawn to these things. Naturally I couldn't have said why, but I liked them, I was moved—indeed, even Basin, who can hardly be called hypersensitive, was struck by the effect that they had on me. 'I won't have you listening to these absurdities,' he said, 'it makes you ill.' And he was right, because although I'm supposed to be a woman without any feeling I'm really a bundle of nerves."

At this moment an unexpected incident occurred. A footman came up to Rachel and told her that the daughter and son-in-law of Berma were asking to speak to her. As we have seen, Berma's daughter had resisted the desire, to which her husband would have yielded, to ask Rachel for an invitation. But after the departure of the solitary guest the irritation of the young pair as they sat with their mother had increased. The thought that other people were enjoying themselves had become a torment to them and presently, profiting from a momentary absence of Berma, who had retired to her room spitting a little blood, they had thrown on some smarter clothes, called for a cab and come, without an invitation, to the Princesse de Guermantes's house. Rachel, guessing what had happened and secretly flattered, put on an arrogant air and told the footman that she could not be disturbed, the visitors must write a line to explain the object of their curious procedure. Soon the footman came back with a card on which Berma's daughter had scribbled a few words to the effect that she and her husband had not been able to resist the desire to hear Rachel—might they have her permission to come in? Rachel smiled at the naïvety of the pretext and at her own triumph. She sent back a reply that she was terribly sorry but she had finished her recital. In the anteroom, where the couple had now been waiting for an embarrassingly long time, the footmen were beginning to jeer at the two rejected petitioners.

But the ignominy of a rebuff, and the thought too of the worthlessness of Rachel in comparison with her mother, drove Berma's daughter to pursue to final victory an enterprise on which she had first embarked merely from an appetite for pleasure. She sent a message to Rachel, asking as a favour that, even if she had missed the privilege of hearing her, she should be allowed to shake her by the hand. Rachel was talking to an

Italian prince, said to be not insensible to the attractions of her large fortune, the origin of which was now to some extent disguised by her partial acceptance in the world of society. And here at her feet were the daughter and the son-in-law of the illustrious Berma, a reversal of positions which she was able to savour to the full. After giving a ludicrous account of what had happened to everybody within earshot, she ordered the young couple to be admitted and in they came without waiting to be asked twice, thus at a single stroke ruining Berma's social position just as they had destroyed her health. Rachel had foreseen this; she knew that an amiable condescension on her part would do more than a refusal to win for herself a reputation in society for kindness of heart and for the young couple one for grovelling servility. So she welcomed them with a theatrical gesture of open arms and a few words spoken in the role of an exalted patroness momentarily laying aside her dignity: "Ah! here you are, it is so lovely to see you. The Princess will be delighted." Not knowing that in the world of the theatre it was generally believed that she had sent out the invitations herself, she had feared perhaps that, if she refused to let Berma's daughter and son-in-law come in, they might have doubts as to the extent, not so much of her good nature, which would scarcely have worried her, as of her influence. Instinctively the Duchesse de Guermantes drifted away, for in proportion as anyone betrayed a desire to seek out fashionable society, he or she sank in her esteem. At the moment she was uniquely impressed with Rachel's kindness, and had the daughter and son-in-law been presented to her she would have turned her back on them. Rachel meanwhile was already composing in her head the gracious phrase with which she would annihilate Berma when she saw her the following day backstage: "I was distressed and appalled that your poor daughter should be made to dance attendance on me. If I had only realised! She kept sending me card after card." Her spirits rose as she thought of this blow that she would deal to Berma. Yet perhaps she would have flinched had she known that it would be mortal. We like to have victims, but without putting ourselves clearly in the wrong: we want them to live. Besides, in what way had she done wrong? A few days later she was heard to say, with a laugh: "It's a bit much. I try to be kinder to her children than she ever was to me, and now I'm practically accused of murdering her. The Duchess will be my witness." So died Berma. It seems that the children of actors inherit from their parents all their ugly emotions and all the artificiality of theatrical life, but not, as a by-product of these, the stubborn will to work that their father or mother possessed, and Berma is not the only great tragic actress who has died as the victim of a domestic plot woven around her, repeating in her own person the fate that she so many times suffered in the final act of a play.

In spite of her new interests the life of the Duchess was now very unhappy, for the reason to which she had briefly alluded in her conversation with me, a reason which had, as a further consequence, a parallel degradation of the society which M. de Guermantes frequented. The Duke was still robust, but with the advance of age his desires had grown less imperious and he had long ceased to be unfaithful to Mme de Guermantes, when suddenly, without anyone knowing quite how the liaison had begun, he had fallen in love with Mme de Forcheville. When one considered what her age must now be, this seemed extraordinary. But perhaps she had been very young when she started on her amatory career. And then there are women who, decade after decade, are found in a new incarnation, having new love affairs (sometimes long after one had thought they were dead) and causing the despair of young wives who are abandoned for them by their husbands. In any case, the Duke's liaison with Mme de Forcheville had assumed such proportions that the old man, imitating in this final love the pattern of those that he had had in the past, watched jealously over his mistress in a manner which, if my love for Albertine had, with important variations, repeated the love of Swann for Odette, made that of M. de Guermantes for this same Odette recall my own for Albertine. He insisted that she should lunch with him and dine with him and he was always in her house, so that she was able to show him off to friends who without her would never have made the acquaintance of a Duc de Guermantes and who came there to meet him rather as one might go to the house of a courtesan to meet a king, her lover. It was true that Mme de Forcheville had long ago become a society lady. But starting again late in life to be kept, and to be kept by an old man of such enormous pride who, in spite of the situation, was the important person in her house, she was herself not too proud to wear only those wraps which pleased him, to serve only the dishes that he liked, and to flatter her friends by telling them that she had spoken of them to her new lover just as in the old days she would tell my great-uncle that she had spoken of him to the Grand Duke who sent her cigarettes; in a word, in spite of all that she had accomplished in building up a social position, she was tending under pressure of new circumstances to become once more, as she had first appeared to me in my earliest childhood, the lady in pink. (It was, of course, many years since my uncle Adolphe had died, but the replacement of the old figures around us by new ones does not necessarily prevent us from beginning our old life again.) If Odette had yielded to the pressure of her new circumstances, this was no doubt partly from greed, but also because, having been much sought after in society as the mother of an eligible daughter and then ignored once Gilberte had married Saint-Loup, she foresaw that the Duc de Guermantes, who would have done anything for her, would rally to her side a number of duchesses who would perhaps be delighted to do an ill turn to their friend Oriane; and perhaps too she warmed to the game when she saw how it distressed the Duchess, in whose discomfiture a feminine sentiment of rivalry caused her to rejoice. Even among the Duke's relations she now had her partisans. Saint-Loup up to his death had continued loyally to visit her with his wife. Were not he and Gilberte heirs both to M. de Guermantes and to Odette, who would herself no doubt be the principal beneficiary of the Duke's will? And even Courvoisier nephews with the most exacting standards, even the Princesses de Trania and Mme de Marsantes, came to her house in the hope of a legacy, without worrying about the pain that this might cause the Duchess, of whom Odette, stung by past affronts, spoke in the most scurrilous fashion. As for the Duke's own social position, his liaison with Mme de Forcheville—this liaison which was merely a pale copy of earlier affairs of the same kind

—had recently caused him for the second time in his life to lose his chance of the presidency of the Jockey and a vacant seat in the Académie des Beaux-Arts, just as the way of life of M. de Charlus and his public association with Jupien had cost him the presidency of the Union and that also of the Société des Amis du Vieux Paris when these were within his grasp. Thus the two brothers, so different in their tastes, had lost their reputations from a common indolence and a common lack of will, qualities already perceptible, but in a more agreeable fashion, in the Duc de Guermantes their grandfather, member of the Académie Française, but which, reappearing in his two grandsons, had permitted a natural taste in the one and what passes for an unnatural taste in the other to alienate their possessors from their proper social sphere.

The old Duke no longer went anywhere, for he spent his days and his evenings with Mme de Forcheville. But today, as he would find her here, he had come for a moment, in spite of the vexation of having to meet his wife. I had not seen him, and I would certainly have failed to recognise him, had he not been clearly pointed out to me. He was no more than a ruin now, a magnificent ruin—or perhaps not even a ruin but a beautiful and romantic natural object, a rock in a tempest. Lashed on all sides by the surrounding waves—waves of suffering, of wrath at being made to suffer, of the rising tide of death—his face, like a crumbling block of marble, preserved the style and the poise which I had always admired; it might have been one of those fine antique heads, eaten away and hopelessly damaged, which you are proud nevertheless to have as an ornament for your study. In one respect only was it changed: it seemed to belong to a more ancient epoch than formerly, not simply because of the now rough and rugged surfaces of what had once been a more brilliant material, but also because to an expression of keen and humorous enjoyment had succeeded one, involuntary and unconscious, built up by illness, by the struggle against death, by passive resistance, by the difficulty of remaining alive. The arteries had lost all suppleness and gave to the once expansive countenance a hard and sculptural quality. And though the Duke had no suspicion of this, there were aspects of his appearance, of his neck and cheeks and forehead, which suggested to the observer that the vital spirit within, compelled to clutch desperately at every passing minute, was buffeted by a great tragic gale, while the white wisps of his still magnificent but less luxuriant hair lashed with their foam the half submerged promontory of his face. And just as there are strange and unique reflexions which only the approach of a supreme all-founding storm can impart to rocks that hitherto have been of a different colour, so I realised that the leaden grey of the stiff, worn cheeks, the almost white, fleecy grey of the drifting wisps of hair, the feeble light that still shone from the eyes that scarcely saw, were not unreal hues and glimmers—they were only too real but they were fantastic, they were borrowed from the palette and the illumination, inimitable in their terrifying and prophetic sombreness, of old age and the imminence of death.

The Duke stayed only for a few moments, long enough, however, for me to perceive that Odette, reserving her favours for younger wooers, treated him with contempt. But curiously, whereas in the past he had been almost ridiculous when he used to behave like a king in a play, he had now assumed an appearance of true grandeur, rather like his brother, whom old age, stripping him of all unessential qualities, caused him to resemble. And—in this too resembling his brother—he who had once been proud, though not in his brother's fashion, seemed now almost deferential, though again in a different fashion. He had not suffered quite the degradation of M. de Charlus, he was not obliged by the unreliable memory of a sick man to greet with civility people whom he would once have disdained. But he was very old and when, wanting to leave, he passed laboriously through the doorway and down the stairs, one saw that old age, which is after all the most miserable of human conditions, which more than anything else precipitates us from the summit of our fortunes like a king in a Greek tragedy, old age, forcing him to halt in the *via dolorosa* which life must become for us when we are impotent and surrounded by menace, to wipe his perspiring brow, to grope his way forward as his eyes sought the step which eluded them, because for his unsteady feet no less than for his clouded eyes he needed support, old age, giving him without his knowing it the air of gently and timidly beseeching those near him, had made him not only august but, even more, suppliant.

Thus in the Faubourg Saint-Germain three apparently impregnable positions, of the Duc and the Duchesse de Guermantes and of the Baron de Charlus, had lost their inviolability, changing, as all things change in this world, under the action of an inherent principle which had at first attracted nobody's attention: in M. de Charlus his love for Charlie, which had enslaved him to the Verdurins, and then later the advent of senility; in Mme de Guermantes a taste for novelty and for art; in the Duke an exclusive amorous passion, of a kind of which he had had several in the course of his life, but one which now, through the feebleness of age, was more tyrannical than those that had gone before and of which the ignominy was no longer compensated by the opposing, the socially redeeming respectability of the Duchess's salon, where the Duke himself no longer appeared and which altogether had almost ceased to function. Thus it is that the pattern of the things of this world changes, that centres of empire, assessments of wealth, letters patent of social prestige, all that seemed to be for ever fixed is constantly being refashioned, so that the eyes of a man who has lived can contemplate the most total transformation exactly where change would have seemed to him to be most impossible.

Unable to do without Odette, always installed by her fireside in the same armchair, whence age and gout made it difficult for him to rise, M. de Guermantes permitted her to receive friends who were only too pleased to be presented to the Duke, to defer to him in conversation, to listen while he talked about the society of an earlier era, about the Marquise de Villeparisis and the Duc de Chartres. At moments, beneath the gaze of the old masters assembled by Swann in a typical "collector's" arrangement which enhanced the unfashionable and "period" character of the scene, with this Restoration Duke and this Second Empire courtesan swathed in one of the wraps which he liked, the lady in pink would interrupt him with a sprightly sally: he would stop dead and fix her with a ferocious glance. Perhaps he had come to see that she too, like the Duchess, sometimes

made stupid remarks; perhaps, suffering from an old man's delusion, he imagined that it was an ill-timed witticism of Mme de Guermantes that had checked his flow of reminiscence, imagined that he was still in his own house, like a wild beast in chains who for a brief second thinks that it is still free in the deserts of Africa. And brusquely raising his head, with his little round yellow eyes which themselves had the glitter of the eyes of a wild animal, he fastened upon her one of those looks which sometimes in Mme de Guermantes's drawing-room, when the Duchess talked too much, had made me tremble. So for a moment the Duke glared at the audacious lady in pink. But she, unflinching, held him in her gaze, and after a few seconds which seemed interminable to the spectators, the old tame lion recollecting that he was not free, with the Duchess beside him, in that Sahara which one entered by stepping over a doormat on a landing, but in Mme de Forcheville's domain, in his cage in the Zoological Gardens, he allowed his head, with its still thick and flowing mane of which it would have been hard to say whether it was yellow or white, to slump back between his shoulders and continued his story. He seemed not to have understood what Mme de Forcheville was trying to say, and indeed there was seldom any very profound meaning in her remarks. He did not forbid her to have friends to dinner with him, but, following a habit derived from his former love-affairs which was hardly likely to surprise Odette, who had been used to the same thing with Swann, and which to me seemed touching because it recalled to me my life with Albertine, he insisted that these guests should take their leave early so that he might be the last to say good-night to her. Needless to say, the moment he was out of the house she went off to meet other people. But of this the Duke had no suspicion or perhaps preferred her to think that he had no suspicion. The sight of old men grows dim as their hearing grows less acute, their insight too becomes clouded and even their vigilance is relaxed by fatigue, and at a certain age, inevitably, Jupiter himself is transformed into a character in one of Molière's plays, and not even into the Olympian lover of Alcmène but into a ludicrous Gêronte. It must be added that Odette was unfaithful to M. de Guermantes in the same fashion that she looked after him, that is to say without charm and without dignity. She was commonplace in this role as she had been in all her others. Not that life had not frequently given her good parts; it had, but she had not known how to play them.

On several occasions after the Guermantes party I attempted to see her again, but each time I was unsuccessful, for M. de Guermantes, in order to satisfy the requirements not only of his jealous nature but also of his medical regime, allowed her to attend social functions only in the daytime and even then placed an embargo upon dances. This seclusion in which she was kept she frankly avowed to me when at last we met, for several reasons. The principal one was that, although I had only written a few articles and published some essays, she imagined me to be a well-known author, an idea which even caused her naïvely to exclaim, recalling the days when I used to go to the Allée des Acacias to see her pass by and later visited her in her home: "Ah! if I had only guessed that he would be a great writer one day!" And having heard that writers seek the society of women as a means of collecting material for their work and like to get them to describe their love-affairs, she now, in order to interest me, reassumed the character of an unashamed tart. She would tell me stories of this sort: "And then once there was a man who was mad about me, and I was desperately in love with him too. We were having a heavenly life together. He had to go to America for some reason, and I was to go with him. The day before we were to leave I decided that, as our love could not always remain at such a pitch of intensity, it was more beautiful not to let it slowly fade to nothing. We had a last evening together—he of course believed that I was coming with him—and then a night of absolute madness, in which I was ecstatically happy in his arms and at the same time in despair because I knew that I should never see him again. A few hours earlier I had gone up to some traveller whom I did not know and given him my ticket. He wanted at least to buy it from me, but I replied: 'No, you are doing me a service by taking it, I don't want any money.' " Here was another: "One day I was in the Champs-Élysées and M. de Bréauté, whom I had only met once, began to stare at me so insistently that I stopped and asked him why he took the liberty of staring at me like that. He replied: 'I am looking at you because you are wearing a ridiculous hat.' This was quite true. It was a little hat with pansies, the fashions were dreadful in those days. But I was furious and said to him: 'I cannot allow you to talk to me like that.' At that moment it started to rain. I said to him: 'I would only forgive you if you had a carriage.' 'But I have one,' he replied, 'and I will accompany you.' 'No, I want your carriage but I don't want you.' I got into the carriage and he walked off in the rain. But the same evening he arrived on my door-step. For two years we were madly in love with each other. Come and have tea with me one day, and I will tell you how I made the acquaintance of M. de Forcheville. The truth is," she went on with a melancholy air, "that I have spent my life in cloistered seclusion because my great loves have all been for men who were horribly jealous. I am not speaking of M. de Forcheville, who was at bottom a commonplace man—and I have never really been able to love anyone who was not intelligent. But M. Swann for one was as jealous as the poor Duke here, for whose sake I renounce all enjoyment, because I know that he is so unhappy in his own home. With M. Swann it was different, I was desperately in love with him and it seems to me only reasonable to sacrifice dancing and society and all the rest of it for a life which will give pleasure to a man who loves you, or will merely prevent him from suffering. Poor Charles, how intelligent he was, how fascinating, just the type of man I liked." And perhaps this was true. There had been a time when she had found Swann attractive, which had coincided with the time when she to him had been "not his type." The truth was that "his type" was something that, even later, she had never been. And yet how he had loved her and with what anguish of mind! Ceasing to love her, he had been puzzled by this contradiction, which really is no contradiction at all, if we consider how large a proportion of the sufferings endured by men in their lives is caused to them by women who are "not their type." Perhaps there are many reasons why this should be so: first, because a woman is "not your type" you let yourself, at the beginning, be loved by her without loving in return, and by doing this you

allow your life to be gripped by a habit which would not have taken root in the same way with a woman who was "your type," who, conscious of your desire, would have offered more resistance, would only rarely have consented to see you, would not have installed herself in every hour of your days with that familiarity which means that later, if you come to love her and then suddenly she is not there, because of a quarrel or because of a journey during which you are left without news of her, you are hurt by the severance not of one but of a thousand links. And then this habit, not resting upon the foundation of strong physical desire, is a sentimental one, and once love is born the brain gets much more busily to work: you are plunged into a romance, not plagued by a mere need. We are not wary of women who are "not our type," we let them love us, and if, subsequently, we come to love them we love them a hundred times more than we love other women, without even enjoying in their arms the satisfaction of assuaged desire. For these reasons and for many others the fact that our greatest unhappinesses come to us from women who are "not our type" is not simply an instance of that mockery of fate which never grants us our wishes except in the form which pleases us least. A woman who is "our type" is seldom dangerous, she is not interested in us, she gives us a limited contentment and then quickly leaves us without establishing herself in our life, and what on the contrary, in love, is dangerous and prolific of suffering is not a woman herself but her presence beside us every day and our curiosity about what she is doing every minute: not the beloved woman, but habit.

I was cowardly enough to say that it was kind and generous of her to talk to me in this way, but I knew how little truth there was in my remark, I knew that her frankness was mixed with all sorts of lies. And as she continued to regale me with adventures from her past life, I thought with terror how much there was that Swann had not known—though some of it he had guessed almost to the point of certainty, merely from the look in her eyes when she saw a man or a woman whom she did not know and whom she found attractive—and how much the knowledge of it would have made him suffer, because he had fastened his sensibility to this one individual. And why was she now so outspoken? Simply in order to give me what she believed were subjects for novels. In this belief she was mistaken. It was true that from my earliest years she had supplied my imagination with abundance of material to work on, but in a much more involuntary fashion, through an act which originated with myself when I sought, unbeknown to her, to deduce from my observation of her the laws which governed her life.

M. de Guermites now reserved his thunderbolts solely for the Duchess, to whose somewhat indiscriminate associations Mme de Forcheville did not fail to draw his wrathful attention. And so Mme de Guermites was very unhappy. It is true that M. de Charlus, with whom I had once discussed the subject, maintained that the original transgressions had not been on his brother's side and that beneath the legendary purity of the Duchess there in fact lay skilfully concealed an incalculable number of love-affairs. But I had never heard any gossip to this effect. In the eyes of almost all the world Mme de Guermites was a woman of a very different kind, and the idea that she had always been irreproachable went unchallenged. Which of these two ideas accorded with the truth I was unable to determine, the truth being almost always something that to three people out of four is unknown. I well recalled certain blue and wandering glances, which I had intercepted as they shot from the eyes of the Duchesse de Guermites down the nave at Combray, but I could not really say that either of the two ideas was disproved by these glances, since both the one and the other could give them meanings which, though different, were equally acceptable. In my foolishness, child as I then was, I had for a moment taken, them to be glances of love directed at myself. Later I had realised that they were merely the gracious looks that a sovereign lady, like the one in the stained-glass windows of the church, bestows upon her vassals. Was I now to suppose that my first idea had been correct and that, if in the sequel the Duchess had never spoken to me of love, this was because she had been more afraid to compromise herself with a friend of her nephew and her aunt than with an unknown boy encountered by chance in the church of Saint-Hilaire at Combray?

Perhaps the Duchess had been pleased for a moment to feel that her past had more substance because it had been shared by me, but certain questions which I put to her on the provincialism of M. de Bréauté, whom at the time I had scarcely distinguished from M. de Sagan or M. de Guermites, caused her to resume the normal point of view of a society woman, the point of view, that is to say, of a woman who affects to despise society. While we were talking, she took me on a tour of the house. In one or two smaller sitting-rooms we came upon special friends of our hostess who had preferred to get away from the crowd in order to listen to the music. One of these was a little room with Empire furniture, where a few men in black evening clothes were sitting about on sofas, listening, while beside a tall mirror supported by a figure of Minerva a *chaise longue*, set at right angles to the wall but with a curved and cradle-like interior which contrasted with the straight lines all round it, disclosed the figure of a young woman lying at full length. The relaxation of her pose, from which she did not even stir when the Duchess entered the room, was set off by the marvellous brilliance of her Empire dress, of a flame-red silk before which even the reddest of fuchsias would have paled and upon whose nacreous texture emblems and flowers seemed to have been imprinted in some distant past, for their patterns were sunk beneath its surface. To acknowledge the presence of the Duchess she made a slight bow with her beautiful, dark head. Although it was broad daylight, she had asked for the curtains to be drawn as an aid to the silence and concentration which the music required and, to prevent people from stumbling over the furniture, an urn had been lit upon a tripod and from it came a faint, iridescent glimmer. I inquired of the Duchess who the young woman was, and she told me that her name was Mme de Saint-Euverte. This led me to inquire further how she was related to the Mme de Saint-Euverte whom I had known. Mme de Guermites said that she was the wife of one of old Mme de Saint-Euverte's great-nephews and appeared to think it possible that her maiden name had been La Rochefoucauld, but denied that she had ever herself known any

Saint-Euvertes. I recalled to her the evening party (known to me, it is true, only from hearsay) at which, when she was still Princesse des Laumes, she had unexpectedly met Swann. Mme de Guermantes assured me that she had never been at this party. The Duchess had never been very truthful and now told lies more readily than ever. For her Mme de Saint-Euverte was a hostess—and one whose reputation, with the passage of time, had sunk very low indeed—whom she chose to disown. I did not insist. “No, someone you may perhaps have seen in my house—because at least he was amusing—is the husband of the woman you are talking about, but I never had anything to do with his wife.” “But she didn’t have a husband.” “That is what you imagined, because they were separated. In fact he was much nicer than she was.” At length it dawned upon me that an enormous man, of vast height and strength, with snow-white hair, whom I used to meet in various houses and whose name I had never known, was the husband of Mme de Saint-Euverte. He had died in the previous year. As for the great-niece, I do not know whether it was owing to some malady of the stomach or the nerves or the veins, or because she was about to have or had just had a child or perhaps a miscarriage, that she lay flat on her back to listen to the music and did not budge for anyone. Very probably she was simply proud of her magnificent red silks and hoped on her *chaise longue* to look like Mme Récamier. She could not know that for me she was giving birth to a new efflorescence of the name of Saint-Euverte, which recurring thus after so long an interval marked both the distance travelled by Time and its continuity. Time was the infant that she cradled in her cockle-shell, where the red fuchsias of her silk dress gave an autumnal flowering to the name of Saint-Euverte and to the Empire style. The latter Mme de Guermantes declared that she had always detested, a remark which meant merely that she detested it now, which was true, for she followed the fashion, even if she did not succeed in keeping up with it. To say nothing of David, whose work she hardly knew, when she was quite young she had thought M. Ingres the most boring and academic of painters, then, by a brusque reversal—which caused her also to loathe Delacroix—the most delectable of the masters revered by *art nouveau*. By what gradations she had subsequently passed from this cult to a renewal of her early contempt matters little, since these are shades of taste which the writings of an art critic reflect ten years before the conversation of clever women. After having delivered herself of some strictures upon the Empire style, she apologised for having talked to me about people of as little interest as the Saint-Euvertes and subjects as trivial as the provincial side of Bréauté’s character, for she was as far from guessing why these things could interest me as was Mme de Saint-Euverte *née* La Rochefoucauld, seeking in her supine pose the well-being of her stomach or an Ingresque effect, from suspecting that her name—her married name, not the infinitely more distinguished one of her own family—had enchanted me and that I saw her, in this room full of symbolic attributes, as a nymph cradling the Infant Time.

“But how can I talk to you about this nonsense, how can it possibly interest you?” exclaimed the Duchess. She had uttered these words in an undertone and nobody had been able to hear what she was saying. But a young man (who interested me later when I discovered his name, which had been much more familiar to me at one time than that of Saint-Euverte) got up with an air of exasperation and moved away from us in order to listen undisturbed. For the Kreutzer Sonata was now being played, but having lost his place in the programme the young man thought that it was a piece by Ravel, which he had been told was as beautiful as Palestrina but difficult to understand. In his haste to move to another seat, he bumped violently against an *escritoire* which he had not seen in the half-dark, and the noise had the effect of slewing round the heads of several people, for whom the trifling physical exertion of looking over their shoulder was a welcome interruption to the torture of listening “religiously” to the Kreutzer Sonata. Mme de Guermantes and I, who had caused this unfortunate little incident, hurriedly left the room. “Yes,” she went on, “how can these inanities interest a man of your talent? That is what I asked myself just now, when I saw you talking to Gilberte de Saint-Loup. You should not waste your time on her. For me that woman is quite literally nothing—she is not even a woman, merely the most artificial and bourgeois phenomenon that I have ever encountered” (for even when she was defending intellectualism the Duchess did not divest herself of her aristocratic prejudices). “What, in any case, are you doing in a house like this? I can just see that you might want to be here today, because there was this recitation by Rachel and naturally that interests you. But wonderful though she was, she does not give of her best before a public like this. You must come and have luncheon alone with her in my house. Then you will see what an extraordinary creature she is. She is worth a hundred times more than all this riff-raff. And after luncheon she will recite Verlaine for you. You will be amazed! But otherwise your coming to a great omnium gatherum like this is something I simply cannot understand. Unless perhaps your interest is professional ...” she added with a doubtful and mistrustful air and without venturing to follow this speculation too far for she had no very precise ideas as to the nature of the improbable operations to which she alluded. She went on to tempt me with the glittering prospect of her “afternoons”: every day after luncheon there was X—and there was Y—and I found that her views on these matters were now those of all women who preside over a salon, those women whom in the past (though she denied it today) she had despised and whose great superiority, whose sign of election lay, according to her present mode of thinking, in getting “all the men” to come to them. If I happened to say that some great lady with a salon had spoken with malice of Mme Howland when she was alive, the Duchess burst out laughing at my simplicity: “But of course, she had all the men and Mme Howland was trying to get them away from her.”

“Don’t you think,” I said to the Duchess, “that it must be painful for Mme de Saint-Loup to have to listen, as she has just been doing, to a woman who was once her husband’s mistress?” I saw form in Mme de Guermantes’s face one of those oblique bars which indicate that a train of thought is linking something a person has just heard to some disagreeable subject of reflexion. A train of thought, it is true, which usually remains unexpressed, for seldom if ever do we receive any answer to the unpleasant things that we say or



write. Only a fool begs vainly ten times in succession for a reply to a letter which was a blunder and which he ought never to have written, for the only reply ever vouchsafed to this sort of letter is in the form of action: the lady whom you suppose to be merely an unpunctual correspondent addresses you as "Monsieur" when she next meets you instead of calling you by your Christian name. My reference to Saint-Loup's liaison with Rachel was, however, not seriously unpleasant and could only cause Mme de Guermantes a moment's annoyance by reminding her that I had been Robert's closest friend and that he had perhaps confided in me on the subject of the snubs which Rachel had suffered when she gave her performance at the Duchess's party. But Mme de Guermantes did not persist in these reflexions, the stormy bar faded from her face and she replied to my question concerning Mme de Saint-Loup: "Frankly, it is my belief that it can matter very little to Gilberte, since she never loved her husband. She is a quite dreadful young woman. She loved the social position and the name and being my niece and getting away from the slime where she belonged, but then having done this her one idea was to return to it. I don't mind telling you that I suffered a great deal for poor Robert, because, though he was no genius, he saw this perfectly well, and a lot of other things too. Perhaps I shouldn't say it, because after all she is my niece and I have no absolute proof that she was unfaithful to him, but there were any number of stories. Oh! yes, there were, and I know for a fact there was something between her and an officer at Méséglise. Robert wanted to challenge him. It was because of all this that Robert joined up—the war came to him as a deliverance from the misery of his family life: if you want my opinion, he wasn't killed, he got himself killed. Do you think she felt any grief? Not a scrap, she even astonished me by the extraordinary cynicism with which she displayed her indifference, and this distressed me very much, because I was really extremely fond of poor Robert. Perhaps this will surprise you, because people have a wrong idea of my character, but even now I still think of him sometimes—I never forget anybody. He never said a word to me, but he saw very clearly that I guessed everything. Do you suppose, if she had loved her husband the least little bit, that she could stoically endure like this to be in the same drawing-room as the woman with whom he was desperately in love for so many years—indeed one may say 'always,' for I am quite certain that he never gave her up, even during the war. Why, she would fly at her throat!" exclaimed the Duchess, forgetting that she herself, in arranging for Rachel to be invited and so setting the stage for the drama which she judged to be inevitable if it were true that Gilberte had loved Robert, had perhaps acted cruelly. "No, in my opinion," the Duchess concluded, "she is a bitch." Such an expression on the lips of the Duchesse de Guermantes was rendered possible by the downward path which she was following, from the polished society of the Guermantes to that of her new actress friends, and came to her all the more easily because she grafted it on to an eighteenth-century mode of speech which she thought of as broad and racy—and then had she not always believed that to her all things were permitted? But the actual choice of the word was dictated by the hatred which she felt for Gilberte, by an irresistible wish to strike her at least in effigy if she could not attack her with physical blows. And at the same time the Duchess thought that somehow the word justified the whole manner in which she conducted herself towards Gilberte, or rather conducted hostilities against Gilberte, in society and in the family and even where pecuniary interests were concerned such as the succession to Robert's estate.

This savage attack on Gilberte struck me as quite unwarranted, but sometimes we pronounce a judgment which receives later from facts of which we were ignorant and which we could not have guessed an apparent justification, and Mme de Guermantes's tirade perhaps belonged to this category. For Gilberte, who had no doubt inherited certain family characteristics from her mother (and I had perhaps unconsciously anticipated some such laxness of principle in her when I had asked her to introduce me to young girls), had now had time to reflect upon my request and, anxious no doubt that the profit should stay in the family, had reached a decision bolder than any that I would have thought possible. "Let me fetch my daughter for you," she said, "I should so like to introduce her to you. She is over there, talking to young Mortemart and other babes in arms who can be of no possible interest. I am sure that she will be a charming little friend for you." I asked whether Robert had been pleased to have a daughter. "Oh! yes," she replied, "he was very proud of her. But naturally," she went on, with a certain naïvety, "I think that nevertheless, his tastes being what they were, he would have preferred a son." Years later, this daughter, whose name and fortune gave her mother the right to hope that she would crown the whole work of social ascent of Swann and his wife by marrying a royal prince, happening to be entirely without snobbery chose for her husband an obscure man of letters. Thus it came about that the family sank once more, below even the level from which it had started its ascent, and a new generation could only with the greatest difficulty be persuaded that the parents of the obscure couple had enjoyed a splendid social position. The names of Swann and Odette de Cr  cy came miraculously to life whenever anyone wanted to explain to you that you were wrong, that there had been nothing so very wonderful about the family, and it was generally supposed that Mme de Saint-Loup had really made as good a match for her daughter as could be expected and that the marriage of this daughter's grandfather to Mme de Cr  cy had been no more than an unsuccessful attempt to rise to a higher sphere—a view of Swann's marriage which would have astonished his fashionable friends, in whose eyes it had been rather the product of an idealistic theory like those which in the eighteenth century drove aristocratic disciples of Rousseau and other precursors of the Revolution to abandon their privileges and live according to nature.

My surprise at Gilberte's words and the pleasure that they caused me were soon replaced, while Mme de Saint-Loup left me and made her way into another drawing-room, by that idea of Time past which was brought home to me once again, in yet another fashion and without my even having seen her, by Mme de Saint-Loup. Was she not—are not, indeed, the majority of human beings?—like one of those star-shaped crossroads in a forest where roads converge that have come, in the forest as in our lives, from the most diverse quarters?

Numerous for me were the roads which led to Mlle de Saint-Loup and which radiated around her. Firstly the two great "ways" themselves, where on my many walks I had dreamed so many dreams, both led to her: through her father Robert de Saint-Loup the Guermantes way; through Gilberte, her mother, the Méséglise way which was also "Swann's way." One of them took me, by way of this girl's mother and the Champs-Élysées, to Swann, to my evenings at Combray, to Méséglise itself; the other, by way of her father, to those afternoons at Balbec where even now I saw him again near the sun-bright sea. And then between these two high roads a network of transversals was set up. Balbec, for example, the real Balbec where I had met Saint-Loup, was a place that I had longed to go to very largely because of what Swann had told me about the churches in its neighbourhood, and especially about its own church in the Persian style, and yet Robert de Saint-Loup was the nephew of the Duchesse de Guermantes, and through him I arrived at Combray again, at the Guermantes way. And Mlle de Saint-Loup led to many other points of my life, to the lady in pink, for instance, who was her grandmother and whom I had seen in the house of my great-uncle. And here there was a new transversal, for this great-uncle's manservant, who had opened the door to me that day and who later, by the gift of a photograph, had enabled me to identify the lady in pink, was the father of the young man with whom not only M. de Charlus but also Mlle de Saint-Loup's father had been in love, the young man on whose account he had made her mother unhappy. And was it not Swann, the grandfather of Mlle de Saint-Loup, who had first spoken to me of the music of Vinteuil, just as it was Gilberte who had first spoken to me of Albertine? Yet it was in speaking of this same music of Vinteuil to Albertine that I had discovered the identity of her great friend and it was with this discovery that that part of our lives had commenced which had led her to her death and caused me such terrible sufferings. And it was also Mlle de Saint-Loup's father who had gone off to try and bring Albertine back. And indeed my whole social life, both in the drawing-rooms of the Swanns and the Guermantes in Paris and also that very different life which I had led with the Verdurins in the country, was in some sense a prolongation of the two ways of Combray, a prolongation which brought into line with one way or the other places as far apart as the Champs-Élysées and the beautiful terrace of La Raspelière. Are there in fact among all our acquaintances any who, if we are to tell the story of our friendship with them, do not constrain us to place them successively in all the most different settings of our own lives? A life of Saint-Loup painted by me would have as its background the various scenes of my own life, would be related to every part of that life, even those to which it was apparently most foreign, such as my grandmother and Albertine. And the Verdurins, though they might be diametrically opposed to these other characters, were yet linked to Odette through her past and to Robert de Saint-Loup through Charlie—and in the Verdurins' house too what a role, what an all-important role had not the music of Vinteuil played! And then Swann had been in love with Legrandin's sister, and Legrandin had known M. de Charlus, whose ward Legrandin's nephew, young Cambremer, had married. Certainly, if he was thinking purely of the human heart, the poet was right when he spoke of the "mysterious threads" which are broken by life. But the truth, even more, is that life is perpetually weaving fresh threads which link one individual and one event to another, and that these threads are crossed and recrossed, doubled and redoubled to thicken the web, so that between any slightest point of our past and all the others a rich network of memories gives us an almost infinite variety of communicating paths to choose from.

At every moment of our lives we are surrounded by things and people which once were endowed with a rich emotional significance that they no longer possess. But let us cease to make use of them in an unconscious way, let us try to recall what they once were in our eyes, and how often do we not find that a thing later transformed into, as it were, mere raw material for our industrial use was once alive, and alive for us with a personal life of its own. All round me on the walls were paintings by Elstir, that Elstir who had first introduced me to Albertine. And it was in the house of Mme Verdurin that I was about to be presented to Mlle de Saint-Loup whom I was going to ask to be Albertine's successor in my life, in the house of that very Mme Verdurin whom I had so often visited with Albertine—and how enchanting they seemed in my memory, all those journeys that we had made together in the little train on the way to Douville and La Raspelière—and who had also schemed first to promote and then to break not only my own love for Albertine but, long before it, that of the grandfather and the grandmother of this same Mlle de Saint-Loup. And to complete the process by which all my various pasts were fused into a single mass Mme Verdurin, like Gilberte, had married a Guermantes.

I have said that it would be impossible to depict our relationship with anyone whom we have even slightly known without passing in review, one after another, the most different settings of our life. Each individual therefore—and I was myself one of these individuals—was a measure of duration for me, in virtue of the revolutions which like some heavenly body he had accomplished not only on his own axis but also around other bodies, in virtue, above all, of the successive positions which he had occupied in relation to myself. And surely the awareness of all these different planes within which, since in this last hour, at this party, I had recaptured it, Time seemed to dispose the different elements of my life, had, by making me reflect that in a book which tried to tell the story of a life it would be necessary to use not the two-dimensional psychology which we normally use but a quite different sort of three-dimensional psychology, added a new beauty to those resurrections of the past which my memory had effected while I was following my thoughts alone in the library, since memory by itself, when it introduces the past, unmodified, into the present—the past just as it was at the moment when it was itself the present—suppresses the mighty dimension of Time which is the dimension in which life is lived.

I saw Gilberte coming across the room towards me. For me the marriage of Saint-Loup and the thoughts which filled my mind at that date—and which were still there, unchanged, this very morning—might have

belonged to yesterday, so that I was astonished to see at her side a girl of about sixteen, whose tall figure was a measure of that distance which I had been reluctant to see. Time, colourless and inapprehensible Time, so that I was almost able to see it and touch it, had materialised itself in this girl, moulding her into a masterpiece, while correspondingly, on me, alas! it had merely done its work. And now Mlle de Saint-Loup was standing in front of me. She had deep-set piercing eyes, and a charming nose thrust slightly forward in the form of a beak and curved, perhaps not in the least like that of Swann but like Saint-Loup's. The soul of that particular Guermantes had fluttered away, but his charming head, as of a bird in flight, with its piercing eyes, had settled momentarily upon the shoulders of Mlle de Saint-Loup and the sight of it there aroused a train of memories and dreams in those who had known her father. I was struck too by the way in which her nose, imitating in this the model of her mother's nose and her grandmother's, was cut off by just that absolutely horizontal line at its base, that same brilliant if slightly tardy stroke of design—a feature so individual that with its help, even without seeing anything else of a head, one could have recognised it out of thousands—and it seemed to me wonderful that at the critical moment nature should have returned, like a great and original sculptor, to give to the granddaughter, as she had given to her mother and her grandmother, that significant and decisive touch of the chisel. I thought her very beautiful: still rich in hopes, full of laughter, formed from those very years which I myself had lost, she was like my own youth.

The idea of Time was of value to me for yet another reason: it was a spur, it told me that it was time to begin if I wished to attain to what I had sometimes perceived in the course of my life, in brief lightning-flashes, on the Guermantes way and in my drives in the carriage of Mme de Villeparisis, at those moments of perception which had made me think that life was worth living. How much more worth living did it appear to me now, now that I seemed to see that this life that we live in half-darkness can be illumined, this life that at every moment we distort can be restored to its true pristine shape, that a life, in short, can be realised within the confines of a book! How happy would he be, I thought, the man who had the power to write such a book! What a task awaited him! To give some idea of this task one would have to borrow comparisons from the loftiest and the most varied arts; for this writer—who, moreover, must bring out the opposed facets of each of his characters in order to show its volume—would have to prepare his book with meticulous care, perpetually regrouping his forces like a general conducting an offensive, and he would have also to endure his book like a form of fatigue, to accept it like a discipline, build it up like a church, follow it like a medical regime, vanquish it like an obstacle, win it like a friendship, cosset it like a little child, create it like a new world without neglecting those mysteries whose explanation is to be found probably only in worlds other than our own and the presentiment of which is the thing that moves us most deeply in life and in art. In long books of this kind there are parts which there has been time only to sketch, parts which, because of the very amplitude of the architect's plan, will no doubt never be completed. How many great cathedrals remain unfinished! The writer feeds his book, he strengthens the parts of it which are weak, he protects it, but afterwards it is the book that grows, that designates its author's tomb and defends it against the world's clamour and for a while against oblivion. But to return to my own case, I thought more modestly of my book and it would be inaccurate even to say that I thought of those who would read it as "my" readers. For it seemed to me that they would not be "my" readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician at Combray used to offer his customers—it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves. So that I should not ask them to praise me or to censure me, but simply to tell me whether "it really is like that," I should ask them whether the words that they read within themselves are the same as those which I have written (though a discrepancy in this respect need not always be the consequence of an error on my part, since the explanation could also be that the reader had eyes for which my book was not a suitable instrument). And—for at every moment the metaphor uppermost in my mind changed as I began to represent to myself more clearly and in a more material shape the task upon which I was about to embark—I thought that at my big deal table, under the eyes of Françoise, who like all unpretentious people who live at close quarters with us would have a certain insight into the nature of my labours (and I had sufficiently forgotten Albertine to have forgiven Françoise anything that she might have done to injure her), I should work beside her and in a way almost as she worked herself (or at least as she had worked in the past, for now, with the onset of old age, she had almost lost her sight) and, pinning here and there an extra page, I should construct my book, I dare not say ambitiously like a cathedral, but quite simply like a dress. Whenever I had not all my "paperies" near me, as Françoise called them, and just the one that I needed was missing, Françoise would understand how this upset me, she who always said that she could not sew if she had not the right size of thread and the proper buttons. And then through sharing my life with me had she not acquired a sort of instinctive comprehension of literary work, more accurate than that possessed by many intelligent people, not to mention fools? Already years ago, when I had written my article for *Le Figaro*, while our old butler, with that sort of commiseration which always slightly exaggerates the laboriousness of an occupation which the sympathiser does not practise himself and does not even clearly visualise—or even of a habit which he does not have himself, like the people who say to you: "How tiring you must find it to sneeze like that!"—expressed his quite sincere pity for writers in the words: "That's a head-splitting job you've got there," Françoise on the contrary both divined my happiness and respected my toil. The only thing that annoyed her was my speaking about the article to Bloch before it appeared, for she was afraid that he might forestall me. "You're too trustful," she would say, "all those people are nothing but copiers." And it was true that, whenever I had outlined to Bloch something that I had written and that he admired, he would provide a retrospective alibi for himself by saying: "Why, isn't that

curious, I have written something very similar myself, I must read it to you one day," from which I inferred that he intended to sit down and write it that very evening.

These "paperies," as Françoise called the pages of my writing, it was my habit to stick together with paste, and sometimes in this process they became torn. But Françoise then would be able to come to my help, by consolidating them just as she stitched patches on to the worn parts of her dresses or as, on the kitchen window, while waiting for the glazier as I was waiting for the printer, she used to paste a piece of newspaper where a pane of glass had been broken. And she would say to me, pointing to my note-books as though they were worm-eaten wood or a piece of stuff which the moth had got into: "Look, it's all eaten away, isn't that dreadful! There's nothing left of this bit of page, it's been torn to ribbons," and examining it with a tailor's eye she would go on: "I don't think I shall be able to mend this one, it's finished and done for. A pity, perhaps it has your best ideas. You know what they say at Combray: there isn't a furrier who knows as much about furs as the moth, they always get into the best ones."

And yet in a book individual characters, whether human or of some other kind, are made up of numerous impressions derived from many girls, many churches, many sonatas, and combined to form a single sonata, a single church, a single girl, so that I should be making my book in the same way that Françoise made that *boeuf à la mode* which M. de Norpois had found so delicious, just because she had enriched its jelly with so many carefully chosen pieces of meat.

Thus it was that I envisaged the task before me, a task which would not end until I had achieved what I had so ardently desired in my walks on the Guermantes way and thought to be impossible, just as I had thought it impossible, as I came home at the end of those walks, that I should ever get used to going to bed without kissing my mother or, later, to the idea that Albertine loved women, though in the end I had grown to live with this idea without even being aware of its presence; for neither our greatest fears nor our greatest hopes are beyond the limits of our strength—we are able in the end both to dominate the first and to achieve the second.

Yes, upon this task the idea of Time which I had formed today told me that it was time to set to work. It was high time. But—and this was the reason for the anxiety which had gripped me as soon as I entered the drawing-room, when the theatrical disguises of the faces around me had first given me the notion of Lost Time—was there still time and was I still in a fit condition to undertake the task? For one thing, a necessary condition of my work as I had conceived it just now in the library was a profound study of impressions which had first to be recreated through the memory. But my memory was old and tired. The mind has landscapes which it is allowed to contemplate only for a certain space of time. In my life I had been like a painter climbing a road high above a lake, a view of which is denied to him by a curtain of rocks and trees. Suddenly through a gap in the curtain he sees the lake, its whole expanse is before him, he takes up his brushes. But already the night is at hand, the night which will put an end to his painting and which no dawn will follow. How could I not be anxious, seeing that nothing was yet begun and that though on the ground of age I could still hope that I had some years to live, my hour might on the other hand strike almost at once? For the fundamental fact was that I had a body, and this meant that I was perpetually threatened by a double danger, internal and external, though to speak thus was merely a matter of linguistic convenience, the truth being that the internal danger—the risk, for instance, of a cerebral haemorrhage—is also external, since it is the body that it threatens. Indeed it is the possession of a body that is the great danger to the mind, to our human and thinking life, which it is surely less correct to describe as a miraculous entelechy of animal and physical life than as an imperfect essay—as rudimentary in this sphere as the communal existence of protozoa attached to their polyparies or as the body of the whale—in the organisation of the spiritual life. The body immures the mind within a fortress; presently on all sides the fortress is besieged and in the end, inevitably, the mind has to surrender.

But—to accept provisionally the distinction which I have just made between the two sorts of danger that threaten the mind, and to begin with that which is in the fullest sense external—I recalled that it had often happened to me in the course of my life, in moments of intellectual excitement which coincided with a complete suspension of physical activity, as for example on those evenings when, half drunk, I had left the restaurant at Rivebelle in a carriage to go to some neighbouring casino, to feel very clearly within me the present object of my thought and at the same time to realise how much at the mercy of chance this intellectual activity was: how fortuitous it was that this particular thought had not entered my mind before, and how easily, through an accident to the carriage which was hurtling through the darkness, it might, along with my body, be annihilated. At the time this did not worry me. My high spirits knew neither forethought nor anxiety. The possibility that this joy might end in a second and turn into nothingness mattered to me scarcely at all. How different was my attitude now! The happiness which I was feeling was the product not of a purely subjective tension of the nerves which isolated me from the past, but on the contrary of an enlargement of my mind, within which the past was re-forming and actualising itself, giving me—but alas! only momentarily—something whose value was eternal. This I should have liked to bequeath to those who might have been enriched by my treasure. Admittedly, what I had experienced in the library and what I was seeking to protect was pleasure still, but no longer pleasure of an egotistical kind, or if there was egotism in it (for all the fruitful altruisms of nature develop in an egotistical manner and any human altruism which is without egotism is sterile, like that of the writer who interrupts his work to receive a friend in distress or to accept some public function or to write propaganda articles) it was an egotism which could be put to work for the benefit of other people. No longer was I indifferent to my fate as I had been on those drives back from Rivebelle; I felt myself enhanced by this work which I bore within me as by something fragile and precious which had

been entrusted to me and which I should have liked to deliver intact into the hands of those for whom it was intended, hands which were not my own. And this feeling that I was the bearer of a work made me think in a changed way of an accident in which I might meet with death, as of something much more greatly to be feared and at the same time, to the extent to which this work of mine seemed to me necessary and durable, absurd because in contradiction with my desire, with the flight of my thought, yet none the less possible for that, since accidents, being produced by material causes, can perfectly well take place at the very moment when wishes of a quite different order, which they destroy without being aware of their existence, render them most bitterly regrettable (at a trivial level of existence such accidents happen every day: at the very moment, for instance, when you are trying your hardest not to make a noise because of a friend who is asleep, a carafe placed too near the edge of his table falls to the ground and awakens him). I knew that my brain was like a basin of rock rich in minerals, in which lay vast and varied ores of great price. But should I have time to exploit them? For two reasons I was the only person who could do this: with my death would disappear the one and only engineer who possessed the skill to extract these minerals and—more than that—the whole stratum itself. Yet presently, when I left this party to go home, it only needed a chance collision between the cab which I should take and another car for my body to be destroyed, thus forcing my mind, from which life instantly would ebb away, to abandon for ever and ever the new ideas which at this moment, not yet having had time to place them within the safety of a book, it anxiously embraced with the fragile protection of its own pulpy and quivering substance.

But by a strange coincidence, this rational fear of danger was taking shape in my mind at a moment when I had finally become indifferent to the idea of death. In the past the fear of being no longer myself was something that had terrified me, and this had made me dread the end of each new love that I had experienced (for Gilberte, for Albertine), because I could not bear the idea that the “I” who loved them would one day cease to exist, since this in itself would be a kind of death. But by dint of repetition this fear had gradually been transformed into a calm confidence. So that if in those early days, as we have seen, the idea of death had cast a shadow over my loves, for a long time now the remembrance of love had helped me not to fear death. For I realised that dying was not something new, but that on the contrary since my childhood I had already died many times. To take a comparatively recent period, had I not clung to Albertine more tenaciously than to my own life? Could I at the time when I loved her conceive my personality without the continued existence within it of my love for her? Yet now I no longer loved her, I was no longer the person who loved her but a different person who did not love her, and it was when I had become a new person that I had ceased to love her. And yet I did not suffer from having become this new person, from no longer loving Albertine, and surely the prospect of one day no longer having a body could not from any point of view seem to me as sad as had then seemed to me that of one day no longer loving Albertine, that prospect which now was a fact and one which left me quite unmoved. These successive deaths, so feared by the self which they were destined to annihilate, so painless, so unimportant once they were accomplished and the self that feared them was no longer there to feel them, had taught me by now that it would be the merest folly to be frightened of death. Yet it was precisely when the thought of death had become a matter of indifference to me that I was beginning once more to fear death, under another form, it is true, as a threat not to myself but to my book, since for my book’s incubation this life that so many dangers threatened was for a while at least indispensable. Victor Hugo says:

Grass must grow and children must die.

To me it seems more correct to say that the cruel law of art is that people die and we ourselves die after exhausting every form of suffering, so that over our heads may grow the grass not of oblivion but of eternal life, the vigorous and luxuriant growth of a true work of art, and so that thither, gaily and without a thought for those who are sleeping beneath them, future generations may come to enjoy their *déjeuner sur l’herbe*.

So much for the dangers from without; there were others, as I have said, that threatened me from within. Supposing that I were preserved from all accidents of an external kind, might I not nevertheless be robbed of the fruits of this good fortune by some accident occurring within myself, some internal catastrophe assailing me before the necessary months had passed and I had had time to write my book? When presently I made my way home through the Champs-Élysées, who was to say that I might not be struck down by that malady which had struck my grandmother one afternoon when she had gone there with me for a walk which, though of this she had no suspicion, was destined to be her last—so ignorant are we, as ignorant as the hand of a clock when it arrives at the point upon its dial where a spring will be released within the mechanism which will cause the hour to strike. And indeed perhaps the fear that I might already have traversed almost the whole of that last minute which precedes the first stroke of the hour, that minute during which the stroke is already preparing itself, perhaps the fear of the stroke that might already be moving into action within my brain was itself a sort of obscure awareness of something that was soon to happen, a sort of reflexion in the conscious mind of the precarious state of the brain whose arteries are about to give way, a phenomenon no more impossible than that sudden acceptance of death that comes to wounded men who, though the doctor and their own desire to live try to deceive them, say, realising the truth: “I am going to die, I am ready,” and write their farewells to their wives.

Nor was anything so grave as a cerebral haemorrhage needed to hinder me in the execution of my task. Already the premonitory symptoms of the same malady, perceptible to me in a certain emptiness in the head and a tendency to forgetfulness thanks to which I now merely stumbled upon things in my memory by chance

in the way in which, when you are tidying your belongings, you find objects which you had forgotten even that you had to look for, were making me resemble a miser whose strongbox has burst open and whose treasures little by little are disappearing. For a while there existed within me a self which deplored the loss of these treasures, then I perceived that memory, as it withdrew from me, carried away with it this self too.

And something not unlike my grandmother's illness itself happened to me shortly afterwards, when I still had not started to work on my book, in a strange fashion which I should never have anticipated. I went out to see some friends one evening and was told that I had never looked so well, and how wonderful it was that I had not a single grey hair. But at the end of the visit, coming downstairs, three times I nearly fell. I had left my home only two hours earlier; but when I got back, I felt that I no longer possessed either memory or the power of thought or strength or existence of any kind. People could have come to call on me or to proclaim me king, to lay violent hands on me or arrest me, and I should passively have submitted, neither opening my eyes nor uttering a word, like those travellers of whom we read who, crossing the Caspian Sea in a small boat, are so utterly prostrated by seasickness that they offer not even a show of resistance when they are told that they are going to be thrown into the sea. I had, strictly speaking, no illness, but I felt myself no longer capable of anything, I was in the condition of those old men who one day are in full possession of their faculties and the next, having fractured a thigh or had an attack of indigestion, can only drag on for a while in their bed an existence which has become nothing more than a preparation, longer or shorter, for a now ineluctable death. One of my selves, the one which in the past had been in the habit of going to those barbarian festivals that we call dinner-parties, at which, for the men in white shirt-fronts and the half-naked women beneath feathered plumes, values have been so reversed that a man who does not turn up after having accepted the invitation—or merely arrives after the roast has been served—is deemed to have committed an act more culpable than any of those immoral actions which, along with the latest deaths, are so lightly discussed at this feast which nothing but death or a serious illness is an acceptable excuse for failing to attend—and then only provided that one has given notice in good time of one's intention to die, so that there may be no danger for the other guests of sitting down thirteen to table—this one of my selves had retained its scruples and lost its memory. The other self, the one which had had a glimpse of the task that lay before it, on the contrary still remembered. I had received an invitation from Mme Molé and I had learnt that Mme Sazerat's son had died. I determined therefore to employ one of those few hours after which I could not hope even to pronounce another word or to swallow a mouthful of milk, since my tongue would be tied as my grandmother's had been during her agony, in addressing my excuses to the one lady and my condolences to the other. But a moment or two later I had forgotten that I had these things to do—most happily forgotten, for the memory of my real work did not slumber but proposed to employ the hour of reprieve which was granted me in laying my first foundations. Unfortunately, as I took up a note-book to write, Mme Molé's invitation card slipped out in front of my eyes. Immediately the forgetful self, which nevertheless was able to dominate the other—is this not always the case with those scrupulous barbarians who have learnt the lore of the dinner-party?—pushed away the note-book and wrote to Mme Molé (whose esteem for me would no doubt have been great had she known that I had allowed my reply to her invitation to take precedence over my labours as an architect). Then suddenly a word in my letter reminded me that Mme Sazerat had lost her son and I wrote to her as well, after which, having sacrificed a real duty to the factitious obligation to appear polite and sympathetic, I fell back exhausted and closed my eyes, not to emerge from a purely vegetal existence before a week had elapsed. During this time, however, if all my unnecessary duties, to which I was willing to sacrifice my true duty, vanished after a few moments from my head, the idea of the edifice that I had to construct did not leave me for an instant. Whether it would be a church where little by little a group of faithful would succeed in apprehending verities and discovering harmonies or perhaps even a grand general plan, or whether it would remain, like a druidic monument on a rocky isle, something for ever unfrequented, I could not tell. But I was resolved to devote to it all my strength, which ebbed, as it seemed, reluctantly and as though to leave me time to complete the periphery of my walls and close “the funeral gate.” Before very long I was able to show a few sketches. No one understood anything of them. Even those who commended my perception of the truths which I wanted eventually to engrave within the temple, congratulated me on having discovered them “with a microscope,” when on the contrary it was a telescope that I had used to observe things which were indeed very small to the naked eye, but only because they were situated at a great distance, and which were each one of them in itself a world. Those passages in which I was trying to arrive at general laws were described as so much pedantic investigation of detail. What, in any case, was I hoping to achieve? In my youth I had had a certain facility, and Bergotte had praised as “admirable” the pages which I wrote while still at school. But instead of working I had lived a life of idleness, of pleasures and distractions, of ill health and cossetting and eccentricities, and I was embarking upon my labour of construction almost at the point of death, without knowing anything of my trade. I felt that I no longer possessed the strength to carry out my obligations to people or my duties to my thoughts and my work, still less to satisfy both of these claims. As for the first, my forgetfulness of the letters I had to write and of the other things I had to do, to some extent simplified my task. But suddenly, at the end of a month, the association of ideas brought back the painful recollection of these duties and I was momentarily overwhelmed by the thought of my impotence. To my astonishment I found that I did not mind, the truth being that, since the day when my legs had trembled so violently as I was going downstairs, I had become indifferent to everything, I longed only for rest, while waiting for the great rest which would come in the end. Amongst other things I was indifferent to the verdict which might be passed on my work by the best minds of my age, and this not because I relegated to some future after my death the admiration which it seemed to me that my work ought to receive. The best minds of posterity might

think what they chose, their opinions mattered to me no more than those of my contemporaries. The truth was that, if I thought of my work and not of the letters which I ought to answer, this was not because I attached to these two things, as I had during my years of idleness and later, in that brief interval between the conception of my book and the day when I had had to cling to the banister, very different degrees of importance. The organisation of my memory, of the preoccupations that filled my mind, was indeed linked to my work, but perhaps simply because, while the letters which I received were forgotten a moment later, the idea of my work was inside my head, always the same, perpetually in process of becoming. But even my work had become for me a tiresome obligation, like a son for a dying mother who still, between her injections and her blood-lettings, has to make the exhausting effort of constantly looking after him. Perhaps she still loves him, but it is only in the form of a duty too great for her strength that she is aware of her affection. In me, in the same way, the powers of the writer were no longer equal to the egotistical demands of the work. Since the day of the staircase, nothing in the world, no happiness, whether it came from friendship or the progress of my book or the hope of fame, reached me except as a sunshine unclouded but so pale that it no longer had the virtue to warm me, to make me live, to instil in me any desire; and yet, faint though it was, it was still too dazzling for my eyes, I closed them and turned my face to the wall. When a lady wrote to me: "I have been *very surprised* not to receive an answer to my letter," I must, it seemed, to judge from the sensation of movement in my lips, have twisted an infinitesimal corner of my mouth into a little smile. Nevertheless, I was reminded of her unanswered letter and I wrote her a reply. Not wishing to be thought ungrateful, I tried hard to raise my tardy civilities to the level of those which I supposed that other people, though I had forgotten it, had shown to me. And I was crushed by the effort to impose upon my moribund existence the superhuman fatigues of life. The loss of my memory helped me a little by creating gaps in my obligations; they were more than made good by the claims of my work.

The idea of death took up permanent residence within me in the way that love sometimes does. Not that I loved death, I abhorred it. But after a preliminary stage in which, no doubt, I thought about it from time to time as one does about a woman with whom one is not yet in love, its image adhered now to the most profound layer of my mind, so completely that I could not give my attention to anything without that thing first traversing the idea of death, and even if no object occupied my attention and I remained in a state of complete repose, the idea of death still kept me company as faithfully as the idea of my self. And, on that day on which I had become a half-dead man, I do not think that it was the accidents characterising this condition—my inability to walk downstairs, to remember a name, to get up from a chair—that had, even by an unconscious train of thought, given rise to this idea of death, this conviction that I was already almost dead; it seems to me rather that the idea had come simultaneously with the symptoms, that inevitably the mind, great mirror that it is, reflected a new reality. Yet still I did not see how from my present ailments one could pass, without warning of what was to come, to total death. Then, however, I thought of other people, of the countless people who die every day without the gap between their illness and their death seeming to us extraordinary. I thought also that it was only because I saw them from within—rather than because I saw them in the deceptive colours of hope—that certain of my ailments, taken singly, did not seem to me to be fatal although I believed that I would soon die, just as those who are most convinced that their hour has come are, nevertheless, easily persuaded that if they are unable to pronounce certain words, this is nothing so serious as aphasia or a stroke, but a symptom merely of a local fatigue of the tongue, or a nervous condition comparable to a stutter, or the lassitude which follows indigestion.

No doubt my books too, like my fleshly being, would in the end one day die. But death is a thing that we must resign ourselves to. We accept the thought that in ten years we ourselves, in a hundred years our books, will have ceased to exist. Eternal duration is promised no more to men's works than to men.

In my awareness of the approach of death I resembled a dying soldier, and like him too, before I died, I had something to write. But my task was longer than his, my words had to reach more than a single person. My task was long. By day, the most I could hope for was to try to sleep. If I worked, it would be only at night. But I should need many nights, a hundred perhaps, or even a thousand. And I should live in the anxiety of not knowing whether the master of my destiny might not prove less indulgent than the Sultan Shahriyar, whether in the morning, when I broke off my story, he would consent to a further reprieve and permit me to resume my narrative the following evening. Not that I had the slightest pretension to be writing a new version, in any way, of the *Arabian Nights*, or of that other book written by night, Saint-Simon's *Memoirs*, or of any of those books which I had loved with a child's simplicity and to which I had been as superstitiously attached as later to my loves, so that I could not imagine without horror any work which should be unlike them. But—as Elstir had found with Chardin—you can make a new version of what you love only by first renouncing it. So my book, though it might be as long as the *Arabian Nights*, would be entirely different. True, when you are in love with some particular book, you would like yourself to write something that closely resembles it, but this love of the moment must be sacrificed, you must think not of your own taste but of a truth which far from asking you what your preferences are forbids you to pay attention to them. And only if you faithfully follow this truth will you sometimes find that you have stumbled again upon what you renounced, find that, by forgetting these works themselves, you have written the *Arabian Nights* or the *Memoirs* of Saint-Simon of another age. But for me was there still time? Was it not too late?

And I had to ask myself not only: "Is there still time?" but also: "Am I well enough?" Ill health, which by compelling me, like a severe director of conscience, to die to the world, had rendered me good service (for "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"), and which, after idleness had preserved me from the dangers of facility, was perhaps going to protect

me from idleness, that same ill health had consumed my strength and as I had first noticed long ago, particularly when I had ceased to love Albertine, the strength of my memory. But was not the re-creation by the memory of impressions which had then to be deepened, illumined, transformed into equivalents of understanding, was not this process one of the conditions, almost the very essence of the work of art as I had just now in the library conceived it? Ah! if only I now possessed the strength which had still been intact on that evening brought back to my mind by the sight of *François le Champi*! Was not that the evening when my mother had abdicated her authority, the evening from which dated, together with the slow death of my grandmother, the decline of my health and my will? All these things had been decided in that moment when, no longer able to bear the prospect of waiting till morning to place my lips upon my mother's face, I had made up my mind, jumped out of bed and gone in my night-shirt to post myself at the window through which the moonlight entered my room until I should hear the sounds of M. Swann's departure. My parents had gone with him to the door, I had heard the garden gate open, give a peal of its bell, and close...

While I was asking myself these questions, it occurred to me suddenly that, if I still had the strength to accomplish my work, this afternoon—like certain days long ago at Combray which had influenced me—which in its brief compass had given me both the idea of my work and the fear of being unable to bring it to fruition, would certainly impress upon it that form of which as a child I had had a presentiment in the church at Combray but which ordinarily, throughout our lives, is invisible to us: the form of Time.

Many errors, it is true, there are, as the reader will have seen that various episodes in this story had proved to me, by which our senses falsify for us the real nature of the world. Some of these, however, it would be possible for me to avoid by the efforts which I should make to give a more exact transcription of things. In the case of sounds, for instance, I should be able to refrain from altering their place of origin, from detaching them from their cause, beside which our intelligence only succeeds in locating them after they have reached our ears—though to make the rain sing softly in the middle of one's room or, contrarily, to make the quiet boiling of one's tisane sound like a deluge in the courtyard outside should not really be more misleading than what is so often done by painters when they paint a sail or the peak of a mountain in such a way that, according to the laws of perspective, the intensity of the colours and the illusion of our first glance, they appear to us either very near or very far away, through an error which the reasoning mind subsequently corrects by, sometimes, a very large displacement. Other errors, though of a more serious kind, I might continue to commit, placing features, for instance, as we all do, upon the face of a woman seen in the street, when instead of nose, cheeks and chin there ought to be merely an empty space with nothing more upon it than a flickering reflexion of our desires. But at least, even if I had not the leisure to prepare—and here was a much more important matter—the hundred different masks which ought properly to be attached to a single face, if only because of the different eyes which look at it and the different meanings which they read into its features, not to mention, for the same eyes, the different emotions of hope and fear or on the contrary love and habit which for thirty years can conceal the changes brought about by age, and even if I did not attempt—though my love-affair with Albertine was sufficient proof to me that any other kind of representation must be artificial and untruthful—to represent some of my characters as existing not outside but within ourselves, where their slightest action can bring fatal disturbances in its train, and to vary also the light of the moral sky which illumines them in accordance with the variations in pressure in our own sensibility (for an object which was so small beneath the clear sky of our certainty can be suddenly magnified many times over on the appearance of a tiny cloud of danger)—if, in my attempt to transcribe a universe which had to be totally redrawn, I could not convey these changes and many others, the needfulness of which, if one is to depict reality, has been made manifest in the course of my narrative, at least I should not fail to portray man, in this universe, as endowed with the length not of his body but of his years and as obliged—a task more and more enormous and in the end too great for his strength—to drag them with him wherever he goes.

Moreover, that we occupy a place, always growing, in Time is something everybody is conscious of, and this universality could only make me rejoice, it being the truth, the truth suspected by each of us, that I had to seek to elucidate. Not only does everybody feel that we occupy a place in Time, but the simplest of us measures this place approximately, as he would measure the one we occupy in space. People with no special perspicacity, seeing two men whom they do not know, both perhaps with black moustaches or both clean-shaven, will say that of the two one is about twenty and the other about forty years old, for the face of a young man cannot possibly be confused with that of a man of middle age, which in the eyes even of the most ignorant beholder is veiled by a sort of mist of seriousness. Of course, this evaluation of age that we make is often inaccurate, but the mere fact that we think ourselves able to make it indicates that we conceive of age as an entity which is measurable. And the second of the two men with black moustaches has, in effect, had twenty years added to his stature.

This notion of Time embodied, of years past but not separated from us, it was now my intention to emphasise as strongly as possible in my work. And at this very moment, in the house of the Prince de Guermantes, as though to strengthen me in my resolve, the noise of my parents' footsteps as they accompanied M. Swann to the door and the peal—resilient, ferruginous, interminable, fresh and shrill—of the bell on the garden gate which informed me that at last he had gone and that Mamma would presently come upstairs, these sounds rang again in my ears, yes, unmistakably I heard these very sounds, situated though they were in a remote past. And as I cast my mind over all the events which were ranged in an unbroken series between the moment of my childhood when I had first heard its sound and the Guermantes party, I was terrified to think that it was indeed this same bell which rang within me and that nothing that I could do would alter its jangling notes. On the contrary, having forgotten the exact manner in which they faded away and wanting to



re-learn this, to hear them properly again, I was obliged to block my ears to the conversations which were proceeding between the masked figures all round me, for in order to get nearer to the sound of the bell and to hear it better it was into my own depths that I had to re-descend. And this could only be because its peal had always been there, inside me, and not this sound only but also, between that distant moment and the present one, unrolled in all its vast length, the whole of that past which I was not aware that I carried about within me. When the bell of the garden gate had pealed, I already existed and from that moment onwards, for me still to be able to hear that peal, there must have been no break in continuity, no single second at which I had ceased or rested from existing, from thinking, from being conscious of myself, since that moment from long ago still adhered to me and I could still find it again, could retrace my steps to it, merely by descending to a greater depth within myself. And it is because they contain thus within themselves the hours of the past that human bodies have the power to hurt so terribly those who love them, because they contain the memories of so many joys and desires already effaced for them, but still cruel for the lover who contemplates and prolongs in the dimension of Time the beloved body of which he is jealous, so jealous that he may even wish for its destruction. For after death Time withdraws from the body, and the memories, so indifferent, grown so pale, are effaced in her who no longer exists, as they soon will be in the lover whom for a while they continue to torment but in whom before long they will perish, once the desire that owed its inspiration to a living body is no longer there to sustain them. Profound Albertine, whom I saw sleeping and who was dead.

In this vast dimension which I had not known myself to possess, the date on which I had heard the noise of the garden bell at Combray—that far-distant noise which nevertheless was within me—was a point from which I might start to make measurements. And I felt, as I say, a sensation of weariness and almost of terror at the thought that all this length of Time had not only, without interruption, been lived, experienced, secreted by me, that it was my life, was in fact me, but also that I was compelled so long as I was alive to keep it attached to me, that it supported me and that, perched on its giddy summit, I could not myself make a movement without displacing it. A feeling of vertigo seized me as I looked down beneath me, yet within me, as though from a height, which was my own height, of many leagues, at the long series of the years.

I understood now why it was that the Duc de Guermantes, who to my surprise, when I had seen him sitting on a chair, had seemed to me so little aged although he had so many more years beneath him than I had, had presently, when he rose to his feet and tried to stand firm upon them, swayed backwards and forwards upon legs as tottery as those of some old archbishop with nothing solid about his person but his metal crucifix, to whose support there rushes a mob of sturdy young seminarists, and had advanced with difficulty, trembling like a leaf, upon the almost unmanageable summit of his eighty-three years, as though men spend their lives perched upon living stilts which never cease to grow until sometimes they become taller than church steeples, making it in the end both difficult and perilous for them to walk and raising them to an eminence from which suddenly they fall. And I was terrified by the thought that the stilts beneath my own feet might already have reached that height; it seemed to me that quite soon now I might be too weak to maintain my hold upon a past which already went down so far. So, if I were given long enough to accomplish my work, I should not fail, even if the effect were to make them resemble monsters, to describe men as occupying so considerable a place, compared with the restricted place which is reserved for them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure, for simultaneously, like giants plunged into the years, they touch the distant epochs through which they have lived, between which so many days have come to range themselves—in Time.

## OVERTURE

FOR A LONG TIME, I went to bed early. Sometimes, my candle scarcely out, my eyes would close so quickly that I did not have time to say to myself: "I'm falling asleep." And, half an hour later, the thought that it was time to try to sleep would wake me; I wanted to put down the book I thought I still had in my hands and blow out my light; I had not ceased while sleeping to form reflections on what I had just read, but these reflections had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was what the book was talking about: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This belief lived on for a few seconds after my waking; it did not shock my reason but lay heavy like scales on my eyes and kept them from realizing that the candlestick was no longer lit. Then it began to grow unintelligible to me, as after metempsychosis do the thoughts of an earlier existence; the subject of the book detached itself from me, I was free to apply myself to it or not; immediately I recovered my sight and I was amazed to find a darkness around me soft and restful for my eyes, but perhaps even more so for my mind, to which it appeared a thing without cause, incomprehensible, a thing truly dark. I would ask myself what time it might be; I could hear the whistling of the trains which, remote or nearby, like the singing of a bird in a forest, plotting the distances, described to me the extent of the deserted countryside where the traveler hastens toward the nearest station; and the little road he is following will be engraved on his memory by the excitement he owes to new places, to unaccustomed activities, to the recent conversation and the farewells under the unfamiliar lamp that follow him still through the silence of the night, to the imminent sweetness of his return.

I would rest my cheeks tenderly against the lovely cheeks of the pillow, which, full and fresh, are like the cheeks of our childhood. I would strike a match to look at my watch. Nearly midnight. This is the hour when the invalid who has been obliged to go off on a journey and has had to sleep in an unfamiliar hotel, wakened by an attack, is cheered to see a ray of light under the door. How fortunate, it's already morning! In a moment the servants will be up, he will be able to ring, someone will come help him. The hope of being relieved gives him the courage to suffer. In fact he thought he heard footsteps; the steps approach, then recede. And the ray of light that was under his door has disappeared. It is midnight; they have just turned off the gas; the last servant has gone and he will have to suffer the whole night through without remedy.

I would go back to sleep, and would sometimes afterward wake again for brief moments only, long enough to hear the organic creak of the woodwork, open my eyes and stare at the kaleidoscope of the darkness, savor in a momentary glimmer of consciousness the sleep into which were plunged the furniture, the room, that whole of which I was only a small part and whose insensibility I would soon return to share. Or else while sleeping I had effortlessly returned to a period of my early life that had ended forever, rediscovered one of my childish terrors such as my great-uncle pulling me by my curls, a terror dispelled on the day—the dawn for me of a new era—when they were cut off. I had forgotten that event during my sleep, I recovered its memory as soon as I managed to wake myself up to escape the hands of my great-uncle, but as a precautionary measure I would completely surround my head with my pillow before returning to the world of dreams.

Sometimes, as Eve was born from one of Adam's ribs, a woman was born during my sleep from a cramped position of my thigh. Formed from the pleasure I was on the point of enjoying, she, I imagined, was the one offering it to me. My body, which felt in hers my own warmth, would try to find itself inside her, I would wake up. The rest of humanity seemed very remote compared with this woman I had left scarcely a few moments before; my cheek was still warm from her kiss, my body aching from the weight of hers. If, as sometimes happened, she had the features of a woman I had known in life, I would devote myself entirely to this end: to finding her again, like those who go off on a journey to see a longed-for city with their own eyes and imagine that one can enjoy in reality the charm of a dream. Little by little the memory of her would fade, I had forgotten the girl of my dream.

A sleeping man holds in a circle around him the sequence of the hours, the order of the years and worlds. He consults them instinctively as he wakes and reads in a second the point on the earth he occupies, the time that has elapsed before his waking; but their ranks can be mixed up, broken. If toward morning, after a bout of insomnia, sleep overcomes him as he is reading, in a position quite different from the one in which he usually sleeps, his raised arm alone is enough to stop the sun and make it retreat, and, in the first minute of his waking, he will no longer know what time it is, he will think he has only just gone to bed. If he dozes off in a position still more displaced and divergent, after dinner sitting in an armchair for instance, then the confusion among the disordered worlds will be complete, the magic armchair will send him traveling at top speed through time and space, and, at the moment of opening his eyelids, he will believe he went to bed several months earlier in another country. But it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was deep and allowed my mind to relax entirely; then it would let go of the map of the place where I had fallen asleep and, when I woke in the middle of the night, since I did not know where I was, I did not even understand in the first moment who I was; I had only, in its original simplicity, the sense of existence as it may quiver in the depths of an animal; I was more destitute than a cave dweller; but then the memory—not yet of the place where I was, but of several of those where I had lived and where I might have been—would come to me like help from on high to pull me out of the void from which I could not have got out on my own; I crossed centuries of civilization in one second, and the image confusedly glimpsed of oil lamps, then of wing-collar shirts, gradually recomposed my self's original features.

Perhaps the immobility of the things around us is imposed on them by our certainty that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our mind confronting them. However that may be, when I woke thus, my mind restlessly attempting, without success, to discover where I was, everything revolved around me in the darkness, things, countries, years. My body, too benumbed to move, would try to locate, according to the form of its fatigue, the position of its limbs so as to deduce from this the direction of the wall, the placement of the furniture, so as to reconstruct and name the dwelling in which it found itself. Its memory, the memory of its ribs, its knees, its shoulders, offered in succession several of the rooms where it had slept, while around it the invisible walls, changing place according to the shape of the imagined room, spun through the shadows. And even

before my mind, hesitating on the thresholds of times and shapes, had identified the house by reassembling the circumstances, it—my body—would recall the kind of bed in each one, the location of the doors, the angle at which the light came in through the windows, the existence of a hallway, along with the thought I had had as I fell asleep and that I had recovered upon waking. My stiffened side, trying to guess its orientation, would imagine, for instance, that it lay facing the wall in a big canopied bed and immediately I would say to myself: “Why, I went to sleep in the end even though Mama didn’t come to say goodnight to me,” I was in the country in the home of my grandfather, dead for many years; and my body, the side on which I was resting, faithful guardians of a past my mind ought never to have forgotten, recalled to me the flame of the night-light of Bohemian glass, in the shape of an urn, which hung from the ceiling by little chains, the mantelpiece of Siena marble, in my bedroom at Combray, at my grandparents’ house, in faraway days which at this moment I imagined were present without picturing them to myself exactly and which I would see more clearly in a little while when I was fully awake.

Then the memory of a new position would reappear; the wall would slip away in another direction: I was in my room at Mme. de Saint-Loup’s, in the country; good Lord! It’s ten o’clock or even later, they will have finished dinner! I must have overslept during the nap I take every evening when I come back from my walk with Mme. de Saint-Loup, before putting on my evening clothes. For many years have passed since Combray, where, however late we returned, it was the sunset’s red reflections I saw in the panes of my window. It is another sort of life one leads at Tansonville, at Mme. de Saint-Loup’s, another sort of pleasure I take in going out only at night, in following by moonlight those lanes where I used to play in the sun; and the room where I fell asleep instead of dressing for dinner—from far off I can see it, as we come back, pierced by the flares of the lamp, a lone beacon in the night.

These revolving, confused evocations never lasted for more than a few seconds; often, in my brief uncertainty about where I was, I did not distinguish the various suppositions of which it was composed any better than we isolate, when we see a horse run, the successive positions shown to us by a kinetoscope. But I had seen sometimes one, sometimes another, of the bedrooms I had inhabited in my life, and in the end I would recall them all in the long reveries that followed my waking: winter bedrooms in which, as soon as you are in bed, you bury your head in a nest braided of the most disparate things: a corner of the pillow, the top of the covers, a bit of shawl, the side of the bed and an issue of the *Débats roses*,<sup>1</sup> which you end by cementing together using the birds’ technique of pressing down on it indefinitely; where in icy weather the pleasure you enjoy is the feeling that you are separated from the outdoors (like the sea swallow which makes its nest deep in an underground passage in the warmth of the earth) and where, since the fire is kept burning all night in the fireplace, you sleep in a great cloak of warm, smoky air, shot with the glimmers from the logs breaking into flame again, a sort of immaterial alcove, a warm cave dug out of the heart of the room itself, a zone of heat with shifting thermal contours, aerated by drafts which cool your face and come from the corners, from the parts close to the window or far from the hearth, and which have grown cold again: summer bedrooms where you delight in becoming one with the soft night, where the moonlight leaning against the half-open shutters casts its enchanted ladder to the foot of the bed, where you sleep almost in the open air, like a titmouse rocked by the breeze on the tip of a ray of light; sometimes the Louis XVI bedroom, so cheerful that even on the first night I had not been too unhappy there and where the slender columns that lightly supported the ceiling stood aside with such grace to show and reserve the place where the bed was; at other times, the small bedroom with the very high ceiling, hollowed out in the form of a pyramid two stories high and partly paneled in mahogany, where from the first second I had been mentally poisoned by the unfamiliar odor of the vetiver, convinced of the hostility of the violet curtains and the insolent indifference of the clock chattering loudly as though I were not there; where a strange and pitiless quadrangular cheval glass, barring obliquely one of the corners of the room, carved from deep inside the soft fullness of my usual field of vision a site for itself which I had not expected; where my mind, struggling for hours to dislodge itself, to stretch upward so as to assume the exact shape of the room and succeed in filling its gigantic funnel to the very top, had suffered many hard nights, while I lay stretched out in my bed, my eyes lifted, my ear anxious, my nostril restive, my heart pounding, until habit had changed the color of the curtains, silenced the clock, taught pity to the cruel oblique mirror, concealed, if not driven out completely, the smell of the vetiver and appreciably diminished the apparent height of the ceiling. Habit! That skillful but very slow housekeeper who begins by letting our mind suffer for weeks in a temporary arrangement; but whom we are nevertheless truly happy to discover, for without habit our mind, reduced to no more than its own resources, would be powerless to make a lodging habitable.

Certainly I was now wide-awake, my body had veered around one last time and the good angel of certainty had brought everything around me to a standstill, laid me down under my covers, in my bedroom, and put approximately where they belonged in the darkness my chest of drawers, my desk, my fireplace, the window onto the street and the two doors. But even though I knew I was not in any of the houses of which my ignorance upon waking had instantly, if not presented me with the distinct picture, at least made me believe the presence possible, my memory had been stirred; generally I would not try to go back to sleep right away; I would spend the greater part of the night remembering our life in the old days, in Combray at my great-aunt’s house, in Balbec, in Paris, in Doncières, in Venice, elsewhere still, remembering the places, the people I had known there, what I had seen of them, what I had been told about them.

At Combray, every day, in the late afternoon, long before the moment when I would have to go to bed and stay there, without sleeping, far away from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom again became the fixed and painful focus of my preoccupations. They had indeed hit upon the idea, to distract me on the evenings when they found me looking too unhappy, of giving me a magic lantern, which, while awaiting the dinner hour, they would set on top of my lamp; and, after the fashion of the first architects and master glaziers of the Gothic age, it replaced the opacity of the walls with impalpable iridescences, supernatural multicolored apparitions, where legends were depicted as in a wavering, momentary stained-glass window. But my sadness was only increased by this since the mere change in lighting destroyed the familiarity which my bedroom had acquired for me and which, except for the torment of going to bed, had made it tolerable to me. Now I no longer recognized it and I was uneasy there, as in a room in some hotel or “chalet” to which I had come for the first time straight from the railway train.

Moving at the jerky pace of his horse, and filled with a hideous design, Golo would come out of the small triangular forest that velveted the hillside with dark green and advance jolting toward the castle of poor Geneviève de Brabant. This castle was cut off along a curved line that was actually the edge of one of the glass ovals arranged in the frame which you slipped between the

grooves of the lantern. It was only a section of castle and it had a moor in front of it where Geneviève stood dreaming, wearing a blue belt. The castle and the moor were yellow, and I had not had to wait to see them to find out their color since, before the glasses of the frame did so, the bronze sonority of the name Brabant had shown it to me clearly. Golo would stop for a moment to listen sadly to the patter read out loud by my great-aunt, which he seemed to understand perfectly, modifying his posture, with a meekness that did not exclude a certain majesty, to conform to the directions of the text; then he moved off at the same jerky pace. And nothing could stop his slow ride. If the lantern was moved, I could make out Golo's horse continuing to advance over the window curtains, swelling out with their folds, descending into their fissures. The body of Golo himself, in its essence as supernatural as that of his steed, accommodated every material obstacle, every hindersome object that he encountered by taking it as his skeleton and absorbing it into himself, even the doorknob he immediately adapted to and floated invincibly over with his red robe or his pale face as noble and as melancholy as ever, but revealing no disturbance at this transvertebration.

Certainly I found some charm in these brilliant projections, which seemed to emanate from a Merovingian past and send out around me such ancient reflections of history. But I cannot express the uneasiness caused in me by this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room I had at last filled with myself to the point of paying no more attention to the room than to that self. The anesthetizing influence of habit having ceased, I would begin to have thoughts, and feelings, and they are such sad things. That doorknob of my room, which differed for me from all other doorknobs in the world in that it seemed to open of its own accord, without my having to turn it, so unconscious had its handling become for me, was now serving as an astral body for Golo. And as soon as they rang for dinner, I hastened to run to the dining room where the big hanging lamp, ignorant of Golo and Bluebeard, and well acquainted with my family and beef casserole, shed the same light as on every other evening; and to fall into the arms of Mama, whom Geneviève de Brabant's misfortunes made all the dearer to me, while Golo's crimes drove me to examine my own conscience more scrupulously.

After dinner, alas, I soon had to leave Mama, who stayed there talking with the others, in the garden if the weather was fine, in the little drawing room to which everyone withdrew if the weather was bad. Everyone, except my grandmother, who felt that "it's a pity to shut oneself indoors in the country" and who had endless arguments with my father on days when it rained too heavily, because he sent me to read in my room instead of having me stay outdoors. "That's no way to make him strong and active," she would say sadly, "especially that boy, who so needs to build up his endurance and willpower." My father would shrug his shoulders and study the barometer, for he liked meteorology, while my mother, making no noise so as not to disturb him, watched him with a tender respect, but not so intently as to try to penetrate the mystery of his superior qualities. But as for my grandmother, in all weathers, even in a downpour when Françoise had rushed the precious wicker armchairs indoors so that they would not get wet, we would see her in the empty, rain-lashed garden, pushing back her disordered gray locks so that her forehead could more freely drink in the salubriousness of the wind and rain. She would say: "At last, one can breathe!" and would roam the soaked paths—too symmetrically aligned for her liking by the new gardener, who lacked all feeling for nature and whom my father had been asking since morning if the weather would clear—with her jerky, enthusiastic little step, regulated by the various emotions excited in her soul by the intoxication of the storm, the power of good health, the stupidity of my upbringing, and the symmetry of the gardens, rather than by the desire, quite unknown to her, to spare her plum-colored skirt the spots of mud under which it would disappear up to a height that was always, for her maid, a source of despair and a problem.

When these garden walks of my grandmother's took place after dinner, one thing had the power to make her come inside again: this was—at one of the periodic intervals when her circular itinerary brought her back, like an insect, in front of the lights of the little drawing room where the liqueurs were set out on the card table—if my great-aunt called out to her: "Bathilde! Come and stop your husband from drinking cognac!" To tease her, in fact (she had brought into my father's family so different a mentality that everyone poked fun at her and tormented her), since liqueurs were forbidden to my grandfather, my great-aunt would make him drink a few drops. My poor grandmother would come in, fervently beg her husband not to taste the cognac; he would become angry, drink his mouthful despite her, and my grandmother would go off again, sad, discouraged, yet smiling, for she was so humble at heart and so gentle that her tenderness for others, and the lack of fuss she made over her own person and her sufferings, came together in her gaze in a smile in which, unlike what one sees in the faces of so many people, there was irony only for herself, and for all of us a sort of kiss from her eyes, which could not see those she cherished without caressing them passionately with her gaze. This torture which my great-aunt inflicted on her, the spectacle of my grandmother's vain entreaties and of her weakness, defeated in advance, trying uselessly to take the liqueur glass away from my grandfather, were the kinds of things which you later become so accustomed to seeing that you smile as you contemplate them and take the part of the persecutor resolutely and gaily enough to persuade yourself privately that no persecution is involved; at that time they filled me with such horror that I would have liked to hit my great-aunt. But as soon as I heard: "Bathilde, come and stop your husband from drinking cognac!," already a man in my cowardice, I did what we all do, once we are grown up, when confronted with sufferings and injustices: I did not want to see them; I went up to sob at the very top of the house next to the schoolroom,<sup>2</sup> under the roofs, in a little room that smelled of orris root and was also perfumed by a wild black-currant bush which had sprouted outside between the stones of the wall and extended a branch of flowers through the half-open window. Intended for a more specialized and more vulgar use, this room, from which during the day you could see all the way to the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, for a long time served me as a refuge, no doubt because it was the only one I was permitted to lock, for all those occupations of mine that demanded an inviolable solitude: reading, reverie, tears, and sensuous pleasure. Alas! I did not know that, much more than her husband's little deviations from his regimen, it was my weak will, my delicate health, the uncertainty they cast on my future that so sadly preoccupied my grandmother in the course of those incessant perambulations, afternoon and evening, when we would see, as it passed and then passed again, lifted slantwise toward the sky, her beautiful face with its brown furrowed cheeks, which with age had become almost mauve like the plowed fields in autumn, crossed, if she was going out, by a veil half raised, while upon them, brought there by the cold or some sad thought, an involuntary tear was always drying.

My sole consolation, when I went upstairs for the night, was that Mama would come kiss me once I was in bed. But this goodnight lasted so short a time, she went down again so soon, that the moment when I heard her coming up, then the soft sound of her garden dress of blue muslin, hung with little cords of plaited straw, passing along the hallway with its double doors, was for me a painful moment. It ushered in the moment that would follow, in which she would have left me, in which she would have

gone back down. So that I came to wish that this goodnight I loved so much would take place as late as possible, so as to prolong the time of respite in which Mama had not yet come. Sometimes when, after kissing me, she opened the door to go, I wanted to call her back, to say “kiss me one more time,” but I knew that immediately her face would look vexed, because the concession she was making to my sadness and agitation by coming up to kiss me, by bringing me this kiss of peace, irritated my father, who found these rituals absurd, and she would have liked to try to induce me to lose the need for it, the habit of it, far indeed from allowing me to acquire that of asking her, when she was already on the doorstep, for one kiss more. And to see her vexed destroyed all the calm she had brought me a moment before, when she had bent her loving face down over my bed and held it out to me like a host for a communion of peace from which my lips would draw her real presence and the power to fall asleep. But those evenings, when Mama stayed so short a time in my room, were still sweet compared to the ones when there was company for dinner and when, because of that, she did not come up to say goodnight to me. That company was usually limited to M. Swann, who, apart from a few acquaintances passing through, was almost the only person who came to our house at Combray, sometimes for a neighborly dinner (more rarely after that unfortunate marriage of his, because my parents did not want to receive his wife), sometimes after dinner, unexpectedly. On those evenings when, as we sat in front of the house under the large chestnut tree, around the iron table, we heard at the far end of the garden, not the copious high-pitched bell that drenched, that deafened in passing with its ferruginous, icy, inexhaustible noise any person in the household who set it off by coming in “without ringing,” but the shy, oval, golden double tinkling of the little visitors’ bell, everyone would immediately wonder: “A visitor—now who can that be?” but we knew very well it could only be M. Swann; my great-aunt speaking loudly, to set an example, in a tone of voice that she strained to make natural, said not to whisper that way; that nothing is more disagreeable for a visitor just coming in who is led to think that people are saying things he should not hear; and they would send as a scout my grandmother, who was always glad to have a pretext for taking one more walk around the garden and who would profit from it by surreptitiously pulling up a few rose stakes on the way so as to make the roses look a little more natural, like a mother who runs her hand through her son’s hair to fluff it up after the barber has flattened it too much.

We would all remain hanging on the news my grandmother was going to bring us of the enemy, as though there had been a great number of possible assailants to choose among, and soon afterward my grandfather would say: “I recognize Swann’s voice.” In fact one could recognize him only by his voice, it was difficult to make out his face, his aquiline nose, his green eyes under a high forehead framed by blond, almost red hair, cut Bressant-style,<sup>3</sup> because we kept as little light as possible in the garden so as not to attract mosquitoes, and I would go off, as though not going for that reason, to say that the syrups should be brought out; my grandmother placed a great deal of importance, considering it more amiable, on the idea that they should not seem anything exceptional, and for visitors only. M. Swann, though much younger, was very attached to my grandfather, who had been one of the closest friends of his father, an excellent man but peculiar, in whom, apparently, a trifle was sometimes enough to interrupt the ardor of his feelings, to change the course of his thinking. Several times a year I would hear my grandfather at the table telling anecdotes, always the same ones, about the behavior of old M. Swann upon the death of his wife, over whom he had watched day and night. My grandfather, who had not seen him for a long time, had rushed to his side at the estate the Swanns owned in the vicinity of Combray and, so that he would not be present at the confining, managed to entice him for a while, all in tears, out of the death chamber. They walked a short way in the park, where there was a little sunshine. Suddenly M. Swann, taking my grandfather by the arm, cried out: “Oh, my old friend, what a joy it is to be walking here together in such fine weather! Don’t you think it’s pretty, all these trees, these hawthorns! And my pond—which you’ve never congratulated me on! You look as sad as an old nightcap. Feel that little breeze? Oh, say what you like, life has something to offer despite everything, my dear Amédée!” Suddenly the memory of his dead wife came back to him and, no doubt feeling it would be too complicated to try to understand how he could have yielded to an impulse of happiness at such a time, he confined himself, in a habitual gesture of his whenever a difficult question came into his mind, to passing his hand over his forehead, wiping his eyes and the lenses of his lorgnon. Yet he could not be consoled for the death of his wife, but, during the two years he survived her, would say to my grandfather: “It’s odd, I think of my poor wife often, but I can’t think of her for long at a time.” “Often, but only a little at a time, like poor old Swann,” had become one of my grandfather’s favorite phrases, which he uttered apropos of the most different sorts of things. I would have thought Swann’s father was a monster, if my grandfather, whom I considered a better judge and whose pronouncement, forming a legal precedent for me, often allowed me later to dismiss offenses I might have been inclined to condemn, had not exclaimed: “What! He had a heart of gold!”

For many years, even though, especially before his marriage, the younger M. Swann often came to see them at Combray, my great-aunt and my grandparents did not suspect that he had entirely ceased to live in the kind of society his family had frequented and that, under the sort of incognito which this name Swann gave him among us, they were harboring—with the perfect innocence of honest inn-keepers who have under their roof, without knowing it, some celebrated highwayman—one of the most elegant members of the Jockey Club,<sup>4</sup> a favorite friend of the Comte de Paris<sup>5</sup> and the Prince of Wales,<sup>6</sup> one of the men most sought after by the high society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Our ignorance of this brilliant social life that Swann led was obviously due in part to the reserve and discretion of his character, but also to the fact that bourgeois people in those days formed for themselves a rather Hindu notion of society and considered it to be made up of closed castes, in which each person, from birth, found himself placed in the station which his family occupied and from which nothing, except the accidents of an exceptional career or an un hoped-for marriage, could withdraw him in order to move him into a higher caste. M. Swann, the father, was a stockbroker; “Swann the son” would find he belonged for his entire life to a caste in which fortunes varied, as in a tax bracket, between such and such fixed incomes. One knew which had been his father’s associations, one therefore knew which were his own, with which people he was “in a position” to consort. If he knew others, these were bachelor acquaintances on whom old friends of the family, such as my relatives, would close their eyes all the more benignly because he continued, after losing his parents, to come faithfully to see us; but we would have been ready to wager that these people he saw, who were unknown to us, were the sort he would not have dared greet had he encountered them when he was with us. If you were determined to assign Swann a social coefficient that was his alone, among the other sons of stockbrokers in a position equal to that of his parents, this coefficient would have been a little lower for him because, very simple in his manner and with a long-standing “craze” for antiques and painting, he now lived and



amassed his collections in an old town house which my grandmother dreamed of visiting, but which was situated on the quai d'Orléans, a part of town where my great-aunt felt it was ignominious to live. "But are you a connoisseur? I ask for your own sake, because you're likely to let the dealers unload some awful daubs on you," my great-aunt would say to him; in fact she did not assume he had any competence and even from an intellectual point of view had no great opinion of a man who in conversation avoided serious subjects and showed a most prosaic preciseness not only when he gave us cooking recipes, entering into the smallest details, but even when my grandmother's sisters talked about artistic subjects. Challenged by them to give his opinion, to express his admiration for a painting, he would maintain an almost ungracious silence and then, on the other hand, redeem himself if he could provide, about the museum in which it was to be found, about the date at which it had been painted, a pertinent piece of information. But usually he would content himself with trying to entertain us by telling a new story each time about something that had just happened to him involving people selected from among those we knew, the Combray pharmacist, our cook, our coachman. Certainly these tales made my great-aunt laugh, but she could not distinguish clearly if this was because of the absurd role Swann always assigned himself or because of the wit he showed in telling them: "You are quite a character, Monsieur Swann!" Being the only rather vulgar person in our family, she took care to point out to strangers, when they were talking about Swann, that, had he wanted to, he could have lived on the boulevard Haussmann or the avenue de l'Opéra, that he was the son of M. Swann, who must have left four or five million, but that this was his whim. One that she felt moreover must be so amusing to others that in Paris, when M. Swann came on New Year's Day to bring her her bag of marrons glacés,<sup>7</sup> she never failed, if there was company, to say to him: "Well, Monsieur Swann! Do you still live next door to the wine warehouse, so as to be sure of not missing the train when you go to Lyon?"<sup>8</sup> And she would look out of the corner of her eye, over her lorgnon, at the other visitors.

But if anyone had told my great-aunt that this same Swann, who, as the son of old M. Swann, was perfectly "qualified" to be received by all the "best of the bourgeoisie," by the most respected notaries or lawyers of Paris (a hereditary privilege he seemed to make little use of), had, as though in secret, quite a different life; that on leaving our house, in Paris, after telling us he was going home to bed, he retraced his steps as soon as he had turned the corner and went to a certain drawing room that no eye of any broker or broker's associate would ever contemplate, this would have seemed to my aunt as extraordinary as might to a better-educated lady the thought of being personally on close terms with Aristaeus and learning that, after having a chat with her, he would go deep into the heart of the realms of Thetis, into an empire hidden from mortal eyes, where Virgil shows him being received with open arms; or—to be content with an image that had more chance of occurring to her, for she had seen it painted on our petits-fours plates at Combray—of having had as a dinner guest Ali Baba, who, as soon as he knows he is alone, will enter the cave dazzling with unsuspected treasure.

One day when he had come to see us in Paris after dinner apologizing for being in evening clothes, Françoise having said, after he left, that she had learned from the coachman that he had dined "at the home of a princess," "Yes, a princess of the demimonde!" my aunt had responded, shrugging her shoulders without raising her eyes from her knitting, with serene irony.

Thus, my great-aunt was cavalier in her treatment of him. Since she believed he must be flattered by our invitations, she found it quite natural that he never came to see us in the summertime without having in his hand a basket of peaches or raspberries from his garden and that from each of his trips to Italy he would bring me back photographs of masterpieces.

They did not hesitate to send him off in search of it when they needed a recipe for gribiche sauce or pineapple salad for large dinners to which they had not invited him, believing he did not have sufficient prestige for one to be able to serve him up to acquaintances who were coming for the first time. If the conversation turned to the princes of the House of France: "people you and I will never know, will we, and we can manage quite well without that, can't we," my great-aunt would say to Swann, who had, perhaps, a letter from Twickenham<sup>9</sup> in his pocket; she had him push the piano around and turn the pages on the evenings when my grandmother's sister sang, handling this creature, who was elsewhere so sought after, with the naive roughness of a child who plays with a collector's curio no more carefully than with some object of little value. No doubt the Swann who was known at the same time to so many clubmen was quite different from the one created by my great-aunt, when in the evening, in the little garden at Combray, after the two hesitant rings of the bell had sounded, she injected and invigorated with all that she knew about the Swann family the dark and uncertain figure who emerged, followed by my grandmother, from a background of shadows, and whom we recognized by his voice. But even with respect to the most insignificant things in life, none of us constitutes a material whole, identical for everyone, which a person has only to go look up as though we were a book of specifications or a last testament; our social personality is a creation of the minds of others. Even the very simple act that we call "seeing a person we know" is in part an intellectual one. We fill the physical appearance of the individual we see with all the notions we have about him, and of the total picture that we form for ourselves, these notions certainly occupy the greater part. In the end they swell his cheeks so perfectly, follow the line of his nose in an adherence so exact, they do so well at nuancing the sonority of his voice as though the latter were only a transparent envelope that each time we see this face and hear this voice, it is these notions that we encounter again, that we hear. No doubt, in the Swann they had formed for themselves, my family had failed out of ignorance to include a host of details from his life in the fashionable world that caused other people, when they were in his presence, to see refinements rule his face and stop at his aquiline nose as though at their natural frontier; but they had also been able to garner in this face disaffected of its prestige, vacant and spacious, in the depths of these depreciated eyes, the vague, sweet residue—half memory, half forgetfulness—of the idle hours spent together after our weekly dinners, around the card table or in the garden, during our life of good country neighborliness. The corporeal envelope of our friend had been so well stuffed with all this, as well as with a few memories relating to his parents, that this particular Swann had become a complete and living being, and I have the impression of leaving one person to go to another distinct from him, when, in my memory, I pass from the Swann I knew later with accuracy to that first Swann—to that first Swann in whom I rediscover the charming mistakes of my youth and who in fact resembles less the other Swann than he resembles the other people I knew at the time, as though one's life were like a museum in which all the portraits from one period have a family look about them, a single tonality—to that first Swann abounding in leisure, fragrant with the smell of the tall chestnut tree, the baskets of raspberries, and a sprig of tarragon.

Yet one day when my grandmother had gone to ask a favor from a lady she had known at the Sacré-Coeur<sup>10</sup> (and with whom, because of our notion of the castes, she had not wished to remain in close contact despite a reciprocal congeniality), this lady, the

Marquise de Villeparisis of the famous de Bouillon<sup>11</sup> family, had said to her: "I believe you know M. Swann very well; he is a great friend of my nephew and niece, the des Laumes." My grandmother had returned from her visit full of enthusiasm for the house, which overlooked some gardens and in which Mme. de Villeparisis had advised her to rent a flat, and also for a waistcoat maker and his daughter, who kept a shop in the courtyard where she had gone to ask them to put a stitch in her skirt, which she had torn in the stairwell. My grandmother had found these people wonderful, she declared that the girl was a gem and the waistcoat maker was most distinguished, the finest man she had ever seen. Because for her, distinction was something absolutely independent of social position. She went into ecstasies over an answer the waistcoat maker had given her, saying to Mama: "Sévigne<sup>12</sup> couldn't have said it any better!" and, in contrast, of a nephew of Mme. de Villeparisis whom she had met at the house: "Oh, my dear daughter, how common he is!"

Now the remark about Swann had had the effect, not of raising him in my great-aunt's estimation, but of lowering Mme. de Villeparisis. It seemed that the respect which, on my grandmother's faith, we accorded Mme. de Villeparisis created a duty on her part to do nothing that would make her less worthy, a duty in which she had failed by learning of Swann's existence, by permitting relatives of hers to associate with him. "What! She knows Swann? A person you claim is a relation of the Maréchal de MacMahon?"<sup>13</sup> My family's opinion regarding Swann's associations seemed confirmed later by his marriage to a woman of the worst social station, practically a cocotte, whom, what was more, he never attempted to introduce, continuing to come to our house alone, though less and less, but from whom they believed they could judge—assuming it was there that he had found her—the social circle, unknown to them, that he habitually frequented.

But one time, my grandfather read in a newspaper that M. Swann was one of the most faithful guests at the Sunday lunches given by the Duc de X . . . , whose father and uncle had been the most prominent statesmen in the reign of Louis-Philippe.<sup>14</sup> Now, my grandfather was interested in all the little facts that could help him enter imaginatively into the private lives of men like Molé, the Duc Pasquier, the Duc de Broglie.<sup>15</sup> He was delighted to learn that Swann associated with people who had known them. My great-aunt, however, interpreted this news in a sense unfavorable to Swann: anyone who chose his associations outside the caste into which he had been born, outside his social "class," suffered in her eyes a regrettable lowering of his social position. It seemed to her that he gave up forthwith the fruit of all the good relations with well-placed people so honorably preserved and stored away for their children by foresightful families (my great-aunt had even stopped seeing the son of a lawyer we knew because he had married royalty and was therefore in her opinion demoted from the respected rank of lawyer's son to that of one of those adventurers, former valets or stableboys, on whom they say that queens sometimes bestowed their favors). She disapproved of my grandfather's plan to question Swann, the next evening he was to come to dinner, about these friends of his we had discovered. At the same time my grandmother's two sisters, old maids who shared her nobility of character, but not her sort of mind, declared that they could not understand what pleasure their brother-in-law could find in talking about such foolishness. They were women of lofty aspirations, who for that very reason were incapable of taking an interest in what is known as tittle-tattle, even if it had some historic interest, and more generally in anything that was not directly connected to an aesthetic or moral subject. The disinterestedness of their minds was such, with respect to all that, closely or distantly, seemed connected with worldly matters, that their sense of hearing—having finally understood its temporary uselessness when the conversation at dinner assumed a tone that was frivolous or merely pedestrian without these two old spinsters being able to lead it back to the subjects dear to them—would suspend the functioning of its receptive organs and allow them to begin to atrophy. If my grandfather needed to attract the two sisters' attention at such times, he had to resort to those bodily signals used by alienists with certain lunatics suffering from distraction: striking a glass repeatedly with the blade of a knife while speaking to them sharply and looking them suddenly in the eye, violent methods which these psychiatrists often bring with them into their ordinary relations with healthy people, either from professional habit or because they believe everyone is a little crazy.

They were more interested when, the day before Swann was to come to dinner, and had personally sent them a case of Asti wine, my aunt, holding a copy of the *Figaro* in which next to the title of a painting in an exhibition of Corot,<sup>16</sup> these words appeared: "From the collection of M. Charles Swann," said: "Did you see this? Swann is 'front page news' in the *Figaro*." "But I've always told you he had a great deal of taste," said my grandmother. "Of course you would! Anything so long as your opinion is not the same as *ours*," answered my great-aunt, who, knowing that my grandmother was never of the same opinion as she, and not being quite sure that she herself was the one we always declared was right, wanted to extract from us a general condemnation of my grandmother's convictions against which she was trying to force us into solidarity with her own. But we remained silent. When my grandmother's sisters expressed their intention of speaking to Swann about this mention in the *Figaro*, my great-aunt advised them against it. Whenever she saw in others an advantage, however small, that she did not have, she persuaded herself that it was not an advantage but a detriment and she pitied them so as not to have to envy them. "I believe you would not be pleasing him at all; I am quite sure I would find it very unpleasant to see my name printed boldly like that in the newspaper, and I would not be at all gratified if someone spoke to me about it." But she did not persist in trying to convince my grandmother's sisters; for they in their horror of vulgarity had made such a fine art of concealing a personal allusion beneath ingenious circumlocutions that it often went unnoticed even by the person to whom it was addressed. As for my mother, she thought only of trying to persuade my father to agree to talk to Swann not about his wife but about his daughter, whom he adored and because of whom it was said he had finally entered into this marriage. "You might just say a word to him; just ask how she is: It must be so hard for him." But my father would become annoyed: "No, no; you have the most absurd ideas. It would be ridiculous."

But the only one of us for whom Swann's arrival became the object of a painful preoccupation was I. This was because on the evenings when strangers, or merely M. Swann, were present, Mama did not come up to my room. I had dinner before everyone else and afterward I came and sat at the table, until eight o'clock when it was understood that I had to go upstairs; the precious and fragile kiss that Mama usually entrusted to me in my bed when I was going to sleep I would have to convey from the dining room to my bedroom and protect during the whole time I undressed, so that its sweetness would not shatter, so that its volatile essence would not disperse and evaporate, and on precisely those evenings when I needed to receive it with more care, I had to take it, I had to snatch it brusquely, publicly, without even having the time and the freedom of mind necessary to bring to what I was doing the attention of those individuals controlled by some mania, who do their utmost not to think of anything else while

they are shutting a door, so as to be able, when the morbid uncertainty returns to them, to confront it victoriously with the memory of the moment when they did shut the door. We were all in the garden when the two hesitant rings of the little bell sounded. We knew it was Swann; even so we all looked at one another questioningly and my grandmother was sent on reconnaissance. "Remember to thank him intelligibly for the wine, you know how delicious it is and the case is enormous," my grandfather exhorted his two sisters-in-law. "Don't start whispering," said my great-aunt. "How comfortable would you feel arriving at a house where everyone is speaking so quietly!" "Ah! Here's M. Swann. Let's ask him if he thinks the weather will be good tomorrow," said my father. My mother thought that one word from her would wipe out all the pain that we in our family might have caused Swann since his marriage. She found an opportunity to take him aside. But I followed her; I could not bring myself to part from her by even one step while thinking that very soon I would have to leave her in the dining room and that I would have to go up to my room without having the consolation I had on the other evenings, that she would come kiss me. "Now, M. Swann," she said to him, "do tell me about your daughter; I'm sure she already has a taste for beautiful things like her papa." "Here, come and sit with the rest of us on the veranda," said my grandfather, coming up to them. My mother was obliged to stop, but she derived from this very constraint one more delicate thought, like good poets forced by the tyranny of rhyme to find their most beautiful lines: "We can talk about her again when we're by ourselves," she said softly to Swann. "Only a mother is capable of understanding you. I'm sure her own mother would agree with me." We all sat down around the iron table. I would have preferred not to think about the hours of anguish I was going to endure that evening alone in my room without being able to go to sleep; I tried to persuade myself they were not at all important, since I would have forgotten them by tomorrow morning, and to fix my mind on ideas of the future that should have led me as though across a bridge beyond the imminent abyss that frightened me so. But my mind, strained by my preoccupation, convex like the glance which I shot at my mother, would not allow itself to be penetrated by any foreign impressions. Thoughts certainly entered it, but only on condition that they left outside every element of beauty or simply of playfulness that could have moved or distracted me. Just as a patient, by means of an anesthetic, can watch with complete lucidity the operation being performed on him, but without feeling anything, I could recite to myself some lines that I loved or observe the efforts my grandfather made to talk to Swann about the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier, without the former making me feel any emotion, the latter any hilarity. Those efforts were fruitless. Scarcely had my grandfather asked Swann a question relating to that orator than one of my grandmother's sisters, in whose ears the question was resonating like a profound but untimely silence that should be broken for the sake of politeness, would address the other: "Just imagine, Céline, I've met a young Swedish governess who has been telling me about cooperatives in the Scandinavian countries; the details are most interesting. We really must have her here for dinner one evening." "Certainly!" answered her sister Flora,<sup>17</sup> "but I haven't been wasting my time either. At M. Vinteuil's I met a learned old man who knows Maubant<sup>18</sup> very well, and Maubant has explained to him in the greatest detail how he creates his parts. It's most interesting. He's a neighbor of M. Vinteuil's, I had no idea; and he's very nice." "M. Vinteuil isn't the only one who has nice neighbors," exclaimed my aunt Céline in a voice amplified by her shyness and given an artificial tone by her premeditation, while casting at Swann what she called a meaningful look. At the same time my aunt Flora, who had understood that this phrase was Céline's way of thanking Swann for the Asti, was also looking at Swann with an expression that combined congratulation and irony, either simply to emphasize her sister's witticism, or because she envied Swann for having inspired it, or because she could not help making fun of him since she thought he was being put on the spot. "I think we can manage to persuade the old gentleman to come for dinner," continued Flora; "when you get him started on Maubant or Mme. Materna,<sup>19</sup> he talks for hours without stopping." "That must be delightful," sighed my grandfather, in whose mind, unfortunately, nature had as completely failed to include the possibility of taking a passionate interest in Swedish cooperatives or the creation of Maubant's parts as it had forgotten to furnish those of my grandmother's sisters with the little grain of salt one must add oneself, in order to find some savor in it, to a story about the private life of Molé or the Comte de Paris. "Now, then," said Swann to my grandfather, "what I'm going to say has more to do than it might appear with what you were asking me, because in certain respects things haven't changed enormously. This morning I was rereading something in Saint-Simon<sup>20</sup> that would have amused you. It's in the volume about his mission to Spain;<sup>21</sup> it's not one of the best, hardly more than a journal, but at least it's a marvelously well written one, which already makes it rather fundamentally different from the deadly boring journals we think we have to read every morning and evening." "I don't agree, there are days when reading the papers seems to me very pleasant indeed . . ." my aunt Flora interrupted, to show that she had read the sentence about Swann's Corot in *Le Figaro*. "When they talk about things or people that interest us!" said my aunt Céline, going one better. "I don't deny it," answered Swann with surprise. "What I fault the newspapers for is that day after day they draw our attention to insignificant things whereas only three or four times in our lives do we read a book in which there is something really essential. Since we tear the band off the newspaper so feverishly every morning, they ought to change things and put into the newspaper, oh, I don't know, perhaps . . . Pascal's *Pensées*!" (He isolated this word with an ironic emphasis so as not to seem pedantic.) "And then, in the gilt-edged volume that we open only once in ten years," he added, showing the disdain for worldly matters affected by certain worldly men, "we would read that the Queen of Greece has gone to Cannes or that the Princesse de Léon has given a costume ball. This way, the proper proportions would be reestablished." But, feeling sorry he had gone so far as to speak even lightly of serious things: "What a lofty conversation we're having," he said ironically; "I don't know why we're climbing to such 'heights'"—and turning to my grandfather: "Well, Saint-Simon describes how Maulévrier<sup>22</sup> had the audacity to offer to shake hands with Saint-Simon's sons. You know, this is the same Maulévrier of whom he says: 'Never did I see in that thick bottle anything but ill-humor, vulgarity, and foolishness.'" "Thick or not, I know some bottles in which there is something quite different," said Flora vivaciously, determined that she too should thank Swann, because the gift of Asti was addressed to both of them. Céline laughed. Swann, disconcerted, went on: "I cannot say whether it was ignorance or a trap," wrote Saint-Simon. "He tried to shake hands with my children. I noticed it in time to prevent him." "My grandfather was already in ecstasies over 'ignorance or a trap,'" but Mlle. Céline, in whom the name of Saint-Simon—a literary man—had prevented the complete anesthesia of her auditory faculties, was already growing indignant: "What? You admire that? Well, that's a fine thing! But what can it mean; isn't one man as good as the next? What difference does it make whether he's a duke or a coachman, if he's intelligent and good-hearted? Your Saint-Simon had a fine way of raising his children, if he didn't teach them to offer their hands to all decent people. Why, it's quite abominable. And you dare to quote that?" And my grandfather, terribly



upset and sensing how impossible it would be, in the face of this obstruction, to try to get Swann to tell the stories that would have amused him, said quietly to Mama: "Now remind me of the line you taught me that comforts me so much at times like this. Oh, yes! 'What virtues, Lord, Thou makest us abhor!'"<sup>23</sup> Oh, how good that is!"

I did not take my eyes off my mother, I knew that when we were at the table, they would not let me stay during the entire dinner and that, in order not to annoy my father, Mama would not let me kiss her several times in front of the guests as though we were in my room. And so I promised myself that in the dining room, as they were beginning dinner and I felt the hour approaching, I would do everything I could do alone in advance of this kiss which would be so brief and furtive, choose with my eyes the place on her cheek that I would kiss, prepare my thoughts so as to be able, by means of this mental beginning of the kiss, to devote the whole of the minute Mama would grant me to feeling her cheek against my lips, as a painter who can obtain only short sittings prepares his palette and, guided by his notes, does in advance from memory everything for which he could if necessary manage without the presence of the model. But now before the dinner bell rang my grandfather had the unwitting brutality to say: "The boy looks tired, he ought to go up to bed. We're dining late tonight anyway." And my father, who was not as scrupulous as my grandmother and my mother about honoring treaties, said: "Yes, go on now, up to bed with you." I tried to kiss Mama, at that moment we heard the dinner bell. "No, really, leave your mother alone, you've already said goodnight to each other as it is, these demonstrations are ridiculous. Go on now, upstairs!" And I had to leave without my viaticum; I had to climb each step of the staircase, as the popular expression has it, "against my heart,"<sup>24</sup> climbing against my heart which wanted to go back to my mother because she had not, by kissing me, given it license to go with me. That detested staircase which I always entered with such gloom exhaled an odor of varnish that had in some sense absorbed, fixated, the particular sort of sorrow I felt every evening and made it perhaps even crueler to my sensibility because, when it took that olfactory form, my intelligence could no longer share in it. When we are asleep and a raging toothache is as yet perceived by us only in the form of a girl whom we attempt two hundred times to pull out of the water or a line by Molière that we repeat to ourselves incessantly, it is a great relief to wake up so that our intelligence can divest the idea of raging toothache of its disguise of heroism or cadence. It was the opposite of this relief that I experienced when my sorrow at going up to my room entered me in a manner infinitely swifter, almost instantaneous, at once insidious and abrupt, through the inhalation—far more toxic than the intellectual penetration—of the smell of varnish peculiar to that staircase. Once in my room, I had to stop up all the exits, close the shutters, dig my own grave by undoing my covers, put on the shroud of my nightshirt. But before burying myself in the iron bed which they had added to the room because I was too hot in the summer under the rep curtains of the big bed, I had a fit of rebelliousness, I wanted to attempt the ruse of a condemned man. I wrote to my mother begging her to come upstairs for something serious that I could not tell her in my letter. My fear was that Françoise, my aunt's cook who was charged with looking after me when I was at Combray, would refuse to convey my note. I suspected that, for her, delivering a message to my mother when there was company would seem as impossible as for a porter to hand a letter to an actor while he was onstage. With respect to things that could or could not be done she possessed a code at once imperious, extensive, subtle, and intransigent about distinctions that were impalpable or otiose (which made it resemble those ancient laws which, alongside such fierce prescriptions as the massacre of children at the breast, forbid one with an exaggerated delicacy to boil a kid in its mother's milk, or to eat the sinew from an animal's thigh). This code, to judge from her sudden obstinacy when she did not wish to do certain errands that we gave her, seemed to have anticipated social complexities and worldly refinements that nothing in Françoise's associations or her life as a village domestic could have suggested to her; and we had to say to ourselves that in her there was a very old French past, noble and ill understood, as in those manufacturing towns where elegant old houses testify that there was once a court life, and where the employees of a factory for chemical products work surrounded by delicate sculptures representing the miracle of Saint Théophile or the four sons of Aymon.<sup>25</sup> In this particular case, the article of the code which made it unlikely that except in case of fire Françoise would go bother Mama in the presence of M. Swann for so small a personage as myself simply betokened the respect she professed not only for the family—as for the dead, for priests, and for kings—but also for the visitor to whom one was offering one's hospitality, a respect that would perhaps have touched me in a book but that always irritated me on her lips, because of the solemn and tender tones she adopted in speaking of it, and especially so this evening, when the sacred character she conferred on the dinner might have the effect of making her refuse to disturb its ceremonial. But to give myself a better chance, I did not hesitate to lie and tell her that it was not in the least I who had wanted to write to Mama, but that it was Mama who, as she said goodnight to me, had exhorted me not to forget to send her an answer concerning something she had asked me to look for; and she would certainly be very annoyed if this note was not delivered to her. I think Françoise did not believe me, for, like those primitive men whose senses were so much more powerful than ours, she could immediately discern, from signs imperceptible to us, any truth that we wanted to hide from her; she looked at the envelope for five minutes as if the examination of the paper and the appearance of the writing would inform her about the nature of the contents or tell her which article of her code she ought to apply. Then she went out with an air of resignation that seemed to signify: "If it isn't a misfortune for parents to have a child like that!" She came back after a moment to tell me that they were still only at the ice stage, that it was impossible for the butler to deliver the letter right away in front of everyone, but that, when the mouth-rinsing bowls<sup>26</sup> were put round, they would find a way to hand it to Mama. Instantly my anxiety subsided; it was now no longer, as it had been only a moment ago, until tomorrow that I had left my mother, since my little note, no doubt annoying her (and doubly because this stratagem would make me ridiculous in Swann's eyes), would at least allow me, invisible and enraptured, to enter the same room as she, would whisper about me in her ear; since that forbidden, hostile dining room, where, just a moment before, the ice itself—the "*granité*"<sup>27</sup>—and the rinsing bowls seemed to me to contain pleasures noxious and mortally sad because Mama was enjoying them far away from me, was opening itself to me and, like a fruit that has turned sweet and bursts its skin, was about to propel, to project, all the way to my intoxicated heart, Mama's attention as she read my lines. Now I was no longer separated from her; the barriers were down, an exquisite thread joined us. And that was not all: Mama would probably come!

I thought Swann would surely have laughed at the anguish I had just suffered if he had read my letter and guessed its purpose; yet, on the contrary, as I learned later, a similar anguish was the torment of long years of his life and no one, perhaps, could have understood me as well as he; in his case, the anguish that comes from feeling that the person you love is in a place of amusement where you are not, where you cannot join her, came to him through love, to which it is in some sense predestined, by

which it will be hoarded, appropriated; but when, as in my case, this anguish enters us before love has made its appearance in our life, it drifts as it waits for it, vague and free, without a particular assignment, at the service of one feeling one day, of another the next, sometimes of filial tenderness or affection for a friend. And the joy with which I served my first apprenticeship when Françoise came back to tell me my letter would be delivered Swann too had known well, that deceptive joy given to us by some friend, some relative of the woman we love when, arriving at the house or theater where she is, for some dance, gala evening, or premiere at which he is going to see her, this friend notices us wandering outside, desperately awaiting some opportunity to communicate with her. He recognizes us, speaks to us familiarly, asks us what we are doing there. And when we invent the story that we have something urgent to say to his relative or friend, he assures us that nothing could be simpler, leads us into the hall, and promises to send her to us in five minutes. How we love him, as at that moment I loved Françoise—the wellintentioned intermediary who with a single word has just made tolerable, human, and almost propitious the unimaginable, infernal festivity into the thick of which we had been imagining that hostile, perverse, and exquisite vortices of pleasure were carrying away from us and inspiring with derisive laughter the woman we love! If we are to judge by him, the relative who has come up to us and is himself also one of the initiates in the cruel mysteries, the other guests at the party cannot have anything very demoniacal about them. Those inaccessible and excruciating hours during which she was about to enjoy unknown pleasures—now, through an unexpected breach, we are entering them; now, one of the moments which, in succession, would have composed those hours, a moment as real as the others, perhaps even more important to us, because our mistress is more involved in it, we can picture to ourselves, we possess it, we are taking part in it, we have created it, almost: the moment in which he will tell her we are here, downstairs. And no doubt the other moments of the party would not have been essentially very different from this one, would not have had anything more delectable about them that should make us suffer so, since the kind friend has said to us: “Why, she’ll be delighted to come down! It’ll be much nicer for her to chat with you than to be bored up there.” Alas! Swann had learned by experience that the good intentions of a third person have no power over a woman who is annoyed to find herself pursued even into a party by someone she does not love. Often, the friend comes back down alone.

My mother did not come, and with no consideration for my pride (which was invested in her not denying the story that she was supposed to have asked me to let her know the results of some search) asked Françoise to say these words to me: “There is no answer,” words I have so often since then heard the doormen in grand hotels or the footmen in bawdy houses bring back to some poor girl who exclaims in surprise: “What, he said nothing? Why, that’s impossible! Did you really give him my note? All right, I’ll go on waiting.” And—just as she invariably assures him she does not need the extra gas jet which the doorman wants to light for her, and remains there, hearing nothing further but the few remarks about the weather exchanged by the doorman and a lackey whom he sends off suddenly, when he notices the time, to put a customer’s drink on ice—having declined Françoise’s offer to make me some tea or to stay with me, I let her return to the servants’ hall, I went to bed and closed my eyes, trying not to hear the voices of my family, who were having their coffee in the garden. But after a few seconds, I became aware that, by writing that note to Mama, by approaching, at the risk of angering her, so close to her that I thought I could touch the moment when I would see her again, I had shut off from myself the possibility of falling asleep without seeing her again, and the beating of my heart grew more painful each minute because I was increasing my agitation by telling myself to be calm, to accept my misfortune. Suddenly my anxiety subsided, a happiness invaded me as when a powerful medicine begins to take effect and our pain vanishes: I had just formed the resolution not to continue trying to fall asleep without seeing Mama again, to kiss her at all costs even though it was with the certainty of being on bad terms with her for a long time after, when she came up to bed. The calm that came with the end of my distress filled me with an extraordinary joy, quite as much as did my expectation, my thirst for and my fear of danger. I opened the window noiselessly and sat down on the foot of my bed; I hardly moved so that I would not be heard from below. Outdoors, too, things seemed frozen in silent attention so as not to disturb the moonlight which, duplicating and distancing each thing by extending its shadow before it, denser and more concrete than itself, had at once thinned and enlarged the landscape like a map that had been folded and was now opened out. What needed to move, a few leaves of the chestnut tree, moved. But their minute quivering, complete, executed even in its slightest nuances and ultimate refinements, did not spill over onto the rest, did not merge with it, remained circumscribed. Exposed against this silence, which absorbed nothing of them, the most distant noises, those that must have come from gardens that lay at the other end of town, could be perceived detailed with such “finish” that they seemed to owe this effect of remoteness only to their pianissimo, like those muted motifs so well executed by the orchestra of the Conservatoire that, although you do not lose a single note, you nonetheless think you are hearing them far away from the concert hall and all the old subscribers—my grandmother’s sisters too, when Swann had given them his seats—strained their ears as if they were listening to the distant advances of an army on the march that had not yet turned the corner of the rue de Trévis.

I knew that the situation I was now placing myself in was the one that could provoke the gravest consequences of all for me, coming from my parents, much graver in truth than a stranger would have supposed, the sort he would have believed could be produced only by truly shameful misdeeds. But in my upbringing, the order of misdeeds was not the same as in that of other children, and I had become accustomed to placing before all the rest (because there were probably no others from which I needed to be more carefully protected) those whose common characteristic I now understand was that you lapse into them by yielding to a nervous impulse. But at the time no one uttered these words, no one revealed this cause, which might have made me believe I was excusable for succumbing to them or even perhaps incapable of resisting them. But I recognized them clearly from the anguish that preceded them as well as from the rigor of the punishment that followed them; and I knew that the one I had just committed was in the same family as others for which I had been severely punished, though infinitely graver. When I went and placed myself in my mother’s path at the moment she was going up to bed, and when she saw that I had stayed up to say goodnight to her again in the hallway, they would not let me continue to live at home, they would send me away to school the next day, that much was certain. Well! Even if I had had to throw myself out of the window five minutes later, I still preferred this. What I wanted now was Mama, to say goodnight to her, I had gone too far along the road that led to the fulfillment of that desire to be able to turn back now.

I heard my parents’ footsteps as they saw Swann out; and when the bell on the gate let me know he had gone, I went to the window. Mama was asking my father if he had thought the lobster was good and if M. Swann had had more coffee-and-

pistachio ice. "I found it quite ordinary," said my mother; "I think next time we'll have to try another flavor." "I can't tell you how changed I find Swann," said my great-aunt, "he has aged so!" My great-aunt was so used to seeing Swann always as the same adolescent that she was surprised to find him suddenly not as young as the age she continued to attribute to him. And my family was also beginning to feel that in him this aging was abnormal, excessive, shameful, and more deserved by the unmarried, by all those for whom it seems that the great day that has no tomorrow is longer than for others, because for them it is empty and the moments in it add up from morning on without then being divided among children. "I think he has no end of worries with that wretched wife of his who is living with a certain Monsieur de Charlus, as all of Combray knows. It's the talk of the town." My mother pointed out that in spite of this he had been looking much less sad for some time now. "He also doesn't make that gesture of his as often, so like his father, of wiping his eyes and running his hand across his forehead. I myself think that in his heart of hearts he no longer loves that woman." "Why, naturally he doesn't love her anymore," answered my grandfather. "I received a letter from him about it a long time ago, by now, a letter with which I hastened not to comply and which leaves no doubt about his feelings, at least his feelings of love, for his wife. Well now! You see, you didn't thank him for the Asti," added my grandfather, turning to his two sisters-in-law. "What? We didn't thank him? I think, just between you and me, that I put it quite delicately," answered my aunt Flora. "Yes, you managed it very well: quite admirable," said my aunt Céline. "But you were very good too." "Yes, I was rather proud of my remark about kind neighbors." "What? Is that what you call thanking him?" exclaimed my grandfather. "I certainly heard that, but devil take me if I thought it was directed at Swann. You can be sure he never noticed." "But see here, Swann isn't stupid, I'm sure he appreciated it. After all, I couldn't tell him how many bottles there were and what the wine cost!" My father and mother were left alone there, and sat down for a moment; then my father said: "Well, shall we go up to bed?" "If you like, my dear, even though I'm not the least bit sleepy; yet it couldn't be that perfectly harmless coffee ice that's keeping me so wide-awake; but I can see a light in the servants' hall, and since poor Françoise has waited up for me, I'll go and ask her to unhook my bodice while you're getting undressed." And my mother opened the latticed door that led from the vestibule to the staircase. Soon, I heard her coming upstairs to close her window. I went without a sound into the hallway; my heart was beating so hard I had trouble walking, but at least it was no longer pounding from anxiety, but from terror and joy. I saw the light cast in the stairwell by Mama's candle. Then I saw Mama herself; I threw myself forward. In the first second, she looked at me with astonishment, not understanding what could have happened. Then an expression of anger came over her face, she did not say a single word to me, and indeed for much less than this they would go several days without speaking to me. If Mama had said one word to me, it would have been an admission that they could talk to me again and in any case it would perhaps have seemed to me even more terrible, as a sign that, given the gravity of the punishment that was going to be prepared for me, silence, and estrangement, would have been childish. A word would have been like the calm with which you answer a servant when you have just decided to dismiss him; the kiss you give a son you are sending off to enlist, whereas you would have refused it if you were simply going to be annoyed with him for a few days. But she heard my father coming up from the dressing room where he had gone to undress and, to avoid the scene he would make over me, she said to me in a voice choked with anger: "Run, run, so at least your father won't see you waiting like this as if you were out of your mind!" But I repeated to her: "Come say goodnight to me," terrified as I saw the gleam from my father's candle already rising up the wall, but also using his approach as a means of blackmail and hoping that Mama, to avoid my father's finding me there still if she continued to refuse, would say: "Go back to your room, I'll come." It was too late, my father was there in front of us. Involuntarily, though no one heard, I murmured these words: "I'm done for!"

It was not so. My father was constantly refusing me permission for things that had been authorized in the more generous covenants granted by my mother and grandmother because he did not bother about "principles" and for him there was no "rule of law." For a completely contingent reason, or even for no reason at all, he would at the last minute deny me a certain walk that was so customary, so consecrated that to deprive me of it was a violation, or, as he had done once again this evening, long before the ritual hour he would say to me: "Go on now, up to bed, no arguments!" But also, because he had no principles (in my grandmother's sense), he was not strictly speaking intransigent. He looked at me for a moment with an expression of surprise and annoyance, then as soon as Mama had explained to him with a few embarrassed words what had happened, he said to her: "Go along with him, then. You were just saying you didn't feel very sleepy, stay in his room for a little while, I don't need anything." "But my dear," answered my mother timidly, "whether I'm sleepy or not doesn't change anything, we can't let the child get into the habit . . ." "But it isn't a question of habit," said my father, shrugging his shoulders, "you can see the boy is upset, he seems very sad; look, we're not executioners! You'll end by making him ill, and that won't do us much good! There are two beds in his room; go tell Françoise to prepare the big one for you and sleep there with him tonight. Now then, goodnight, I'm not as high-strung as the two of you, I'm going to bed."

It was impossible to thank my father; he would have been irritated by what he called mawkishness. I stood there not daring to move; he was still there in front of us, tall in his white nightshirt, under the pink and violet Indian cashmere shawl that he tied around his head now that he had attacks of neuralgia, with the gesture of Abraham in the engraving after Benozzo Gozzoli<sup>28</sup> that M. Swann had given me, as he told Sarah she must leave Issac's side. This was many years ago. The staircase wall on which I saw the rising glimmer of his candle has long since ceased to exist. In me, too, many things have been destroyed that I thought were bound to last forever and new ones have formed that have given birth to new sorrows and joys which I could not have foreseen then, just as the old ones have become difficult for me to understand. It was a very long time ago, too, that my father ceased to be able to say to Mama: "Go with the boy." The possibility of such hours will never be reborn for me. But for a little while now, I have begun to hear again very clearly, if I take care to listen, the sobs that I was strong enough to contain in front of my father and that broke out only when I found myself alone again with Mama. They have never really stopped; and it is only because life is now becoming quieter around me that I can hear them again, like those convent bells covered so well by the clamor of the town during the day that one would think they had ceased altogether but which begin sounding again in the silence of the evening.

Mama spent that night in my room; when I had just committed such a misdeed that I expected to have to leave the house, my parents granted me more than I could ever have won from them as a reward for any good deed. Even at the moment when it manifested itself through this pardon, my father's conduct toward me retained that arbitrary and undeserved quality that

characterized it and was due to the fact that it generally resulted from fortuitous convenience rather than a premeditated plan. It may even be that what I called his severity, when he sent me to bed, deserved that name less than my mother's or my grandmother's, for his nature, in certain respects more different from mine than theirs was, had probably kept him from discovering until now how very unhappy I was every evening, something my mother and my grandmother knew well; but they loved me enough not to consent to spare me my suffering, they wanted to teach me to master it in order to reduce my nervous sensitivity and strengthen my will. As for my father, whose affection for me was of another sort, I do not know if he would have been courageous enough for that: the one time he realized that I was upset, he had said to my mother: "Go and comfort him." Mama stayed in my room that night and, as though not to allow any remorse to spoil those hours which were so different from what I had had any right to expect, when Françoise, realizing that something extraordinary was happening when she saw Mama sitting next to me, holding my hand and letting me cry without scolding me, asked her: "Why, madame, now what's wrong with Monsieur that he's crying so?" Mama answered her: "Why, even he doesn't know, Françoise, he's in a state; prepare the big bed for me quickly and then go on up to bed yourself." And so, for the first time, my sadness was regarded no longer as a punishable offense but as an involuntary ailment that had just been officially recognized, a nervous condition for which I was not responsible; I had the relief of no longer having to mingle qualms of conscience with the bitterness of my tears, I could cry without sin. I was also not a little proud, with respect to Françoise, of this turnabout in human affairs which, an hour after Mama had refused to come up to my room and had sent the disdainful answer that I should go to sleep, raised me to the dignity of a grown-up and brought me suddenly to a sort of puberty of grief, of emancipation from tears. I ought to have been happy: I was not. It seemed to me that my mother had just made me a first concession which must have been painful to her, that this was a first abdication on her part from the ideal she had conceived for me, and that for the first time she, who was so courageous, had to confess herself beaten. It seemed to me that, if I had just gained a victory, it was over her, that I had succeeded, as illness, affliction, or age might have done, in relaxing her will, in weakening her judgment, and that this evening was the beginning of a new era, would remain as a sad date. If I had dared, now, I would have said to Mama: "No, I don't want you to do this, don't sleep here." But I was aware of the practical wisdom, the realism as it would be called now, which in her tempered my grandmother's ardently idealistic nature, and I knew that, now that the harm was done, she would prefer to let me at least enjoy the soothing pleasure of it and not disturb my father. To be sure, my mother's lovely face still shone with youth that evening when she so gently held my hands and tried to stop my tears; but it seemed to me that this was precisely what should not have been, her anger would have saddened me less than this new gentleness which my childhood had not known before; it seemed to me that with an impious and secret hand I had just traced in her soul a first wrinkle and caused a first white hair to appear. At the thought of this my sobs redoubled, and then I saw that Mama, who never let herself give way to any emotion with me, was suddenly overcome by my own and was trying to suppress a desire to cry. When she saw that I had noticed, she said to me with a smile: "There now, my little chick, my little canary, he's going to make his mama as silly as himself if this continues. Look, since you're not sleepy and your mama isn't either, let's not go on upsetting each other, let's do something, let's get one of your books." But I had none there. "Would you enjoy it less if I took out the books your grandmother will be giving you on your saint's day? Think about it carefully: you mustn't be disappointed not to have anything the day after tomorrow." On the contrary, I was delighted, and Mama went to get a packet of books, of which I could not distinguish, through the paper in which they were wrapped, more than their shape, short and thick, but which, in this first guise, though summary and veiled, already eclipsed the box of colors from New Year's Day and the silkworms from last year. They were *La Mare au Diable*, *François le Champi*, *La Petite Fadette*, and *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*. My grandmother, as I learned afterward, had first chosen the poems of Musset, a volume of Rousseau, and *Indiana*;<sup>29</sup> for though she judged frivolous reading to be as unhealthy as sweets and pastries, it did not occur to her that a great breath of genius might have a more dangerous and less invigorating influence on the mind even of a child than would the open air and the sea breeze on his body. But as my father had nearly called her mad when he learned which books she wanted to give me, she had returned to the bookstore in Jouy-le-Vicomte herself, so that I would not risk not having my present (it was a burning-hot day and she had come home so indisposed that the doctor had warned my mother not to let her tire herself out that way again) and she had resorted to the four pastoral novels of George Sand. "My dear daughter," she said to Mama, "I could not bring myself to give the boy something badly written."

In fact, she could never resign herself to buying anything from which one could not derive an intellectual profit, and especially that which beautiful things afford us by teaching us to seek our pleasure elsewhere than in the satisfactions of material comfort and vanity. Even when she had to make someone a present of the kind called "useful," when she had to give an armchair, silverware, a walking stick, she looked for "old" ones, as though, now that long desuetude had effaced their character of usefulness, they would appear more disposed to tell us about the life of people of other times than to serve the needs of our own life. She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of the most beautiful monuments or landscapes. But at the moment of buying them, and even though the thing represented had an aesthetic value, she would find that vulgarity and utility too quickly resumed their places in that mechanical mode of representation, the photograph. She would try to use cunning and, if not to eliminate commercial banality entirely, at least to reduce it, to substitute for the greater part of it more art, to introduce into it in a sense several "layers" of art: instead of photographs of Chartres Cathedral, the Fountains of Saint-Cloud, or Mount Vesuvius, she would make inquiries of Swann as to whether some great painter had not depicted them, and preferred to give me photographs of Chartres Cathedral by Corot, of the Fountains of Saint-Cloud by Hubert Robert,<sup>30</sup> of Mount Vesuvius by Turner,<sup>31</sup> which made one further degree of art. But if the photographer had been removed from the representation of the masterpiece or of nature and replaced by a great artist, he still reclaimed his rights to reproduce that very interpretation. Having deferred vulgarity as far as possible, my grandmother would try to move it back still further. She would ask Swann if the work had not been engraved, preferring, whenever possible, old engravings that also had an interest beyond themselves, such as those that represent a masterpiece in a state in which we can no longer see it today (like the engraving by Morghen<sup>32</sup> of Leonardo's *Last Supper* before its deterioration). It must be said that the results of this interpretation of the art of gift giving were not always brilliant. The idea I formed of Venice from a drawing by Titian that is supposed to have the lagoon in the background was certainly far less accurate than the one I would have derived from simple photographs. We could no longer keep count, at home, when my great-aunt wanted to draw up an indictment against my grandmother, of the armchairs she had presented to young

couples engaged to be married or old married couples which, at the first attempt to make use of them, had immediately collapsed under the weight of one of the recipients. But my grandmother would have believed it petty to be overly concerned about the solidity of a piece of wood in which one could still distinguish a small flower, a smile, sometimes a lovely invention from the past. Even what might, in these pieces of furniture, answer a need, since it did so in a manner to which we are no longer accustomed, charmed her like the old ways of speaking in which we see a metaphor that is obliterated, in our modern language, by the abrasion of habit. Now, in fact, the pastoral novels of George Sand that she was giving me for my saint's day were, like an old piece of furniture, full of expressions that had fallen into disuse and turned figurative again, the sort you no longer find anywhere but in the country. And my grandmother had bought them in preference to others just as she would sooner have rented an estate on which there was a Gothic dovecote or another of those old things that exercise such a happy influence on the mind by filling it with longing for impossible voyages through time.

Mama sat down by my bed; she had picked up *François le Champi*, whose reddish cover and incomprehensible title gave it, in my eyes, a distinct personality and a mysterious attraction. I had not yet read a real novel. I had heard people say that George Sand was an exemplary novelist. This already predisposed me to imagine something indefinable and delicious in *François le Champi*. Narrative devices intended to arouse curiosity or emotion, certain modes of expression that make one uneasy or melancholy, and that a reader with some education will recognize as common to many novels, appeared to me—who considered a new book not as a thing having many counterparts, but as a unique person, having no reason for existing but in itself—simply as a disturbing emanation of *François le Champi*'s peculiar essence. Behind those events so ordinary, those things so common, those words so current, I sensed a strange sort of intonation, accentuation. The action began; it seemed to me all the more obscure because in those days, when I read, I often daydreamed, for entire pages, of something quite different. And in addition to the lacunae that this distraction left in the story, there was the fact, when Mama was the one reading aloud to me, that she skipped all the love scenes. Thus, all the bizarre changes that take place in the respective attitudes of the miller's wife and the child and that can be explained only by the progress of a nascent love seemed to me marked by a profound mystery whose source I readily imagined must be in that strange and sweet name "Champi," which gave the child, who bore it without my knowing why, its vivid, charming purplish color. If my mother was an unfaithful reader she was also, in the case of books in which she found the inflection of true feeling, a wonderful reader for the respect and simplicity of her interpretation, the beauty and gentleness of the sound of her voice. Even in real life, when it was people and not works of art which moved her to compassion or admiration, it was touching to see with what deference she removed from her voice, from her motions, from her words, any spark of gaiety that might hurt some mother who had once lost a child, any recollection of a saint's day or birthday that might remind some old man of his advanced age, any remark about housekeeping that might seem tedious to some young scholar. In the same way, when she was reading George Sand's prose, which always breathes that goodness, that moral distinction which Mama had learned from my grandmother to consider superior to all else in life, and which I was to teach her only much later not to consider superior to all else in books too, taking care to banish from her voice any pettiness, any affectation which might have prevented it from receiving that powerful torrent, she imparted all the natural tenderness, all the ample sweetness they demanded to those sentences which seemed written for her voice and which remained, so to speak, entirely within the register of her sensibility. She found, to attack them in the necessary tone, the warm inflection that preexists them and that dictated them, but that the words do not indicate; with this inflection she softened as she went along any crudeness in the tenses of the verbs, gave the imperfect and the past historic the sweetness that lies in goodness, the melancholy that lies in tenderness, directed the sentence that was ending toward the one that was about to begin, sometimes hurrying, sometimes slowing down the pace of the syllables so as to bring them, though their quantities were different, into one uniform rhythm, she breathed into this very common prose a sort of continuous emotional life.

My remorse was quieted, I gave in to the sweetness of that night in which I had my mother close to me. I knew that such a night could not be repeated; that the greatest desire I had in the world, to keep my mother in my room during those sad hours of darkness, was too contrary to the necessities of life and the wishes of others for its fulfillment, granted this night, to be anything other than artificial and exceptional. Tomorrow my anxieties would reawaken and Mama would not stay here. But when my anxieties were soothed, I no longer understood them; and then tomorrow night was still far away; I told myself I would have time to think of what to do, even though that time could not bring me any access of power, since these things did not depend on my will and seemed more avoidable to me only because of the interval that still separated them from me.

So it was that, for a long time, when, awakened at night, I remembered Combray again, I saw nothing of it but this sort of luminous panel, cut out among indistinct shadows, like those panels which the glow of a Bengal light or some electric projection will cut out and illuminate in a building whose other parts remain plunged in darkness: at the rather broad base, the small parlor, the dining room, the opening of the dark path by which M. Swann, the unconscious author of my sufferings, would arrive, the front hall where I would head toward the first step of the staircase, so painful to climb, that formed, by itself, the very narrow trunk of this irregular pyramid; and, at the top, my bedroom with the little hallway and its glass-paned door for Mama's entrance; in a word, always seen at the same hour, isolated from everything that might surround it, standing out alone against the darkness, the bare minimum of scenery (such as one sees prescribed at the beginnings of the old plays for performances in the provinces) needed for the drama of my undressing; as though Combray had consisted only of two floors connected by a slender staircase and as though it had always been seven o'clock in the evening there. The fact is, I could have answered anyone who asked me that Combray also included other things and existed at other times of day. But since what I recalled would have been supplied to me only by my voluntary memory, the memory of the intelligence, and since the information it gives about the past preserves nothing of the past itself, I would never have had any desire to think about the rest of Combray. It was all really quite dead for me.

Dead forever? Possibly.

There is a great deal of chance in all this, and a second sort of chance event, that of our own death, often does not allow us to wait long for the favors of the first.

I find the Celtic belief very reasonable, that the souls of those we have lost are held captive in some inferior creature, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, effectively lost to us until the day, which for many never comes, when we happen to pass close to the tree, come into possession of the object that is their prison. Then they quiver, they call out to us, and as soon as we have recognized them, the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and they return to live with us.

It is the same with our past. It is a waste of effort for us to try to summon it, all the exertions of our intelligence are useless. The past is hidden outside the realm of our intelligence and beyond its reach, in some material object (in the sensation that this material object would give us) which we do not suspect. It depends on chance whether we encounter this object before we die, or do not encounter it.